"Zero is where the real fun starts" - Evaluation for value(s) co-production

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we propose that the dominance of quantifiable measurable phenomena over qualitative, less tangible aspects of experience, is simply a provisional, although ubiquitous, discoursive artefact, a story no more necessary or truthful than any alternative view. The pedigree and increasing pervasiveness of this story can be traced to the ascent of the primacy of rational thinking, which assumes that knowledge is fixed and can be externally verified, that humans can 'know' - in an absolute sense - and consequently control, the material world around them, to the Enlightenment period, closely associated with the scientific revolution. From the early 18th century, philosophy became increasingly dominated by scientific discourse, and its principles of reason and logic. Ethics were subject to the same rational treatment, with the emergence of the utilitarian principle guiding moral decisions: 'the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers'[1]. The authority of the Church was challenged, in favour of attributing authority and legitimacy to government and individual liberty. Arguably, 'homo economicus' - the hypothetical portrayal at the foundation of modern economics of humans as rational self-maximising individuals, displaying predictable behaviour - was born, or at least conceived, during the Age of Enlightenment. Soon followed the Industrial Revolution, and even our modern education system mirrors the features and conditions then created to streamline and manage human resources within the ever-increasing pace of the commercial machine: "ringing bells, separate facilities, specialised into separate subjects…educat[ing] children in 'batches'"[2]. In the early 20th century, the American industrial engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor published "Principles of Scientific Management"[3]. 'Taylorism', as it became known, is a production efficiency methodology, which proposed to fragment tasks into the smallest possible

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1 cf Francis Hutcheson, 1694-1745
2 Robinson, TED, (2006) http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity
3 Taylor, FW (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management,* Harper and Brothers, New York

measurable part, closely observe workers and measure their output in minute detail, and bestow reward or discipline accordingly.

There have, arguably, been many benefits of "valuing what's measurable" and its associated conceptual landscape, from improved women's rights (Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was published in 1791[4]), protection of human rights through fairer judicial systems, and widening access to educational opportunities. However, it is not difficult to also trace the origins of the current social and environmental challenges of today - associated with our anthropocentric view of nature as a resource in service to our ever-increasing obsession with economic growth - in the various chapters and engrossing plot of this story.   One needs only scan the newspapers to find evidence that, in its extreme articulations, our obsession with quantification and measurability has long since become a burden, even for our educational system, on individual teachers and children. A recent article in Der Spiegel, entitled "Release our kids – Grades are not everything: what really matters in life" laments the fact that schools have become a highly stress-inducing system, resulting in children moving from school to university already being burnt-out, and quoting the President of the German National Teachers Representation as saying "Grades have lost their indicative power (for future career/success), even if people still believe they do". What matters, suggests the journalist, are "Love, passion, curiosity" (p96). [5]

In order to explore the ways in which this story, our current paradigm, has been created and reinforced, we here briefly introduce the concept and methodology of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which foregrounds language as being the prime site of the enactment and recreation of ideology, and as such suggest that it should be the focus of analysis for those seeking to understand power relations, domination, and resistance.

2. The importance of words

"The limits of my language means the limits of my world."
Ludwig Wittgenstein

The study of language as a discipline originated in the early 20th century, and early linguists took a generally scientific approach, much concerned with sorting through diversity, finding common structures and learning how to work with those. But gradually, and as a result of interdisciplinary cross-pollination from fields as diverse as epistemology, sociology and even politics, a new powerful perspective emerged. Akin to how Newton's insights might have opened our eyes to the fact that the laws of physics apparently govern all of our existence, linguistics started to look at the interplay between language and

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4 Wollstonecraft, M (1791) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women,* Thomas and Andrews, Boston
5 Der Spiegel (2016), Nr. 35, Spiegel Verlag

social realities, and with the keyword of "discourse", the boundaries of this previously niche field and its everyday relevance were thrown open. In the second half of the 20th century the study of language and discourse became as fundamental to understanding our human world as mathematics was to the natural sciences.

Discourse in its narrower/colloquial sense refers to a particular form of communication, often implying an educated, specialist conversation, e.g. legal discourse is recognisable by its archaic technocratic nature. But to the linguist-sociologist, discourse has a much broader yet very specific meaning. Discourse in their understanding is everything we do interpersonally, all that gives meaning to ourselves and our world(s). This includes texts of all kinds and genres, all spoken language, but also includes gestures, signage, pictures, film etc. As such, discourse is the fabric into which the image of our world is woven - and without discourse we would not have any image of the world to look at. This "social constructivist" approach is built upon the assumption that reality is not something we encounter and then describe as best we can, but, as far as human knowledge and its development is concerned, we make up, or construe, the world "as we know it" through the act of communicating about it.

Communication is a social process, a collective endeavour. Whenever we express ourselves and say something about the world within or around us, we initiate 'discursive events' which create or reinforce (or, even, deconstruct) a particular worldview. If words constitute not only world-views but the world (at least all that we can know if it) a powerful tool seems to be at our disposal. But its uncritical use might amount to complicity in creating a world we would not want to sign up to. Here are just a few examples about how intricate yet relevant this process is:

- What does it convey about our collective compassion when people seeking help are described in the media as a crisis for us, with little regard to the crisis they are fleeing from? And what does it reveal about the state of our society when their arrival at our borders is thus, in our heads, turned into a "tidal wave"[6]?

- It seems we are willing to be "hard" or "sweet" talked into certain attitudes and assumptions by words nobody really understands. The phrase 'hardworking families' has become so familiar in political discourse, that the use of these two words together serves to de-problematise each of them: what is a family anyway? why should 'hardworking' become a commonsense synonym of 'worthy'? - a process called *collocation* in discourse studies.

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6 Daily Mail, 26 June 2015 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3141005/Tidal-wave-migrants-biggest-threat-Europe-war.html

- As a last example, what are the emotions, attitudes, perceptions of and assumptions about the world we live in that are conjured when we describe our social processes and aspirations by applying words and imagery from economics? Phrases such as "*pay attention*", "*homework*", "*it pays off*", "*the idea has currency*" are economic metaphors that are so deeply embedded in discourse that they are difficult to spot. This phenomenon called "econophonics"[7] steeps every walk of life with the neoliberal sentiments of individualism, competition and inescapable austerity.

These examples may seem extreme, even evoking violence. But, whilst the process of the social construal of realities by communicating about them is seldom fast or dramatic, nothing is irrelevant. And the three cases presented also serve to illustrate one important element of contemporary discourse studies: the role of power. If we accept that the words we use matter, and that discourse is the site of the creation and reinforcement of our shared sense of reality, we also need to recognise that this is not a process in which everybody's contribution has equal weight. The amount of airtime that some people (or institutions) enjoy and the importance that others attribute to their words, varies greatly. And obviously, deliberate or naively, the advantage of determining the agenda by dominating the discourse can be used to fortify one's position and further one's own interests. Hence, discourse is never a neutral process and discourse analysis cannot simply be a description of what was said. It always requires a critical stance based on the values and objectives we as individuals or practitioners want to hold and manifest in this world. This values-driven attitude as a research programme is called "Critical Discourse Analysis"[8], or CDA. Paying attention to power and its determination within discourse means recognising that words do not only matter, they can actually kill.

3. How this matters for educators

There are innumerable possibilities for exploring the implications of a critical discourse lens for education practice, and a clear alignment with ESDGC. Individuals within this sector are 'practical critical theorists'. That is to say, global education is an approach based on principles of critical engagement, recognition of multiple perspectives, reflective practice and consciously 'holding a space' that enables equality, democratic participation, and recognises the importance of co-creation of new forms of knowledge in order to challenge inequalities and support social justice. This includes engaging with the tension inherent in relying heavily on conditional grant funding for

[7] Giacalone, R. A., Promislo, M. D. (2013) *'Broken When Entering: The Stigmatization of Goodness and Business Ethics Education,* Academy of Management Learning & Education 12 (1), 86-101

[8] Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Pearson.

outcomes-oriented projects, and the implication of the 'Faustian bargain' which has been struck, which "compromises [the movement's] radical roots and values base...within a donor-led agenda."[9]

In terms of classroom practice, the current requirement for British schools to promote fundamental British values provides an illuminating example of the ways in which prevailing discourse gives clear indications of the ways in which power and societal conventions are replicated. "British Values" is an example of collocation, the two terms being repeatedly used together serves to deproblematise both. And research carried out by the Common Cause Foundation[10] has shown that values are a universally experienced socio-cultural phenomenon, a set of deeply held beliefs that influence, and are therefore evidenced in, our decisions and behaviours; they cannot be dictated or bestowed, but are co-created within a community, through the process of exchange amongst members, the communicative practices we here call discourse.

But beyond the explicit curriculum taught in school, CDA invites us to ask different questions about the ways in which discourse (language as well as other non-verbal 'texts') contributes to a whole 'wealth' of lessons which children learn through the hidden curriculum. These may include:
- What do children learn about authority and power through teachers being always referred to as Mr. or Mrs?
- Why does the term 'sustainability' no longer appear in the national curriculum?
- What does the term home*work* tell us about the implied purpose of education?
- What are the effects of learning being parcelled into discrete subjects?
- Despite often telling children that there is no right or wrong answer to a particular question, what is conveyed by the fact that their classroom walls are enthusiastically plastered with the right answers?
- What do fervent security measures at the school gates/reception tell children about the state of the world outside?
- What are we to make of the tension between the stated aims to build children's *self*-esteem, and the relentless barrage of external assessment that they are subject to?

It is not possible to 'teach' ESDGC without giving children the tools to learn about things in a different way. Thus critical thinking, dialogic learning and child-led learning approaches become mechanisms for resisting or subverting the effects of dominant discourse.

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9 Troll, T & Skinner, A (2013) *Catalysing the 'Shadow Spaces': Challenging Development Discourse from within the DEEEP Project*, Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review
10 http://valuesandframes.org/

4. How this matters for evaluation

When taking evaluation beyond a monitoring and management exercise by asking "How do we know it's working?", critical discourse analysis offers various ways to engage with the question reflectively. In the first instance, it demands critical scrutiny of the original intention - or objective - of the activity under evaluation in the first place. How do we know that the aim of the activity was 'right' or 'useful', and is it described clear enough to confidently measure progress against it? If those principle considerations are not taken seriously, the effort of evaluation would generate potentially interesting but ultimately irrelevant results. But beyond that, all elements of the question need to carefully appraised as well.

For example, would any reply to "how" be acceptable? Are there any unintended impacts of the evaluation approach itself which might contradict the initial objectives or values of that activity? And who is the "we" that poses the question? Is it asked on behalf of the beneficiaries of the activity? And if yes, would they agree or even give consent to the evaluation efforts? Or is the "we" those delivering the activity, being professionally interested in improving their own practice? Lastly, the "we" could be another third party entity, funders for example, and their agenda is concerned with generating evidence of 'value for money', resulting in discursive 'colonisation' of the delivery of activities by economic assumptions.

Section 2 above already illustrates the ways in which critical discourse analysis may explore the idea of "to know". But particularly when it comes to measuring qualitative elements, our epistemology and heuristics – or what we think we can know and how we go about extending that knowledge – becomes a minefield of biases and fallacies. Ultimately, what can be said with scientific certainty might turn out to be so little that any effort expended proving it becomes misdirected. And if we allow ourselves to ascertain anything beyond that speck of certainty, one way or another we seem bound to commit one self-serving fallacy or another. With all these fundamentals considered, the first issue with the questions 'How do we know it's working now' might look like the easiest part to answer: what is the "it" we are trying to evaluate and what do we mean by "it's working"? As ESDGC does not primarily aim to deliver a specific knowledge content or some context-independent skills, but has its core and foundation in its values, any measure that conveys objectivity and quantifiability would seem to be at odds with ESDGC intrinsically. And even if evaluation is an external requirement, a critical attitude is a necessary condition for sufficient clarity and transparency throughout the process, so that detrimental side-effects (akin to the 'hidden curriculum' referred to above) may be prevented.

The examples above represent a set of aspirational ideas, to which no simple guidance can be given other than a reminder of the importance of maintaining a critical stance. Nevertheless, we will suggest one talking point by looking to how the same questions have been addressed in another field, with specific reference to the role of discourse. In light of the above mentioned econophonics, the nature of counting and the pervasiveness of money, an opportune example seemed to lie in the widespread but little known field of so called "community currencies"[11]. Initiatives involved in this practice try to redesign the nature of money into something that is not in conflict with the objectives of convivial communities, social equality and environmental sustainability. For an EU Interreg project[12] led by the New Economics Foundation in London, six organisations accepted the challenge to develop an evaluation framework for themselves to ascertain the impact of their activities[13].

But similar to ESDGC, for this community of practice even trying to adopt a holistic evaluation framework or turning to the broad recognition of value for example in a "Social Return on Investment"[14] methodology would have meant to enclose the practice of community currencies in a discourse that has its semantic and ideological roots in our current monetary regime and would thus hamper their efforts from the start. In addition, each community currency programme is a unique intervention with a highly context-dependent set of stakeholders, objectives and legacies. Attempting to make sense of this diversity by seeking a common denominator for all of those would misrepresent what they stand for locally. In recognition of this dilemma, the proposed framework "No Small Change"[15] did not focus on indicators and measurement options, as both would vary greatly for each case study, but supports the initiatives that are looking into evaluation to find answers to the question "How do we know it's working?", the concrete outcomes sought and the often hidden assumptions that determine the interventions. Being mindful of the fact that evaluation itself is a discoursive process, not only in the field of community currencies, this framework focuses on the constellation of stakeholders which constitutes the 'discoursive community'. It seeks to give guidance, in a practical DIY manner, to determine what exactly the initiative tries to achieve, and what the hidden assumptions behind its activities, interventions and desired outcomes might be.

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11 To learn more about this topic see http://www.community-currency.info or this free handbook
CCIA (2015), People Powered Money – Designing, developing and delivering community currencies, London. Available at: http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/people-powered-money

12 Community Currencies in Action, 2012-2015, http://ccia.eu

13 Leander Bindewald, co-author of this paper was the principle researcher for the evaluation outputs on behalf of the New Economics Foundation, London.

14 New Economics Foundation (2009), A Guide to Social Return on Investment, London. Available at http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/a-guide-to-social-return-on-investment

15 New Economics Foundation, CCIA (2013), No Small Change – Evaluating the success of your community currency project, London. Available at http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/no-small-change

By employing a variation of the "Theory of Change" process common to many evaluation approaches, the 'No Small Change' framework seeks to make the description of individual desired outcomes so concrete, that deriving indicators for an ensuing evaluation can be easily achieved by external evaluators researchers or the initiative's team itself. Those outcomes and indicators will naturally be highly diverse across all the different initiatives as will be the methodologies for data collection and analysis appropriate to them. However, providing a coherent and attentive way to arrive at this diversity made more sense for this field of practice than the demands of observers, prospective partners and funders[16] and have been lauded and appraised by both the practitioners and researchers in the field.

5. Conclusions/Outlook

Max Weber used the term 'disenchantment' to described the intellectual move in modern society towards rationale, reason, and scientific understanding, away from belief and imagination. Are there ways in which the ESDGC movement can become consciously aware how it is colluding in its own colonisation, and adopt discoursive positions that challenge this story? What might education look and feel like if the discourse of economics and measurability was entirely absent? Weber described this as a "world [which] remains a great enchanted garden"[17].

CDA can bring a fresh and illuminating perspective to help understand how the ways in which we communicate with each other - using language but also non-verbal 'texts' - is the prime site of co-creation of ideology.

There is potential for further exploration, both practical and academic, of the boundary between ESDGC and the practices of community currencies. The inclusion of a critical education about economic, money/currency, and exchange needs to be one of the core components of ESDGC. There is already a lot of finance education happening in schools, but it is aimed towards enabling children to become better consumers, good savers, and effective pension planners. The principles of ESDGC call for a more nuanced approach, supporting teachers to create materials and methodologies for a truly globally aware and sustainability-geared monetary, financial, economic curriculum. Economy is what we make of it, and it's about time we take it out of the hands of economists.

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16 Evaluation results during the EU project based on the No Small Change approach are published in New Economics Foundation, CCIA (2015), Money with a purpose – Community currencies achieving social, economic and environmental impact. Available here: http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/money-with-a-purpose

17 Weber, m (1971) *The Sociology of Religion*, p270