

AN EVALUATION OF THE CANADA STUDIES FOUNDATION

Eleanor Duckworth¹ reports on the evaluation of Phase One of the Canada Studies Foundation's effort to develop curriculum focused on Canada.² The evaluation team conducted document analyses, questionnaires, interviews, and field visits (coast to coast) as part of the evaluation. It seems Duckworth and her colleagues were favorably impressed, as they recommended that the Foundation receive public funding for Phase Two.

Duckworth begins: "I think that all of us, at the outset, thought of the Foundation primarily as a curriculum development program, an impression that was conveyed by much of its literature," an impression that focused the evaluation team's attention on "the scholarly and pedagogical quality of the materials produced."³ The team's focus shifted, in part due to "the Foundation's insistence that it was the Foundation that was being evaluated, not the teams" [of teachers] through whom the Foundation had worked.⁴ "Whatever the standard of work done by the teams," Duckworth reports, "our concern was with that fundamental decision on the part of the Foundation."⁵ So: "Rather than assess the output of all the teams, we should find out whether there were cases in which this approach had worked," the point being that: "If it did work for some teams, then it *could* work. If it did not work with others, then we should try to find out why."⁶

To familiarize themselves with the Foundation, Duckworth and her colleagues read not only "voluminous documentation that ranged from annual reports, historical summaries, working papers, and internal memoranda, masters' theses on the work of the teams," but they also "spent a few days during the 1974/75 winter attending a variety of Foundation conferences, and talking at length with participants at every level."⁷ Not unlike R. D. Carswell (see research brief #59), Duckworth and her colleagues "realized that the effects on the participants were at least as interesting as the materials that might be produced."⁸ She continues: "Our shared focus became an attempt to understand as well as we could how this organization functioned, and what effects it had, both on its participants and on the Canadian educational community at large."⁹

In coming to their conclusions and recommendations, Duckworth "drew on all our information, whether it came from questionnaire data, from our field visits, from our other interviews, from documentation, or from attending Foundation conferences."¹⁰ They attended to "each element in the Foundation's structure - Board of Trustees, Advisory Panel, Secretariat, co-ordinators, consultants, and project teams," describing what and how each worked and how that work was regarded by "other elements within the Foundation and by constituencies outside, and inconsistencies and

tensions arising from the various viewpoints and approaches.”¹¹ Curriculum materials and other publications, the “competencies, knowledge, and interests of the participants” as well as “various forms of interprovincial and interinstitutional cooperation” were all discussed.¹² Duckworth and her colleagues also pointed out “how various tendencies within any given level affected the work of the Foundation as a whole,”¹³ an extensive no doubt terribly time-consuming effort, all of it completed in eleven months.¹⁴

COMMENTARY

As Anton Birioukov-Brant pointed out in his report, “the design of the evaluation does point to the general movement from more rigid and standardized methods of evaluation to a more fluid and subjective approach,” as “there is clearly a greater emphasis on process and perceptions, rather than on outcomes and definitive findings,” adding: “It seems like this was a shift within curricular evaluation during this period,” a conclusion I share, although one must emphasize that any shift was primarily theoretical in nature. I found the article of interest because Eleanor Duckworth wrote it – and while a graduate student.

REFERENCES

- Duckworth, Eleanor. 1977. Assessing the Canada Studies Foundation, Phase 1: An Approach to a National Evaluation. *Canadian Journal of Education* (2) 1, 27-34.
- Duckworth, Eleanor. Ed. 2001. “*Tell Me More.*” *Listening to Learners Explain*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Duckworth, Eleanor. 2006. *The Having of Wonderful Ideas: And Other Essays on Teaching and Learning*. [Third edition.] New York: Teachers College Press.

ENDNOTE

¹ Eleanor Ruth Duckworth got her Ph.D. at the Université de Genève in 1977, grounding her work in Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder's research into the nature and development of understanding and intelligence and in their clinical interview method. She went on to enjoy an enviable career at Harvard University. (See Duckworth 2001, 2006.) We enjoyed a conversation together taking the train from Shanghai to

Hangzhou (each of speaking at conferences in both cities). A few years later, after she had retired from Harvard, I attended a modern dance in Vancouver where she performed – in her late seventies I suspect. As a child, Duckworth had studied ballet in Halifax, a fact evident (I thought) in how she danced then.

² See also research briefs #52, #55, #59.

³ Duckworth 1977, 29.

⁴ Duckworth 1977, 29.

⁵ Duckworth 1977, 29.

⁶ Duckworth 1977, 29.

⁷ Duckworth 1977, 29.

⁸ Duckworth 1977, 29.

⁹ Duckworth 1977, 30.

¹⁰ Duckworth 1977, 33.

¹¹ Duckworth 1977, 33.

¹² Duckworth 1977, 33.

¹³ Duckworth 1977, 33.

¹⁴ Duckworth 1977, 29.