# Evaluation: from reflective to deliberative practice?

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# This LTT

- An opportunity to articulate some thoughts to colleagues and peers!

- Sharing results of an exploration into the overlap between the policymaking and evaluation literatures:
  - Background
  - Motivation
  - Findings

- Discussion

# Background/Premise

- Evidence-based policy (EBP) movement and 'rational' policymaking

- Low use of policy theories to understand the research/policy relationship (e.g. Burton 2006; Greenhalgh and Russell 2009; Cairney 2016; Parkhurst 2017, among others)

  - Importance of beliefs, ideas, emotions
  - The role of values is not well-researched

- Questions around the consequences of fact/value dichotomy

- From 'stages' model to the 'argumentative turn' and deliberation

# Motivation

- What are we overlooking while busy strengthening our technical skills to understand 'what works'?

- As evaluators, (how) do we understand the nature and practice of policy-making?

- Where are we in terms of the balance between empiricism and judgement in evaluation?

# Aims

1. Explore the literature on deliberation and the argumentative nature of policymaking;

2. Explore the extent to which it has been incorporated in evaluation practice.

# Deliberation

## Essential features:

- Giving, weighing-up, accepting, rejecting 'reasons' for/against a course of action
- Emphasises equality and inclusiveness

## Purpose:

- Collective problem-solving
- Agree on how to act (practical), in pursuit of a common good (normative)

# Insights on the nature of evidence

- "It's not about what is true, but about what to do" (Kock, 2003, p.157);

- Technical evidence is not enough;

- Different types of knowledge and evidence are combined;

- Values, even emotions, are legitimate

# The 'Argumentative Turn'
### (Fischer and Forester, 1993 & 2013)

Research-based knowledge is not used because technical solutions do not reflect the nature of policymaking, which is about:

- "Crafted arguments" i.e. factual statements, values, beliefs, opinions (Fischer 2013 p.105) and

- Deliberative spaces
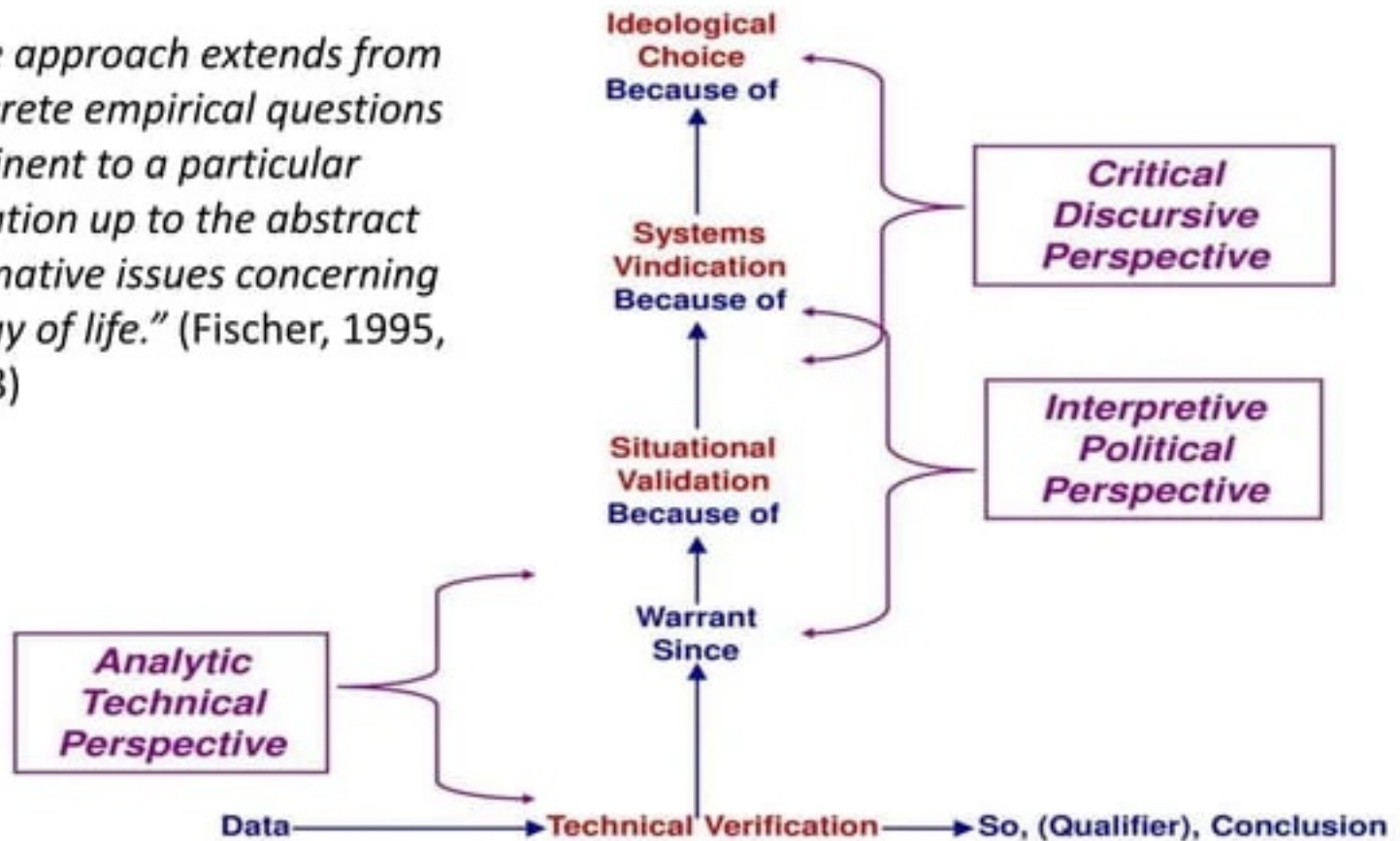
# The 'Argumentative Turn'

What, then, does it mean to evaluate and be an evaluator?

1. Analytical tasks cannot provide objective solutions;

2. The unit of analysis becomes the policy argument, identifying strengths and weaknesses;

3. The analyst / evaluator shifts from being a *technician* to a *deliberative practitioner* (Forester 2013).

# Four levels of (empirical and normative) evaluation: "Practical Logic of Evaluation"

*"The approach extends from concrete empirical questions pertinent to a particular situation up to the abstract normative issues concerning a way of life."* (Fischer, 1995, p. 18)

Ideological
Choice
Because of

Systems
Vindication
Because of

Critical
Discursive
Perspective

Situational
Validation
Because of

Interpretive
Political
Perspective

Warrant
Since

Analytic
Technical
Perspective

Data ——→ Technical Verification ——→ So, (Qualifier), Conclusion

# Approach to review: step 1

- Major evaluation journals: **Evaluation**;

  **American Journal of Evaluation**, *Evaluation Review, Evaluation and Planning*

- Search terms: *Deliberation/deliberative and/or argumentation* (only in Abstracts; 2000-2019)

- Result: 17 articles
  - 2 excluded
  - 15

# Findings

1. The deliberation and argumentation literature is reflected in discussions that focus on:

- The role of values in evaluation

- Deliberative democratic evaluation (DDE)
  (House and Howe, 1999)

....and the need to 'rescue' them

# Values: some themes

Discussions on:

- Value-neutral vs value-sensitive stance to evaluation (Greene 2001; Hall et al. 2012; Datta, 2017; Stame, 2018)

- Evaluation's moral function (Sanderson; 2004; Schwandt 2003; 2008; 2018)

*Deliberation about different normative logics is central to valuing, which (…) means engaging with facts and values to reach an 'all-things-considered' evaluative judgement (Schwandt, 2008), and doing so by "acting together" (2018)*

*We must recognise that moral and ethical implications of policy should not be relegated to a realm of politics deemed 'irrational' but rather incorporated within an arena of 'practical rationality' based upon open deliberation"* (Sanderson, 2004, p.376)

# DDE: Themes

- A first set of articles describe the implementation aspect of deliberative democratic evaluation;

- A second reflects on the role of evaluation in democracies, outlining the challenges currently confronting this tradition.

# Findings (cont.)

2. Both are 'losing out'

- 'Valuing' is in danger of being side-lined by 'what works'
- Evaluation "trapped in a paradox" (e.g. Stame, 2017)
- Challenges to pragmatic use  (Greene, 2000)
- Current discourse is un-supportive e.g. "Fee-dependency"; requires challenging fact/value dichotomy (Mathison, 2000; 2018; Picciotto, 2017)

# Conclusions

1. There **is** an overlap between the recent policymaking literature and the evaluation literature.

2. Reflected through discussions that focus on the role of values in evaluation, and on deliberative democratic evaluation

3. Both struggling to progress (and the conversations allude to questions related to "who we are and what we stand for" and there is no common voice).

4. This may explain why the overlap, while there, is limited.

# Reflections

1. Has the focus (in some cases at least) been less on how facts and values interact and more on the tools?

2. In what ways do we engage in 'value-critique' – or should we?

3. Do we need to better understand evaluation utilisation (e.g. evaluation as argumentation) to support learning?