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Interests, Knowledge and Evaluation: Alternative Approaches to Curriculum Evaluation[1]

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In any serious discussion of school improvement, improvement of curriculum is implied. Curriculum improvement, in turn, implies curriculum evaluation.

In spite of the many years of curriculum evaluation activities at local, provincial, and national levels, it is only in recent years that the notion of "curriculum evaluation" itself has been made problematic and subjected to rigorous scrutinizing. It is this meta-level concern in curriculum evaluation that is the focus of this paper, guided by an interest in understanding more fully what is meant when we say "curriculum evaluation."

In recent years, some of us have come to question the tendency of educators to reduce the idiom of educational evaluation to the paradigm of scientistic research. In our search flowing from our questioning, we have come to know some Continental European scholars who did not succumb to the persuasions of logical positivism expounded by members of the Vienna Circle as did North American scholars. Among these is Jürgen Habermas, a German scholar affiliated with the Frankfurt School.[2] He, together with others such as Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno, announced what they saw as a serious crisis in the Western intellectual world so dominated by instrumental reason based on scientism and technology. Habermas appealed to philosophical anthropology to reveal knowledge constitutive of human interests embedded in basically different paradigms. In our endeavour to transcend the dominant tradition in curriculum evaluation, we appropriated Habermas's paradigms, and relabeled them for our purposes.

These we have termed:

1. Ends-Means (technical) Evaluation Orientation.

2. Situational Interpretive Evaluation Orientation.

3. Critical Theoretic Evaluation Orientation.

I wish to discuss these orientations by grounding my discussion in a concrete evaluation experience: the assessment of the British Columbia Social Studies program.

Public school educators in British Columbia are very aware of the many evaluation activities spawned by the office of the Assessment Branch of the Ministry of Education over the past several years, in response, in part, we sense, to the public clamour for accountability in education.

Our experiences in evaluating the British Columbia Social Studies[3] provide an exemplar of how multiple perspectives can guide curriculum evaluation. From the outset, as we ventured into various centers in British Columbia, seeking out and trying to make sense of concerns about social studies expressed by teachers, students, parents, school trustees, administrators, and professors

of social studies education, we seriously posed ourselves a question: "What are the evaluation frameworks and approaches we should employ in evaluating the phenomenon called social studies in British Columbia?"

We took a cue from what Kenneth Beittel (1973)[4] called, appropriately, the "Rashomon effect," a notion borrowed from Kurosawa's acclaimed film in which he disclosed the same event from several perspectives. Simultaneously, we were mindful of the risk of reductionism of evaluation possibilities to the dominant ends-means orientation in evaluation research, a point M. Q. Patton made in the following way:

> The very dominance of the scientific method in evaluation research appears to have cut off the great majority of practitioners from serious consideration of any research paradigm. The label "research" has come to mean the equivalent of employing the Scientific Method ... of working within the dominant paradigm. (1975, p. 6)[5]

We approached our evaluation activities mindful of the importance to us of ourselves being open to fresh possibilities. We began our evaluation tasks guided by paper-and-pencil-oriented questionnaires that sought teachers', parents' and students' views of aspects of Social Studies, and also students' views and knowledge of Social Studies content. We extended ourselves to include on-site studies, guided by concerns for meanings people who dwell within classroom and school situations give to Social Studies. Further, we added a critical evaluation dimension, seeking out underlying "official" perspectives embedded in the Ministry's official curriculum documents.

These activities led to the formulation of five reports and a special paper as follows:

Report A: Teacher Views of Social Studies

Report B: Teacher Views of Prescribed Social Studies Curriculum Resources

Report C: Views of Goals of Social Studies

Report D: Student Achievement and Views in Social Studies

Report E: Interpretive Studies of Selected School Situations

Special Paper: "An Interpretation of Intents of the Elementary and Secondary Curriculum Guides" in The Summary Report: B.C. Social Studies Assessment.

Now, some years after the completion of the evaluation, we are in a position to provide a reconstructed version, possessing to some degree a clarity and tidiness, which only a reconstruction can give. In fact, it is through such a reconstruction that we were able to provide a portrayal of our evaluation approaches interpreted within a framework of evaluation paradigms (Aoki, 1978, p. 54).

We must now turn to an effort to illuminate to some extent these three evaluation orientations.

Ends-Means (Technical) Evaluation Orientation

Evaluators acting within an ends-means orientation reflect their interests by entertaining a set of evaluation concerns.

Ends-Means Concerns:

1. How efficient are the means in achieving the curricular goals and objectives?

2. How effective are the means in predicting the desired outcomes?

3. What is the degree of congruency between and among intended outcomes, the content in the instructional materials and the teaching approaches specified?

4. How good is Curriculum A compared with Curriculum B in achieving given ends?

5. Of given curricula, which one is the most cost-effective and time-efficient?

6. What valid generalizations can be made for all schools in a district?

7. How well are inputs organized to achieve organizational goals?

8. What are the principal means used to achieve goals? How do we know that these means are actually enacted, with what frequency, and with what intensity?

These ends-means concerns reflect an orientation to evaluation, which can be characterized as technical or instrumental. As such, these concerns reflect the dominant evaluation approach in use, going hand-in-hand with the technically oriented mainstream curriculum development/evaluation rationale, known popularly as the Tyler Rationale. We know it by Tyler's sequentially arranged four-step formulation (1949):

Step 1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

Step 2. How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives?

Step 3. How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction?

Step 4. How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated?

The ends-means evaluation orientation has for the pragmatically oriented a commonsensical ring carrying with it the validity of popular support. Further, its congruency with the mainstream social theory idioms of basically instrumental reason, such as behaviourism, systems thinking, and structural functionalism borrowed heavily by educators, lends end-means evaluation a credibility that assumes the status of consensual validity of legitimated educator "scholars." Such legitimated authenticity has led many evaluators to regard this evaluation orientation as the orientation.

But what does this orientation imply in terms of cognitive interests and assumptions held tacitly? I suggest that underneath the avowed interest in efficiency, effectiveness, predictability, and certainty, as reflected in the list of concerns we examined, is a more deeply rooted interest—that of control. It is saturated with a manipulative ethos that leads evaluators of this orientation to value evaluation questions such as: How well have the ends been achieved? Which is a better program, Curriculum A or Curriculum B?

Within this framework, the form of knowledge that is prized is empirical data; the "harder" they are, the better, and the more objective they are, the better. Data are seen as brute facts. In scientific terms the form of knowledge assumes nomological status, demanding empirical validation and seeking levels of generalizability. Knowledge is objective, carrying with it the false dignity of value-free neutrality, reducing out as humanly as possible contamination by the subjectivity of the knower.

Evaluators who subscribe to the ends-means view are technologically oriented, primarily

interested in seeing how well the system is able to control components within the system as it struggles to achieve its goals. In their tasks, these evaluators seek efficient tools and instruments such as tests and questionnaires, and seek rigor by bringing to bear the expertise of psychometricians and statisticians. They tend to resort to measurable quantitative data subjected to sophisticated statistical analyses.

In our B.C. Social Studies Evaluation, we administered achievement tests to Grade 4, 8, and 12 classes randomly selected throughout the province, and we sent questionnaires to randomly selected teachers in order to seek the teachers' assessment of instructional resources. These are illustrations of the instruments we used in the technically oriented dimension of our evaluation.

In summary, we might say that the ends-means evaluation mode just considered is framed within the orienting perspective of the following cognitive interest, form of knowing, and mode of evaluation:

Interest in the ethos of *control* as reflected in the values of efficiency, effectiveness, certainty, and predictability.

Form of Knowing emphasized is that of empirical nomological knowing. Understanding is in terms of facts and generalizations.

Mode of Evaluation is ends-means evaluation, which is achievement oriented, goal based, criterion referenced, and cost benefit oriented.

Situational Interpretive Evaluation Orientation

In contrast, to the technical interests and concerns reflected in the ends-means approach to evaluation, those evaluators oriented toward the situational interpretive mode of evaluation register interest in the following kinds of concerns:

Situational Interpretive Concerns:

1. How do various groups such as teachers, the ministry, parents, students, and administrators view Curriculum X?

2. In what ways do various groups approve or disapprove the program?

3. How do the various groups see Curriculum X in terms of relevance, meaningfulness, and appropriateness?

4. What are the various groups' perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program?

5. What questions do administrators and significant others have about Curriculum X?

The situational concerns expressed in these evaluation concerns reflect an orientation to evaluation that we can characterize as situational interpretive. As such these concerns reflect an approach to evaluation in which evaluators show interest in the meanings those living in the situation give to a given curriculum.

Although the technical evaluator assumes a posture as an outsider external to the situation (i.e., as a disinterested observer or as a stranger), the situational interpretive evaluator attempts to gain insights into human experiences as they are experienced by insiders, as they live within

the situation.

For example, at this very moment as I write I find myself situated within my world of teacher educators. In this world of mine, my "I" is at the center. I am experiencing life as I am now living it, guided by my commonsense-typified knowledge about educators' writings and about people who read such writings. I define my life now by giving meaning to my paper on evaluation, as I sit at my desk awaiting words to come into view, and to ongoing events about me as I experience them. I am continuously involved in meaning-giving activities as I am subjectively engaged in constructing my personal world of meanings. The structure of these meanings is my present reality.

I can also picture you seated with the text of this writing before you as you are experiencing the reading of my paper. You are situated with yourself at center, that central point of your being that allows you to say "I." You are experiencing life as you are now living it in your typical "reading" way, giving your own meaning to the text of what you are reading. You, too, are continuously involved in meaning-giving activities as you construct your own personal world of meanings. The structure of these meanings is your present reality.

In a social situation, which a classroom or school significantly is, there are multifold ways in which things, people, and events are given meaning by those who are living in the situation. In other words, people are continuously interpreting events that they experience, and these interpretations differ from person to person. Hence, an evaluator oriented toward situational interpretation must keep two significant features in mind: (1) People give personal meanings to each situation experienced, and (2) people interpret the same event in different ways.

Although, as we have seen, the human activity of central concern within the ends-means orientation is man's technical productive capacity to achieve ends, the activity of most concern for evaluators in the situational interpretive framework is communication between man and man. Because evaluation-guiding interests of the situational interpretive evaluation are insights into human experiences as socially lived, the evaluator needs to direct efforts toward clarifying, authenticating, and bringing into full human awareness the meaning structures of the constructive activities of the social actors in the situation. Thus, the form of knowledge sought by the evaluator within this situation is not nomological statements, but rather structures of meaning as man meaningfully experiences and cognitively appropriates the natural and social world. Hence, when the situational interpretive evaluator comes to know situationally, he [or she] knows the world in a different form and in a different way compared with the knowledge gained by the ends-means evaluator.

In seeking out, therefore, the structure of meanings, which are not accessible to ends-means evaluators, those in the situational interpretive orientation must attempt to provide explanations of a different kind. That is, although "explaining" within the ends-means orientation means giving causal, functional, or hypothetico-deductive statements, within the situational orientation, "explaining" requires the striking of a responsive chord among people in dialogue situations by clarifying motives, authentic experiences, and common meanings. The evaluator, hence, cannot stand aloof as an observer as is done in the ends-means evaluation, but must enter into intersubjective dialogue with the people in the evaluation situation.

Within the situational interpretive orientation, there are different approaches, each allowing a description of the meaning structure in a situation. There is growing interest among evaluators in studies that fall within the phenomenological attitude. The phenomenology of socially constructed understanding, requiring investigation of meaning-giving activities in the everyday world, is the main interest of sociologists of knowledge such as P. Berger, T. Luckman, and A.

Schutz, ethnomethodologists such as H. Garfinkel, I. Goffman, and Cicourel, and hermeneutists such as F. Schleiermacher, H. Palmer, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Such interpretations of situations are called phenomenological descriptions, providing first-order experiences people directly experience. Evaluators of this persuasion are interested in the quality of life-as-lived in the classroom or school, life experienced by those who dwell within the situation.

Within the B.C. Social Studies Assessment, we experimented with two situational evaluation approaches: (1) an ethnographic approach in which we sought out views of the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-in-use as interpreted by parents, students, teachers and administrators, and (2) an approach using conversational analysis of the meaning structures of the existential life of teachers and students. The inclusion of these reports represented our attempt to portray more fully the social studies phenomenon as it existed in British Columbia.

We can summarize the situational interpretive framework in terms of its cognitive interest, form of knowledge, and mode of evaluation as follows:

Interest in the meaning structure of intersubjective communication between and among people who dwell within a situation.

Form of Knowing is situational knowing, within which understanding is in terms of the structure of meaning. Within this orientation, to explain is to strike a resonant chord by clarifying motives and common meanings.

Mode of Evaluation is situational evaluation, which seeks the quality of meanings people living in a situation give to their lived situations.

Critical Evaluation Mode Orientation

Evaluators thinking and acting within the critical mode reflect their interests by committing themselves to a set of evaluation concerns that differ markedly from either the technically or the situationally oriented evaluators. The following concerns illustrate the interest of critical evaluators:

Critical Evaluation Concerns:

1. What are the perspectives underlying Curriculum X? (What are underlying root interests, root assumptions, and root approaches?)

2. What is the implied view of the student or the teacher held by the curriculum planner?

3. At the root level, whose interests does Curriculum X serve?

4. What are the root metaphors that guide the curriculum developer, the curriculum implementer, or the curriculum evaluator?

5. What is the basic bias of the publisher/author/developer of prescribed or recommended resource materials?

6. What is the curriculum's supporting worldview?

The evaluation concerns just illustrated reflect an orientation to evaluation that we can characterize as critical or critical theoretic, rooted in critical social theory, an emerging discipline

area. These concerns reflect an approach to evaluation in which the evaluators are interested in bringing into full view underlying perspectives of programs that are typically taken-for-granted and therefore, hidden from view. Implied within a "perspective" are root metaphors, deep-seated human interests, assumptions about man, worldview, and knowledge, as well as stances that man takes in approaching himself or his world. Critical evaluators are interested in making these visible. But they do not stop here.

As we have noted, although evaluation is seen in ends-means evaluation within the framework of instrumental or technical action, and in situational evaluation within the framework of communicative action, in critical theoretic evaluation it is seen within the dialectical framework of practical action and critical reflection, what Paulo Freire refers to as praxis. In critical reflection, the actor, through the critical analytic process, discovers and makes explicit the tacit and hidden assumptions and intentions held. Such reflective activity is guided by interest in revealing the root condition that makes knowing possible, or in revealing the underlying human and social conditions that distort human existence, distortions that tend to alienate man. Thus, critical evaluators attempt to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of human and social action or when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can, in principle, be transformed. Richard Schaull captures aptly this critical orientation in the following way:

> There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (1968, foreword)

Thus, a critically oriented evaluator becomes a part of the object of the evaluation research. The evaluator, in becoming involved with his [or her] subjects, enters into their world and attempts to engage them mutually in reflective activity. The evaluator questions subjects and self, and encourages subjects to question him [or her] and themselves. Reflection by the evaluator and by participants allows new questions to emerge from the situation, which, in turn, leads to further reflective activity. Reflection, however, is not only oriented toward making conscious the unconscious by discovering underlying interests, assumptions and intentions, but it is also oriented toward action guided by the newly gained conscious, critical knowledge. Hence, in the ongoing process, which is dialectical and transformative, both evaluator and subjects become participants in an open dialogue.

Reflection in the foregoing sense is not the kind of activity school people, as actors, engage in their ongoing lives. In their everyday existence, actors deal with their concerns in routine ways, guided by the commonplace recipes that sustain them in good stead. What is missing is a conscious effort to examine critically the assumptions and intentions underlying their practical thoughts and acts. They may be reflective but not critically reflective. Critical reflection leads to an understanding of what is beyond the actor's ordinary view, by making the familiar unfamiliar, by making the invisible visible. Such reflective activity not only allows liberation from the unconsciously held assumptions and intentions that lie buried and hidden. For example, at the personal level the content of reflection may be the "rationalization" an actor uses to hide underlying motives for his actions. Or at the societal level, the content may be the "ideology" used to support social practices and policies, rendering obscure society's manipulative ethos and

interests that lie beneath. Critical interest thus sees interest in uncovering the "true" interests embedded in some given personal or social condition.

But more than that, it is interested in bringing about reorientation through transformative action of the assumptions and intentions upon which reflection and action rest. Critical orientation, then, with its evaluation-guiding interest to liberate people from hidden assumptions and intentions, promotes a theory of man and society that is grounded in the moral attitude of emancipation.

Curriculum evaluation within this orientation would ask that focus be given to the dynamic of the dialectic between the knowledge structure of life experiences and the normative structure as well. Within this critical framework, phenomenological description of educational phenomena will be regarded as incomplete, but significant in making possible critical reflection and action. Within such a framework of interest the pioneer work of Langeveld, associated with the School of Utrecht, makes sense. He has argued that phenomenological disciplines are conducted within the dialogical context of an ongoing situational interpretive activity but guided by some normative purpose of what it means to educate and to be educated within the critically reflective orientation. As van Manen states, referring to Langeveld's pedagogical position: "Educational activities must always be structured pedagogically; that is, it should be grounded reflectively in the emancipatory norms toward which all education is oriented" (1978, p. 5).[6]

Within the British Columbia Social Studies Assessment, critical evaluation was included under the innocuous title "An Interpretation of Intents of the Elementary and Secondary Curriculum Guides," and exists as an afterthought, an addendum to the summary report. In it we examined the official text of the social studies curriculum-as-plan and gave it a critical look.

To get a sense of the flavour of this evaluation, read the concluding statement of the critical analysis:

> The B.C. Social Studies program approaches the study of man-in-his-world from three different perspectives: scientific, situational and critically reflective knowing. Through each of these, students are exposed to various interpretations of how the social world has been constructed. The program, however, does not provide a balance among these perspectives: rather, it emphasizes scientific knowledge. Through such an emphasis teachers and students are made dependent on one particular way of viewing the social world. Such dependence limits the possibilities which the participants have available for exploring their social environment. The extent to which the perspectives influence classroom presentations (passive vs. active, non-committal vs. committal) stresses the importance of providing a balance of knowledge perspectives in the program. (Aoki & Harrison, 1977, p. 62)

What we have done is to bring the official B.C. Social Studies Program into fuller view by revealing the tacitly held assumptions and intentions. Following the comment we added, as a recommendation to the ministry, the following:

> To aid teachers in moving towards consideration of perspectives, it is recommended that a full description of the perspectives incorporated into the B.C. Social Studies program be carefully described in the Curriculum Guides. Students and teachers are entitled to a full explanation of the curriculum developers' knowing stance. The curriculum developers' perspective toward the social world should not, in other words, be hidden from users of the curriculum. (Aoki & Harrison, 1977, p. 62)

We might summarize the third evaluation mode discussed here as follows:

Critical evaluation: A Summary:

Interest in emancipation from hidden assumptions or underlying human conditions.

Form of Knowing is critical knowing in the sense of understanding hidden assumptions, perspectives, motives, rationalizations, and ideologies. To explain within critical knowing is to trace down and bring into fuller view underlying unreflected aspects.

Mode of Evaluation is critical theoretic evaluation, which involves (1) discovering through critical reflection underlying human conditions, assumptions, and intentions, and (2) acting on self and world to improve the human conditions or to transform the underlying assumptions and intentions.

In this paper I have attempted to trace out a post hoc reconstruction of three orientations that undergirded the evaluation we conducted. By embracing these perspectives we acknowledged multiple human interests, each associated with a form of knowledge. We stated that within the ends-means evaluation approach, the implied interest is intellectual and technical control, and the implied form of knowledge is generalizable objective knowledge. Within the situational interpretive approach, the implied interest is authentic communicative consensus, and the form of knowledge, situational knowledge in terms of meaning. Within the critical orientation, the implied interest is emancipatory, based on action that brings into fuller view the taken-for-granted assumptions and intentions. The knowledge flowing from this activity is critical knowledge.

It has been said that an educator's understanding of his [or her] task as educator is most clearly demonstrated by his [or her] method of evaluation. If that be so, the evaluation approaches we used disclose our understanding of possible ways of understanding what it means to be an educator and what it means to be educated. In our efforts we employed evaluation orientations that reflect to some extent our commitment to our understanding of evaluation as human intentional activities grounded in multiple human interests. So committed, we directed our efforts to go beyond technical instrumentalism, to which we educators in North America have been so prone.

We feel that we have gained a fuller and richer understanding of curriculum evaluation and a sense of how this understanding might help in efforts toward school improvement. And yet, in reaching out for a fuller understanding, we have a gnawing sense flowing from having experienced a reaching out that never fully reaches.

We acknowledge that our effort in conducting this evaluation was a human effort and, as such, subject to the weaknesses and blindness to limit situations that all humans, being human, suffer.

And so, when we felt the task was done, we asked ourselves these questions: Has the job been done? Has the picture of Social Studies in British Columbia been adequately drawn? We replied:

Certainly in our efforts to give an accurate portrayal, we have employed not only traditionally accepted techniques, but also more personalized ones aimed at seriously attempting to "hear" what the people of the province are saying about the subject.

There may be dissatisfactions. Some may feel that this is "just another assessment" and thereby dismiss it. Others may argue quite rightly that the findings do not represent the true picture as they see it. But all this is as it should be.

Whenever we see a picture of ourselves taken by someone else, we are anxious that justice be done to the "real me". If there is disappointment, it is because we know that there is so much more to the "real me" than has been momentarily captured by the photographer's click. So too with this assessment: there are deeper and wider dimensions to the total subject than can be justly dealt with from such a hasty glance. Any ensuing dissatisfaction should not be simply taken as a measure of the assessment's failing but as testimony to that crucial vitality of the subject that eludes captivity on paper. We know that the true magic of the educating act is so much more than a simple, albeit justifiable, concern for improved resources, more sensitively stated objectives, better pre-service and in-service training for teachers, or improved bureaucratic efficiency. Rather it has to do with the whole meaning of a society's search for true maturity and responsible freedom through its young people. (Aoki et al., 1977, p. 49)

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Notes

1. Reprinted with permission from Aoki, T. (1986). Interests, knowledge and evaluation: Alternative approaches to curriculum evaluation. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 6*(4), pp. 27–44. https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/issue/view/95

2. I have been influenced greatly by the writings of Jürgen Habermas, principally *Knowledge and human interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972). The reader will note the relationship between the title of the book and the title of this paper.

3. The British Columbia Social Studies Assessment: A Report to the Ministry of Education, 1977, is comprised of six reports in four volumes. The reports are as follows:

   - Views of Goals of Social Studies

   - Teachers' Views of Social Studies

   - Teachers' Views of Prescribed Social Studies Curriculum Resources

   - Student Achievement and Views in Social Studies

- Interpretive Studies of Selected School Situation

- British Columbia Social Studies Assessment: Summary Report

The Contract Team consisted of Ted T. Aoki, Chairman, Caroline Langford, David M. Williams, and Donald C. Wilson, and the reports were submitted to the Ministry of Education, Government of British Columbia, Victoria, B.C.

4. What Beittel (1973) has to say about art education research is applicable to evaluation studies.

5. This is a monograph in a series developed by the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation.

6. An account of Langeveld's conception of phenomenological pedagogy is described by Max van Manen (1978, March).

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