

RESPONSIBILITY FOR CURRICULUM EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

The tradition in Australia of strong system control over the curriculum has been significantly changed by the devolution of responsibility for curriculum development to the school level. However, the State systems have not devolved the responsibility for curriculum evaluation to the same extent that they have the responsibility for curriculum development and this results in an incongruous position. If the system's evaluation procedures substantially influence the nature of a school's curriculum, the school cannot be said to be really responsible for that curriculum. Despite this, system authorities appear reluctant to devolve all responsibility for curriculum evaluation to schools. Indeed, there appears to be a common agreement that systems must monitor their schools for accountability purposes.

Examples of inconsistent policies on curriculum development and curriculum evaluation are presented. Explanations for these inconsistencies are sought and strategies for their removal or reduction are considered.

Traditionally in Australia, the centralized administrations of the various Education Departments held tight control over what was taught in their schools. Although at least since the sixties, centrally developed syllabi typically carried an invitation to schools and teachers to make adaptations that they considered appropriate, the principals and superintendent's evaluation procedures assumed the standard curriculum such that in effect teachers could make additions to the recommended syllabi but alterations or deletions could well prove embarrassing.

However, at least since the seventies began, the Education Departments, to varying degrees, have sought to reduce the degree of central control and to encourage schools to take initiatives on curriculum matters. As a result the expression "School Based Curriculum Development" has become common in the literature and in teacher development programmes.

To different extents in each State system, responsibility for education policy and curriculum development has been delegated to schools. This could have been done in the confidence that traditional ties will hold schools reasonably close to the central administrations' expectations, or with the knowledge that there are sufficient covert controls to make the overt exercise of authority unnecessary. On the other hand the delegation of curriculum responsibility could be the result of confidence and trust in the professional capabilities of the school staffs and the belief that better education will result if schools determine for themselves what they are going to do. Alternatively, it could be a concession won by the schools.

The actual reasons are not at issue here. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that schools have been encouraged to think independently and to formulate their own policy and curriculum. What is far from clear is the

degree of school independence that schools will be allowed and how the increased independence will be made compatible with the central administrations' responsibility for what happens in schools. This paper is not advocating devolution of curriculum responsibility to the school level. The topic explored here is the problem of reconciling the prima facie inconsistency of giving freedom and responsibility to schools to decide what they will teach, and any continuing responsibility of the Education Departments for monitoring what is happening in its schools.

It is incongruous to speak of giving schools responsibility for their curriculum if the evaluation is decided according to the central administrations' policy and aims. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the various degrees of school-level curriculum responsibility that are evident in Australia in order to consider the relationship between the evaluation procedures needed by schools to monitor their curriculum and those needed by the central administration to ascertain the results of encouraging schools to increased independence on curriculum matters.

It will be argued that a paradoxical situation will arise if schools are evaluated according to Departmental policy and aims when the staff have developed a curriculum in the implementation of their own school policy unless there is clear resolution of the relationship between schools' policies and aims and those of the central administration.

If schools really are to be given responsibility for the curriculum that they design for their students then the monitoring role of the central administration requires re-examination. There seem to be the following possibilities:

1. The traditional monitoring system, with the central administration having total supervisory responsibility, is continued such that school-based curriculum development and implementation are designed to meet the requirements of the central aims and policy.
2. The monitoring system is modified such that certain clearly defined policy and curriculum responsibilities are delegated to the schools, while other responsibilities are retained by the central administration. The delineation would have to be clear and appropriate for this to be a genuine solution which met the needs of both parties.
3. Full responsibility is given to the schools. The central administration could perhaps institute a meta-evaluation procedure which monitored the school's evaluation procedures rather than the school's policy and results.

Unless one of these procedures is developed into a declared policy then the level of the schools' responsibility will remain indefinite and the possibility of overlap and conflict between school level and system level evaluation purposes and procedures will be real.

This situation seems to have arisen in Western Australia. The Palmer Report (1973, p.1) declared a policy of sponsoring the professional freedom of teachers. It stated that it was considered that teachers had been over-supervised and that this had resulted in too great a uniformity among schools and too great an emphasis on subject content and syllabus coverage. It was suggested that schools should develop their own policy and aims in the hope that "in a climate of comparative freedom, essential qualities like responsibility, teacher dedication, educational experimentation and innovation can be generated" (1973, p.2).

The Report (1973, p.3) also stated that it was a policy of the primary division to encourage diversity between schools. A stated purpose of the Report was to frame general educational goals which the central administration supported, that principals could examine and accept or reject as they framed their own list of aims and priorities. Schools were advised against attempting to meet the comprehensive set of aims in the Report.

The suggestions for school diversification in the Palmer Report seemed like encouragement to schools to devise their own aims rather than a suggestion to choose their own subset from the list of recommended examples given or to devise their own school aims in the light of over-arching system-level aims and objectives. However, the Report illustrates the ambivalence that is the topic of this paper, by adding as a Catch 22 to the encouragement towards school independence, the comment that at the same time it was acknowledged that control of the education system is a responsibility of the central administration and that the exercise of this authority is sometimes necessary.

A similar duality has occurred in recent policy statements. For example in the "Literacy and Numeracy" policy (1977, p.1) it was stated that each school is expected to prepare a developmental policy for each subject area so that learning programmes within the school are coherent and compatible when compared across years. The responsibility for developing the learning programme is clearly assigned to the school. In the conclusion (1977, p.2) schools are also clearly assigned responsibility for the evaluation of their policies.

To ensure this coherence of programme each school is expected to formulate a policy for its ... programme, to make sure that this policy is comprehended by and implemented by all of its staff, and to monitor student progress systematically in order to determine the effectiveness of the school's programme.

In contrast with this school-based approach, in the "Education and Standards" policy statement (1977, p.2), the Director-General states as a matter of policy that the Education Department recognises the importance of standards, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy and "will continue to monitor level of attainment so as to ensure that achievement levels continue to rise".

These two approaches are not necessarily contradictory or conflicting. However, they indicate at least a dual approach to curriculum responsibility in the areas of design and evaluation that requires reconciliation for clarity.

In the West Australian Education Department's draft discussion paper on evaluation (1978, p.3) the necessity for system-level monitoring of schools was asserted. School evaluation was considered to have the joint functions of aiding school development and assisting system accountability. This dual function is increased in complexity if schools are really given the freedoms suggested in the Palmer Report. At present the various State Education Departments have the responsibility and the authority to decide what will be taught in their schools. They can delegate the authority to decide what will be taught in schools but cannot delegate the responsibility for the result.

Evaluation at both school and system level is necessary for effective planning and accountability at each level. Therefore, the two approaches will need to be structured into compatibility to avoid overlap of effort and conflict of purpose.

Paradigms of the Distribution of Curriculum Responsibility

Varying degrees of devolution of responsibility for curriculum development are represented in Figure 1. The sequence from top to bottom reflects the states through which changes appear to be occurring.

a. Traditional System Control

The traditional Australian model for curriculum development and implementation involved system level development and school level implementation. Decisions about aims, organization and content, and recommendations about teaching methods that would be applicable, generally were made centrally. Syllabus and support material was prepared at a Curriculum Branch and distributed to schools for implementation. Schools had some flexibility over sequences of topic treatment and teaching style but the net result was a close similarity between the curricula of the schools within the system.

b. Centrally Developed Guidelines: School Adaptation and Implementation

An initial stage in increasing the school's opportunity to participate in curriculum development was to change the status of the centrally issued material from specification to guidelines. Instead of being the material that is to be taught, the centrally issued material in this paradigm is regarded as a suggestion that can be followed or freely adapted.

This approach offers support for teachers who lack the experience, interest or ability to develop their own curriculum, it provides a guide as to the central administration's expectations and it permits schools who wish to do so to develop their own curriculum. The suggested aims and content breakdown also creates expectations between teachers of various levels whereby particular content is regarded as belonging to a specific level.

	GENERAL EDUCATION AIMS	CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES	ORGANISATION AND CONTENT	TEACHING METHODS	IMPLEMENTATION
TRADITIONAL CENTRAL CONTROL	CENTRAL	✓	✓	GUIDES	
	SCHOOL			ACCEPT OR ADAPT	✓
CENTRAL AIMS WITH CURRICULUM GUIDES	CENTRAL	✓	GUIDES	GUIDES	
	SCHOOL		ACCEPT OR ADAPT	ACCEPT OR ADAPT	✓
CENTRAL AIMS WITH SCHOOL BASED CURR.	CENTRAL	✓			
	SCHOOL		✓	✓	✓
SCHOOL AIMS AND CURRIC. DEVELOPMENT	CENTRAL				
	SCHOOL	ACCEPT OR ADAPT	✓	✓	✓

FIG. 1. STAGES IN THE DEVOLUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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This may encourage teachers to see their role as part of the school effort, so that if the teacher wishes to adapt a part of the suggested curriculum it is likely that the constraints of the total school operation will be recognised.

c. Centrally Developed General Aims: School Level Curriculum Development

This division of responsibilities between schools and the central administration forces schools into curriculum development because curriculum outlines are not issued centrally. Schools are given some guide as to the central administration's expectations by the centrally issued general aims but the role of curriculum development is left to the school.

d. School Level Curriculum Development from School-Level Aims

With this approach each school develops or chooses its own curriculum. The central administration may provide curriculum support material of a general nature but no deliberate attempt is made to influence the purpose, structure and content of the school's curriculum. It would be possible for schools to select significantly different curricula such that transfer between schools would be difficult. It would also be possible for schools to assign such different priorities to subject areas that the schooling students receive at one school may differ fundamentally from what is received at another.

It is not the purpose of this paper to compare the above alternatives or to argue for a particular approach. The levels of devolution of curriculum development responsibility have been shown as the first step in outlining a cause of concern relating to curriculum evaluation. The second step is to examine levels of devolution of curriculum evaluation.

Paradigms of the Distribution of Curriculum Evaluation Responsibility

In addition to dividing the responsibility for curriculum evaluation between schools and the central administration, there is the possibility of sharing responsibilities in a co-operative approach. A "co-operative approach" as used here refers to the central administration and the school and perhaps also people from tertiary institutions or the community, getting together to decide some aspects of the evaluation. The further possibility of a completely external component to evaluation is not developed here because the principles of the argument developed transfer to this situation also, and because its inclusion might serve only to cloud the simple points sought.

Figure 2 shows the broad categories of evaluation paradigms and likely roles within the categories. The passage below outlines some examples that may be observed within the Australian education systems.

a. Central Specification and Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

This heading describes the traditional centralised monitoring whereby itinerant inspectors or superintendents visit each school to examine the nature of its operation. The inspectors traditionally set and administered their own measuring devices presuming the use of the centralised syllabus. The results of the inspection were often important for promotion and permanent status.

This tradition has continued in Western Australia. Although other forms of school evaluation are being trialled, the inspection of teachers' and students' work that results in a school report is still in evidence in some primary schools.

	INITIATED	SHAPED	INFORMATION COLLECTED	AUDIENCE
CENTRAL SPECIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓
CENTRAL SPECIFICATION SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓
CENTRAL SPECIFICATION CO-OPERATIVE IMPLE.	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
CO-OPERATIVE SPECIF. AND IMPLEMENTATION	✓ ?	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
CO-OPERATIVE SPECIF. SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION	✓ ?	✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓
CO-OPERATIVE SPECIF. CENTRAL IMPLEMENTATION	✓ ?	✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓
SCHOOL SPECIFICATION CO-OPERATIVE IMPLE.	✓	✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
SCHOOL SPECIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION	? ✓	✓	✓	? ✓

FIG. 2. STAGES IN THE DEVOLUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR CURRICULUM EVALUATION

b. Central Specification and School Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

An alternative procedure with a step of school responsibility for evaluation involves the central administration in deciding the purpose and structure of the curriculum evaluation procedures that they want schools to use but where the schools themselves perform the evaluation and report the results to the administration. Such an approach has the merit of avoiding the insiders/outside barrier of the superintendent's visit and helps develop the idea of evaluation as a school responsibility. The central administration would be in a position to specify what it wanted to see evaluated and schools would be able to schedule the evaluation over a suitable period. Some disadvantages of the system arise in both the specification and implementation of this approach. The system level specifications would have to be fairly general if they were issued to groups of schools. This would make it difficult for the central administration to specify the information that it required. Further, since schools would be conducting the evaluation on themselves it might be difficult to obtain a high degree of objectivity.

An approach after this model was proposed for Victorian primary schools.

c. Central Specification and Co-operative Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

This approach lies half way between the first two. There is an increase in the flexibility of the specification and the objectivity of the results because representatives of the central administration will be assisting to implement the evaluation. However the evaluation no longer is just the school's operation because outsiders are involved, therefore the school might not be as open in its approach.

The American accountability evaluation models use this model (Manual for School Evaluation, 1972). In most examples of this approach the steps to be followed both by the school and by the external examiners are set down in some detail. This model has been introduced to Australia by the Conference of Headmasters of Independent Schools with funds from the Schools Commission (Creese and Roff, 1977).

d. Co-operative Specification and Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

The central administration and the school jointly decide the purposes of the evaluation and the procedures to be used. Then both the school and representatives of the central administration jointly set about gathering the evaluation data. This permits the development of an approach that meets the needs of both parties. The Queensland Education Department's "Co-operative Evaluation" approach (Jackson and Henderson, 1976) approximates this type and in Tasmania an approach of this type has received Schools Commission funding.

It is important that the evaluation approach remains flexible so that it can be decided co-operatively. If the approach settled into a mould that was implemented co-operatively in different schools then this would be more akin to a type c model.

e. Co-operative Specification and School Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

If the evaluation purpose and design are jointly developed and the schools implement the design, then the approach selected should suit both parties and the evaluation should not be threatening to schools. Some objectivity would be lost in comparison with the previous model, however the programme would be more easily implemented because the school would be able to arrange the evaluation at a time and over a period that best suited it.

f. Co-operative Specification and Centralised Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

The co-operative development of the evaluation plan should ensure that it is mutually satisfactory and the implementation by representatives of the central administration should assist in obtaining an objective evaluation. Such an approach could take on the character of an inspection. The fact that the school had a say in the purpose and direction of the evaluation could help ensure that the approach adopted was suitable but the inspectorial nature of this approach could well cause teachers to try to show only the best image.

In Western Australia, some experimental school evaluations with external agents acting on behalf of the central administration fit this model. In February this year the Ministry of Education in Victoria (McGarvie, 1978) announced the formulation of a Committee to organize the testing of standards of achievement of the basic skills of numeracy and literacy. The programme is to be planned co-operatively in that teachers, parents, employees and people from tertiary institutions will be involved in developing the tests. Then students in grades three, six and nine will be tested State-wide.

g. School Specification and Co-operative Implementation of Curriculum Evaluation

Lovegrove and others in the Research Branch in South Australia and the Research Branch in Western Australia have experimented with an approach similar to this concept. Schools that have identified an area that they consider to be requiring evaluation can receive support in designing and implementing the approach. This model could serve the purposes of project evaluation, however it is likely that the central administration would require more control over curriculum matters than this approach would offer.

The increasing independence being given to schools on curriculum matters has made it important that they have an internal evaluation programme. However, it is the subject of this paper to explore the relationships between the system's evaluation procedures and the school's internal programme. This approach suggests complete school independence. The central administration could monitor the results of the school's evaluation and could offer a meta-evaluation of the school's procedures. This would keep head office informed and help schools to develop effective evaluation procedures, but the central administration would have little influence upon the curriculum.

The Australian Capital Territory has given schools almost complete independence from any centralized control. Apart from the provision that courses at the upper secondary level have to be accredited, schools can prepare and implement their evaluation without taking system aims into consideration. This raises the question of how far school independence can go in centralized systems. Perhaps centralized systems will voluntarily decide to decentralize schools completely. Even if this were to occur there would need to be a system level evaluation to determine whether the decision to decentralize had been appropriate.

Evaluation Policies Appropriate to School-Level Curriculum Responsibility

Of the models of responsibility for curriculum development shown in part one, only the almost outmoded centrally prescribed syllabus would be inimical to school-level curriculum responsibility. In the other three, centrally produced material provides schools with varying amounts of support ideas and materials. The support material also serves to provide schools with an indication of the central administration's aims and expectations.

Given that there is freedom for schools to develop their own curricula and that the central administrations seem to be encouraging them to do so, then it is important that the role that the central administrations will play in curriculum evaluation is made clear. Clearly central specification of curriculum evaluation would not be consistent with school responsibility. Such central influence would be likely to be showing schools the system's priorities so that in effect schools would be guided by the evaluation specifications in much the same way that they are influenced by external examinations where the examination content becomes the curriculum content. 217

Co-operative specification of the evaluation approach has similar implications. To the extent that the central administration influences the components of the evaluation, the school's freedom is reduced. With factors like promotion and permanent employment decided centrally, schools are likely to appreciate the value of meeting the expectations of the central administration.

In a co-operative approach there would be room for flexibility, however the influences of central expectations would surely be felt. Only when schools specify the evaluation procedures is a school really responsible for its curriculum. If there were co-operative implementation of the school's evaluation specifications, provided that the evaluation did not report on areas outside this, then schools would be determining their own curriculum.

It is only in the last two evaluation models that schools specify the evaluation approach. The final approach is totally school-based. The other models all involve either a centrally specified approach or one developed co-operatively.

However, given that the central administration has overall responsibility for what happens in its schools then this responsibility requires that as well as knowing what is occurring, the central administration sees to it that appropriate standards are achieved. These standards must logically be the central administration's standards because it will be assessing the school's standards against what it thinks ought to be achieved in the light of standards at its other schools and schools under other administrations.

If the central administrations have this responsibility then it does not seem as if they can really devolve curriculum responsibility to schools. They can give schools the tasks of developing their own curricula and monitoring the results but they will need to monitor the results of this decision. To do this they will need to retain sufficient control over the school's evaluation procedures to ensure that they get the information that they need for the monitoring.

There is of course the possibility that the State systems will devolve almost all of their powers to schools such that they approximate the Australian Capital Territory model, but this paper is written on the premise that this will not happen, at least in the near future.

Unless the central administrations are genuinely going to cast schools loose such that they literally can do what they think best, then there has to be some mechanism for finding out which schools have gone to undesirable extremes and some mechanism for controlling such schools. The requirement is to find a way of providing the central administration with sufficient information for these purposes without retracting the curriculum freedom. In an absolute sense this clearly is not possible. Therefore what seems to be required is a clarification of the responsibility subdivision.

This does not appear to be occurring. The central administrations appear to have developed independent and incompatible policies on curriculum development and curriculum evaluation. On the one hand schools are being encouraged to take curriculum initiatives and on the other hand the centralized evaluation procedures ensure that they stay near to the expectations.

Conflict Between Curriculum Development and Evaluation Policies

There are several possible explanations for the differences and they are not mutually exclusive.

1. It may be the case that the inconsistencies have not been recognised. Curriculum development policies have evolved gradually over time and while evaluation has long been conceptually linked with curriculum development it is only comparatively recently that its practical role has been extended much beyond assessment of student achievement.

The traditional centralised school supervision procedures were developed in times of short teacher training periods, a general teacher shortage during which some barely qualified teachers were employed and when decisions about aims, content and methods were made centrally. All of these conditions have changed markedly. However the change has been gradual such that expectations have changed with it. Instead of deciding that central supervision was no longer needed because the school was professional enough to judge for itself, the purpose of the evaluation changed towards gathering information for decisions about promotion and permanent status.

Perhaps these administrative reasons for continuing the monitoring plus the traditional acceptance and expectation of centralised supervision have prevented the process from being seen as curriculum evaluation.

2. It is also possible that the inconsistency of policy is the result

of experimentation. Perhaps the central administrations wish to see what happens when schools increase their involvement with curriculum responsibility. It would be irresponsible to change levels of responsibility for the curriculum without monitoring the results to determine whether the change was beneficial.

Perhaps the central bodies are hedging their bets by retaining a system-level back up control in case that school-level controls prove inadequate.

3. Another possibility is that the inconsistency is a sign of a deliberate concealment of the real policy. It may be the case that the central administrations wish to give schools the appearance of freedom and responsibility so that they will feel more accountable and increase their commitment, whereas in reality the system has merely shifted the stage at which it impacts on the curriculum. Perhaps the system's real intention is to be found in the control exercised through evaluation rather than in the declarations about devolution.

Towards Resolution

The purpose of this paper is to look towards resolution of the inconsistencies rather than speculate about which of the above causes is dominant. In seeking a resolution the following are taken as premises:

- a) the central authority will continue to monitor what occurs in schools, and
- b) the present devolution to the school level of responsibility for preparing school aims, policy and curriculum will continue.

There are other possibilities of course but it is with these contingencies that the resolution is sought.

A first step in the re-assessment of the central authorities' role in evaluation starts with analysing the purposes underlying the traditional procedures. Then decisions can be made as to the present appropriate responsibility level for undertaking these evaluations.

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The results of these decisions should then be announced as a policy. It would of course be vital to the success of the operation that the policy was clear, consistent and practical. It would be only common sense to involve schools with the development of the policy, however responsibility for the consistency and clarity would remain with the central authority.

Of prime importance is a declaration of the aims and policy of the education system. These need to be at a level of detail that permits an assessment of the extent to which they have been achieved. Then it is important that there is a specification of the relationship between the system's aims and policy and those developed by the schools. Given the above premises then the obvious relationship is for the school's aims and policy to be regarded as the school's assessment of the best method of implementing the central policy in view of the local circumstances.

The next requirement is for a clear statement of the evaluation purposes and procedures that the central administrations intend and the evaluation purposes and procedures that it is expected that schools will have.

These suggestions amount to little more than a plea for clarity of purpose and public policy. To a large extent, if not entirely, educational policy is public such that this paper has been able to quote from examples and we are publically discussing it. However, there does seem to be a need for increased clarity and for the resolution of an inconsistency between existing policies.

In addition, it is critically important that schools be assisted to develop evaluation expertise. This will require support services and materials and extensive in-service experiences. The dissemination of evaluation information would need to be carefully planned.

Evaluation has become the bandwagon of the seventies. To offset this it is important that it is used in a way which indicates its purposes and procedures so that it is seen as a necessary monitoring rather than a special, semi-mystical operation.

Much of what comes under the heading of evaluation is routine educational practice. Perhaps the bandwagon tendency would be unhitched if the word were avoided altogether and what was to be monitored was specified, but that is room for further thought. Certainly with regard to the issue considered here, the potential problem would be recognised and dissolved if there was a clear statement of curriculum development and monitoring responsibilities.

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