What If Evaluation Takes Place Seated Around the Table Whilst Enjoying a Drink? A Social Practice View of Evaluation of Development Education

Keywords

Evaluation Practice, Social Practice Theory, Development Education, Humanistic Evaluation, Holistic Evaluation, Social Learning

Introduction

This article focuses on the contribution of social practice theory to understand the evaluation practice undertaken by development education organisations (DEOs). It draws on findings from an in-depth longitudinal case study that critically explored changes in practitioners' evaluation practice. The article proposes a social practice theoretical framework intended to characterize and understand evaluation of development education (DE) initiatives, oriented towards the delivery on social justice and democratic outcomes. I argue that by understanding evaluation, and how its meaning and value is attributed DE practitioners and other stakeholders within the international development arena, are likely to own their practice of evaluation, therefore, able to experience a deeper enjoyment in their everyday routine. As a result, the concept of evaluation practice intersects with that of 'ownership', instigating a *collaborative evaluation practice,* which may be associated with the developmental process maintained by the group of DE practitioners and other international development stakeholders, as they sit around the table. The social practice theoretical framework enables the symbolic meaning of the act of 'seating around the table', legitimizing practitioners to bring their individual practices – which becomes owned evaluation practices – through a transformative collaborative ecosystem. The term 'ownership' connects with aspects of participation, engagement and empowerment and appears as a natural consequence of giving the necessary skills to empower groups of practitioners or individuals.

There is an increased public and educational interest in understanding the role and effectiveness that development education makes to educate global citizens (Bourn, 2014). To gain this understanding most government-funded initiatives, require adequate tools to evaluate the impact on the societal landscape. Previous studies have addressed the need for performance-based indicators to measure results, whilst showing that funders are concerned with accountability evidenced by prescribed evaluation reports (Morra-Imas & Rist, 2009).

However, the type of evaluation required by most funders, of placing performance indicators at the center, failed to attribute value to DE initiatives, oriented towards principles such as, social justice, democracy and human rights, to name just a few (DARE Forum, 2004).

Scholars suggest that the current performance-based approach to evaluation, preferred by funders, obscures the meaning of evaluation (Schwandt, 2015); so the questions of why evaluate and what does it means to practise evaluation emerge. These questions have relevance to the international development domain, which tends to have prescriptive and performance-based evaluation methods embedded in a technocratic governance environment. Moreover, past work remain unclear on how small, a-political non-profit organisations practise[1] evaluation (Henry & Mark, 2003) and how their practice changes over time and with what effects (Saunders, Charlier, & Bonamy, 2005). This gap is problematic and it challenges whether a performance-based evaluation is suitable for DE initiatives. Within the DE sector, studies have revealed insufficient knowledge of how DE organisations engage in evaluation on an everyday basis (Bourn, 2014). The exploration of this gap has implications for a wide variety of initiatives in the sector of international development and in the technocratic governance environment. This article contributes to addressing that gap as well as to enabling international development organisations to learn from DE organisations.

The paucity of research on evaluation approaches that place people at the core of DE initiatives indicates the need for an in-depth understanding of evaluation practice (Bourn, 2011). This is important because DE is mostly represented through NGOs and/or civil society and as such, approaches that prioritize performance rather than social interactions are inadequate. The original study for this research was conducted as part of my PhD in Educational Research and explores how evaluation practice emerges, develops and is sustained over time. A social-practice approach offers a valuable way to address the above gap because of its focus on human

[1] I refer to 'practise' with 's' as a verb, and to 'practice' with 'c' as a noun (Simpson, PR, & Weiner, 2009)

interests, values, and self-respect. Indeed, this original research adopts the theoretical premise that all societal life can be interpreted as sets or clusters of practices within different contexts and from a variety of angles (Schatzki, 1996; Reckwitz, 2002; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017). A social practice lens brings the human interface to the forefront of evaluation research and introduces social justice and fairness lenses to the field (Fetterman, 1994; Mertens, 2001). It connects people, relationships, and attitudes rather than a formal and prescriptive performance-based practice. A distinctive feature of this study is that it draws on a specific strand of social practice theory – the Dynamics of Social Practice (DSP) - as a novel theoretical lens to explore the practice of evaluation, its changing connections, and the influencers of that change over time (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017). Given how relevant the individual perspective is for the emergence, development and sustainability of the practice of evaluation across DE and international development arena, a DSP framework offers a critical approach to understanding a collaborative approach to evaluation (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Hui et al., 2017).

The principles that shaped the original research positioned evaluation as:

- conducted by people towards improving other peoples' lives (Greene, 1988; Mertens, 2001).
- a set of routinized social practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Saunders et al., 2011).
- undertaken by evaluation practitioners who are carriers of practice whose past experiences and equity of access are critical (Shove et al., 2012).

This article draws in an in-depth longitudinal qualitative case study approach (Simons, 2009) to explore evaluation practice and its change over time. The research context in which this study took place is an English development education organisation, with a public-funded initiative to raise awareness on MDGs (Millennium Development Goals). Data from coordinators, practitioners and funders was ethnographically collected in various phases,

during 1 year (see Figure 1), through analysis of documentary evidence, 16 semi-structured interviews and 134 hours of observation where participants articulated their experiences of evaluation whilst identifying the influences shaping their evaluation practice. Although this study was conducted in an English context, findings can apply to other DE and international development evaluation arenas. For instance, a comprehensive typology of practitioner's engagement is explored to discuss social practice features of evaluation, opposing to accountability-based features, present on the current technocratic model, which are common practice across DE and international development sectors.

The next section positions the concepts of evaluation and performance as part of the technocratic governance environment. I then provide a brief description of the context of development education to situate the topic of evaluation practice within that same context. The following section provides a related overview of social practice theory applied to evaluation focused on the context of DE concerning to the current research. The methodology is outlined with emphasis on the case study approach, and a detailed description of the research process. The succeeding section presents a comprehensive typology of practitioner's engagement in evaluation and the last section discusses a social practice understanding of evaluation. The article concludes with some recommendations to DE policy makers and practitioners on their evaluation practices.

Evaluation and Performance as part of the technocratic governance environment

Relevant literature has noted that, within a technocratic governance environment, the role of the funders and their evaluation requests is a major area of interest within the field of evaluation practice (Stevenson, Florin, Mills, & Andrade, 2002; Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2004; Carman, 2009; Carman & Fredericks, 2010). In this regard, there have been a number of studies referring to funder-recipients, stakeholders, or grant-holders (Greene, 1988; Morra-Imas & Rist, 2009; Saunders et al., 2011; Berry, Barnett, & Hinton, 2015) in the context of non-profit

organisations (NPOs) (Carman, 2007) and in other institutions (Saunders et al., 2011). The term, "funder-recipient based context" was coined by Saunders et al., (2011, p. 12) within the evaluation context of Higher Education, and it represents the funding agency and the organisation in receipt of the funding, respectively. The relational nature of evaluation dominates the type of relationships within a funder-recipient based context, because evaluation is frequently set against a political landscape, with power relations operating (Simons, 1987) as an intrinsically political practice (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 2000). As such, the previous debate around development organisations, their performance, and public spending intersects with a debate of governance, calling for a review of DE as a funder-recipient based context.

Context of Development Education

Development education (DE) is a discipline in the interdependent and globalised world, aiming to raise awareness and understanding of how global issues affect the everyday lives of individuals' communities and how each one of us can and do influence the global society (DARE Forum, 2004). As no common understanding of a DE standard definition, mission, and values has been reached, a concern about its shared vision has increased among its practitioners (Bourn, 2011). Consequently, there is weak consensus on the evaluative object of 'what' do DE organisations should evaluate for, if there is lack of conceptual alignment of what DE is about. Besides, the practice of evaluation appears particularly important, because NPOs are more likely to encounter difficulties in getting reliable evidence of their actions (in aiming to develop awareness to increase understanding, and to ensure a commitment that leads to attitudinal change). Thus, an adequate evaluation approach is vital in ensuring that the attribution of worth in DE interventions is correctly made (Bourn, 2011). DE organisations tend to promote education for a sustainable world, and one of their main distinctive characteristics is to ensure that the civil societies of most developed countries are aware of the reality of the least developing countries, in terms of poverty, food security, education, health,

and environment. However, these characteristics of DE are problematic when it is time to evaluate their social interventions, because organisations will have to attribute value to whether and how social change has been achieved. Apart from Bourn (2011, 2014) there is a general lack of research in how non –profits, particularly development education organisations (DEOs), practise evaluation over time. Previous studies on non-profits' evaluation practice remain narrow in focus, dealing mainly with performance-based approaches to evaluation undertaken in large-scale organisations (Carman, 2007, 2009). Although there is still insufficient knowledge, there is increased public interest, on how DEOs attribute value to their interventions, what the terms mean, and what is their value and contribution to educational goals. Possible reasons for this increased attention include a philanthropic attitude, a solidarity approach to global issues and citizens' raised awareness of the interconnected world where they live in. The more they are aware, the more accountable evidence is required for DE and international development-funded initiatives. The response to this call was illustrated by the introduction of the Global Learning Programme (GLP) for England, which has highlighted a need for educationalists to be aware of the various interpretations of this plethora of terms around DE. GLP also provides an occasion for "practitioners to reflect on their own views and perspectives and how they relate to current debates on development education and global learning" (Bourn, 2014, p. 7).

Recently, there are initiatives such as, the Global Education Network Europe (GENE), a network of ministries, agencies and institutions with national responsibility for Global Education, promoting the role of evaluation, and supporting networking, peer learning, policy research, national strategy development and quality enhancement in the field of Global Education. In its recent report entitled 'State of Global Education in Europe', GENE (2018) explored funding trends, cross-cutting themes and policy issues among European countries by reporting best practices among different stakeholders. In a DE context, it is important to ask

what the implications for policy makers are, if a performance based approach to evaluation – as proposed by a technocratic governance environment – is sustained. For example, in the past DE policy context of the UK, the Coalition Government decided to review the DE policy on funding, for transparency and accountability purposes and one of the main changes was the termination of funding to DE projects in non-formal settings (O'Brien, 2011). Consequently, some DE organisations (DEOs) were forced to close and a rather deeper debate emerged around the practice of evaluation within DE (Bourn, 2014), with a problematic that seems transferable to the international development and, even, to the humanitarian aid arena. The debate challenged whether a current performance-based approach to evaluation is adequate, especially, in a sector with specific social characteristics such as, understanding global issues, promoting global education and raising awareness (Dare Forum, 2004). This debate took place in other European countries and these social characteristics may be visible across other domains, such as sustainable education, intersectionality in international development and global challenges - thus the current debate is timely and transferable across other social sciences. These characteristics were, and remain, problematic when DEOs come to evaluate their social interventions and demonstrate how citizens' social change has been achieved – in Saunders' words (2005) – to *'attribute'* value to whether and how a specific intervention has '*contributed'* to their social change.

This article argues that by understanding evaluation and how its meaning and value is attributed, DE practitioners (and possibly other stakeholders within the international development arena) are likely to own their practice of evaluation and, therefore, to experience a deeper enjoyment of their everyday routine. The evidence presented next, suggests that the engagement of practitioners in evaluation practice may not occur as expected by the funders and other stakeholders, or may occur without their previous participation in the design of such DE interventions. Meanwhile, a performance-based approach to evaluation appears to

perpetuate patterns of disengagement and resistance in evaluation practice. One of the key benefits of adopting a social practice approach to evaluation is challenging the traditional views of performance and engagement (Zozimo, 2016), by promoting principles that are more appropriate to evaluate social interventions such as, DE, international development, and other social sciences, rather than the conventional performance-based approaches, still required by the funders (Bourn, 2014; Greene, 1999).

Social Practice Theory applied to Evaluation

For the purpose of this article, there is no scope to review in full social practice theory (SPT) - see (Zozimo, 2016), for a full discussion, and Saunders (2012) and Trowler (2013) for further discussion on the use of SPT across humanities and social sciences. Here, I provide an overview to explain the choice of SPT theoretical lens, focusing on its constitutive elements that, I argue, enhanced the original research. The main reason to adopt SPT, instead of other branches of social theory, is the aim to explore what people do when they evaluate social interventions - their practices: not their mental qualities (Lévi-Strauss, 2004 [1962]; Schutz, 1972); not their discourse (Foucault, 1972; Geertz, 1973); or even their interactions (Habermas & Burger, 2008). Mentalism, textualism, and intersubjectivism are the other branches of social theory that focus the investigation of social reality in other aspects of practice (mind, discourse and interactions).

The interest in social theory has its origins in the late 1960s and early 1970s and has developed by other theorists; for example, by Foucault's (1972, 1990) analysis of relations, between the elements of bodies, agency, knowledge and understanding; Bourdieu's (1977) work on outlining a theory of practice and Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, as a version of practice theory. In the domain of empirical anthropology and sociology, the contributions of Garfinkel´s (1984) ethnomethodology; Butler's (1990) gender studies and Latour's (2010)

science studies have gained momentum within the family of social theories. Since then, contemporary research has advanced and applied a framework of the dynamics of social practice in domains, such as science, technology and society (Pred, 1981, 2007; Shove, Watson, Hand, & Ingram, 2007; Shove, Trentmann, & Wilk, 2009), change behaviour (Shove, 2003; Shove et al., 2012), and climate change (Shove, 2014). The commonality across the original studies on social theory, until today, is the pursuit for an in-depth exploration to understand social reality.

Whilst some of these theorists privilege some specific elements, such as discourse, agency, and the intersection of structures to understand social reality (Foucault, 1972; Garfinkel, 1984; Habermas & Burger, 2008), others have chosen to look to peoples' behaviours to depict their understanding of the world (Giddens, 1979; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Savigny, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove et al., 2012). A social practice theoretical view was advanced by Reckwitz (2002) as a conceptual alternative that places the unit of analysis in 'practices', as a *"form of bodily activities, mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge"* (ibid. p. 250). Accordingly, a practice represents a *"pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing that practice"* (ibid.). Reckwitz (2002) illustrates what a practice is by giving the example of a certain way of consuming things that can be filled out by several actions of consumption. Another example more relevant to this research is that a certain way of attributing value and worth of social interventions can be filled out with a myriad of evaluation approaches. Social practice theory (SPT) explores what people do, what are their routines and behaviours and *"how a certain nexus or interconnection of these actions, behaviours and routines – practices – affects the way social activity is undertaken in a specific place and time"* (ibid. p. 258).

Within the current context of DE, it was appropriate to explore the socio-relational context in which evaluation practice takes place and how it evolves over time. In applying SPT to evaluation practice, it has been widely recognized that this domain of knowledge has seen a substantial increase in scholarly work (Schwandt, 2005; Saunders et al., 2011; Chouinard, 2013; Chelimsky, 2013; Leviton, 2015). More specifically, Saunders et al., (2011) introduce a social practice approach into their discussions on the social context of attribution of value in a specific intervention on Higher Education. They draw on Reckwitz's (2002) notion of practice, as *"a routinized type of behavior", " a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc."* (p. 250). Acceptance in the literature that the process of attributing value is social and relational has advanced the conceptualisation of evaluation as a social practice. Abma and Widdershoven (2008) argue that *"evaluation is not only a scientific and technical affair, but a social practice in itself"* (p.121); whereas for Saunders et al., (2011), evaluation is characteristic of all social policy areas; it involves dimensions of evaluative practice consisting of symbolic structures, specific orders of meaning in particular places and has unintended effects. It consists of *"practices which use implicit, tacit or unconscious knowledge as well as explicit knowledge; can have progressive enabling characteristics but are also perceived as part of the surveillance culture"* (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 4).

Commentators suggest that the current performance-based approach to evaluation, preferred by funders, tends to hide the real meaning of evaluation (Schwandt, 2015); put it simply, why evaluate and what does it means to practise evaluation? These questions have relevance to the international development domain, which tends to have prescriptive and performance-based evaluation methods embedded in a technocratic governance environment. Scholars argue that evaluations are needed to attribute results to a particular intervention, rather than to other potential causes (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Mayne, 2004; Morra-Imas & Rist, 2009) or for

improvement purposes (Vo & Christie, 2015). For some, the main purpose of evaluation is about accountability corroborated by a programme evaluation theory (Huffman et al., 2008; Carman, 2009), while others advocate learning (Riddell, 2001; Hoole & Patterson, 2008; McCluskey, 2011) supported by a value-pluralism or social practice theory. In the social practice literature applied to evaluation, the term 'social relationships' tends to be used to refer to aspects of meaning (Saunders et al., 2011). The need for a social practice approach to evaluation challenges the debate on whether there are alternative approaches to evaluation, other than performance, at the center. I argue, here and elsewhere (Zozimo, 2016), that a social practice view of evaluation is of paramount importance for the DE context, because it places people at its center.

Social practice theorists noted that not only meaning is a critical element of any practice, but competence and material too (Shove et al., 2012). For the purpose of this article, I will mainly focus on the elements of meaning and competence, because these were more prominent in the previous works on social practice applied to evaluation (Saunders, 2000, 2012). For instance, to take evaluation 'off the ground' from the outset, practitioners need to understand the foundations of the evaluative task required – why is it being conducted, for what purpose and by whom. Only when possessing this meaningful knowledge, will practitioners be able to grasp why they are practising evaluation. Arguably, this only happens if practitioners are located at the core of the evaluation process and have some sense of ownership of their practice. When they lack ownership of evaluation, the recognition of its meaning is limited, which is problematic when trying to evaluate a complex social world. This is the case of some DE and international development organisations in calling for a collaborative approach to evaluation practice.

From a social practice standpoint, the everyday routine of practitioners is valuable mostly on a provisional basis (Saunders et al., 2005), because their practice evolves over time and as such,

there is critical need for a reflective space where practitioners can realize what they have been doing and why. Reflection on one's own practice plays a key role in building a meaningful evaluation for practitioners, in supporting their learning, and in (re)focusing their goals setting (McCluskey, 2011). It, therefore, enhances the movement from an unrecognized evaluation, as something that one does, towards the intentional practice of a transformative and enjoyable experience of evaluation for practitioners (Bourn, 2014; Zozimo, 2016). In addition, enjoyment is crucial for practitioner's engagement in evaluation, because only paying lip service to evaluation is not helpful to funders or themselves.

In this article, the concept of a collaborative evaluation practice emerges, illustrated by the symbolic meaning, which the group of DE practitioners and other stakeholders develops as they sit around the table bringing their individual practices - which becomes 'owned' practices. A collaborative evaluation practice is associated with the developmental process maintained by social relationships enacted and owned by people. The term 'ownership' connects with aspects of participation, engagement and empowerment and appears as a natural consequence of giving the necessary skills to put people "*in charge of their own destinies"* (Fetterman, 1994, p.4) and fostering their competence in evaluation practice. The contrary approach to evaluation positions the evaluator as a detached expert, which makes practitioners *"dependent on an outside agent"* (ibid.) lacking competence, self-determination, and self-esteem. Taut and Brauns (2003) refer to lack of engagement when practitioners are left aside during the evaluation decision-making process, leading to disengagement and a sense of not owning their evaluation tends to increase. Engagement is critical to a socio-relational practice of evaluation and in its absence, practitioners resist taking part in evaluation. On this vein, past work shown that the intersection of lack of understanding (meaning) with practitioner's detachment from the design stage of evaluation (ownership) have a cyclical influence on their pattern of (dis) engagement, leading to resistance (Greene, 1988).

Method: In-depth longitudinal case study

Case study approach

The research was a qualitative enquiry that explored practitioners' perceptions of their everyday evaluation practice. Whilst acknowledging the ecosystems where evaluation currently happens are massively diverse, the in-depth single case study (Simons, 2009) allowed for the exploration of the particularities and uniqueness of the evaluation practice in a specific non-profit DE setting. The ethnographic data collection strategies valued the multiple perspectives of research participants, observation in daily-life circumstances, and interpretation in context. Selected as an information-rich case (Patton, 2002), the case organisation involved immersion into their evaluative culture between February 2012 and March 2013, which ensured the depth and the longitudinal element of the study (See chapter 5, Zozimo, 2016). Figure one represents a broad overview of the two phases of data collection, alongside my presence in the field, first as a volunteer and, second, as a researcher.

FIGURE 1: Phases of data collection (Zozimo, 2016).

Prior to fieldwork, key ethical aspects such as access, confidentiality and anonymity were addressed. For example, the confidentiality of the research was officially ensured by the participants' completion of the informed consent, after having followed the ethical guidelines set out by the university and received their approval to proceed with the fieldwork. In addition, the name of the organisation and the research participants have been anonymized due to the research ethics protocol.

Ethnographic observations (totaling 118 hours, and including 94 hours conducted as a participant observer and 24 hours as a non-participant observer at extraordinary meetings) were critical to capture immersion in the setting and complemented participant's accounts of evaluation (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987). In addition, practitioners, funders and evaluator were interviewed at multiple points in time, during the data collection period of one year, alongside informal conversations with these respondents (See Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: Multiple points and sources of data collection per stage (Zozimo, 2016).

Empirical setting

Development Education (DE) operates a significant part of its public face through NGOs, development education organisations (DEOs) and other institutions of civil society. As the case under investigation revealed some DEOs have seen decrease on Government's support in England, over the past 30 years which, in terms of funding and sustainability of DE, sheds light on the role of evaluation, and how influential issues around the technocratic governance environment are in the UK. However, this challenging context might well transfers to other European countries, as well as some features of the DE research context of evaluation to the international development arena.

Data Analysis

The documentary analysis enhanced understanding the background context, and consisted of policy documents and other type of formal reports. Sixteen semi-structured interviews focused on a responsive approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) to investigate what funders, practitioners and coordinators do on a daily basis and how do they attribute meaning to evaluation. Interviews lasting around 90 minutes took place at two stages of the evaluation timeline: implementation and dissemination. All interviews were recorded, and fully transcribed using Express Scribe software and a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted using Atlas TI. – an useful tool to monitor the 'researcher's loyalty' and respective bias (Zozimo, 2016, p.135).

Data analysis followed the principles of a qualitative thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2002), in which initial codes were merged under main themes, a process far from linear and often required a thoughtful reflection on research decisions. Consistent with valuing participants' perspectives, a summary of preliminary findings was shared to ensure that the emerging social constructs represented a context they would identify with (Flyvbjerg & Sampson, 2011).

Three main findings emerged from this research: power relationships, co-occurrence of practices and, a non-linear sequence of practitioners' engagement in evaluation, discussed in the next section.

Quality criteria of research

Guba and Lincoln (1988) propose parallel criteria to the conventional internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity that include trustworthiness and authenticity, which has been used in case study research (Simons, 2009). Trustworthiness is the parallel term to reliability to justify the value of an account as more likely or more credible (Wolcott, 1994). Authenticity refers to the "fairness" (ibid.) through which research participants were treated and their accounts translated. These terms connect with my social constructivist approach to qualitative enquiry, because they are concerned with how data is "negotiated and understood" (Simons, 2009, p. 128), and have been widely used in empirical studies on evaluation practice. For this reason, this article follows Simons' procedures of trustworthiness and authenticity to ensure the quality of research, which is explained through data triangulation and response validation (ibid.). Data triangulation is adopted to defend the quality of this study, because the preoccupation to gather various perspectives about the phenomenon of evaluation was visible from the beginning of this research. For this reason, I have interviewed three groups of participants, whilst also having informal conversations with other informants, such as volunteers and other practitioners. This triangulation reinforced that the main views emerging from data collection were authentic and not potentially biased by my presence in the field, making social science as reliable as possible (Flyvbjerg & Sampson, 2011). In addition, data triangulation was ensured by using various sources to explore the phenomenon under investigation, combining interviews with observation and documentary evidence, which allowed monitoring the trustworthiness of this case study throughout. Response validation means to "check the accuracy, adequacy, and fairness of observation, representations and

interpretations of experience with those whom they concern" (Simons, 2009, p.131). In developing a list that draws inductively on what is used most widely as indicators of recognized interpretive practices, research practices progress and change - which is very much appropriate for DE evaluation, as the phenomenon under investigation, within a constantly changing environment due to political swings and economic measures. Thus, for any specific period it may be possible to name a key set of criteria useful for attributing value to the quality of our interpretative research (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). The current research illustrates the respondents' validation criteria through: 1) longitudinal data collection, 2) informal conversations, and 3) sharing preliminary findings with research participants.

A comprehensive typology of practitioner's engagement in the practice of evaluation

The findings presented below focus on a non-linear sequence of practitioners' engagement in evaluation over the project's evaluation timeline. The five types illustrated in Figure 3 are discussed as sub-themes, combining extracts of raw data with commentary.

FIGURE 3: A comprehensive typology of practitioner's engagement in the practice of evaluation (Zozimo, 2016)

Disengagement

> I am not involved personally and I am not really sure where the evaluation is up to, I don't know [pause] **I should know, but I don't know**. (Eli, partner coordinator, **emphasis added**)

The first set of interview questions aimed to capture the overall perception of the term evaluation, and to understand how participants attributed meaning to evaluation. In this regard, most practitioners and coordinators referred to a lack of involvement and time to engage in the evaluation. A common view amongst interviewees was that there are assumptions about an active practitioner engagement in designing a project. It appeared that in reality practitioners had relatively restricted roles in a DE setting; consequently, they struggled to plan the evaluation of the project, due to their limited or nonexistent involvement in the initial project design. The circumstances of the design process for a DE initiative influenced the involvement and further engagement of practitioners in the evaluation of that same initiative. Figure three, above, diagrammatically illustrates disengagement as one of the types of engagement observed within a non-sequential continuum of engagement. As the original research was longitudinally conducted this sense of disengagement evolved over time.

Findings also suggest that pressure from the funder is a great challenge to engagement, described as the *"devil of pleasing the funder's agenda" (Jesse, practitioner)*. Observations throughout the project, alongside documentary evidence, confirmed the strong influence of a funder-recipient based context on practitioners' engagement in evaluation. For some participants, the element of funding drives the process and the practice of evaluation, as one of the coordinators, Eli, mentioned: "*Sometimes funders do a bit of a disservice to evaluation; they make demands that turn off people that deliver the evaluation work".* Consequently, practitioners appeared not interested in engaging with evaluation.

One possible reason for practitioners' disengagement may be related to explicit concerns about how funding could be withdrawn from current projects if the evaluation could not demonstrate

evidence of the outcomes achieved. In the context of this case organisation, disengaged practitioners seemed to have an inconsistent and messy practice of evaluation.

Forcing

> "Evaluation is not a practice that anyone could do and certainly **is an impossibility to do all that evaluation entails, and to do it well**" (Jesse, practitioner, **emphasis added**).

Observations during the planning stage of evaluation highlighted the critical role of daily informal conversations, in the corridor or in other awkward places; making explicit some methodological, technical and other challenging issues encountered on the research journey (see section 5.4, Zozimo, 2016). It was possible to depict a 'forced' evaluation practice through these daily conversations, compared with documentary evidence where individuals found it difficult to separate evaluation of the project's performance itself from their own individual performance. Sam, a practitioner, shared that she was *"in the deep end with the new funded project with some really heavy evaluation tools that funders wanted"* and that she did not have *"that much experience in evaluation and monitoring"*.

Sam's view combined with observations and informal conversations illustrated an implicit lack of ownership of evaluation, particularly evident within practitioners' retrospective reflection of their practice. Their account of being 'forced' to evaluate shed light to their potential lack of competence, and the ability to pursue an evaluative task (Shove et al., 2012); thus a blurred vision of the meaning of evaluation was strongly evident across most participants' narratives, which may explain their perception of a 'forced practice' of evaluation. This circular logic appeared to influence the lack of interest in engaging in evaluation practice, generating barriers to understand the meaning of evaluation, to own practitioner's work in evaluation, and more importantly to enjoy their evaluative work. This research strongly proposes that the more practitioners are disengaged, the less they own their evaluation practice, resulting in a 'forced

practice' of evaluation – not as much collaborative and failing to place people at the core of its practice - which appears of the utmost relevance, yet taken for granted by some scholars (Morra-Imas & Rist, 2009; Carman & Fredericks, 2010). This comprehensive typology of practitioner's engagement reinforced the call for alternative approaches to practise evaluation (Bourn, 2014; Daykin, Gray, McCree, & Willis, 2017).

Resistance

> So if the evaluation relates to performance in any way it won't do, it will not be reflective, people will tell you just what they think you want to know (Dale, practitioner).

Evidence of practitioners adopting a resistant approach to evaluation seemed to connect with coordinators and funders' concerns with their performance-led evaluation practice. This view influenced practitioners' confidence and willingness to share their evaluative feedback, because it may challenge their managers' expectations of their competence.

The theme of resistance in evaluation practice was manifested, for example, when practitioners described their lack of understanding with the apparent performance paranoia, required by funders and, therefore, requested to the coordinators of the case organisation. They also shared their perception of evaluation as *"a huge task dictated from above"* (Dale), which reinforced the gap between what is evaluation in theory and its everyday routinized practice (Shove et al., 2012).

Findings also highlighted practitioners' need for guidance and how *"lost"* they were when funders changed evaluation requirements; as a result, they appeared to resist engaging in evaluation. Furthermore, all participants agreed that the cycle of change initiated by the funders seemed abrupt and unconstructive and some mentioned the contradiction in what one particular funder used to accept, compared to their subsequent requirements. These shifts in funders'

requirements shed light on the political influence on the monitoring and evaluation process - reinforcing the gap between theory and practice (Chelimsky, 2013).

The findings presented above illustrate resistance as a theme within a broader comprehensive typology of practitioner's engagement. To resist engaging in evaluation appeared as a 'protective shield', which may be explained by the ontological nature of resistance, nevertheless some commentators argued that practitioners resist in engaging with evaluation by emphasising a 'defensive' approach or by avoiding participation in evaluation at all (Saunders et al., 2011).

Findings from my original research proposed a strong connection between resistance and engagement, particularly regarding practitioners' deliberate exclusion from the stage of the project design. From the longitudinal observation of the case organisation, it appeared that practitioners' resistance towards evaluation might undermine their practice of evaluation over time, because it generated indifference and passivity, leading to a lack of ownership, competence, and enjoyment.

Coping

> I have not really thought about that [evaluation]. I am here to do what needs to be done (Tyler, practitioner).

The sharing of difficulties and uncertainties amongst practitioners was a critical mechanism to build the project's evaluation practice. A sense of leaping into an unfamiliar territory emerged, yet, practitioners had to manage a three-year demonstration of hard evidence, plus planning, implementing, and reporting a prescribed evaluation. Data collected over time suggested that the team became resilient, and have accepted the tensions and hard work involved.

When attempting to reflect about evaluation practice, Tyler seemed to neglect thinking over practising, possibly, because they had so many other concurrent activities to respond to that they could not afford to pause and to reflect about what their everyday practice (Zozimo, 2016).

In recognising the need for support, practitioners explicitly noted some tensions, when assuming that "*one thing that takes a lot of time and it is difficult in our work is trying to evaluate"* (Dale). This explicit recognition was particularly relevant, when tensions about the final purpose of the evaluation arose: *"as soon as you put in the numbers game to tick boxes, it become* ***very difficult to enjoy it*** (Dale, **emphasis added**).

Indeed, when practitioners are aware of their evaluation practice they are able to reflect explicitly on their engagement or on the lack of it; even making sense of their enjoyment or the lack of it. In opposition, when they are practising evaluation unintentionally, as Tyler's quote illustrates, there is an apparent tendency to be less reflective, adding an implicit layer of interpretation that allows a *thick description* of this episode (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). The current study suggests that through an unconscious practice of evaluation, practitioners sometimes cannot recognise the behavioural patterns and values of their practice, because what they thought they were doing, is different from what they actually did (Shove et al., 2012); which was illustrated in Tyler's apparent lack of reflection on their evaluation practice.

Collaboration

> "I think we are more informed about what we want to, how we want it and the ways to go about it, as **things change very quickly** and **we need to adapt very quickly**" (Sam, practitioner, **emphasis added**).

In contrasting sources of evidence, it was apparent that the process of sharing worries, by working collaboratively, seemed to have gradually engaged practitioners in recovering their sense of ownership. The more they reflect about how and why to engage in evaluation, their levels of resistance appeared to decrease, opening space for collaboration in their evaluation practice – and possibly, enjoyment.

Enjoyment is crucial for practitioners' engagement, and their willingness to collaborate and co-create with others appeared to increase their engagement in evaluation (see Figure 3). Data

suggests that some practitioners perceive evaluation as boring, prescriptive, and pointless; however, if evaluation could be seen in a more creative and practical way, through practice-based techniques (Simons, 2003), such as video, drama, arts, and other informal ways of gathering evidence, practitioners would 'enjoy it' more. Evaluation practitioners are seen as carriers of practice for whom past experiences and equity of access are critical. Additionally, their skills are enhanced when they realized the changes occurring over time, as Sam mentioned in the opening quote; such realization of change was made possible as participants were interviewed at different stages of the evaluation process. From the research analysis, it is possible to infer that if the meaning for conducting the evaluation and the reasons for change are better-understood, practitioners are more likely to engage with their practice, and to enjoy evaluation.

What if evaluation takes place seated around the table whilst enjoying a drink?

This article focuses on the contribution of social practice theory to understand evaluation practice undertaken by development education organisations (DEOs). It proposes a social practice theoretical framework intended to characterize and understand the evaluation of development education (DE) initiatives, oriented towards the delivery on social justice and democratic outcomes. It examines what people do in their everyday routine regarding evaluation, by discussing the concept of evaluation practice in the intersection with that of 'ownership', instigating a collaborative evaluation practice - in contrast to a performance-based approach under a technocratic governance environment, where DE and international development funders operate.

As Shaw et al. (2006) noted, "research on evaluation will not be a magic bullet. [...] It will not replace all judgements about wise evaluation practice – but instead can aid such judgement to

a significant extent" (p.18). This discussion about a collaborative evaluation practice in opposition to a performance-based approach is important because it extends the literature that claims that a technocratic governance model is inadequate to evaluate social interventions (Greene, 1999; Bourn, 2014).

1. *Evaluation is about people, conducted by people to improve other peoples' lives*

The development of practitioners' engagement in evaluation was critical to demonstrate their willingness to make evaluation more humanistic and socio-relational, to transform its boredom and pressure into a meaningful and enjoyable practice. Meaningful and enjoyable evaluative moments are still not firmly in place in a DE context, which remains very much performance-dependent (McCluskey, 2011). However, there is a call to action to tackle this need (Bourn, 2014), which combined with the current and further research makes an important contribution to the field of evaluation in DE, and to the international development arena.

A collaborative approach to evaluation practice places people at the core, as owners of their practice, whereas a technocratic approach prioritizes project's performance (as if 'projects' have agency and were not operated by people). There is broader relevance to be explored within international development project-based funded organizations in relation to a less prescribed performance approach to evaluation (Bamberger & Segone, 2011).

2. *Evaluation as a set of routinized practices*

A social practice view of evaluation assumes that its practice is composed by a set of routines, which can vary in their format such as, a conversation, a meeting, a drama performance or any other repeated routine over time. It can also be formal or informal, as I argued that a possible (and desirable) evaluation moment could be sitting around the table having an enjoyable drink[2].

[2]*Zozimo, 2016 'What if evaluation takes place seated around the table whilst enjoying a drink? in Doctoral Seminar, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, 16 March 2016*

In contrast, funders tend to require performance reports in written form, thus the scope to transform and innovate evaluation appears limited.

This article acknowledges that literature assumes that DEOs and international development organisations have sufficient knowledge to meet the funders' requests of evaluation (García-Iriarte, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, & Luna, 2011). This assumption leads to a problematic implication of the lack of understanding about the meaning of evaluation.

Unlike Shove et al.'s (2012), who interprets competence as the skills required to understand and participate in evaluation, my original research shows that practitioner's notion of their competence is undermined because of a strong embedded perception that they lack skills to practise evaluation and to meet the funder's expectations. Hence, I argue that a collaborative approach to evaluation is the transformation of practitioners' disengaged, forced, resisted, and coped practice towards a meaningful, enjoyable, and collaborative evaluation.

3. Practitioners are carriers of evaluation practice

Literature on evaluation of stakeholders' participation advocates the participation and engagement of practitioners (Greene, 1988, 1999) across all stages of the project cycle; yet the current research indicates that when practitioners had not participated in the project design, they were likely to struggle with a 'forced' engagement in evaluation. In contrasting this feature, it is relevant to express funder's assumption that evaluation has to be accountable, performance-based, standardized and logic-driven which, as Greene (1988) and others noted, has less to do with engagement and even less with the notion of 'carriers' of evaluation practice (Shove et al., 2012). By carriers of practice, I interpret practitioners whom past experiences of evaluation have the potential to influence their practice and their teams' in a constructive manner, practitioners who carry evaluation forward to maintain their engagement over time, and to replicate that evaluative experience in a routinized way over time.

4. *An unintentional practice, means that what people do and how they perceive what they do can be different*

The original research sheds light to a lack of recognition in evaluation practice whereby what practitioners do and how they perceive what they do is different (Shove et al., 2009); in other words, as everything that is 'social' entails subjectivities, complexities, multiple interpretations and messiness - so it is the practice of evaluation.

This research brings into question this lack of recognition by closely capturing learning from practitioners, project's activities, and evaluation trajectory over time; and by mapping this continuum of practices. Although practitioners shared different levels of engagement in evaluation, documentary evidence demonstrated that practitioners, from the current case organization, had carried their evaluation practice forward, and more importantly, observations showed that, a reflective space amongst the team emerged. This case study generated an unintentional contribution in relation to the role of reflection to advance a practice-based evaluation. Such evaluation encouraged the reflection needed to unpack some misperceived issues faced by practitioners on a daily basis, seeing connections they were not aware of before, as well as, expressing experiences that challenged practitioner's views of evaluation. As Jesse mentioned: *"we cannot consider evaluation at all, because we have not reflected about its meaning"*.

Contrastingly, a performance-based approach to evaluation within the present technocratic governance environment lacks time for reflection to occur, as practitioners and funders have multi stakeholders' requirements to respond. In a 'social practice' evaluation, practitioners can recognize change in their practice as they place reflection at the heart of the evaluation process. An unintentional practice means that what people do and how they perceive what they do, can be different.

This study indicates that a collaborative type of engagement, at last, occurred, regardless of several changes over time – sustaining a collaborative evaluation practice.

Conclusion: Dare to enjoy evaluation

This article recommends that by understanding evaluation, and how meaning and value is attributed, DE practitioners, and other stakeholders within the international development arena are likely to own their practice of evaluation through experiencing a deeper enjoyment in their everyday routine. As a result, the concept of evaluation practice intersects with that of 'ownership', instigating a collaborative evaluation practice, which may be associated with the developmental process maintained by the group of DE practitioners and other international development stakeholders, as they sit around the table. The social practice theoretical framework enables the symbolic meaning of the act of 'seating around the table', legitimizing practitioners to bring their individual practices – which becomes owned evaluation practices – through a transformative collaborative ecosystem.

Meanwhile, a performance-based approach to evaluation perpetuates patterns of disengagement and resistance in the individuals' practice of evaluation, challenging a transformation towards reflection and collaboration. However, further work needs to address to what extent does the appearance of more stakeholders in a technocratic governance context shape the power relationships at stake (where consultants have to please funders; funders have to please the Government; and the Government has to please their citizens). On a theoretical level, there is scope to explore how access to meaning, competence, and material is distributed, and how these dynamics of social practice transform and generate new meanings, competences, and materials.

Implications for policy and practice

The findings of this study have practical implications for policy and practice. For policy makers, continued effort is needed to encourage the debate about transforming evaluation more accessible to practitioners, particularly in terms of setting their agendas. Specifically, the need to engage and reflect about evaluation practice is of paramount importance to funders within small and medium organizations. This implication has broader relevance to international development organizations, because their indicators for measuring impact tend to be mostly project-based led. The challenge is for policy makers to consider reflection as an evaluative tool, perhaps through a wider acceptance of more creative methods of collaboration when practising evaluation.

For practitioners in the DE, international development, and in other sectors, important questions persist in relation to the purpose, the agency, and the adequate framework to attribute value to social interventions. To contribute to the refinement of evaluation practice, I propose the facilitation of collaborative action learning sets (Smith, 2011), where a small group of practitioners meet up, as a team, with the funder over a pre-agreed period of time to debate through open questions and honest dialogue about their evaluation practice. This reflective questioning *"is the main way to help participants proceed with their problems, and learning occurs from reflection on actions taken"* (ibid. p.20). Practitioner's reflection may serve as a roadmap to increase their understanding of the meaning of evaluation, potentially leading to a sense of ownership of their evaluation practice, alongside enjoyment through transformative collaboration. This article contributes to this transformation by using a social practice view of evaluation, rather than a performance-based approach, since evaluation practice is about people, conducted by people and aiming to improve peoples' lives. A more holistic approach to practise evaluation is possible, desirable and needed.

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