

Outlines of the social and symbolic function of evaluations of education

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Abstract

The article presents the major findings from a research project on the social and symbolic function of evaluations of education. The aim and perspective of the research project was to formulate a social theory *about* evaluations. The project was documented in the author's dissertation (Nørholm 2008a). The original article Danish article consisted of an edited version of the oral presentation of the project, published in Danish as Nørholm (2008b).

The analyses draw upon theories by Durkheim (art or practical practice, practical theory, science or theoretical theory respectively), Bourdieu (the notions of *habitus*, capital, field and the theories from *Reproduction*), Ulf P. Lundgren (a scientific theory of evaluations) and Staf Callewaert (pedagogy as science). The empirical material consists of eight evaluation reports regarding the educations/formal training programmes for the (semi-)professions within a medical field, of different text about evaluations, and of dominant examples of Danish normal evaluation research.

The analysed evaluations were conducted by representatives at all hierarchical levels, and was implicitly relating to evaluation research performed by a group of researchers/experts allocated seemingly external to the representatives. In a typically meritocratic vision and according to a New-Public-Management model, the evaluations and the evaluation research presuppose that in contemporary society, performances *e.g.* in school are only legitimate, they only exist, when they are evaluated. Any other performance or effort is illegitimate, non-existent. The premise being that the directions formulated in the purposive evaluation research are realized.

The social and symbolic function of evaluations of educations is constructed as a societal tool for social sorting, reproducing an already existing arbitrary social order. Normal evaluation research is constructed as a symbolically necessary part of the scientific object evaluation of education. Evaluations of education, an accompanying normal evaluation research and the evaluated educations are constructed as parts of a societal tool for social sorting, for reproducing an already existing arbitrary social order. The

legitimacy of the evaluations is borrowed from a research constituting a non-autonomous part of a political-administrative field, the field of power, despite the fact that it is administratively allocated externally related to the evaluations and to the evaluand.

Entry, focus and interest

In an unpublished manuscript, Staf Callewaert (unpubl. 1976) pinpoints the problematic: Everybody knows that any peasant will change his or her practice today learning from the experiences of yesterday, and everybody knows that these experiences will be shared among the peasants. As soon as the evaluation and formulation of suggestions for a change of practice is left to a group of specialists, it becomes obvious that not only an improvement of the practice, but something else is at stake. A central aspect is the public/private relation, homologous with the dominant/dominated relation. However, this type of explanations are found only in the research project; they are absent in Callewaert (unpubl. 1976).

This present article is presenting the major findings of a research project on the social and symbolic function of evaluations of education (or of formal training programmes). The research project was focused on explaining evaluations, *i.e.* on formulating a social theory *about* evaluations. The research project is documented in the author's dissertation (Nørholm 2008a). This present article is an edited and rewritten version of the oral presentation of the project, published in Danish as Nørholm (2008b).

In accordance with a New Public Management a performance seems only to legitimately exist as a performance if evaluated. This gives rise to complaints from the evaluated practitioners knowing that improvements of their practice follows from non-formal discussions and not from formalised evaluations, and it gives rise to an interest in examining the social need for specialised instances with the exclusive right to produce what has been produced between peers for innumerable years, *i.e.* to produce this in a more or less inapplicable form if the ambition were to improve practice.

The interest and aim hence is concentrated on *breaking* with an immediate understanding of what an evaluation is, that the evaluation is necessary, that an evaluation offers something indispensable for the concrete practice, and that a task is to (normatively) improve the evaluation or just to choose the right (cf. Bachelard 1968). This narrows the perspective of the research project to explaining and understanding evaluations as an occurrence in the world: Why are they here, who performs them, what are the implicit or explicit presuppositions of the evaluations? What do they do? What is the social and symbolic function of evaluations? What are the social consequences of performing and/or deciding to carry out an evaluation and what is the symbolic function of the performed or planned evaluations? In other words the aim is to construct the *practice* of evaluations, *i.e.* to construct the true pedagogical function of evaluations of education/formal training programmes.

Another essential focus of the research project concerns the applied evaluation *method*: The implicit or explicit presuppositions, who performed these evaluations, the qualifications of these persons, the implicit assumptions regarding the relation between directions and practice underlying the

evaluations etc. At an immediate level the recommendations of the evaluations do not seem to be in the interest of anybody. Hence, the attempt is to explain and understand how the recommendations of the evaluations are formulated and put through apparently unanimously: What are the interests in what seemingly is in the interest of nobody?

However, the focus of the research project was neither on the contents of the analysed evaluations nor on the contents of the evaluated educations/formal training programmes. And the focus is not on the advantages/disadvantages of different evaluation *methods*, it is not on the *developing* of these methods, and it is not on whether the methods are applied properly, what possible methodological mistakes have been made, how the methods might be applied more expedient, what alternative methods might be more expedient etc. In other words: The focus is relatively narrow on the human practice evaluation of education, with perspectives to evaluations in a broader sense and to evaluation research as a socially and symbolically indispensable part, *i.e.* as an accompanying discourse to the evaluations.

The analyses are of the evaluation reports concerning eight educations/formal training programmes for jobs within a medical field¹: The research project seeks to explain *why* these evaluations with an increasing naturalness suggest improvements that are contrary to a relation between school/education/formal training programmes on one hand and the acquiring of practical mastery on the other (cf. Bourdieu 1977, Bourdieu & Passeron 1992): *Why* do the evaluations of educations/formal training programmes present suggestions of the introduction of more theory and a more structured on-the-job training when both the theoretical parts and the practical parts of the education/formal training programme consists of practical theory, *i.e.* neither theory nor practice? And *how* do these recommendations come about unanimously? Cf. Durkheim (1956), Nørholm & Brinkkjær (2005), Petersen (1992/3, esp. p. 72; 1997/8), Nørholm (1997).

First time round with the theoretical frame of reference

The analyses are depending on the existence of a theory about human action including the social genesis, meaning and distribution of these actions, and are depending on the existence a theory that, in an anthropological sense, can be applied to explain and understand the symbolic (or ritual cf. Bell 1992) function of education or formal training programmes: A scientific theory for the reconstruction of a social and symbolic function of education/formal training programmes, *i.e.* a theory *about* a social distribution of what is misleadingly designated the 'results' of education/formal training programmes; misleadingly since it is not obvious that the education/formal training programmes are instrumental in someone acquiring a mastery.

This implies searching for a sociological theory to explain a social distribution of different forms of practical competences (practical practice and

¹ Seven evaluations were performed by the Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, now The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) (midwife, nurse, medical doctor, radiographer (radiologist), physiotherapist, occupational therapist and dentist respectively) and one by The Adult Education Research Group at Roskilde University (Social and health care assistant and helper) (cf. the list of references).

practical theory respectively, cf. Durkheim 1956), and about the social conditions related to the sorting in school/education system (Bourdieu & Passeron 1992): How does education/formal training programmes work socially? How is the social distribution of different forms of practical competences? How is the social distribution of training of and allocation of practical competences respectively? And especially: What is the role of evaluations of education/formal training programmes in this complex? Thus at an early stage, this already shows how one is forced to step by step construct the object by constructing the implied objects.

This practico-sociological focus is present in especially the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, and the relevance of the theories of Bourdieu is even depending on:

- The scope of the present research project being limited to describing and explaining, *i.e.* not to suggesting improvements,
- The chosen theories resulting from empirical investigations and not from philosophical or other considerations, and
- The chosen theories including even meta-theoretical considerations of the status of a theory as such.

In other words, the theories of Bourdieu are chosen because they offer a sociological theory of practice (a sociology of action), a theory of obtaining knowledge about practice (a social theory of knowledge), and a sociologically reflexive theory about the practice of the researcher himself and about the role of this scientific practice in relation to the investigated phenomenon as well as in relation to the result of an analysis of the investigated phenomenon.

Bourdieu's notions of *habitus*, capital, field and the theories from *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1992) are applied, emphasizing that notions and theories far from being static and determined once and for all, constitute dynamic parts of an analytical apparatus with the work of constructing the scientific object as part of a continuous scientific process. This also stresses the fact that the concrete theories are applied as a method for analysis, as opposed to a positivist point of view where the methods for analysis are initially determined as a set of procedures and systems of categorisation seemingly independent of what they are applied to, and under what circumstances, *i.e.* implicitly or explicitly as if such considerations were not necessary. Lundgren (1979) contains a discussion of the (positivist) implications related to evaluations/evaluation research: Lundgren argues that uniform methods ensure fundamentally incomparable results.

The research included discussions of the applied method in the analysed evaluations, in an accompanying normal evaluation research, as well as in the analysis. Thus stating that the chosen theory is the method applied might look like a mystification. However, this is due mainly to the naturalisation of a typically positivist (fallacious) separation of theory, method and scientific object. A precondition for the mystification, and for the need to explain it, is the naturalisation of (objectivist) scientific premises diametrically opposite to that of the analysis of the research project. So, if anything it is a way of speaking clearly: Under any circumstance, a chosen method implicates a

theory; it is not possible to maintain independence by claiming it. Furthermore, it is a way to turn these limiting conditions into an advantage by systematically trying to control them instead of relying on an, in principle, im-possible neutral method.

Stating this explicitly might seem to suggest a vicious circle analytically, it might seem to imply circular arguments: Reflexively, objectivated stating that the theory is the starting point not only for the discussions of empirical findings, but even for the theoretical construction of these empirical findings, might seem to suggest that the research only illustrates the applied method and theories. First of all, it seems to be the other way round: A naturalised positivist vision seems to imply what is investigated, because the starting point for the investigations is based mainly on ideas. Secondly, however, this does not imply refusing to discuss the chosen categories, just that the discussions must involve reflecting on the conditions of possibility for an analytical work as part of the construction of the scientific object of the investigation using the chosen theory as a frame of understanding (cf. Bourdieu 2004a, esp. pp. 85ff). Hence, the theoretical work consists of "... drawing up a counter description of the phenomena instead of taking over the view found in everyday language in administrative or political documents or in the heads of the participants" (Callewaert 2006, p. 128, my translation, MN).

In other words, the starting point is following an epistemological tradition of saying "no" to the immediate, to that which offers itself as evident for analysis, as part of an active, conscious defence against every kind of implicit or explicit normativity, cf. Bachelard (1968), Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron (1991), Broady & Callewaert (1994), and cf. for instance Durkheim's *maxime* that science is studying "facts to know them, and only to know them ..." (Durkheim 1956, pp. 92-93); the approach of Bourdieu implies the necessity of a systematised and systematic experience as a counterbalance to an unsystematic, immediate everyday experience.

But not only is it necessary to break with everything immediate 'out there' that presents itself as self-evident, as an essential theoretical-methodological step in the construction of the object. It is even necessary to break with everything 'within', with the scholastic error of the researcher projecting an observed regularity or a reconstructed social function into the analysed agents as a deliberate intention, and "[...] to objectivate everything that is linked to the scholastic universe [...]" (Bourdieu 2004a, p. 94) as part of the result of the research project the approach involves the second of a Bourdieuan double break in which the researcher systematically compensates for his own place in the field he is part of, *i.e.* for the social struggles going on in the scientific field the researcher is part of (cf. Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron 1991).

In Denmark a Bourdieuan tradition is present in a number of dissertations written to the professor of pedagogy/education Staf Callewaert at the University of Copenhagen (cf. Callewaert 2002), as well as in the so-called KUA-Viborg network that continued the *Bourdieu-Programme*, cf. the presentations of a number of projects in Petersen (ed. 2001). In Sweden it is present at the Uppsala university centred around Donald Broady (cf. Broady ed. 1998, 2007, cf. even www.isak.liu.se). However, none of these research

projects have evaluations or evaluations of education as their immediate or reconstructed object.

Second time round with the theoretical frame of reference

Because of the focus on the social and symbolic function of evaluations of education/formal training programmes, the research covers several domains or fields in an everyday meaning. The constructions go beyond an immediate understanding of the idea of evaluations and what they do, cf. Scriven (1991, p.1): "Evaluation is the process of determining the merit, worth and value of things, and evaluations are the products of that process" or Vedung (1998, p.20): "Att utvärdera är att noggrant bedöma. Att bedöma innebär att fastställa värdet"².

The character of the work of constructing a social theory *about* evaluations of education/formal training programmes places the work within a part of a university field: Pedagogy/education/social science. The ambition is to present an alternative to (meta-evaluating) normal evaluation research (e.g. Scriven 1991, Vedung 1998): Formulations of theories *for* evaluations, methodologies etc. This even places the present research project in relation to profession research, with a focus only on parts of this inasmuch as the focus is on a number of formal conditions (education/formal training programmes) for the legitimate performing of a (semi-)profession (cf. Lortie 1979). This, even calls for theories about the social and symbolic function and necessity of the education/formal training for the (semi-)professions. Thus, the analyses draw upon theories about the social and symbolic function and necessity of not only education/formal training programmes, but also of the social distribution hereof in a population as such.

The research project involved résumés, analyses and discussions of a number of evaluation *research* texts, as well as a discussion and a preliminary construction of a (sub-)field of producers of normal evaluation research. Due to the limited resources the research was limited to Danish normal evaluation research, but the argument is that the results can be applied internationally as well. This focus does not place the research within normal evaluation research (*i.e.* in a (sub-)field of producers of normal evaluation research) but rather within a (sub-)field of (scientific) sociological/pedagogical research *about* evaluation research. Hence, the results of the present research project do not compete with normal evaluation research: Scientific knowledge does not compete with administrative knowledge: Because of totally different functions (activity of keeping order in normal evaluation research and scientific activity in the present research project respectively), they are located far from each other in a university field (cf. Bourdieu 1988).

The starting point was normal evaluation research, *i.e.* what, in view of the ruling social forces (field forces), *is* evaluation research. However, it was soon obvious that normal evaluation research does not offer the kind of answers sought for, and does not correspond to the aim and objective of the research project. By breaking with this spontaneous starting point and by systematically

² "To evaluate is to scrupulously judge. To judge involves determining the worth"; translated by MN.

reflecting on the origin of the interests of the researcher (me), and hence reflecting on what parts of myself as a researcher reject the relevance of the explanations found in normal evaluation research, the research project involved resuming the central parts of the chosen theoretical frame of reference behind the rejection of the relevance of normal evaluation research, and even involved an epistemological break with the immediate starting point in normal evaluation research. This might suggest that the rejection of normal evaluation research in favour of a Durkheim-Bourdieu-Lundgren-Callewaert frame of reference was made free of any social or other constraints or circumstances, which, however, would be counter to the chosen frame of reference. Therefore, the research project involved outlining an auto-socio-analysis of the researcher as a researcher (cf. Bourdieu 2004a, b).

Bourdieu's theory of practice and the theoretical constructions *habitus*, field and capital are employed as analytical tools for an analysis of the persons (agents) connected to the evaluations in order to understand and explain their actions as well as the social conditions for these actions, *i.e.* viewing the actions as a result of a pre-reflexive work of distinction in the agents generated by *habitus* and not as a product of an enlightened free will, and reconstructing the social necessity of the activities.

Durkheim's theory of the three forms of knowledge (art or practical practice, practical theory, science or theoretical theory respectively (Durkheim 1956) is presented. This distinction is relevant for the discussion of different forms of theory: *Practical theory*, backwards and forwards in time normative towards the object, and more directly a prerequisite for or concluding in directions for action, and *theoretical theory*, theories for the explanations of *how* and *why* certain actions come about, facilitating the explanation and understanding of phenomena in preference to formulating directions for action or in any other way being normative towards an examined phenomenon.

The relation between Bourdieu's categories (theory and practice) and Durkheim's (art or practical practice, practical theory, science or theoretical theory) are discussed, especially the relation between Durkheim's *practical theory* and Bourdieu's *practice*. This discussion constructs Durkheim's *practical theory* as part of Bourdieu's *practice* and neither as a certain category of its own nor as part of Bourdieu's theory. This demonstrates how Bourdieu's theory of practice involves even a meta-theory, an epistemology or a theory of theory.

Parts of *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1992) are applied, including a theory of the social role of schools/education systems (and particularly the role of the implicit and explicit evaluations in schools/education systems) in the reproduction of a given social order at the cost of any other, and a theory of how this order can appear as universal and not as one among an in principle infinitely many. The widespread normal idea of the role of education/formal training programmes is "... the school ideology of social salvation through scholastic merit" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1992, p. 200). However, success in school seems rather to build upon already existing social relations with language, acquired in early childhood, *i.e.* before attending school as a principal factor: School is the societal instrument with the objectivated function to perform and legitimate a sorting performed through the delegation

of the power to exercise this sorting to a group of officials (the teachers) having a relatively uniform social background and through the exertion of symbolic violence. This means that *Reproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1992) presents a theory of the legitimate exertion of this particular kind of violence that, in order to function effectively, is miscognized³ as arbitrary and violent, and is cognized and recognized by everyone as fair. The theories on marking (*i.e.* of evaluation) and about who performs the assessments is related to and a prerequisite for the discussions of the imposition of an in principle arbitrary (social) point of view in the analysed evaluations, cognized and recognized as if it were absolute.

The theories *about* evaluations of Ulf P. Lundgren (1979) are applied as a scientific pedagogico-sociological vision: Lundgren's theories, as the whole body of his work, are based on especially the theories of Durkheim, though this is seldom set out explicitly. This starting point regarding the relation between theory and practice is even relevant for the theories of Bourdieu. Lundgren's theories are relevant for the theoretical discussions of a social and symbolic function of evaluations of education on the more concrete, specific object (in an immediate as well as a reconstructed sense). However, neither the work of Lundgren nor the quoted work of Callewaert (unpubl. 1976) presents theories applicable for the construction of a social and symbolic function of evaluations. The latter is claimed as a relatively original contribution of the present research project.

Setting out from the concrete; the practical implementation

The research project originates in a certain spontaneous astonishment over the investigations connected to the evaluation of the formal training of nurses (Evalueringsscenteret 1996, cf. Nørholm 2001), and gradually proved inspired by my familiarity with Bourdieu's way of doing social science eventually leading to a more sharp and explicit awareness of at least two important circumstances, despite that Bourdieu did not work with evaluations or evaluation research, unless the work presented in e.g. *Reproduction* (1992) is indirectly regarded as such:

1. Social science is primarily seen as a study *of* social action, not a study *for* social action
2. Practice is regarded not as generated through the conscious and deliberate acting of individual actors (rational choice), but as generated in an interplay between position, dispositions (*habitus*) and positioning/position taking.

These two central points are contrary to the perspective applied in evaluations, and this is why it was necessary to even take a closer look at evaluation research, primarily in Denmark but also internationally, in order to determine whether a sociological approach had been applied in other theories than Bourdieu's theories respectively in Lundgren's referring to Durkheim and the

³ Bourdieu uses the term "méconnaissance" to describe how e.g. arbitrary objective power relations are perceived of as legitimate. Throughout the article the words "miscognition"/"miscognize" are employed.

sociological tradition. Consequently, the research project involved resuming a normal approach: How are evaluations defined? What are the implicit theoretical assumptions behind a normal evaluation practice? Etc. Applying the questions to the most frequently referred Danish normal evaluation research. This normal tradition consists of research *for* evaluations and does not offer research *about* evaluations etc.: Practice is seen as rational action rather than as generated by a *habitus*-orientation within a field.

A normal understanding of evaluation and of evaluation research does not offer explanations of the phenomenon (evaluation), its occurrence or its social and symbolic function beyond the implicit and explicit presuppositions of normal evaluation research. Consequently, it is important to analyse and discuss a social and symbolic function even of a normal vision of evaluation and evaluation research respectively. This is done by breaking with the immediate (normal) vision, and it shows how the presuppositions of normal evaluation research are hindering the very explanations sought for: The normal understanding found in the analysed texts (as a symbolically necessary part of an evaluation practice) is accordingly constructed as part of the evaluation practice instead of as a source of explanation and hence as a part of what should be explained to understand what is in focus of the research project.

Eight evaluations of education/formal training programmes are analysed. The evaluations are carried out after explicit standardised methods. Where there are no explicit methods, the evaluations are carried out *as if* the standards existed, and so that when there are no explicit directions, the irregularities are seen perfectly regularly, they are normal.

Of the analysed evaluations, seven were carried out by the Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education (now The Danish Evaluation Institute) and employed a uniform method. One of the evaluations was carried out by The Adult Education Research Group at Roskilde University. In spite of immediate differences, the same fundamental assumptions are found in all of the evaluations. This is especially the case regarding the collection of information used in the evaluation. In the evaluations uniform, standardised methods are applied to the recording of interviews with a number of representatives at many hierarchical levels. This is a typically (instrumental) positivist vision: Standardised methods are seen as guaranteeing comparable results, whereas the opposite seems to be the case (cf. Lundgren 1979). This is also the case regarding the implication of a rational theory of action (a theory without a symbolic economy of human action), and a similar methodological vision is found in the analysed examples of Danish normal evaluation research (cf. later in the article). What is never seen in the analysed evaluations however, is the evaluators performing scientific empirical studies of their own, just as they never refer to the scientific empirical work of others.

This clarifies why the original Bourdieu tradition was maintained, and it explains why the research project involved only few discussions of other approaches: From the point of view of the analyses, they are only presenting additional problems rather than answers (e.g. what is the social and symbolic function of normal evaluation research?). Furthermore, it was convincing in what initially was only a presumption, later became a hypothesis and finally

became a conviction: An evaluation of education/formal training programme has a social and symbolic function rather than a function of generating cognition. However, this is unintentionally obscured by the fact that the results of an evaluation are fundamentally necessary for a policy, just as they are necessary for a professional procedure - albeit in the second instance. It is hardly surprising that a societal order is maintained via sophisticated mechanisms. On the other hand it is interesting and essential to investigate why and how the strength of these mechanisms depend on nothing being said outright and is instead called and recognized as being something else. And it is essential to investigate why and how administrative and managerial initiatives are legitimised by applying tools produced in contexts that are not immediately recognized as parts of an administrative or managerial system.

The term evaluation⁴ originates from the words evaluate/evaluation originally used in estimations of crop, values connected to trade etc., *i.e.* in a mundane, non-symbolical sense in determining whether a stock was in an acceptable condition. Gradually, evaluate/evaluation became part of a (symbolic) *economic* vocabulary used in determining economic worth. Over the years the original meaning disappeared and the use became connected to the estimation of the services of different (especially public) organisations. It became connected to education and to the evaluation(!) of the performances of pupils and of whether an education/formal training programme lived up to (internally) set goals. The evaluations at school implied evaluations of an outcome related to an intention, and were carried out against criteria set within the system itself. Regardless of changing terms, the evaluations are system-*internal* estimations employing system-*internal* criteria. However refined, this is still the case.

In Danish educational terminology, evaluations were introduced at the end of the 1960s as a mechanism which was not in itself value-neutral, inasmuch as the evaluations are performed normatively and in relation to certain criteria, but where the *procedures* of investigation and the *methods* of evaluation are assumed to guarantee a partial impartiality (in a positivist vision). A mechanism employed in the improvement of education in relation to system-internal criteria and where the mechanism is not only normative inwards *qua* directing action, but also outwards inasmuch as the criteria appear as if they were absolute.

Danish normal evaluation research

In the research project, a pilot investigation was carried out to find and map the predominant (dominant, *doxic*, normal) evaluation research. The work identified Erik Albæk⁵ (professor, University of Southern Denmark), Peter Dahler-Larsen⁶ (professor, University of Southern Denmark), Hanne Foss

⁴ This part is based upon look-ups in several Danish, French, German and English dictionaries and encyclopedia, cf. instead Nørholm (2008a, esp. pp. 103-134).

⁵ Albæk 1988a, 1988b, 1993, 1995, 2001a (1997, 1998), 2001b (1996).

⁶ Dahler-Larsen 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, Dahler-Larsen *et al.* 2000, and Dahler-Larsen & Krogstrup 2000a (2000b), 2000c, eds. 2001).

Hansen⁷ (professor, University of Copenhagen), and Finn Hansson⁸ (associate professor, Copenhagen Business School) as the four researchers presenting/representing four distinct, dominant versions of Danish normal evaluation research. The selection is considered representative for a tradition in Denmark as well as more generally in an above all Anglo-American tradition. A (sub-)field of producers of Danish normal evaluation research is constructed, and a social division of labour is signalled, including a discussion of a social distribution of what seems to be at stake.

It should be stressed that the work of these researchers is not presented in order to ridicule someone or something. What is presented is what is functioning, and is functioning well, under the given, never challenged circumstances. A coherent research approach is identified, a paradigm. Danish normal evaluation research is present under certain social, material, historical and other circumstances. These circumstances imply a New Public Management where the evaluations are employed as tools of a management imposing certain changes necessary only under the same circumstances that condition normal evaluation research. Hence, Danish normal evaluation research only to a very small degree helps improve practice, whether this is an evaluation or an evaluated education/formal training programme.

In a normal approach, there seems to be no distinction between evaluations and evaluation research. They both involve the same kind of investigations or estimations: Evaluation research functions meta-evaluating as practical theories *for* evaluations, involving a social division of labour between evaluation researchers and evaluators respectively, so that in any case evaluation research is practical theory *for* evaluations and not theoretical theory, *i.e.* *science* in a strict sense (cf. Durkheim 1956). Hence, evaluation research is a socially and symbolically necessary part of a evaluation practice, produced as an evaluation of evaluations, by means of which are offered seemingly value-neutral tools for improving the evaluations in order to rectify the deficiencies in relation to, for instance, an alleged value-neutrality of the evaluations.

What might be considered deplorable is that one certain approach to the (purposive) research *for* evaluations (normal evaluation research) seems to exclude any other approach. *In itself* this does not present a problem. However, it is problematic if/when normal evaluation research (practical theory *for* evaluations) is considered scientific in a strict sense, which is signalled by the fact that the research is carried out for instance at universities, and by certain assertions and implications in the analysed evaluation research, and it is problematic if any other research on evaluations is excluded.

In normal evaluation research a (rational) theory of action fundamentally viewing human action as fully enlightened, conscious and rational is presupposed or implied. Hence, it is excluded viewing and explaining human

⁷ The position of Hanne Foss Hansen was the last position examined. The vision in the examined authors turned out to be uniform, which made it unnecessary to examine more than three texts: Foss Hansen (2003), Foss Hansen & Borum (1999), Hansen & Foss Hansen (2000).

⁸ Hansson 1993a (1993b), 1997b (1997c, 1995), 1998 (1997a), 2001, 2002a (2002b), 2003, Hansson, Husted, Vestergaard 2005, Hansson & Jørgensen eds. 2002, Frederiksen, Hansson, Wenneberg 2003.

action in the light of a symbolic economy of these actions: Human actions do not mean more than what meets the eye. Normal evaluation research does not offer an explanation of the social and symbolic function of evaluations/evaluation research that goes beyond the presumptions of the evaluations or the evaluation research, nor does it offer any explanation at all. Nothing reaches beyond the immediate ideas, that the evaluations are tools for assessing and improving the evaluated. And, in a more general perspective, no explanations are offered for the presence of the evaluations and for why they are carried out.

Normal evaluation research functions as an ideology for the evaluations that in turn function as an ideology for the evaluated, which in turn even functions as an ideology. Next time round normal evaluation research is constructed as a socially necessary practical theory *for* evaluations produced by a number of specialists who (*qua* a social division of labour that place the ones who *do* the practical work in a dominated position in relation to the ones who produce the *directions for* the practical work) possess a double privilege: They can explain how the evaluations should be carried out, and how the evaluations should be understood/interpreted.

In general, as long as everything is kept within the implicit and/or explicit assumptions of the evaluations, and as long as these assumptions or premises are not constructed, no explanation *can* be produced by means of normal evaluation research. This could be stated positively: The reason why this system functions so well is that everything is kept within a certain frame of reference, within 'the common pre-conscious'; nothing else is necessary under the given social conditions. This only becomes problematic when the presupposed naturalness is questioned as it is was done in the research project. In other words, as long as the actions carried out by the participants of the evaluations or evaluation research are not objectivated or constructed under the given social conditions, and as long as no systematic *break* is carried out with these assumptions (including breaking with an implicit rational theory of action without a symbolic economy of human action), even the explanations from normal evaluation research (produced with the explicit purpose to convey an understanding of the different mechanisms involved in the evaluations) does not explain anything at all and should be regarded as part of what needs to be explained.

In other words: Evaluations and evaluation research are (constructed as) parts of the way an economic-administrative pole is imposing and cementing one specific, in principle arbitrary, view and thereby imposing and cementing one specific, in principle arbitrary, social order at the cost of any other.

On the existence of a (sub-)field of producers of evaluation research

In Danish normal evaluation research shows an outline of a social division of labour: With reference to Bourdieu (1984, esp. pp. 126-131, 1988) a relatively dominant relative '*left*' position is seen: A relatively dominant-dominated (dominant feminine) position is constructed, involving major empirical works, and involving (in infinity) repeated uniform tasks (cf. Bourdieu 2001), but not involving a systematic break with the presuppositions regarding genesis and

structure of human practical action. Hanne Foss Hansen takes this position. A relatively dominant middle position is constructed (relative to 'right'-'left' as well as up-down) acting as a sort of Trojan horse, advocating for evaluations as the source of new scientific sociological knowledge, but not involving the researcher's own empirical studies characteristic of a strictly scientific position. Peter Dahler-Larsen and Finn Hansson take this position. As the author of methodologies and as a participant of The Danish Democracy and Power Study Peter Dahler-Larsen takes a relatively 'right' position in relation to Finn Hansson. Finally, a relatively dominant 'right' position is constructed, involving internationalization, representation, conference talks, contributions to international method books and review works and with a seniority in the field as an argument for a more dominant position in relation to the other positions. Erik Albæk takes this position. In every instance the empirical work within the frame of normal (Danish) evaluation research is "impure" (cf. Bourdieu 1988, Figure A, p. 122).

Between the analysed producers, something is *at stake* and *in play* (*illusio*). The stakes are *i.e.* articles/books, participation in conferences, in national and international networks etc.; the work is purposive, directly (meta-evaluating) to improve evaluations and more indirectly to improve the order of society. Reconstructed, the research (what is at stake and set in play) is a sort of solicitude or care for evaluation research concluding firstly in an improved evaluation research, secondly in improved evaluations, and finally in improvements of what is evaluated. In turn this even implies a sort of solicitude or care for an existing society/societal order.

There are certain common beliefs (*doxa*), seemingly uniform in the (sub-)field (the good evaluation, the same objective for a social order, the same underlying theory of action). There is a common *doxa* regarding the content of the notion 'research' (it is and should be practical theory) and regarding the relation between 'research' (practical theory) and university: Practical theory is (should be) produced with the premise that the directions formulated in the purposive research are realized in practice. Different strategies for administering different, unevenly distributed capitals, and different strategies for obtaining goods are constructed. There are internal mechanisms for the distribution of reward or punishments respectively, different mechanisms of being consecrated as an evaluation researcher in relation to the stakes mentioned above. There is an exchange of references functioning as capital for the one referring as well as for the one being referred to. There are specific journals, associations/societies and notions with a relatively unique content. In other words, there is a mutual understanding, an explicit and implicit matter of course in the way something is spoken of and something else is not. And there are specific ways of which different subject matters are spoken of, and others are not. Hence, a number of characteristics for a social field (cf. Broady 1998, 2002, 2007) are identified. This might in turn argue for the existence of a relatively autonomous (sub-)field of producers of evaluation research.

By and large this is repeating a self-understanding, improving and/or caring for evaluation research, evaluations and among other things for the evaluated educations/formal training programmes is a matter for the producers of normal evaluation research which is claimed in the (sub-)field and comes in

natural miscognized as arbitrary. Too, it is implied that this is the way it *should be*; this is part of the *doxa*, and, hence, part of what is at stake is how this is done best. However, *doxa* is not the result of an independent, field-*internal* work. It is repeating and meeting demands, presumptions and implications found elsewhere, just as *illusio* is answering demands, presumptions and implications seen elsewhere: *Doxa* and *illusio* are found in a political-administrative sphere, or in a political-administrative field. In other words, evaluations/evaluation research are reconstructed as tools for a (public) administration, part of a New Public Management and not as tools for the production of (scientific) cognition. The *legitimacy*, however, is unchallenged when the production of evaluation research, functioning as an ideology ultimately for an arbitrary social order, is allocated to a sphere cognized and recognized as (relatively) autonomous.

The radical interpretation of these results involves constructing Danish normal evaluation research in a (sub)-field in or as a part of a political-administrative field, the field of power, *i.e.* decidedly *non-autonomous*: The production of an accompanying discourse, of practical theory *for* evaluations, is thus seen in a non-autonomous (sub-)field in the field of power. And consequently, the administrative allocation of this particular type of research to for instance universities impedes seeing evaluation research as part of the basis for the legitimizing of certain education policy initiatives. This is the case because these education policy initiatives are put through *as if* they were scientifically necessary, because references are made to the production of a legitimacy as if it was produced elsewhere. Just as it seems to stand in the way of seeing evaluation research as produced in a *non-autonomous* part of a political-administrative field. An important prerequisite for these arguments is that the university is recognized as relatively autonomous and outside at least a direct political control from a political-administrative power. The discussion shows that this might not be the case.

Gradually all research is becoming purposive, practical theory, which eventually undermines relative autonomy of the university. Generalizing the above, it is emphasized how scientific reason (a social conquest in line with a national health insurance (cf. Bourdieu 1985, p. 389), existing only under certain social conditions (including a relative autonomy), and hence being at the risk of disappearing if these social conditions change, is under liquidation. This is not seen as a movement *backwards* in time to something pre-modern where everything is in everything, but as a movement *forwards* in time to something *after the modern*, after the dismantling of the characteristics of The Modern, including for instance a relatively autonomous scientific/university field. This is the case regarding the legitimate grounds for the imposition of administrative decisions connected to another essential tool for social sorting and reproduction: School, education, formal training programmes. In itself it does not have to present a problem if purposive research is carried out in the context of, for instance, university. The problems only arise when nothing else is produced under the given social/historical conditions, conditions that are never taken into systematic consideration. The consequences are suggested here.

Summary and discussion of the findings

The social and symbolic function of evaluations/educations/formal training programmes is constructed as a societal tool for social sorting/reproducing already existing social differences. Furthermore, normal evaluation research is constructed as a part of the scientific object as a socially and symbolically indispensable practical theory *for* evaluations produced in a non-autonomous (sub-)field in the field of power. Analyses of selected examples of evaluations of educations/formal training programmes, and analyses of what is understood by evaluations or evaluation research respectively support these points.

It is not sufficient to base the work on explicit written guidelines when performing an evaluation. Under the given circumstances, something else is employed; something implicit that ensures that the right/approved follows by itself. If, correspondingly the purpose is to understand and explain this, it does not suffice to set out from normal evaluation research: The method is uniform which is seen as a result of *both* a deliberate developing of a uniform method *and* a social necessitation hereof. However, this arbitrariness is never challenged, but is instead naturalized as if it were the only one, stressing how evaluations are carried out as position takings (*i.e.* by *habitus*) and not by scientific reconstruction.

The analysed evaluations set out from theoretical starting points similar to those of normal evaluation research. However, it should be emphasized that the implication is *not* that the evaluations are carried out as they are *because* evaluation research looks the way it does, or vice versa. Rather there is seen a simultaneity where evaluations, evaluation research etc. should be constructed as simultaneously necessary parts of an evaluation practice. And although a practical theory *for* evaluations (normal evaluation research) is produced at what is cognized and recognized as an *other place*, dis-connected from the evaluations, it is not possible to understand evaluation research separately from the evaluations nor vice versa. Evaluation research is a socially and symbolically necessary part of the evaluation practice, just as this *other place* is constructed breaking with an immediate vision.

Thus, in an ongoing process of constructing the object, it becomes ever clearer that normal evaluation research does not supply the sort of answers sought for. It, too, becomes ever clearer within a sociological frame of reference why this is so. Everything is happening as if it were a coherent entity, *at the same time* as this is the way it *can* happen - under the given circumstances that however are never explicated, discussed nor taken into systematic account or consideration. In turn, these arbitrary conditions appear as if they were absolute and not just arbitrary. They are normal.

Everything seems sensible and natural. However, as soon as the implicit assumptions are reconstructed and challenged (e.g. the implied notions of action, knowledge, science, evaluation, theory etc. and their implications) everything turns out to be best explained as arbitrary. It is by no means the intention to show how the existing is *wrong*. However, this well-functioning societal mechanism turns out to be problematic, and it gives rise to problems when so many conditions and circumstances are presupposed and are left unchallenged: It is shown that it has very specific social and symbolic consequences when the arbitrary is naturalized. This is another one of the main

points in explaining and understanding a new meritocratic model for public management.

One of the consequences of the above is that presupposing that a uniform method ensures uniform and comparable results, rather has the opposite effect: A uniform method ensures completely different and completely incomparable results. If the tools for examination are not adjusted to what is examined, this in it self can prevent the investigation from giving the results claimed. These points are supported by Lundgren (1979). As above, this should not be read as the pointing out of an error. It amounts to the uncovering of yet another regularity that should be taken in to consideration when the focus is on the social and symbolic function of evaluations of education.

This social and symbolic function does not depend on the evaluation being carried out in accordance with externally or internally formulated criteria. At least not in principle. But the *strength* and *legitimacy* depends on the cognition and recognition of the criteria *as if* they were external. The function of the evaluations of education/formal training programmes becomes to perform and legitimize a sorting of the evaluated educations/formal training programmes, which seems uncontroversial. But because all that is said in the analysed evaluations is a dominant (accompanying) discourse, and constitutes what *can* be said under the given, unchallenged conditions, and because everything is carried out as position takings (by *habitus*) and not through scientific reconstruction, the sorting reproduces already existing social differences. This is, however, illegitimate as an explicit purpose. A necessary precondition for the evaluations to be cognized and recognized as fair and natural is therefore that the criteria are cognized and recognized *as if* they were external. Another precondition is that the instances performing the evaluations are cognized and recognized *as if* they were external. The research project shows how this is not the case.

Concluding remarks

A coherent rationale is constructed. Everything seems to be functioning function free, inasmuch as e.g. arguing for the legitimacy is unnecessary under the given, unchallenged conditions. On the contrary, this would amount to a profanation. Too, it is shown that all the different parts, evaluation, evaluation research, encyclopaedia, dictionaries etc., constitute conditions that, under the given social circumstances, are separately necessary for designing the evaluations and the evaluated educations/formal training programmes in the continuation of and conditioning a certain vision of the relation between theory and practice (that is actually between school and a practical mastering). This vision lies in the continuation of a normal, widespread vision and is even an essential part of the foundation for the legitimacy of school and education system. The social and symbolic function of evaluations of education/formal training programmes is consequently to reproduce and legitimize already existing social relations of dominance at the cost of any other, *as if* these relations of dominance were universal, and so that, in principle, arbitrary, existing relations of dominance are cognized and recognized as universal, natural relations of dominance.

The certain way the educations/formal training programmes are designed might resemble an educational policy formulated in advance. However, this policy could not be realized without the evaluations, not asking general questions and not giving general answers, but instead asking the questions and giving the answers that *can* be asked or given respectively, under the given circumstances that are never challenged, analysed or even taken into consideration. In turn, this implies a collective amnesia regarding for instance the social history of the employed tools (the genesis) as well as of the way they work (the structure): Instead of appearing as socially arbitrary tools having socially arbitrary conditions, designed at an arbitrary time and place, the evaluations as well as evaluation research (a socially and symbolically necessary accompanying discourse) appear as absolute tools under absolute circumstances, *i.e.* out of time and place.

What is seen is a reproduction of one specific vision of the relation between evaluation and evaluation research and between school and practical mastery (implicating a rational theory of action). More generally, this shows the reproduction of the relation between the one who legitimately speaks about (that is the one who can symbolically treat) how practical actions should be performed (maybe without being able to practically perform these actions), and the one performing the practical actions in question. The evaluations, evaluation research etc. contribute to the reproduction of this social division of labour, and more generally to the reproduction of in principle arbitrary social relations of dominance.

The analysed evaluations of education/formal training programmes are but one of the steps in a sophisticated four-step societal tool for social sorting: Normal evaluation research is sorting the evaluations of education/formal training programmes, sorting educations/formal training programmes, in turn sorting the students/apprentices/pupils. Because of the different allocations of the different parts of an evaluation practice, the latter amounts to and implies a social division of labour in relation to educational level (cf. Durkheim 1956, Bourdieu & Passeron 1992) and in relation to an allocation to different places in a social hierarchy. So, not only are the evaluations tools for sorting (which is uncontroversial), the evaluations are sorting in accordance with already existing social differences so that the already existing social differences are cemented and expanded. In other words, this four step societal sorting tool functions by and through an imposition, cementing, reproduction and expanding of an existing and in principle arbitrary social relation of dominance at the cost of any other. Because the sorting at any hierarchical level is performed according to already existing social differences, at any hierarchical level the interests of the dominant groups and not of any group are considered. Consequently, an expert/representative participating in the evaluations, and a general imposition of dominant interests in favour of existing arbitrary social relations of dominance should be seen as two faces of the same coin.

Evaluations of education/formal training programmes and an accompanying evaluation research is but one out of many tools used in uniforming, standardising, quality assessments. They are administrative tools (in a New Public Management) where employees at any hierarchical level participate in and hence become accomplices of, cognizing, recognizing and

claiming the fairness of a social sorting by means of these administrative tools. Tools for separating the 'wrong' from the 'right' and for uniting the 'right' by uniforming the way things can be done legitimately. Add to this the presuppositions of a New Public Management model that nothing exists unless it has been properly evaluated, the strengths and extent of this tool is seen.

Here, the focus has been on the social and symbolic function of evaluations of *education/formal training programmes* (and on an accompanying socially and symbolically necessary normal evaluation *research*) However, there is hardly any essential difference between evaluations of educations/formal training programmes and any other evaluation: It is predictable that the social and symbolic function of evaluations as such are equivalent to that of evaluations of educations/formal training programmes. In a broader perspective, the findings regarding evaluations of education/formal training programmes (documented in the author's dissertation (Nørholm 2008a) are more generally applicable to any institutionalised evaluation. And even more generally: Any judgement (of taste) seems to presuppose social hierarchies. Some judgements are more proper than others, and this seems to be enhanced by a meritocratic (New Public Management) model as it is argued in this article.

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