

Critical elements in evaluating and developing practice in social work: An exploratory overview

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Abstract: *Evaluation research deals with practical questions of how practice is being carried out, how it can be studied and evaluated and how the outcomes can be communicated with the practice. In this article critical elements in evaluation practices are scrutinized from an evolutive perspective. It draws attention to the role of the researcher, the knowledge production and dissemination phases and how these have changed. It highlights the importance on practice connectedness and how this challenges the knowledge production processes. And concludes by stating that to be able to learn from practice, evaluation needs to evolve towards a more deliberative approach and have an active role both in science and society.*

Key words: *evaluation practice; social work; development; reflexivity; deliberation; co-evolution*

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Introduction

In the last decade the emergence of new modes of knowledge production has been much debated. There has been a shift of emphasis from acquisition and transmission of knowledge to construction and production of knowledge. New actors have stepped in and the roles of the researchers are being discussed critically. Also the outcome of research – the usefulness of research with respect to practice development – is a topical agenda. New models of producing knowledge are thus evolving while at the same time welfare communities feel the pressure of demands for legitimation through research and evaluation. Effectiveness, knowledge and management have become central demands and have spread throughout the governance of the welfare state. This is not just a matter of an increasing discourse, but also evaluation practices in different forms. This is where evaluation steps in.

This article explores the practice of doing evaluation in social work through the changed role of the researcher. It highlights the position of the researcher and their chosen perspectives, and critically evaluates what the consequences are for the development of practice. It starts by reflecting on the researcher role and then considers more widely the issue of multiple ownership of the evaluation practice.

Evaluation is a giga-trend cutting through our era (Vedung 2004). In the Nordic countries it was influenced by the emergence, from the 1960s, of the evaluation discipline in the USA. Today evaluation is highly pluralistic. It covers a broad landscape and different models have been developed through the decades. There has been a transition from evaluation as academic research to a more participative and dialogue based form of research where evaluators and evaluatees meet. Different approaches exist as do different reasonings. Rajavaara (2007) has analyzed what kinds of rationales exist for effectiveness and their impacts on welfare state activities, using Finnish social policy and social work research as case studies. The study considered debates and empirical research dealing with the effectiveness and quality of social services and social work. Rajavaara claimed that in the 2000's dialogical research and evaluation forms were quite common within the welfare sector; she found the evaluation practice within social work in Finland to belong to the interaction-based style of reasoning. By interaction-based style is meant that the target of knowledge is action-based and the subjects of knowledge are all the actors involved in the process. The perspective is democracy driven, striving towards shared knowledge, development and change. This democracy-driven perspective is grounded partly in a critique of representative democracy and partly in a concern for evaluation as learning (Vedung 2004). The pluralistic dimensions of evaluation with its different justifications and reasonings make it even more important for an evaluator to contemplate what perspective to choose and the consequences of their choice. How do we look at practice through the eyes of evaluation? What does the chosen method do to the phenomenon? Can pluralism be realized in practice and

what are the changes that different perspectives and methods have brought forth?

After 10 years of being active in evaluation practice and research I wanted to explore the critical elements that I have experienced, which are essentially inherent in evaluation, and how they have changed during this time. Divergent views as such certainly belong to scientific development, but how do we look at these disputes? Is there a risk that we see more fractures and divergencies between different approaches? Or, should we look at fractures differently? There have been claims that what seems to be gaping divides between evaluation theories may shrink when the practice is examined (Donaldson & Scriven 2003). This is one aspect of this case study: to elaborate on the making of evaluation. There is an abundance of literature on different methods and approaches but the making of evaluation, the practice itself, is seldom described. And the making is *sui generis*, a mixture of different methods, including diverse standpoints, and aspects of values, emotions and moral judgements.

Another point that I want to make concerns the emergence of the new vision of evaluation, a vision that increasingly recognizes evaluation as an active partner in human service organizations. This new vision, I claim, has meant a very rapid development of new methodologies, and can thus be seen as a forerunner for the application-directed type of research. Ernest House remarked as early as 1986 that 'the practices of evaluation has been substantially transformed by the growth of internal evaluation'. What has made it possible, is the evaluation's strict adherence to practice. Evaluation research has had to deal with practical questions of how practice is being carried out, how it can be studied and evaluated and how the outcomes can be communicated with the practice. This aspect is closely connected to the challenges and practices of practice research.

The third point is one of synthesis, and a critical one. Is there a risk of narrowing down evaluation as a tool for welfare service and as an application-directed type of research? Where does theory step in? And should we stop at pluralism and complexity or are we heading into a new integrative phase, a phase that looks more deeply into the structures and systems involved? A phase – or a paradigm – that is holistic and strives at organized complexity?

But why a personal perspective and why a process approach? I started out in the traditional scientific manner; critically investigating and comparing evaluation methods that were based on different rationales. The problem was that I was not capable of highlighting the complexity and the change in the process. I needed to consider cases and contexts, but foremost the researcher mind. The solution was telling a development story and thus describing both the critical elements in the practice as well as stating where I stand as an evaluator. (cf. Hildrum & Strand 2007; Schwandt 2002) As Thomas Schwandt (2002, 189) has phrased it:

Evaluator identity is about creating a narrative – a story – of who they are and what they should be as professionals. Telling such a narrative is inescapably to take a moral stance.

Research, evaluation and change

Recently, there has been discussion on the issue of scale and wider influence in both research and evaluation (Reason 2001; Ennals 2005; Gustavsen 1998; Gustavsen 2001; Chen 2005). Questions have been raised about the connectedness between research and a broader impact. What is the scale of our research and how is it connected to change? Peirce claimed in 1990 that

evaluation is seldom capable of creating radical changes and that an instrumental use of evaluation, or research for that part, is an illusion. The real change actors are the ones who are working within the practice and the best way to understand an idea or action or system is to change it.

Here we can see a clear notion of how evaluation and practice are separate. The evaluator is an external researcher and it remains unclear how the use of evaluation is transferred and how it in fact can be connected to change. What was clear, however, was that Peirce saw the practitioner as the change agent.

But let us explore the connectedness: One way of examining research connectedness is to elucidate the methodology and the different forms of research and clarify the scope of research. Reason and Torbert (2001) have differentiated the scope of research through the division of first-person inquiry, second-person inquiry and third-person inquiry. First-person inquiry refers to the reflective researcher who brings inquiry into everyday practice seeing research as informing the practice and themselves, as perhaps self-appointed change agents. Second-person inquiry is a more co-operated inquiry in which a face-to-face group of co-researchers engage together in cycles of action and reflection through research. The third-person inquiry goes further than this and tries to contribute to wider movements.

Nonwithstanding, change also happens at the interpersonal level, in people's minds, in attitudes and orientations, and in how we seek to understand each other in different encounters and contexts. These differences can be elucidated via Gadamer's (1989) three ways to encounter situations and people that challenge our expectations and assumptions. Here the encounters with researchers and field practice may serve as a good example. The first approach to encounter is to try to discover the typical behaviour of the other and to make predictions about others on the basis of experience. This is the methodological attitude of the social sciences, the idea of theoretical contemplation of an object of our understanding. In the second type of encounter, the interpreter acknowledges the other as a person, but this understanding is a form of self-relatedness. This can be understood as a form of sympathetic listening in which we interpret others in our own terms and refuse to risk our own prejudgements. The third way of understanding begins with the full acknowledgement that as interpreters we are situated within a tradition. It is only from such a position that an interpreter can experience the other truly as another.

Hence, understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with that which challenges our self-understanding.

A third dimension in research connectedness is the program level. Programmes for workplace development have a wide range of goals by which their outcomes can be evaluated. First of all programmes have workplace-level goals that include 'first-degree' goals relating to immediate improvements in actions targeted by the project and 'second-degree' goals relating to the sustainability of outcomes at participating workplaces, which typically requires changes in work practices. Chen (2005) often refers to this as a shift from internal validation to external validation. Thirdly programmes have generative goals that concern ways in which the outcomes and experiences gained at individual workplaces benefit other workplaces, stakeholder groups or the general public. Outcomes and experiences typically cannot be shifted from one context to another *as such* but rather in the form of generative ideas to be reflected on and shaped as required in the new context.

With these three elements I will pursue the journey of research asking: What are the critical elements in knowledge production processes in evaluation practice on a personal level? (how do we look at practice and knowledge), on a methodological level (how do we do the research?); and on a program level (what are the outcomes of research?). Who are seen as change agents, the researcher and the research community or the practice and how have these changed?

Scientific happenings

Let me first start with a more generic approach. As a researcher I have a long experience of large surveys and quantitative analyses. Quantitative research is often described as a deductive process with clear questions, hypotheses and tests. In its most rigid form the quantitative researcher is external and does not have any values or feelings. He (and usually it is a he) is a positivist who interprets and relates to the interviewed with a methodological attitude and contemplation of an object (cf. Gadamer 1989). The research process as such is homogenous and straightforward. There is no risk of misunderstanding. This, at least, is the image of quantitative research. But, as Hammersley (1995; 1992) and also many researchers have pointed out in criticizing this view, the divide between qualitative and quantitative research is arbitrary. Looking at social research methodology in terms of paradigms is really unhelpful. It exaggerates the depth of empirical differences in view among researchers, and the scale and the impacts of these in the practice of research. Moreover, it gives the impression that these issues can and should be researched simply by a choice among paradigms. The distinctions tend also to obscure the complexity of the problems that face us as researchers. For me it is not a question of either/or but of both/and, which in practice can have many dimensions; by

using different methods, but also, by combining different orientations and using qualitative lenses in weaving quantitative data, reading the data both vertically and horizontally.

Quantitative research processes use statistical analyses but the research process as such includes processes that are qualitative. Dialogue exists both with interviewees as well as with the analytical material. Yes, material does speak back. It is a process that starts out by hypotheses but changes on the way, as new questions arise and new hypotheses are formed. Lofland & Lofland (1996) emphasise freedom in the research process and this can and is used also within quantitative research. Reflecting on my position as a researcher and how the research relates to other actors, one can conclude, in contrast to the usual image of quantitative research, that the research was a creative process. The creativity was made possible through the interaction with other researchers but also through encounters with the interviewees. The knowledge achieved through this process was not 'unabashedly aimed at removing uncertainty or reducing diversity' (cf. Schwandt 2002, 198), quite the contrary it tried to set different aspects into question. Still, what was achieved at this point, was merely a change of mind, a critical reflectiveness that opened the forces that shaped my mind as a researcher. It did not though have a wider influence than face-to-face interactions. The research results were presented to the public, as well as to the interviewees, although disseminated mechanically through 'scientific happenings'. This traditional interview research can well serve as an example of a first-person inquiry seeing research as informing the practice and the researcher as the self-appointed change agent.

Interactive evaluation practice

The first evaluation (1997) I was involved in can be characterised as a mixed-method approach with a realistic twist. I was fortunate to be involved in a fairly long-term evaluation process for nearly four years following a development project for young children at risk of exclusion from work and education. From a request for an outcome-oriented and cost-effectiveness evaluation we managed to negotiate a more multidimensional approach, involving different researchers and various methods, focusing on service and user, process and outcome. And combining both surveys, cost-effectiveness studies, process analysis, time analysis and life story interviews. A critical, realistic evaluation can be seen as a challenger to the traditional effectiveness evaluation. The fact that one must know and understand what the results are made up of is emphasized in this approach. In this evaluation process we did not follow the realistic evaluation design to its fullness, trying to grasp the so-called clear box or white box through mechanisms, contexts, modifiers and outcome (Pawson & Tilley 1997). Instead we chose to view the material from different angles and let

the different results reflect one another. This form of multidimensional evaluation process is seldom achieved in evaluation practice, but we as researchers chose to use this form of methodology to grasp the complexity of the practice focusing both on process and outcome and both on the practice and the user of the practice (Julkunen et al. 2000).

Table 1
A multidimensional evaluation research process

	Welfare Practice	User
Outcome	Cost-effectiveness	Effects on the life-situation
Process	Monitoring	Subjective experiences

In this reflection we also included the practitioners in the project. It was a co-operative inquiry where we worked together as researchers to better understand aspects of the project world, and also to find ways to act more effectively and search for practical forms of knowledge. The innermost core in evaluation is said to have a strict adherence to practical work: how it is actually carried out, and not how it is described as being carried out. It is a question of getting ones hands dirty, of digging into the real practice. At a personal level we as researchers encountered many obstacles, skepticism and fear at first, even criticism. Eventually, we succeeded in setting a dialogue with the project personnel and the process itself was developmental. It was a continuous developmental communicative interchange through which the project members and we as researchers gained more insight in the logic of the project.

What was our role as evaluators? As evaluators we came to serve as interpreters, helping the practitioners to better understand the logic of the project. We described and explained and were not engaged with normative criticism- at least how we felt it to be. Sue White (2001) talks about auto-ethnography and refers to the necessity to translate back and forth of experience-near and experience-distant concepts. In generating autoethnographic work, researchers attempt to more fully realize the ideal of reflexivity, which is the idea that the researcher needs to be aware of his or her role as a researcher. This was not an easy process. We had difficulties in finding the right platform for the discussion; should we just present the results or involve the practitioners in evaluating the results and how should we go about doing it? We started off rather traditionally, presenting the results and at the same time evaluating how the results were perceived. We listened sympathetically,

understanding the claims of the practitioners, but it was from the standpoint of us as outside researchers.

At first we felt a mutual insecurity in what was behind the spoken words. It took a while to find the right meeting rituals and relevant subjects to discuss. After a while trust between us increased and we came to know each other's manners. (Julkunen et al. 2000, 176)

We achieved then a mutual understanding, but we were not involved in a common framework or process. We were the experts and this led to a process where our expertise was in even greater demand. One may claim that the practitioners saw themselves as change agents, but up to a point, they became dependent on us as experts. A different approach was surely needed.

From interactive evaluation to inclusive learning

The following turn in the realistic twist emerged from our being engaged in a development project that we had together with practitioners at the welfare office (2003). As a case it consisted of an application of realistic thinking, and was designed and performed as a single case evaluation. A key question was to find answers to why a certain intervention had an effect. It was a struggle to understand what the results are made up of, and through this to try to develop future practice. By analyzing – and creating – the documentation we can find out what the practice consists of, what interventions and processes there are, and what their consequences are for the users. It is an approach that is based on consideration of each individual case and on professional evaluation of these circumstances. Theoretically it is based on realism and it is required to have some understanding of the underlying thoughts of the philosophy of science on which realism is based.

We started out by trying to clarify for ourselves the realistic concepts and thinking. The process was both challenging and complicated. Starting required outside guidance and counseling as well as analyzing the evaluation mode and getting it more in touch with practical work. (Högnabba et al. 2005).

The three-year development project consisted of workshops, consultations, seminars, together researching, and together dwellings: in Thomas Schwandt's words (2007)

a mode of engagement with the world in which the familiar things around us are non-deliberately and effortlessly co-opted into our current activity to form an extension of our being and doing

Here, the learning dimension came into place. It was clear that in order to get more far-reaching results in practice, we needed to place emphasis on learning. We wanted to develop a tool to assist practitioners to make sense of the practice, and for this development work needed support of theories and movement between empirical observations and theories. From a practitioner perspective this may be a shift from street-level bureaucrats to street-level intellectuals (Marthinsen in this issue). This is well illuminated by a practitioner in the report that followed the project :

We were able to make use of the realistic approach in the experiment in many ways. The use of the concepts of realistic evaluation helped to analyze the reality in a new way. For instance, we learned to think, analyze and theorize the mechanisms underlying a phenomenon. The realistic approach is made clearer also in other ways by the role of theory in the research: especially the dialogue between empiric results and theories becomes easier to manage.

Nevertheless:

In the use of different research methods and verification of outcome, the same difficulties and problems were encountered as in other approaches. (Högnabba et al. 2005, 123)

The realistic evaluation method did not as such survive as a pragmatical tool, but what did survive was the theory, a research-mindedness, and, I claim, a change in thinking about practice. The practitioners learned to think, act and analyse the practice in a new way. This became a more far-reaching result. Program theory (Chen 2005) seemed then successful as a conceptual mirror or map (cf. Connolly 2006). The process was created in dialogical forums, and was practice based, where both academic and stakeholder theories intertwine. It included a rather large group of people, with the urge to learn together. As researchers we were positioned merely as facilitators, but failed to systematically evaluate the process.

This case exemplifies a democracy-driven approach and serves as an example of the second person inquiry where we as researchers are engaged together in cycles of action and reflection. Reflecting on it is also a question of being engaged in elucidating work models not as static products, but as generative metaphors which may lead to new ideas and images of how to change social systems.

From group interaction to wider influence

The wider influence in evaluation has been triggered by developing evaluation models (Seppänen-Järvelä et al. 2006). Developing evaluation, particularly the deliberative democracy approach, is gaining ground in the evaluation practice. It is a procedure that promotes not only more profoundly informed views on the service but also empowers citizens.

In this example of the evaluation process the user dimension also enters. User involvement has been argued from a direct-democracy and deliberative-democracy case (Vedung 2004). The deliberative feature engenders a discursive, reasoning, discussing, learning-through-dialogue encounter, which may educate clients to become better citizens in general: 'the consumer as citizen rather than the consumer as customer' (Jenkins & Gray 1992, 296).

In early 2000s I became acquainted with the user-oriented BIKVA-model, a democratic and development oriented evaluation model that was originally developed in Denmark (Krogstrup 1996; 1997; 2004). This model has been developed in response to growing demands for involving the users in evaluations in the mid-1990s. The object of the model is, through including users in evaluations, to secure correlation between the users' perception of problems and the public services, and hence between the users' perception of problems and the social work at different levels in the organization. A unifying element in this model is the change process which gives meaning and direction to the evaluation. The idea is, that the users hold important knowledge that can contribute to goal-direct the services of the public sector. The evaluation process is bottom-up, oriented toward learning, and is expected to contribute to methodological development. The evaluation starts with focus groups of users where the problems that the users find relevant are discussed, but front stage staff (employees in direct contact with the users), managers, and politicians are also included. Hence, the users are assigned a key role in this model as triggers for learning. Through this dialogue public organizations receive knowledge on how to develop practice. Dialogic and improvement approaches are embedded in the model, which can thus be seen as one way of revitalizing praxis and the moral-political life of society (Schwandt 2001). But how to implement it in practice and avoiding the expert trap?

The fourth example is a teaching and learning process (2005) where we applied peer working methods and explored the user-oriented evaluation method together with practitioners who wanted to learn the method and pilot it in practice. We created a one year peer working group following the different steps in the evaluation process and sharing the experiences (Hänninen et al. 2006). Our interest and aim was to experiment how the method fit into developing welfare practices in a Finnish context and test whether the method could function as an internal evaluation, and furthermore, through the pilots lead to the creation of structures for user involvement. In so doing we included several communities of practice

(Wenger 1998) – in fact over two years altogether 23 different practices, where the participants within and across these communities of practice were connected by a set of relationships and a set of shared experience. Our sessions formed a common set of boundary objects, such as mutual development goals and shared project plans (cf. Hildrum & Liavåg Strand 2007). This may be characterised as an open environment where practice developed at different levels, at the learning forums where practitioners and researchers (or we as teachers) met, at the practical environment where users and practitioners met, and at a personal level where the thinking developed.

In peer learning the process is built on support from each other, so there is constant change between the roles being supported and giving support. Support cannot be ordered but favourable conditions can be built up (Hyväri 2005.) Peer learning is also an emotional, social and dynamic process. Learning always involves emotions, without which learning is claimed not to be possible. Emotions and factional knowledge is intertwined and learning by doing and actively testing is involved in skills. It comes more close to the forms of auto-ethnographic work embracing personal thoughts, feelings, stories, and observations as a way of understanding the social context we were studying.

Susanne Hyväri (2005) concludes, that for peer learning to be successful a common space is needed, where experiences can be shared. This also requires a set of shared rules. In peer learning specific elements are the build blocks. In our setting we built on the learning processes that have been analysed in pedagogy. For instance, Hakkarainen (2001) talks about research oriented learning which has the common denominator of shared knowledge. Still, we had a rather broad and open approach, a process that did not just focus on shared knowledge about the methodology but also about the practice. What changed, or did anything change? The intention was to monitor the process and the process ended with a common publication where the practitioners critically assessed the process in their own practice. We found difficulties associated with the practitioner's location within the organization and about the tensions between practitioner's own experiences of user dilemmas and bringing them into the process. These triggered discussions on using the user evaluation model as an internal evaluation. The practice insight is however essential with regard to changes in structures.

The model strengthened and concretized the various dimensions of user involvement. Before we had approached the issue problem-orientedly and did not succeed in getting the users involved. The evaluation process gave courage and understanding in that evaluation can bridge the spoken languages of the service providers and service receivers. The authenticity of the user voice is preserved in this deliberative process. (Hirsikoski 2007, 28)

The role of the evaluator was also elaborated by the practitioners:

The evaluator is not the one who changes things, he gives the welfare workers and the leaders possibilities, space and tools for making use of the users experiences and responses. One could see the evaluator as an active coach during the process. (Högnabba & Paananen 2007, 26)

Learning is much about solving problems and conflicts. Practice may need forms of understanding that are in themselves practical. This was manifested in the peer working process we had. Problems, successes and stories were brought into the group and based on the common ground in which they participated and to which they contributed. It was the practitioners and the developers who set the agenda through their questions, uncertainties and descriptions of how the different steps have been taken. Through these deliberations the different practice communities could reflect their practice. How can we describe our role? Perhaps as development-oriented supervisors, or auto-ethnographic researchers, with the aim of highlighting the theoretical and analytical aspects in the process as well as allowing for innovative processes. A clear structure, but also space for creativity, the direct support and the interaction with other professionals made this a pleasant experience, as one participant phrased it. It was a joint action within which the dialogue between the theoretical and the more practical processes are conducted (cf. Shotter 1999).

Burbules (1993) and Mönkkönen (2007) highlight the concept of dialogue as a process of communication which is directed toward new discovery and new knowledge. Dialogue is in itself not a goal but a process that supports many other goals. Schwandt (2002) discusses Burbules further and argues that dialogue is both a practice that helps us achieve phronesis (practical-moral-knowledge) and a regulative ideal that points us towards the tasks that we need to undertake. As a practice, it is not eristic but constitutes a conversational interaction directed intentionally towards learning. It is not aimed at changing other people but at affecting change in and by participants in the dialogue.

The process was exciting, respectful and participatory. I believe that systematically fulfilled the evaluation process creates cyclically something new. This, on the other side, helps to understand the meaning of the common responsibility we have: the culture of pride increases. (Thomasén 2007, 40).

The user-oriented evaluation model contributed thus to wider movements, to levels not just in practice but in thinking and eventually at the policy level. The learning process we developed built a new balance of understanding where the second-person, dialogic processes are primary elements that may cause third person systems conditions. This kind of evaluation practice is reframed as dialogical interpretive encounters. It is not the evaluator nor the practitioner that is aimed at in solving a problem, but to understand it. This kind of reasoning involves incorporating the complexity of the situation and making sense of it. According to Gadamer (1981)

this kind of reasoning contributes to a broadening of our horizon and our human experiences. This new understanding also transformed and consolidated future strategies in practice. In many of the practice environments structures for better user involvement were developed.

The changed roles and processes in evaluation practice

Evaluation research is applied research intended to exploit new knowledge in solving practical problems and developing the activity. These case studies brought forward in this article show all that the production of knowledge in social work and welfare settings must be seen as a continuum. It needs as well to be grounded in the individual nature of the people involved and their life situations. Professional social workers have often been disappointed in studies presenting average results or evaluation studies based on extensive material where the expected results vanish and disappears.

Evaluation research has had to deal with practical questions of how practice is being carried out, how it can be studied and evaluated and how the outcomes can be communicated with the practice. This aspect is closely connected to the challenges of practice research. What are then these new modes of organizing and completing evaluation practice? In Table 2, I have summarized the different elements inherent in the cases described by disseminating five dimensions: 1) research interest, 2) methodology, 3) apprehension of knowledge, 4) knowledge outcome of research, 5) dissemination process and 6) role of researcher.

There is an ongoing discussion about the evolution of science and society. Much of this discussion has been criticized to be abstract. Tove Rasmussen in this issue discussed the different modes of knowledge with reference to what can be called evidence in social work. The focus in this chapter is on evaluation, with an attempt to highlight the critical elements in the development of evaluation practices through using cases from practice. The cases described in this chapter are not validly comparable but are chosen to highlight both practice and research. It draws attention both to the role of researcher, and the knowledge production and dissemination process. The first mode is characterised by a traditional research design with the researcher who brings inquiry into practice seeing research as informing the practice and researchers as self-appointed change agents. The validity of the research is assured through scientific peer evaluation. The second mode is a more co-operated inquiry in which a group of researchers and practitioners engage together in cycles of action and reflection through research. Here the practitioner is seen as the change agent and an integration of a reflective mode is seen as essential. The validity is tested inside the practice incorporating dialogues with involved actors. The third mode is a more open and extensive process with multi-dimensional networking

CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN EVALUATING AND DEVELOPING PRACTICE IN SOCIAL WORK

Table 2
Critical elements in evaluation practice

	Traditional evaluation research	Co-operative practice evaluation	Co-evolutive practice evaluation
Research interest	Hierarchical, first person inquiry	Interactive, second person inquiry	Interactive, third person inquiry
Methodology	Surveys and interviews Analysis of data	Multimethods Single case studies Analysis involves reflective interpretations	Ethnographic and multidimensional evaluation Analysis involves narration of the researcher role
Knowledge apprehension and positioning	High level of expertise Knowledge develops through research	Postmodern expertise Knowledge develops in interaction with practice	Postmodern expertise Knowledge emerges and develops in communication in, at and between different levels
Knowledge outcome	Descriptions and explanations New knowledge	Deliberation Dialogue within research Dialogue with practitioners Reflective knowledge	Deliberation and learning New understanding
Dissemination process	Knowledge transition Certain knowledge Quality assessment through scientific peer evaluation	Knowledge production Reflexivity Simultaneous learning and development Quality assessment through dialogue	Knowledge production and knowledge development Reflexivity Peer learning and methodological development Quality assurance tested through the process of extension
Role of researcher	Researcher as the change agent Research informs practice Internal validity	Practitioner as the change agent Practice informs research Internal validity	Co-evolutive agency Collective learning, evaluation as an active partner External validity

and encounters at the interfaces of various operating contexts. Evaluation is seen as an active partner in the process of knowledge and validity is repeatedly tested not only inside the practice but outside the community involving different networks. This can be described as co-evolution of science and society with reference to Helga Nowotny (2006).

Karvinen- Niinikoski (2005) stresses that the shift towards open expertise has increased the significance of interaction. Expertise is not a matter of individual professionals being able to store information and knowledge within themselves but the communication and construction of knowledge, and the development of creative models rests on a sense of community. The researcher role has much expanded from the self-appointed expert to a reflexive and dialogical researcher where the analysis of data involves interpretation on the part of the researcher. However, rather than a portrait of the Other (person, group, culture), the difference is that the researcher is also obliged to construct a portrait of the self. In generating cooperative evaluation researchers attempt to realize the ideal of reflexivity and embrace also personal thoughts, stories and observations as a way of understanding the context. This is much the opposite of a hypothesis driven, (post)positivist research.

The importance of knowledge dissemination was recognised as early as the 1960's and 1970's. These problematics are still a central element of practice development. Since the 1980's the orientation of discussion has been away from structural towards generative approaches and more recently the focus of research has been on how to find solutions to the problems of work and organisations (Gustavsen 1985). The notion of how a change in practices takes place becomes visible through ways of dissemination. Arnkil (2006) compares different concepts of knowledge dissemination and various development strategies, identifying rational planning, learning organisation, and an everyday 'complex response' model each of which impact on development efforts and concepts.

What are then these different modes of organizing evaluation practice and what are the characteristics of the new modes of practice evaluation? Shaw (2006) has argued that following elements are involved: 1) direct concern with the outcome of research, 2) researchers as both subjects and objects, 3) overlap between the production and appropriation of knowledge, 4) personal stakes and objectives, and 5) research process that is one of identity formation.

A new generation of evaluators is said to explore how to engage in a kind of evaluation practice that is at once descriptive and normative, that incorporates the moral and political dimensions of everyday life into the activity of defining social problems and evaluating social programs as solutions to those problems, and that regards evaluation as a form of social self understanding or interpretation in the traditions of public philosophy (Schwandt 2002, 124; 191). It is a question both of narrating the role of the researcher and of being an active partner both in science and society. A new conceptualization of evaluation is interested in recovering a sense of making and participating rather than just seeing and finding. And to be

able to learn from practice, evaluation needs to develop social relationships in open environments.

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