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Doctor Honoris Causa

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About twenty five years ago, during a trip to the United States, I made a brief stop at one university (I forget which) where I was asked to give a talk to research students. Arriving at the lecture theatre, I was met by the chairperson, who said

"I'll just give you a very brief introduction, Doctor MacDonald, if that's OK with you."

"That's fine,", I said, "but I'm not a doctor."

"Oh" she said, "you don't have a doctorate?"

"No, I'm afraid not," I said, "Is that a problem?"

"Of course not" she said, but with no great confidence. She paused for a few seconds, and then she said "Well, if you don't mind, I'll still introduce you as Doctor MacDonald because, you see, if I don't the students won't listen to you." I am very grateful to the University of Valladolid for solving this problem, and making an honest man of me.

I'm glad that I don't have to justify this honour, but I do know that I would not be standing here today were it not for the educational vision of the late, lamented Lawrence Stenhouse, the first Director of the Centre for Applied Research in Education, where I

have worked for the past thirty years. My career as an evaluator began with Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Project, one of the many curriculum development projects launched in the sixties to prepare schools for the projected raising of the school leaving age from fifteen to sixteen. At the core of the project was a quite radical hypothesis-that quite ordinary, young adolescents were capable of the kind of intellectual life historically achieved by a small elite. The problem was how to release them from the contrary and self-fulfilling assumptions embodied in institutional and pedagogic practice. The Project attempted this by promoting a discussion-based study of controversial social issues in which the proactive role of the teacher and the reactive role of the pupils was reversed. The pupils were asked to take responsibility for their learning, the teacher to feed the discussion from packs of thematic materials prepared by the Project team. Crucially, and most controversially, the teacher was required to express no view on the issues being discussed, but to ensure that the discussion was based on the pupils' interpretation of the evidence relating to each theme that the Project had assembled. When you consider some of the themes-the Family, Relations Between the Sexes, Education, Poverty, Race Relations, it is not difficult to see that the exclusion of the teacher's view from this curriculum would attract opposition as well as support, but it was crucial to the project's aim of developing and liberating the individual pupil's judgement from the yoke of authority.

One observer of the curriculum development movement, as evidence accumulated of its failure to deliver the promise of a rapid transformation of schooling, suggested that the projects were insufficiently challenging, and therefore easily assimilated without achieving significant change. He said that for an innovation to qualify as a serious

change it had to be as a disreputable practice. In this respect and the reason why I have described the Project in so much detail, is that it qualified for this label and, in so doing, compelled me to engage in an equally disreputable practice in my efforts to evaluate it.

I arrived on the scene at a point where about one hundred teachers, in thirty six schools scattered throughout England and Wales, had just begun trials of the Stenhouse hypothesis, following an induction by the Project team. I came on a two-year secondment from a college of teacher education in Scotland. My task seemed simple enough-it was to provide feedback to the team on how the trials were going, and to design an evaluation for the dissemination stage of the Project, when its materials would be on sale to teachers generally. It seemed simple because, like other novice evaluators from other Projects, we had available a textbook on the curriculum development cycle, in which the role of the evaluator was spelled out. It was to measure the extent to which the student learning objectives of the curriculum, preferably stated in behavioural terms, were achieved.

Simple enough, but then I was told that Stenhouse and his team would have nothing to do with objectives. "Not appropriate in this area" I was told. Stenhouse himself put it more strongly. "We are engaged in an educational process, and a process is only education to the extent that it makes student learning outcomes unpredictable." So that was that. I remained committed to the value of testing student outcomes but also realised that, in the end, that might be limited to recording the process of the Project in classrooms and making that available to interested parties to judge for themselves.

In the meantime I began to visit the schools in order to see the project in action and speak to the teachers about it. A number of things became clear as I went from

school to school. In the first place very few of the teachers had grasped the idea they were being asked to test a hypothesis. They thought they were on trial, and they were not doing very well. The gap between the innovation and their previous practice was huge. The Project's requirements deskilled both teachers and pupils. Both had to learn new roles, new skills. Many of the pupils resented what they saw as the teacher's abdication of responsibility, a breach of the unwritten but well understood rules governing the division of labour between teacher and taught. It might have helped had they taken the pupils into their confidence and explained that the Project was an experiment, but it had not occurred to them to do so, nor had the Project team, somewhat inconsistently, suggested that they do so. It would undoubtedly have helped to have the active and informed support of their head teacher, but at that time it was assumed, not just by the Stenhouse project but by all the curriculum development projects, that reforms would be best achieved by dealing directly with the individual teacher. And this belief derived from the fatal myth of the autonomy of the teacher, master or mistress of their own private space, insulated from the institution in which they were located. One has to keep in mind that at this time, in England and Wales, the business of schools was still a professional enclosure, and the business of modernisation was the responsibility of an ad hoc Schools Council dominated by the teacher unions. For them the concept of teacher autonomy was an untouchable icon. In the second place, it became clear that the impact of the project was not confined to the classroom. Nor was its adoption and implementation a straightforward matter. In the first school I visited I could not understand the extraordinary tension of the teachers, all senior staff, until one of them revealed that they had been conscripted by the headmaster, and told in no uncertain terms

that their positions were at stake. In two of the next six schools the Project teachers appeared to be using the Project as a resource in take-over bids for control of the school. I began, in my visits, to talk with teachers not involved in the Project. From this emerged, though not in every school, a picture of discontent, sometimes of open hostility. One element of this was an understandable envy of the privileges enjoyed by the Project teachers-mainly half classes for discussion and leave of absence for Project conferences, but another was the perception of the Project as embodying a denunciation of their teaching and an unrealistic, utopian view of what could be achieved with otherwise low achieving pupils. Some, particularly in schools where the project was going well, claimed that the Project was having a disruptive effect on the pupils' behaviour in other classes. "Just wait till they get to the workplace" said one, "and they'll get all this nonsense knocked out of them". In one school the disturbance was such that it was to lead to a formal protest meeting of all the staff, at which supporters as well as participants in the Project faced their critics. Nothing remotely like that ever happened in any of the other curriculum projects, to my knowledge.

But I had seen enough to convince me of two things. The first was that, in some schools, the Project was provocative enough to illuminate the culture of the institutions that the whole curriculum movement was bent on changing, and the second was I should curtail my plan to visit all the schools in favour of doing case studies of a few.

In terms of evaluation I didn't know what I was doing or how to justify it. I was already spending two days a week documenting and writing up the weekly meetings of the project team, simply because someone at the Schools Council had told me that the Council had no idea of how their Project teams worked. That left three days for case

study, actually considerably less because of the need to analyse feedback from the schools which I had organised. I refused all invitations to give talks about what I was doing. I was basically in hiding from the research community, especially the sociologists and ethnographers on whose territory I was clearly now trampling.

Then I had a stroke of luck. A chance meeting in London led to a visit to the University of Illinois and its evaluation centre, CIRCE, where I found people who were well ahead of me in every respect, but clearly in the same ballpark. Having thanked Stenhouse for making life difficult for me, I would now like to thank my friends in CIRCE for making it easier, particularly at that point in time, but also for their support and influence over the following thirty years. The move to a qualitative methodology for evaluation, and a broader canvas, had already been made.

Back home, new problems were soon to emerge. I had completed two case studies, anonymised them, made them available to the Project team, sent one to the Council's publications committee, and was preparing to use them in the dissemination phase of the Project. In fact, I was prepared to give them to anyone except the schools they were about. I assumed that they were mine. That assumption, over the following years, was to undergo a transformation. By chance, a copy of the case study I had sent the Council fell into the hands of the school concerned. There followed a furious protest. They had not been consulted, they had not even been told I was doing a case study, parts of the study were inaccurate, other parts were irrelevant, still others were unfair, and most of it was all three. I pleaded guilty to all charges, and agreed that I could produce an alternative view of the school that would include their critique of mine. This was duly done by the schools Project teachers and, as agreed, the two case studies were published

side by side, without any comment from me on their interpretation, although I believed it betrayed the same faults as my own.

But I was shocked by the realisation of my own arrogant and autocratic behaviour. Quite apart from the rather obvious issue of validity, which I could hardly claim simply on the basis that the head teacher in each case had seen drafts of studies and agreed that I could make them available to Stenhouse and his team, and furthermore could publish them in anonymised form. Quite apart from that, a whole snakepit of other issues engulfed, issues to do with power, knowledge, fairness, consequences -issues that arose from the move to intimate, close up portrayal of school life. I think it was about that time that my attitude was summed up very well by a joke calling card which read "I am engaged on secret research for an important academic organisation...do not be alarmed but simply remove all your clothing and remain passive in the interests of science." I never used the card, but I got the message.

The trial phase was over, with enough startling breakthroughs by persistent, committed teachers to encourage the team now reduced in number and institutionalised in the Centre, to proceed with dissemination through the market. I was joined by three new colleagues to form an evaluation team, to implement a design that mixed testing for generalisation and case studies for interpretation. The Project was a big success in the market place, but doomed to failure in the classroom, for reasons we were beginning to understand. It was just too hard, and too vulnerable to conservative pressure. The evaluation failed too, not on the case study side, but on the testing side, for reasons I haven't got time to go into.

However, we were still thinking of school case studies in terms of assisting consumer choice and helping those who were responsible for development strategies. We were opening windows on the realities of schools and the problem of change but only for those within what I have called the professional enclosure-what on Minister had called the "secret garden of schooling". Within its walls the various actors could be trusted to make educational use of anything we produced. At the same time we were well aware that the storm clouds were gathering. By 1970 the economic buoyancy that had allowed us to think of ourselves as evaluators for investment had gone, there was a new right wing government in place with Margaret Thatcher in charge of education, there was a pamphlet circulating in the corridors of the government machine called Management by Objectives, calls for educational accountability were already being heard. Although the Schools Council would stumble on into the eighties before it was finally disbanded, the writing was already on the garden wall. In 1971 Thatcher convened a secret conference on evaluation, to which only accountants were invited. In 72 at the first of a series of small international conferences held to consolidate and advance the case for more qualitative and holistic approaches to evaluation, the shape of the future became clear. The conference was attended, in an observer role, by the Director Designate of the first, direct intervention by Government in the affairs of educational institutions, a major programme in the development of computer-assisted learning, which was to begin the following year. By-passing the Council and other existing agencies, it was to be managed by a committee of senior civil servants from seven government departments with an interest in the field, operating on a step funding model and a no nonsense requirement of objectives achievement. This was clearly the shape of things to come,

although of course we had no idea of the nightmare of political authoritarianism that was to follow the rise to power of the Thatcher regime.

After the conference, I was invited by the Programme Director to undertake the educational evaluation, and I readily agreed. This was an opportunity to extend the case study boundary, not just to the local education authorities, which we were already doing, but to the heart of government, the seat of power and policy. And with that access, in the context of calls for accountability and every indication of a Government take-over in sight, the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the problem of change was redefined as an obligation to hold government to public account for its conduct. In 1973, before that programme began, I had formulated the democratic evaluation model that was to guide that evaluation. The implementation was based largely on the work that my colleagues and I were doing, under the auspices of another case-based research project, to redefine the relations between investigator and investigated, to make them fairer, safer and more educative for those who were vulnerable to the consequences of exposure, paying particular attention to individuals in hierarchical organisations. By this time, learning the lessons of experience we were now, as educators, looking at case studies as primarily a resource for those within the cases, to help them in institutional development and give them the confidence and the skills to meet the growing demand for accountability. We established participant rights and more of a participant, collaborative approach, with shared power and responsibility. This approach, ridiculed initially by the research community and dismissed as teacher protectionism, was redefined by us in the context of the new national programme in terms of the relations between funded projects and management committee, with the evaluation in a kind of go-between role rather than

the bought and paid for servant of the Committee. It won't surprise you to learn that that four year evaluation was characterised by continuous confrontation between ourselves and the committee, although our stance was consistent with the rationale of the evaluation, which they had endorsed. That rationale was couched in democratic rhetoric rather than the reality of power that they constantly invoked. There were gains and losses on both sides, but we all learned a lot, both about ourselves and about our responsibilities. It may surprise you that we went on to do more government-funded evaluation.

I will end my story there. Over the next two or three days we will have many opportunities to debate evaluation in contemporary circumstances. Professional evaluation was initially entrusted to educators. These days evaluation is increasingly in the hands of econometrists, not just in our own administration, but in Paris, where they dream of a global curriculum, and in Brussels, where they dream of standardised training of professions throughout the European university system.

I have told my story in the way that I have to remind us, as we go into these discussions that we are not just evaluators, but educators and democrats. The promise and the fate of the Stenhouse project reminds us, in all three of these roles, of the problem that we should keep in mind-that probably half our citizens got a raw deal from the schooling they were, and continue to be, compelled to attend. This constitutes a massive problem of individual, social and economic injustice. It is also a growing threat to the creation and maintenance of a robust democracy. In the early days of the Thatcher government her first Minister of Education confided to his adviser, who many years later confided to me, that the problem of the schools was that too many pupils were passing the examinations. That New Right ideology is still gathering force across the world.

That's part of the problem. The rise of econometric evaluation is another. In a paradoxical way, perhaps the increasing disaffection and defection of young adolescents from secondary schools, which is worrying governments, may give us some opportunities and purchase on the scene from which, at least in my country, we are largely excluded.

That's it. I would like to thank all my colleagues and friends at home and abroad for their support and guidance. Except for perhaps the first year of my evaluation career I have never worked alone and I am conscious of my debts. In particular I would like to thank friends and colleagues in Spain, at this university and at others, who over the past decade and more have had to play catch up with the field of evaluation. I've been grateful for their friendship and many times astounded by their intellect. I will never say 'catch-up' of them again.

It was a former citizen of Valladolid, one Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, who said that you can judge a man by the company he keeps. In that respect I have been exceedingly fortunate. Thank you.