2.1. Education governance, autonomy and accountability

SP - (20152) - "IT'S A NUMBERS LOVE AFFAIR": DEVELOPING A TEAM BASED EVALUATION (TBE) MODEL FOR NON-FORMAL LEARNING.

Andrew Clapham (United Kingdom)[2]; Raquel Barata (Portugal)[1]

1 - National Museum of Natural History and Science - University of Lisbon; 2 - Centre for Behavioural Research Methods, Nottingham Institute of Education, Nottingham Trent University

Short Abstract

Museums and other non-formal learning settings increasingly inhabit an economic landscape where value for money is a priority (Legget, 2009; Bulaitis, 2020). This paper reports on a four-year research project, LearntoEngage (BGCI, 2020), that explored educators' experiences of undertaking non-formal learning evaluation. Interview and focus-group data generated by educators from four European countries were complemented by in-depth interviews with one of one of them, Julia (pseudonym, see BERA, 2018). Directing a composite theoretical framework consisting of performativity (Lyotard, 1984); Team Based Inquiry (Pattison, Cohn and Kollmann, 2013) and thinking evaluatively (Luke and Ancelet, 2014), and employing reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020), our data suggested 'performative evaluation' was the prominent evaluation model. To provide an alternative, we co-constructed Team Based Evaluation (TBE) based on Julia's day-to-day evaluation experience. .

To develop TBE we had two aims: to understand the social and philosophical context within which educators were undertaking non-formal learning evaluation and to draw upon theory that would support the development of an alternative approach to such evaluation. For the first of these, we used the concept of performativity (Lyotard, 1984), which is a set of conditions and technologies that are concerned with ensuring optimal efficiency. Lyotard's ideas reveal how evaluation all to easily becomes a performative activity which shapes, restricts and reorientates practices; and which is focused upon accountability and targets rather than development (de St Croix, 2018, 2020).

For the second aim, we drew on the concepts of Team Based Inquiry (Pattison, Cohn and Kollmann, 2013) and 'thinking evaluatively' (Luke and Ancelet ,2014). The first blends inquiry and team-based learning through a systematic and collaborative ongoing process led by education professionals, supported by leadership, and informs the evaluation of specific projects. Thinking evaluatively, also embeds developmental evaluation into practices. It does so by focussing on evaluation teams that are based upon partnership models. These two concepts underpinned the development of TBE, through grounding it within established theoretical frameworks.

TBE values both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and is underpinned by five key areas: it is a team based activity that is dialogic and democratic; it is done 'by' educators not 'to' them; roles, responsibilities and knowledge within TBE are shared; it is embedded within day-to-day practices; and crucially, is supported by organisational and senior leadership team buy-in. When employed in this way, TBE can contribute to a reset of non-formal learning evaluation so it becomes a developmental rather than accountability focussed activity - facing several challenges starting with the 2008 financial crisis, accompanying austerity policies, and the Covid-19 pandemic (Museums Association, 2021).

We conclude therefore, that developing TBE using a composite theoretical framework enabled us to both identify the problem facing non-formal learning educators - performative evaluation - and to propose an alternative to it. Key to TBE is that evaluation is a team based developmental process which is embedded in day-to-day activities and supported by senior leaders. When these conditions occur, TBE produces insightful and rich evaluation that supports development rather than accountability.

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