

THE LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES
OF
SCHOOL-LEVEL CURRICULUM EVALUATION

by

DIANA McCONACHY

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ABSTRACT

This study emanates from a concern about social injustice. I believe that a number of people in our society, by virtue of their race, gender or class, are disadvantaged in the distribution of wealth and privilege. Some people have suggested that schools contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of this situation because, in various ways, they replicate inequitable social, political and economic arrangements. I accept this claim and argue that any attempt to improve schooling must focus on the social, economic and political outcomes of education, as well as on curricular, pedagogical and administrative concerns.

In this study one recent attempt to improve Australian education, the move to school-level curriculum evaluation, is examined to ascertain if it represents a challenge to existing school practices and the beliefs and assumptions which underpin these. Dominant ideological orientations to improvement are examined and their key features and assumptions delineated. Because I believe that these exclude any consideration of the relationship between school knowledge and the distribution of power and privilege within society, an attempt is made to reconceptualize school-level curriculum evaluation in a way that will permit teachers to unpack what schools do socially, politically and economically. Theories of cultural and economic reproduction and the work of Freire are drawn on to help with this task.

Evaluation policy statements and guidelines and examples of evaluation practice are then analysed in terms of dominant and reconceptualized notions of evaluation. What emerges is that although many of these are engulfed by dominant and limiting ideologies, school-level curriculum may be reconceptualized in a way that will permit the penetration and contestation of dominant practices and beliefs and thereby will offer educators a possible means of addressing problems of social injustice.

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