CURRICULUM EVALUATION

Ken Leithwood summarizes the questions Arieh Lewy's *Handbook of Curriculum Evaluation* asks: "How is curriculum evaluation to be defined, conceptualized, and conducted? In what respects is it different from other types of evaluation? Does curriculum evaluation warrant the status of a discipline in its own right?"[1] Leithwood then proceeds to summarize the sections, singling out a chapter by Levy in Part I that "provides orientation for non-evaluation specialists," linking curriculum evaluation to objectives (as Tyler did[2]), phrased here as "information about decisions relevant to development of curriculum material used in specific courses of study."[3] Levy follows with (in Leithwood's view) "a simple, useful classification of existing evaluation models" as well as "a working definition of curriculum evaluation based on the provision of information about decisions related to a six-staged view of curriculum development processes."[4] Indeed, "procedures commonly employed by national curriculum-development centres provide the rationale for this view."[5]

Included in Part II of the *Handbook*, in separate chapters by different authors, are descriptions of curriculum development processes and forms of evaluation, each aligned with the six stages.[6] There are chapters on "general aims" (chapter 2), "planning" (chapter 3), "tryout and revision" (chapter 4), "field trials" (chapter 5), "large scale implementation" (chapter 6), and "quality control of implemented curriculum overtime" (chapter 7).[7] As for being satisfied with "the *Handbook*'s answer to the question of how curriculum evaluation is to be defined and conceptualized," Leithwood answers "maybe," as the aforementioned chapters varied in quality.[8]

Part III consists of five chapters depicting with "evaluation instruments and strategies," among these "expert judgments" (chapter 8), "observational techniques" (chapter 9), "tests and scales" (chapter 10), "teachers, parents, and community as data sources" (chapter 11), as well as "collecting and analysing evaluation data" (chapter 12).[9] While Leithwood again finds the chapters variable in quality, "perhaps the major problem with Part III of the book is Part II," as much "methodological discussion is contained in the chapters of Part II and this creates some significant redundancy by Part III."[10] He allows that when consulting it "as a reference source rather than reading it from cover to cover," this redundancy proves not such a problem.[11]

Lewy's claim for a separate discipline of curriculum evaluation Leithwood does consider a problem, as it "seems to be unjustified, largely on the basis of his own implicit argument; in order to do curriculum evaluation well, one must be sensitive to the questions curriculum developers need answers to and the context in which those answers must be provided," thereby implying the contrary, e.g. that curriculum evaluation should be subsumed within curriculum development, as making the placement of "evaluation enterprise behind its own disciplinary walls" serving "to make it less sensitive to development processes and, as a result, less useful."[12]

Accordingly, Leithwood concludes "that we should more systematically examine alternatives to stages of curriculum development outlined in the book, as a way of conceptualizing the major features of curriculum evaluation processes."[13] He alludes to "stages of curriculum development different from those proposed in the book," and that "viewing curriculum evaluation as consisting of the aggregated methodologies for data collection discussed in Parts II and III of the book would be close to the view of curriculum evaluation as presently practised."[14] He continues:

> The most promising alternative, in my view, is to examine more systematically the decision-making processes to be served by curriculum evaluation. The conception of evaluation presented in the handbook clearly locates itself within a decision-making framework. But this does not mean that the classes of decisions to be made (stages of curriculum development) are necessarily the most productive conceptual organizers. Components or steps in decision-making are also attractive for this purpose.[15]

In service to understanding curriculum development, focusing on such "steps" would seem helpful; in the service of administrative surveillance, it seems like micro-managing (at best).

Understanding is not the main motive here, as Leithwood makes clear in his conclusion: "Attractive alternatives notwithstanding, the *Handbook of Curriculum Evaluation* is, on the whole, a well-developed, readable, and usable resource for curriculum developers."[16] He adds "Its main strength will be to convince curriculum developers of the advantages of more systematic use of formal data collection, to alert them as to when in the development process particular forms of data collection are appropriate, and to provide some initial insights into how to go about collecting such data."[17] While not contesting this insight, I do want to points to its (historical) place (as a "step") in the contemporary calamity: the datafication of education.[18]

COMMENTARY

As the research assistant – Anton Birioukov-Brant – points out, Leithwood disagrees with one of Lewy's main assertions: curriculum evaluation should be a separate discipline. Leithwood insists instead that curriculum evaluation should be considered an integral aspect of curriculum development. That conceptual point is complemented by a practical one, as Leithwood points to those guidelines, including data collection techniques, listed in the *Handbook* that evaluators might well employ, an orientation to curriculum contrasting – Birioukov-Brant also notes – with so-called qualitative

(including specifically subjective) conceptions.[19] I'd add a methodological point myself, namely that – perhaps due to space constraints – Leithwood's review sketches rather than specifies the *Handbook*'s content, a rather different format than, say, the *New York Review of Books,* the model for essays published in the *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*.[20]

References

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Endnotes

[1] 1978, 99.

[2] Tyler (1949) summarized a scheme – so-called "basic principles" that linked objectives to assessment – which had been in circulation for thirty years or more (Pinar 2015, 99). Linking evaluation to curriculum developers' objectives ignores entirely the ("curriculum-as-lived" (Aoki 2005 [1986], 160).

[3] 1978, 99. Note that the basic curriculum question – what knowledge is of most worth? – is ignored, as is the *sine qua non* of curriculum theory, consideration of the overall school program (including extra-curricular programs and activities: see Berk 1992) and its embeddedness in society, politics, subjectivity (e.g. curriculum as lived).

[4] 1978, 99. Note that at this stage of formulation curriculum evaluation sidesteps the curriculum question – what knowledge is of most worth? in favour of procedure, in the quoted passage once again linking evaluation to objectives.

[5] 1978, 99. I am not denying the importance of procedure; I am (and was then) astonished that it preoccupied the field (although not all of it: Willis 1978).

[6] Leithwood 1978, 99.

[7] Leithwood 1978, 99.

[8] Leithwood 1978, 99-100

[9] Leithwood 1978, 100.

[10] Leithwood 1978, 100.

[11] Leithwood 1978, 100.

[12] Leithwood 1978, 100. Leithwood's call for contextualization here seems limited to the curriculum development process, itself evidently extracted from its larger institutional (i.e., governmental) and/or political settings.

[13] Leithwood 1978, 101.

[14] Leithwood 1978, 101.

[15] Leithwood 1978, 101. Decision-making turns out to be a topic Leithwood himself takes up: see research brief #70.

[16] Leithwood 1978, 101.

[17] Leithwood 1978, 101.

[18] See, for instance, Williamson 2017.

[19] Whose work was collected in the Willis book.

[20] https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/jaaacs/index