THE LIMITATIONS OF PROGRAMME EVALUATION

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Introduction and Summary

Curriculum development has been an active concern of governments for at
least thirty years now. For the last twenty years, since it became clear
that the task was a difficult one, developments have been monitored by
evaluators. The evaluation agenda has expanded in that time, from an
initial focus on student learning outcomes to the study of cases (programmes,
schools, individuals) as a better way of understanding the problems and
effects of change. Evaluators have become the storytellers and theorists
of innovation.

On the whole the early experiences of developers and evaluators alike led
them to suggest that central initiatives should give way to local initiatives
within a framework of facilitative support. They emphasised, too, that the
possession of ideas was a prerequisite of teacher and institutional commitment
to their effective implementation. The message was received and understood
but, in the rapidly deteriorating economic circumstances of the seventies,
was overwhelmed by other messages offering more persuasive scenarios. The
government view, asserted initally in the form of the National Development
Programme in Computer Assisted Learning (MacDonald et al, 1975) was that
only more direct central control of new curriculum sponsorship could ensure
that its priorities received due attention from the education professionals.
NDPCAL, with civil servants at the helm, was launched in 1973. Since that
time, but more dramatically during the period of office of the present
government, we have seen the government move to centre stage in curriculum
determination, exercising more and more control of development funding,
concentrating more and more of that funding in fewer and larger programmes,
and settling for compliance rather than commitment from its weakened LEA
and teacher 'partners' in the curriculum enterprise. The organic community
methaphors of growth advocated by the educational theorists of curriculum
development have been rejected in favour of hard-nosed social engineering.
The concept of partnership has given way to the concept of the task force
with an unambiguous mission.

Evaluators were among those who foresaw with some alarm this concentration
of political power, and feared the threat it could pose to their freedom to
inform those who could reasonably be construed as entitled to know what
was going on (MacDonald 1974). It is one thing to tell the story of the

kind of entrepreneurial individuals like Lawrence Stenhouse who in the
sixties were enabled by sponsorship to set up their personal stalls in
the marketplace of teacher consumerism and ply their curriculum visions.
The case for having an evaluator to check on the developers' claims, to
help the buyer beware, and to inform the sponsors about what the projects
were doing and learning, was fairly straightforward and broadly acceptable
in political terms. But is is quite another thing to tell a similar story
about programmes where civil servants are in the front line of accountability
to government ministers for the successful implementation of politically
important curriculum developments. And that is where we are now.

Evaluations have always, by and large, been commissioned by administrators
responsible for sponsoring the developments to which the evaluations were
attached. That remains the case although it is important to note that
contemporary preferences for two levels of evaluation, national and local,
mean that the commissioning takes place at the two levels of administrative
responsibility for programme enactment. The difference, and this is crucial
to the argument of this paper, is that at both levels these administrators
have become programme managers rather than programme facilitators. This
enhanced responsibility, whilst increasing their need for evaluation as a
cybernetic loop, has heightened their sensitivity to bad news about programme
success, and has encouraged them to seek more control over both the agenda
and the reporting of evaluative inquiry. There can be little doubt that
these efforts to control evaluation have been highly successful. The hope
that evaluation, carried out by institutions and individuals not implicated
in programme responsibility, would help a wide range of audiences to reach
informed judgements of the merits of new curriculum directions, that it
might help to democratise the processes of curriculum policymaking, has not
been fulfilled. The paucity and the blandness of public reports fail
to expose   the quantity of evaluation now taking place,   or   the
turmoil, disruption, conflicts and contradictions inherent in the processes
of systematic planned change. The'secret garden' survives, but under new
ownership.

In this article we will draw upon our own recent experience of evaluation
to enlarge upon this proposition, to articulate more precisely the nature
of the constraints to which we have drawn attention, and finally to argue
the need for alternative sources of programme evaluation sponsorship. Of
course we accept the fact that not everyone sees evaluation as primarily a
source of credible public knowledge, let alone as a theory of political

interaction (MacDonald, op. cit.). This is a particular view of the evaluator
as a democratic agent with privileged access to social service initiatives,
and we shall, as our thesis unfolds, refer to other, certainly more widely
practised views of the evaluative responsibility. But we cannot be alone in
our growing anxiety about authoritarian trends in educational policymaking,
nor in perceiving a decline in both informed challenge and informed
support in relation to the impact of these trends on the experience of
schooling. Evaluators have a modest, but important role to play in creating
the data base of communal participation in shaping the future of curriculum.
That role, we will contend, is no longer acceptable to the managers of
curriculum innovation.

But we shall begin with an overview of the evaluation process in this
context, looking at the relationship between evaluators and sponsors, and
at ways in which evaluators typically construe their responsibilities
and opportunities. Following that, we shall offer an issues-based
analysis of the problems we encountered as independent evaluators of
one local project under the aegis of categorical funding, taking the case
as illustrative of more general problems associated with that framework.
Our concluding section looks ahead to an uncertain future, and explores
some strategic possibilities for rescuing this particular public information
service from the threat of emasculation.

Programme evaluation - participant and not-so-participant roles

Evaluation is an interrogative activity, intended to yield useful knowledge
about social action. 'Useful to whom?' is of course the obvious question.
In a democracy such as ours, where ends, means, and perhaps especially
priorities are always at issue, utility is problematic. What is useful
for some may disadvantage others. Evaluation takes time, and therefore
money. In the case of national programmes with action sites spread across
the country, we are talking about quite a lot of time and quite a lot of
money. To give you some idea, take the case of the Educational Support
Grant funding initiatives in primary science. The DES is paying more than
half-a-million pounds for a four person evaluation of this programme.
Programme evaluation is expensi.., and those who can afford it are rarely
indifferent to its potential impact. Even if those who pay the evaluation
piper don't exactly call the tune, they are not averse to restricting the
repertoire. As we have already indicated, the great majority of programme

evaluations are, directly or indirectly, commissioned by the executive agencies of central government. Naturally enough they want from the evaluator knowledge that is useful to them about programmes they initiate and manage.

These civil servant managers who commission evaluations are vulnerable to unfavourable judgements of the policies they are implementing or of the ways in which they have chosen to prosecute them. Typically they seek from the evaluator knowledge that will increase their control over programme participants and maintain fidelity of interpretation and action across distributed and distant sites. They also want evaluators to assist development at the local level, to help participants make a better fist of their piece of action. They do not want, and will strenuously oppose, policy evaluation of a kind that could embarass their superiors by raising questions about the validity of the programme rationale. Nor do they want their own performance as managers evaluated, though they may welcome confidential, off-the-record advice. Evaluators, faced with these sensitivities, and not without an interest in their own marketability, tend to adopt one of two roles, both readily tolerable to programme managers. The first is that of ally, auxiliary, or emissary of management, seeking out knowledge that is responsive to the needs and anxieties of those in charge. This is not necessarily a supine role. Evaluators who go along this path can play the part of critic within management circles, can even be a countervailing force within decision making, exploiting their independence of view to broaden the deliberative frame. At its most influential this can be a power-sharing role, offering the evaluator a seat at the high table of management, albeit at the expense of her credibility as a witness to its transactions, and usually at the expense of her liberty to report them. For some this may constitute a rare opportunity to promote educational values that may be more prominent in the rhetoric of the programme than in the reality of its implementation. Such evaluators may well see themselves as lobbyists for relatively powerless groups in the educational sector - pupils, blacks, women, parents for example. Temporary allegiance to the power structure embodied in the programme as well as to its mission can look like a small price to pay for the chance to directly influence its direction and outcomes.

That is one option. Another, equally acceptable to many sponsoring programme managers, is that of nourishing the grassroots of programme action, more or less defining the programme as a schools-based activity, and providing

formative evaluation for those in the front line. What matters most to evaluators who take this path is the contribution they can make to the quality of the programme at the point of delivery, and useable knowledge tends therefore to be defined in terms of the needs of involved teachers. They are teacher rather than manager-allies, and use their privileged access to higher levels of the programme to represent the difficulties faced by teachers in the classroom. With such a singular focus, however, many significant determinants of those difficulties that emanate from programme management remain insulated from evaluative scrutiny. The grassroots option is in any case increasingly foreclosed to national evaluators by the separate provision of a local level of evaluation, commissioned by individual participating Authorities. We shall deal with the probelms of evaluation at the local level shortly.

Now, both of the evaluation roles we have described are essentially 'insider' roles. They operate within programmes, owing allegiance to different participant groups. They could be called participant forms of evaluation, at best exploiting their independence to educate internal action. This begins to explain why so little evaluative information reaches the world outside. We want to stress, if it is not clear from the way in which we have characterised these roles, that they can and do provide their practitioners with honourable occupations and defensible interpretations of their responsibilities, both in educational and political terms. The programmes are, after all, authorised by elected representatives and managed by public servants. Their legitimacy is not, in that sense, in question.

Or is it? If, as Macpherson (1973) so succinctly says, a liberal democracy is more than a mere 'mechanism of authorisation', and if, which we consider to be evident, categorical funding strategies constitute potentially dangerous concentrations of single-minded power over educational futures, then that 'legitimacy' should be subject to continuously informed and renewed public consent. Programme evaluators have an opportunity, and we would argue therefore an obligation, to play a role in supporting democratic processes of policy formation and accountability. Within the constraints of participant evaluation roles as we have described them the needs of stakeholders outside the programme are, to put it mildly, de-emphasised. Whether by evaluator prudence, by choice, or by the lure of potent involvement, or by a combination of all three, the end result is that the broad community of citizens concerned about educational change are poorly served by programme evaluation.

Lest is be thought that we are alone, and uniquely presumptuous, in advocating
such an obligation, we would remind the reader that Cronbach (1981),
undoubtedly the most distinguished academic to specialise in programme
evaluation, has reformulated the role as that of 'public scientist',
thus harnessing expertise in knowledge construction to the service of public
judgement. Although this concept, in our view, overstates scientific
authority and ignores the role of evaluators as democratic agents within
programmes, nevertheless it represents a way of thinking about evaluation,
and about policymaking, that is close to our own. Cronbach has interpreted
the role in much the same terms as Cohen suggested might be appropriate for
the broader field of applied research in education (Cohen 1975), those of
improving and facilitating rather than pre-empting democratic discourse
about the values and effects of public programmes. For our part, in this
country, we have been arguing along similar lines, and trying to embody
them in our evaluation practice, since the early seventies (MacDonald 1974,
MacDonald and Norris 1977, Kushner and Norris, 197). Under the rubric of
'democratic evaluation' we have attempted in a variety of circumstances
to marry the internal demands of programmes for knowledge to serve their
private justifications with external demands for programmes to be justified
in the broader court of community judgement. This 'broker' role has never
been an easy one to pursue - it has not been popular with our paymasters
and we have yet to fully deliver on its promise. Under the new, more
authoritarian strategies of innovation that currently dominate the curriculum
development scene, we now fear that the opportunities to pursue that
aspiration have become restricted to the point of non-viability. To illustrate
and substantiate what is for us at least a serious setback to a tradition
of evaluation we have spent most of our professional lives cultivating, we
turn now to consider a case in point.

Categorical Funding and Project Evaluation

Categorical funding of curriculum initiatives, whereby local administrators
submit bids to national administrators for money to finance stipulated
areas of development, and accept accountability for effective investment,
is now a significant feature of the educational landscape. It is essentially
a customer/contract relationship between the two levels of administration,
through which Whitehall keeps a tight fiscal rein on a necessarily devolved
responsibility for action. The money involved may be small in terms of the
total cost of schooling, but in circumstances of restrained expenditure
it is precious enough to induce competitive tenders and at least formal
obeisance to central policy. And central policy no longer operates

exclusively through the Department of Education and Science. The utilitarian, vocationalist thrust of policy involves other ministries, such as the Department of Employment and the Department of Trade and Industry, in curriculum sponsorship. In particular the Manpower Services Commission, a D of E Quango increasingly preoccupied with the politically sensitive issue of youth unemployment, has assumed a leading role in the promotion of curriculum change through its Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI). With the Department of the Environment restricting the purse strings of Local Authority initiatives, development money is heavily concentrated in Whitehall, and administrative professionals at the local level have, in many cases reluctantly, assumed the role of middle managers of earmarked resources.

Two other changes related to contemporary programmes are worthy of note. With the demise of mediating agencies such as the Schools Council in favour of more unilateral political origination of programmes, government ministers are now more closely associated with major programmes and have a correspondingly greater stake in their public success. Conversely, at the local government level, councillors are more marginalised and may even be bypassed as their employees seek to milk the central purse to prop up impoverished infrastructures of school support.

These leaner, more linear structures of command and compliance, unencumbered by compromising negotiations with powerful interest groups, are markedly authoritatian in their management style. They are bigger, less self-questioning, more single-minded in their search for vindicative data, quick to publicise success stories, quicker still to suppress or dismiss bad news from any quarter. The administrators who manage these programmes are under no illusions about the political imperatives that constitute their brief. These programmes, though they may well bear the official status of 'pilot' or 'experiment', and though they may be saturated with evaluation processes apparently designed to establish their worth, are expressions of political conviction rather than explorations of educational hypotheses.

That is the context. Let us turn to the case.

> "I do hope that our response to your letter brings us nearer to
> a resolution of this matter. However I have to add that we would
> need a written assurance from the Centre for Applied Research in
> Education that no reference is made to the . . . . . Project in
> either public or semi-public arenas other than that which is

> contained within the report of the Evaluation. Therefore if
> CARE wish to adumbrate upon the contents of the report at some
> future date in either a semi-public or public arena then
> approval would have to be sought from the . . . . . . Authority.
> In the event of the Authority giving such approval it would also
> reserve the right to be represented at such an occasion."

(LEA official and Director of LAP Project in the Authority)

The evaluation contract to which this item of correspondence refers had
been entered into in a spirit of friendly collaboration on both sides. The
director of the evaluation and the director of this LAP (Lower Attaining Pupils)
project, who commissioned us to do the evaluation, had a shared history of
collaborative research and knew each other well. He was familiar with our
approach to evaluation, and valued our independent but empathetic
perspective on the problems of curriculum development. Despite this
favourable background the evaluation was terminated in mid-stream when it
became clear that working relationships with the project management had
irretrievably broken down.

The termination, suggested by us and accepted by the project director, was
followed by a lengthy, quasi-legal wrangle about who had the right to say what
and to whom about the project and about the demise of the evaluation. While
this was going on the unexpired portion of the contract was placed with one
of the LEA's neighbouring polytechnics. Neither the new local evaluators,
nor the national programme evaluators at the National Foundation for
Educational Research, nor the Department of Education and Science, who
sponsored the programme and provided the money that enabled the LEA to
commission the evaluation, made a single enquiry of us as to the circumstances
which led to the breakdown. Yet this was the first time in almost twenty
years of continuous engagement in the business of curriculum evaluation
that members of the CARE group had felt unable to complete a contract.
While none of us expected this, or any other independent evaluation, to be
conflict-free, the problems encountered in trying to fashion and maintain
a viable relationship between ourselves and the project managers were so
severe that attempts on both sides to resolve them through negotiation all
ended in failure.

It is not our purpose in this paper to explore all the reasons for this
failure or to engage in the apportionment of blame. One of the authors,
who was directly involved in the conduct of the evaluation, is preparing
for publication a case study of the experience, which tells the story in
some detail and offers an extensive post mortem (Kushner S., in preparation).

Rather we are concerned here to draw upon the experience in order to illuminate issues of generalisable salience to the theory and practice of evaluation in education. These are issues that are more than likely to arise when we evaluate innovations initiated within the framework of categorical funding. The LAP project was one such innovation and, in relation to the difficulties we encountered, we regard it as significant that this was the first time we had undertaken to evaluate a local project operating within the specifications and other requirements of such a programme. We discussed our experience with many evaluators of this and other such programmes. Although terminations have so far been rare (see Barron et al., 1981, and Simons H., 1987, however for other examples) the constraints that we will identify command broad agreement among evaluators. We propose to deal with these constraints by grouping them under four headings.

ISSUE ONE: 'Curriculum development is often seen as administrative enactment rather than as action by administrators'

We have already referred to the demise of agencies like the Schools Council which offered a forum for mediating between central government initiative and the needs and initiatives of local authorities and schools.

The professionally representative scrutiny such arrangements offered of curriculum policy development is barely possible under these new funding arrangements. The sources of TVEI, LAP, SEGs, Records of Achievement lie, not in public enquiries or cross-professional consultation. They lie in private discussions at the DES, at the MSC and in the Department of Employment – perhaps in the Cabinet Office. Even the 'Great Debate' had the feel of a false war – a catharsis with no substance. These programmes represent decisions disembedded from due process, leaving their political and ideological assumptions insufficiently challenged.

The result is that the guidelines which attend, for example, TVEI read more like substantive prioritisations than parameters for experimentation. Teachers and schools are at the other end of a very long arm that reaches all the way back to the engine-room of politics.

In our LAP evaluation we observed, on a number of occasions, the Project Managers assuring school teams that they would act as a buffer between schools and the DES – that they would protect experimentation by the

the teachers. But we also spoke with coordinators of school teams and with heads who felt unable to take that leap of faith and who preferred the safety of conservative practice - or the risk of practices which they might not divulge to Project Managers and which they could not easily, therefore, "allow" the evaluation to report. Often, this nervousness surfaced when Project Managers visited participating LAP schools. They were also, of course, LEA officials and what could be gleaned or hinted at from their conversations with school heads were read like runes for an indication as to what was expected from on-high. Genuine offers to act as a buffer notwithstanding, Project Managers could not look innocent.

For these and other reasons, teacher teams can easily view categorical funding curriculum projects as the pursuit of pre-set plans of action rather than as the exploration of alternatives. Equally, and because evaluators find it hard to negotiate data from the teachers, at one end, and DES, at the other, they, too, are pressurised into looking at these projects as implementation strategies. There was, on our LAP evaluation, a constant demand for formative feedback and a resistance to any kind of overview report. The evaluation was asked to act in a service role - to recognise the 'realpolitik' of the programme and to limit its aspirations. It was an 'all-hands-on-deck' kind of affair. To Stenhouse's (1980) division of curriculum projects into child-centred and content-centred we must now add policy-centred.

ISSUE TWO: Teachers do not necessarily share the problem-definitions which underpin their curriculum projects

A teacher in a London primary school spoke to us of visits to her classrooms by no fewer than eight official observers in two terms - one for multiculturalis one for equal opportunities, another for special education, one an in-house educational researcher - and so forth. The insulation shield has been pierced and the school bell rings visiting hours. Virtually anyone can make a claim on classrooms these days and apply pressure, but the important point is, of course, that only the government can afford to buy. For some teachers, it must be said, involvement in a programme can provide some insulation from this variety of pressures. "TVEI," one teacher has been quoted as saying, (Fiddy & Stronach, 1987) "was a chance to stand still and analyse what we were doing."

Teachers and schools have many reasons for participating in these projects and those reasons are not always consonant with the programme rationale. In

our LAP evaluation and in the TVEI evaluation reported by Fiddy & Stronach (opp. cit.), there is evidence of these categorical funding programmes being used by educational authorities as remedial

strategies for 'lower attaining schools', as it were. Although this is not a new phenomenon (see MacDonald 1978) offers to participate can be hard to refuse in these impoverished and threatening times. Not only that, but the presence of TVEI or LAP or a major Assessment project in a school can often stifle any other curriculum development so that the only way to engage in resource-led innovation is to join the flagship.

In such circumstances teachers often have to rest content with the project passed down to them - to live with official definitions of the problems they are alleged to have. Although a similar charge could be laid at the door of any centrally devised initiative, there is now much more of a sense of schools, and individual teachers, receiving "offers they can't refuse".

In their overview of the curriculum reform period of the Schools Council, MacDonald and Walker (1976) introduce the term 'curriculum negotiation'. For them it represented the competing pressures on curriculum developers to justify their products to academic peers on the one hand (who judged them against educational standards) and to teachers on the other (who judged them against criteria like practicability). The same package would be presented (negotiated) to each audience in appropriate terms to ensure, from the former, continued intellectual support (not unrelated to developers' career aspirations) and, from the latter, continued market support. But these developers, as can be inferred, stood outside of these two worlds - in the system, but not of it. Their problem, say MacDonald and Walker, was not whether people understood what they had to say, but whether people wanted to hear it.

In categorical funding programmes there is a similar situation, but with crucial differences. Developers are a more homogenous group of people - LEA officials, heads, senior teachers, advisers. They are in and of the system - well-known by the people they are trying to sell to. They have less chance of camouflage - more need to argue their survival at both ends of the system - nowhere to go if they fail to get the message right and it rebounds. The problem is a variation of the one MacDonald and Walker analysed in the previous decade.

Take the case of one of the LAP schools we were evaluating. They saw themselves as working beyond the LAP rationale - piloting new curricula with

pupil volunteers. They saw themselves as programme 'outlaws'. When there were
no volunteers they deliberated long and hard before making this known. It
was difficult to present what had happened as anything other than 'failure' –
in spite of the learning they were gleaning from the event. When they did
go public, one of the Project Managers visited them to try and help out –
to discuss the problem. But for the school, all he represented was the
symbol of accountability by which their outlaw status would be confirmed.
The fear was that he would bring with him criteria of success and failure
which related to implementation and not to their autonomous curriculum
values.

ISSUE THREE: Contemporary curriculum developers may be caught up in a
movement rather than innovation

The following question was raised by Harry Torrance during an in-service
training session for teacher teams on the LAP project we were evaluating.
It relates to assessment, but is relevant to many features of categorical
funding programmes.

If, after having developed profiling for two or three years, you find it
to be too disruptive or not to have worked, would you feel able to abandon
it as a failed experiment?

Of course, underlying that question is a suggestion that there is too much
public legitimacy and rhetorical investment behind these developments not
to go along with them. If you do decide that profiling is an inadequate
edcuational instrument, are you committing one of the heresies of the
contemporary age – anti-modernism? Berger (1974) in presenting his ethical
manifesto for researchers of social change argues that "modernity exacts
a high price on the level of meaning. Those who are unwilling to pay this
price must be taken with utmost seriousness, and not be dismissed as
'backward' or 'irrational'." That injunction is appropriate to the
political culture we live in at present which embodies at least as much
reverence for the future as it does for the past in its social programmes.
"Schools," said our LEA in their submission for the LAP award to the DES,
"have been unable to grasp the vocational nettle . . . unable to break free
from a traditional view of society's expectations."

The LEA was, of course, searching for the kind of presentation of its bid
that would appeal to their prospective sponsor – successfully, it transpired.
In order to understand this a little better we might think of the difference

between an innovation and a movement.

Both are driven by a sense of mission; both represent attempts at forward momentum; both demand the participation of disciples. But movements have a tendency to use moral compulsion as the driving energy. They tend to rest upon assumptions which are difficult to challenge through formal discourse. There are logics, of course, but beyond logic there is a recourse to arguments that need not be spoken to be understood. "Our ability to dream goes beyond our ability to explain," expressed one observer (Heussenstamm, 1973) during a conference, seeking privileged status for the Arts. But the claim could well be applied to advocates of categorical funding programmes. It is unlikely that profiling or TVEI would be dropped - whatever its evaluations come up with.

Innovators normally struggle for that kind of institutional security. They are vulnerable because that is their job - to learn about the potential and limitations of ideas by exploring them. So, the Humanities Curriculum Project was adopted or abandoned by teachers who were converts or not - and the arguments were public and vigorous. Nuffield Chemistry became an established curriculum and assessment scheme on the basis of disciplined and empirical claims to validity. The LAP project we were evaluating, while embodying a great deal of experimentation and generating significant learnings about constraints upon change, was part of a programme which carried the pre-hoc vindication of political conviction. The programme was "good" because it was the embodiment of a new and successful idea which emanates from central government. Teachers found themselves caught up in an irresistable movement rather than a (resistable) innovation.

These categorical funding programmes, taken individually, clearly are innovations, however, and the argument is related more to the context of attitudes and expectations in which they collectively exist. We entered the LAP evaluation following experience of evaluating an earlier innovatory project which fitted more into the mould of Schools Council-type initiatives. We spoke to one teacher who was leaving that innovation behind after some experiences which she had felt to be largely ineffectual, and looking ahead to participating in TVEI. Hitherto, she explained, she had been accustomed to public attacks on her school's educational competence, against which she felt there was no easy defence. "But with our TVEI hats on we'll be seen to succeed," she said.

Movements have a place in change theory, of course, Perhaps the closest
model in that literature is Donald Schon's 'shifting centres' model
(see MacDonald and Walker op. cit. chap.1). In this model, the source
of the innovation may be ambiguous in its location and in its precise
intention – there may not even be a clear definition of the message. It
is a model suited to the volatile nature of allegiance, resourcing,
political trends and charismatic leadership. It may be hard to pin down
in analytic terms, but there is no doubt that it is there, and that it
is broadly understood – or intuited.

LAP had a definite source – often, indeed, associated with an individual,
Sir Keith Joseph. But the process by which it emerged and through which
it was translated into an operational programme to change secondary
schooling remains obscure. Indeed, the processes by which it's progress
and results are monitored and appraised are unclear in spite of there being
a national evaluation. The Project Managers in the LEA we were associated
with – though offering themselves as 'buffers' to their teachers – were
never (while we were conducting the evaluation) able to penetrate those
policy arenas. They were not allowed to attend the Steering Committee for
the Programme and they had no direct communication with that Steering Group.
The same is no doubt true for other LEA proejcts – and yet there was no
difficulty in sharing ocmmon experiences with LAP teachers from other
authorities when visits were made. There is certainly considerable diversity
in the LAP and, for example, the TVEI programmes – coupled with a very loose
system for monitoring and standardising the results. In a sense, the
'centres' for the pursuit of vocational curriculum reform are 'shifting'
all the time as programmes multiply and redefine their participant
constituencies.

But where this diveristy compromises the integrity of the 'new vocationalism'
remains to be seen. There is a sense in which the movement is sustained less
by structures of control and more by a successfully marketed ideology.
'Vocational chic' (Kushner, 1986) is in.

ISSUE FOUR: How much secrecy is essential for the survival of these programmes
in a democratic system?

There is always a tension in democratic evaluation between the individual
'right to privacy' and the public 'right to know'. But we have seen that the

politicisation of these programmes places undue stress on participants who are exposed to potentially punitive consequences for professionally legitimate decisions. For evaluators this can raise, in acute form, issues of fairness to individuals and sensitivity to the consequences of reporting. "At times," suggests House (1980) "evaluators may have to resort to their consciences rather than to their contracts."

Some evaluators are dissuaded from pressing the publication of features of categorical funding programmes - as did our LAP evaluators, for example, in suppressing all accounts of conversations with the LAP Project Managers. Where teachers feel themselves - as many did in our LAP evaluation - to be working beyond the preferred direction of the DES, then they feel themselves to be programme 'outlaws'. Doing evaluation can feel like being invited in to the 'outlaw hideout' on condition that its presence is not revealed to the authorities. Project managers, equally, can find it threatening to reveal their allegiances, having to balance patronage from above with credibility from below.

As a result of this, what we are seeing is the gradual disappearance into secretive enclave of crucial programme processes at all levels. We lost policy sources from the very beginning; innovation strategies of LEA leaders are often too sensitive to report; the workings of the infrastructures which support programmes at LEA level are equally sensitive and often lost to confidentiality or conscience; creative educational developments are often secreted away by teachers, fearful of administrative disapproval of deviation. And it goes on - a litany of anxiety, and the erosion of opportunity to create public knowledge of these programmes.

There are good reasons for this. In our LAP evaluation, in order to document the context of the innovation, we found ourselves evaluating the whole LEA policy of curriculum development. This makes demands on evaluators which outstrip the usually meagre resources available for categorical funding evaluation at the local level. It is all the harder for evaluators who work in Schools of Education which rely on the patronage of LEAs for students and in-service training resources. McCabe (1986) gives a detailed account of the tensions between the need to survive in a TVEI evaluation and the need to meet the standards expected of a professional research community.

Whether through compliance or through force of circumstance, evaluators can find themselves - as we did - contributing to the endemic secrecy that

shrouds the origins and the workings of these programmes. Let us look a
little more closely at secrecy.

In the LAP evaluation we were conducting there arose a series of complaints
about our activities - allegations of late arrival, low productivity,
insensitivity. We found it ever-harder to respond to these allegations since
there was no direct access to the complainants. For their part, the Project
Managers could not divulge the identity of complainants since they were part
of the personal networks of the Advisory Service. These personal networks
are crucial to the functioning of an advisory service which has to operate
with the open market and the 'black markets' of information. Eventually the
evaluation breached the 'black market', but only to the point where
confidential data could be collected - data which was (and remains) unusable
since it too easily identifies vulnerable individuals. The same went for
the Project Managers, though they suffered the added complication of having
ro reveal their personal thoughts about policy initiatives not yet fully-
fledged or negotiated with their own Authority. At one point the evaluation
was under pressure from project teachers to meet with local elected councillors
but felt unable to do so for fear of creating unpredictable and possible
punitive consequences for the Project management.

What was happening in thiscase was that the evaluation was picking up the
kind of informal conversations and speculations that characterise any hierarchica
system. Such conversations are the lubricants which allow the system's cogs
to turn without grinding against each other too abrasively. Gossip can
reduce the powerful in the minds of the powerless - it can be used by people
to create alliances out of shared grievances, for example. Secret
conversations can be comforting and even empowering.

The day an evaluation is commissioned all such private discourses become
threatened by possible exposure. And the options are now more restricted.
In Schools Council projects, for example, it was usually the case that
curriculum developers and project managers came from outside the Authority -
project venues (conferences and in-service training) were often geographically
far off. There were sympathetic ears to be bent without consequence - advice
to be sought from outsiders other than evaluators. In categorical funding
programmes there are rarely outsiders other than evaluators. Teachers are
asked to have an adventure, but to stay at home to do it. It's all too
public even without the presence of an evaluator. And participation in a
programme can mean the end of old alliances that had proved familiar and
supportive. One LAP teacher viewed with trepidation the prospect of his
school colleagues learning about some significant difficulties his team
was encountering. "You would begin to get the heebie-jeebies - because you
can no longer control what people are saying about it."

At all levels, therefore, of programme involvement, participants feel
strongly the need for secrecy and the fear of exposure - of their activities,
of their values, of their hopes and anxieties. Evaluators, who must take
responsibility for the consequences of what they report, are embroiled in
this complexity. In our particular case, we withdrew.

Concluding Comments and a Look Ahead

Readers familiar with the literature of innovation and evaluation may well
be tempted to say at this point, "So what's new?". The schools system has
always been hierarchical and secretive. New curricula have always travelled
under an aura of evangelical authority. And case study evaluation, whatever
the particular circumstances of curriculum initiatives, has always
threatened to "penetrate the secrecy and so threaten the carefully
constructed claims which form the basis of authority." (MacDonald and
Walker, 1974) Yes, case study has always been difficult but, with due
attention to a reasonable balance between the protection of individual
interests and the rights of others to judge the work of those individuals,
it has been negotiable. Such negotiation operated in the space afforded
by respect for pluralism of interests and values, for the right to dissent
without consequence, for choice, voluntarism and growth to be adequately
informed. Perhaps crucially, it could work because the bureaucracy, whose
most cultivated skills lie in the control of information, kept their
distance from the arenas of specific endeavour, and construed themselves
as audiences rather than performers.

Basically what we are saying now is that trends in the management of
curriculum and particularly in the management of curriculum development,
have now coalesced into patterns of control which are essentially
authoritarian and anti-democratic. The virtual collapse of mediating
agencies, a characteristic of the collaborative partnership tradition of
post-war management, and the assimilation of local administrators as
branch agents of central executives, has created a bureaucratic monolith
for the enactment of governing political convictions in curriculum matters.
Administrative vulnerability to the exposure of programme failures has
correspondingly become acute. Tolerance of independent critique is low.
Although there is more funded evaluation of programmes than there has ever
been before, and although much of this evaluation is officially independent,
evaluators are largely coopted into a conspiracy of pretence - that the
programmes are educationally and economically sound, that they are going

reasonably well, that those who have been drafted by necessity or
opportunism within their fold are there by choice and conviction, or have
been persuaded subsequently by their merits. Evaluators may know better
but they, or their institutions, are more than ever dependent upon the
patronage of the implicated, particularly at the local level, where the
responsibility for programme impression management is now crucially located.
The space for dissent at all levels of involvement has closed down.
Democratic brokerage within a programme and the transmission of useful
knowledge to the public sphere, are not consistent with the requirements
of the programme managers who dominate evaluation sponsorship. And evaluation
is just as threatening in some respects to those teachers who feel they
have no "right to fail". Those evaluators who share our broad persuasion
about its aspirations will find themselves excluded, or in trouble. This
bodes ill for democracy in the matter of schooling. Educational evaluation,
in so far as it embodies a promise of impartial and useable knowledge for
the enlightenment and empowerment of those who are not party to government
action, is in danger of becoming a discreditable activity.

Is there a future for public evaluation? Has the time come perhaps to
decline, even in the increasingly rare cases where it is offered on
acceptable terms, the sponsorship of programme managers? Before answering
that, perhaps we should take a peek at the future, since there are signs
that yet another transformation of school management may be in store.

It is April, 1987. A general election looms. Will Mrs Thatcher achieve a
third term of office, to continue the political reform of an educational
sector even now in the throes of the most radical redistribution of power
since the immediate post-war legislation? Are schools on the privatisation
agenda, are Local Education Authorities as we have known them on the verge
of extinction, will a new partnership of central government, private
capital and parent governors take over the 'secret garden'? How far will
the logic of the market be applied to the institutionalised experience of
the young?

Many of us who work in education, perhaps especially those of us who
operate at one remove from direct involvement in curriculum determination,
are anxious about such possibilities, taken aback by their boldness,
surprised by their apparent electoral viability, bewildered by the speed
and confidence with which the props of this scenario are being assembled.
In education at least, the ascendancy of the 'new right' has taken us all

by storm and, in a sense, changed the problem. Concerned throughout the
seventies to mediate in our various ways the growing centralisation of
power over the curriculum and the increasing use of that power to control
in politically useful terms the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired
by the young, we now face a new prospect, that of statism in reverse gear,
fuelled by bureauphobia, the theory of public choice, and a keen eye for
cost sharing. None of us knows how far or how fast such an ideology will
be pursued, or to what extent it will be compromised by prudence or by
dissenting counsels - or mediated by party politics. But it would take us
into new political territory, perhaps into another country.If so, we may
all have to rethink our roles and obligations, not least those of us who
work in educational evaluation. Our economy has largely thrived as an
offshoot of bureaucratic imperialism, if not its creature. Who will want
to spend their voucher on evaluation? Will the bureaucracy, relieved of
many of its present burdens, have a renewed interest in evaluative feeback
from a devolved system of a new kind? We do not know.

Let not this speculative peek into the future deter us, however, from the
here and now, and the very different picture it presents. The manager of
the LAP project who accepted out invitation to terminate the evaluation
contract commented at one point of high acrimony that democratic evaluation
was   an "anachronism". We take his point, but would assert that his is
a short-term view of a democratic society that is presently under great
stress as it tries to come to terms with its changing relationship to the
rest of the world. It is, arguably, the case that Democratic Evaluation
becomes more relevant the more it is alleged to be 'anachronistic' - that
we must heed, but not be immobilised by, those words of John Maynard Keynes,
written in 1930:

> 'For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves
> and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is
> useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must
> be our Gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us
> out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.'

The morality of scarcity has imposed on schooling a utilitarian mythology
at the present stage of our development, and coercive strategies of myth
maintenance. But it is not for evaluators to pretend that foul is fair
and fair is foul. Our task is to demythologise action in ways which
facilitate reality-based, broadly participative policymaking processes,
because in the longer term that has to be the basis of our collective and
individual emancipation. But at this time a heavily implicated bureaucracy -
our traditional sponsor - constitutes a disabling source of sponshorship.
We must look elsewhere, to others who have been disadvanteged by the present

concentration of power and control of information about the consequences
of its exercise. Perhaps at the national level to Select Committees of
Parliament, presently hampered by limited access to useable knowledge.
Perhaps to local councils, whose knowledge of programmes is too dependent
on what their own staff choose to tell them. Perhaps to teacher
organisations, as they seek to rebuild their platform. And to the sponsoring
charities, who presently tread only in the footsteps of government.
Perhaps to multiple sponsorship from diverse sources, splitting the
interests and sharing the risks.

Finding alternative sources of funding is not of course a simple matter.
Had it been, we would have accomplished it by now. Select Committees have
no money, local councils prefer to improve their internal evaluative
mechanisms. Charities are fearful of accusations of political inference,
and have their tax exemption at stake. Our impoverished universities
seek to placate government, not to question it. This is not the USA,
where the checks and balances in education are heavily financed. We cannot
look either to the European Commission, despire its increasing role in
curriculum sponsorship. Having initially funded a substantial network of
programme evaluators in the late seventies to monitor the first stage of
its Transition from School programme. the Brussels bureaucrats showed
their contempt for public knowledge by replacing them for the second stage
by a small group of hired, in-house reporters.

So it will not be easy. This is hardly the most hopeful of scenarios, but it
is not devoid of possibilities. We must work on public, and perhaps
particularly on politician education about the difficulties we face. We
must stop pretending that all is well, and look to share our perspective,
our aspirations and our problems with those whose interests or values are
close to our own.

Much will depend on how our democracy responds to further developments of
present trends. We certainly should not give up on evaluation, simply
because we are dealing with a bureaucracy which Mrs Thatcher once called
the most secretive in Western democracies. There is a job to do. Evaluators
who can stay in business have the priceless advantage of access to a
secret and largely secretive world of significant social action. We must
find ways of maintaining that access and of using it to inform all those
who have a right to make informed judgements about whether they can
entrust children to the care of compulsory state institutions.

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