

# **Recasting professionalisation: understanding self-legitimising professionalisation as a precursor to neoliberal professionalisation**

## **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the complex ways in which development NGOs become professional development actors. It offers a uniquely holistic understanding of professionalisation that draws on extensive new research data. It challenges the accepted narrative, presented by development scholars, of neoliberalism as the fundamental driver of professionalisation. Instead, it offers a more nuanced theorisation that recognises that professionalisation from outside, driven by neoliberalism, is often preceded by a professionalisation from within. Here the paper develops the concept of *self-legitimising professionalisation* as part of a ‘two stage process’ through a case study of international development practice delivered by UK based development education actors.

## **KEYWORDS**

CIVIL SOCIETY; PROFESSIONALISATION; NEOLIBERALISATION; DEVELOPMENT  
EDUCATION

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Debates that focus on the professionalisation of development actors have had a significant impact on the way we understand the political economy of development and the changing role of these actors. At the core of these debates is the recognition that neoliberalism has, over the last 30 years, played a significant role in influencing and shaping the role and work of civil society organisations engaged in development practice (Korten, 1990; Mirafteb, 1997; Alvarez, 1998; Tvedt, 1998; Edwards and Fowler, 2002; Townsend, Mawdsley and Porter, 2003; Kamat, 2004; Townsend and Townsend, 2004; Kapoor, 2005; O’Reilly, 2010; James, 2016). Despite this, some of these organisations have been able to find ways of finding space for activism and innovation alongside their funded/mainstreamed activities (Bondi, 2005; Jenkins, 2008). At the core of this body of scholarship is a focus on neoliberal professionalisation and the ways in which civil society organisations are able to work within this

broad socio-political context. It is these debates that this article seeks to challenge by critiquing the relatively exclusive focus this literature has on professionalisation as an outcome of neoliberal ideology.

The concept of neoliberalism is used here as short hand for the market driven discourse that has emerged, since the 1980s, to dominate global socio-economic and political spheres (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Harvey, 2005) and to capture, more specifically, the processes through which “social movements professionalize, institutionalize, and bureaucratize in vertically structured, policy-outcome-oriented organizations that focus on generating issue-specific and, to some degree, marketable expert knowledge or services” (Lang, 2013: 63–64). Despite this it is important to recognise that the concept of neoliberalism is, as Clarke (Clarke, 2008, p. 135) notes “omnipresent” and, as a result, “is now widely acknowledged in the literature as a controversial, incoherent and crisis-ridden term, even by many of its most influential deployers” (Venugopal, 2015, p. 166). What this paper seeks to do, notwithstanding these critiques (which this paper cannot engage with fully), is to challenge the way it is used by moving beyond the accepted use of the concept through a case study of development education. What this case offers is an insightful way to shine a light on alternatives to neoliberalism professionalisation that recognises the autonomy of educators and development education professionals to make decisions around professionalisation that are driven not by neoliberal forces but by the needs of teachers and educators.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to address two central problems that emerge within the existing literature. Firstly that this scholarship, in its eagerness to critique neoliberalism and its impact on development actors, fails to fully consider the steps towards professionalisation that preceded neoliberal professionalisation – that professionalisation, for some development actors, is a planned process and a desirable outcome. Secondly, that what constitutes a development actor within this literature is restricted, primarily, to civil society organisations in the global South. Thus not recognising that development actors in the global North not only have a significant role to play in international development but have experienced similar trajectories of change to their counterparts in

the global South (Humble 2013). Development education, therefore, provides a critical context through which we can understand the shift towards a distinctly neoliberal form of professionalisation.

This article responds to these two challenges by exploring the ways in which UK based development education NGOs experience professionalisation by demonstrating that there are two stages of professionalisation. This unique *two stage approach* to professionalisation posed here recognises that the drivers underpinning the professionalisation of development actors are significantly more complex than the current literature suggests. Drawing on extensive ethnographic research with a leading UK development education NGO new data will be used to outline and theorise the two stages of professionalisation, drawing in initially on neoliberal professionalisation literature and then offering an analysis of the preceding self-legitimising professionalisation that is visible in development education NGOs.

The next section will continue by exploring development education. Section three will then explore the literature surrounding neoliberal professionalisation, applying this to a UK development education NGO. It will then, in section three, outline self-legitimising professionalisation, by exploring evidence from the case study organisation to show that this form of self-legitimising professionalisation ‘paves the way’ for neoliberalism. It will conclude by exploring the value of this two stage approach whilst recognising the importance of a more nuanced understanding of professionalisation in development NGOs. In taking this approach, this article contributes to debates in development studies, human geography and international sociology by seeking to offer new thinking around the professionalisation of development actors and to critique the dominant focus within the extant literature.

### *1.1 Methodology*

This article is based on extensive ethnographic research with a leading UK development education organisation<sup>i</sup>. The aim of the research was to explore and understand the ways in which development

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<sup>i</sup> The organisation that forms the case study has been anonymised throughout to protect the organisation and, following pre-interview agreements, interview responses have been depersonalised to ensure that individual staff members cannot be identified from any interview quotes used.

education non-governmental organisations (NGOs) ‘do’ development education and how this has changed over time. The data collection strategy involved working with a leading UK development education organisation for a total of 14 months during the 2007-2008 academic cycle and through ongoing dialogue with the organisation, its staff team and the wider sector from 2008-2015 (following the impacts of policy change during the end of the New Labour government and through the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government’s term in office (2010-2015)).

The organisation in question was founded in the 1970s and was at the cutting edge of development education. At the time of the research the organisations employed eight members of staff, had a significant reach into the local education community and a growing reputation for cutting edge development education initiatives which had resulted in it supporting the development of a national wide development education strategy following the creation of the Department for International Development in 1997.

The research approach adopted was qualitative and in keeping with an inductive actor oriented approach to development research (Long, 2001; Hillhorst, 2003; Mosse, 2005). The core research method was based on a traditional ethnographic approach. This involved 14 months of working in the organisation’s office overtly conducting research whilst also supporting projects and day-to-day activities. The ethnographic strategy was focused on three key methods. Firstly, observations - “watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Secondly, accessing the organisation’s archive of educational resources and materials (financial reports, strategy documents, meeting minutes, project reports and communications) and thirdly, carrying out semi structured interviews in the final four months of the ethnography (with all eight members of the team and 10 members of the core management committee). Interviews lasted between 60 and 150 minutes and were audio recorded. The approach taken was in line with Heyl’s (2001, p. 369) understanding of ethnographic interviews which, he argues:

will include those projects in which researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds.

All data collected during the project, including observations (referred to here as field notes) were collated and analysed thematically, identifying key themes and concepts that emerged in the interviews and exploring these themes in relation to the wider data set. These excerpts from interview transcripts, archive materials and field notes support the analysis and discussion in this article.

## **2. DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION**

Although contested and subject to significant change over time (Wright and Wright, 1974; Osler, 1994; Shah, 2007; Bourne, 2008a) development education is, at its core, a practice of developing knowledge and skills for and about global development. Baillie Smith (2008, p. 9) defines this as:

work done by a variety of organisations, including [International Non-Governmental Development Organisations], trade unions and schools, to educate constituencies in the North about development and global interdependence and global/local responsibilities. The emphasis is on critical reflection and, in the UK at least, is differentiated from more general awareness raising around development issues.

Here Baillie Smith emphasises development education's ability to offer a critique of the global world order. Development education emerged in the UK in the early 1970s (Lemaresquier, 1987; Bourne, 2008b; Harrison, 2008) as an awareness raising project and a 'call to arms' for teachers at a time when new communication technologies were increasingly shaping the way people in the UK were able to engage with and understand international issues. Issues such as the impacts of decolonisation, the progress or limited progress of ex-colonies and events such as the Vietnam War, the Biafra war and famine, for example, were reported in the UK in significant detail, often with colour images and video footage. Such events and reports led to an increased awareness of the wider world, and an increase in internationalism as people were becoming more knowledgeable about the inequalities inherent within

in it and, of particular importance to development education, the reported plight of others. It was in this context that development education (and regional Development Education Centres) emerged as a mechanism and space to educate teachers and educators about development issues, global inequalities and the complex nature of an increasingly global world (Bourne, 2008a).

Development education centres were established to provide resources and training opportunities for teachers focused on understanding, communicating and responding to development issues. These opportunities ranged from cultural awareness events to education projects, training days, conferences and overseas study visits. Humble (2013, 2012) argues that the work of development education organisations was primarily concerned with creating opportunities for teachers and educators to encounter development and encounter others and that despite significant changes in the wider contexts of education and development, the emphasis on creating encounters was as relevant in the 2000s as it was in the 1970s. Whilst the emergence of development education and its relationship to state policy will feature in the following sections, it is important to recognise that in 2000, for example, there were in excess of 50 UK development education centres in the UK as well as significant engagement with development education from a broad range of international development NGOs (Cameron and Fairbrass, 2004; Smith, 2004).

At the time of the fieldwork there had been no attempts to explore the professionalisation of development education in the existing literature or, by virtue of this, connect the then relatively new literature that focuses on professionalisation in international development to development education in the UK. However, in the spring of 2011, the Centre for Global Education, a Belfast based NGO, published an edition of its practitioner focused journal 'Policy and Practice: a Development Education Review' that focused on the 'Professionalisation and Deradicalization of Development Education'. This collection, broadly speaking, focused on the roles, challenges and contradictions of contemporary development education practice, recognising that development education has a role to play in North-South development initiatives challenging the social and economic causes of inequality and injustice and in framing rather than reacting to global social policies, events and issues:

rather than driving the framing of global responses, DE has tended to engage in a more reactive and less critical way with greater emphasis on public awareness of global responses when they happen (Gyoh, 2011, pp. 89–90)

What Gyoh captures here is a subtle change between the ‘critical’ development education captured in Baillie Smith’s quote above and a more depoliticised version of development education in the late 2000s.

Development Education is further critiqued in contributions to this edition by Bryan (2011) and Selby and Kagawa (2011). Bryan (2011:6) captures the key thrust of the debates within the volume in recognising the “disjuncture between the radical aims and professed rhetoric of development education and its practical implementation” which she argues “has led many to become deeply disillusioned by, and increasingly sceptical of development education itself”. In their article Selby and Kagawa present their ‘hunch’ that development education and education for sustainable development have, despite their aims, found themselves “falling in with the neo-liberal marketplace agenda” (2011, p. 15) through, what can be considered, an increased acceptance of the status quo and, as this paper will go on to argue, a similar experience of neoliberal depoliticisation not dissimilar to that which civil society organisations in the global South experiences.

These papers are an example of more recent engagement with aspects of development education and do begin to address issues related to professionalisation and depoliticisation, however contributions to this edition do not foreground discussions of professionalisation in the established literature on neoliberal professionalisation in international development practice (linked to work cited here). Nor in the original theoretical discussions of professionalisation and profession building found in sociological discussions of the medical and related professions (Friedson, 1970; James and Willis, 2001; Bondi, 2003).

### **3. NEOLIBERAL PROFESSIONALISATION: DEBATES TO DATE**

Neoliberal professionalisation, as a catalyst for organisational change in development practice, has, in recent years, received considerable interest from development scholars (from a variety of disciplinary

backgrounds). The focus of this interest is in exploring the mechanisms and impact of neoliberalism on the work of civil society organisations in the global South (Laurie and Bondi, 2005; Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2011). This literature focuses specifically on the way development NGOs have become efficient and professional development practitioners, formalising their organisations, processes and working practices to meet the conditions of donors and funders (Tvedt, 1998). This section explores the key themes and criticisms that emerge within the neoliberalism professionalisation literature including the mainstreaming or co-option of development actors into the mainstream development agenda (Clark, 1997; Jenkins, 2008), or what Alvarez (1998) refers to as ‘NGOization’; the influence of new management principles in development (Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley, 2002) and the importance of donor led ‘fashions’ (Tvedt, 1998); and the emphasis that is placed on the professional ‘expert’ (Laurie, Andolina and Radcliffe, 2003; Lang, 2013).

Although the role of neoliberalism in development stretches back to the late 1970s, its influence over development practice is most noticeable from the 1980s onwards (Clark, 1991; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Laurie and Bondi, 2005). Here I want to argue that whilst this is also the case for development education, the focus here on the impact of neoliberalism from the late 1990s onwards, coinciding with the formation of the Department for International Development (DfID) in 1997 and strategic aim of ‘Building Support for Development’:

The government ... attaches great importance to increasing development awareness in Britain. Every child should be educated about development issues, so that they can understand the key global considerations which shape their lives. (DfID, 1997, p. 77)

As a result, the reach and reputation of the development education sector in the UK (which I will explore in the next section in greater depth) provided a mechanism for DfID to operationalise its aims of embedding development in the UK schools’ curriculum. The rationale for this was that by 1997 an organised body of development education practice existed, it was delivered by an extensive network of active Development Education Centres and organisations (some of which, like the case study organisation, had been working in and with schools, local authorities and educational practitioners



since the mid 1970s). The UK development education sector was underpinned by a coordinating national association (the Development Education Association replacing its predecessor organisation the National Association of Development Education Centres in 1993) tasked with supporting practice and ensuring a place for development education on the national policy agenda. Funding development education recognised, as donors had with NGOs in the global South previously (Clark, 1997; Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Kamat, 2004), that development education organisations DEOs could provide DfID with a cost effective way to ‘do development’ (in this case development awareness) from the ‘bottom up’. This was also in line with DfID’s recognition of the importance of working with civil society organisations to ‘eliminate world poverty’ (DfID, 2000) which would become a donor-recipient relationship whereby NGOs would be able to access funding streams to deliver aspects of DfID’s strategic agenda. Development education centres would, through this model, receive funding from DfID to continue to work with schools and educators with the aim of achieving DfID’s awareness building aims.

As a result DfID funding for development education came through the ‘Enabling Effective Support’ (EES) strategy following a consultation process with development education practitioners. The final report outlined the purpose of EES and its potential:

[EES] has been specifically designed to provide teachers with more effective and sustained support to incorporate a global dimension into their teaching. It supports the development of locally owned strategies to achieve more comprehensive, high quality support to teachers for the delivery of the global dimension. Each strategy will focus on how global perspectives in the curriculum can be effectively delivered and supported, particularly through new partnerships and co-operative ways of working; and also how to access resources that support work in this area. The strategies will place schools in a stronger position to engage with and respond to the challenges of globalisation, sustainable development and active citizenship. (DfID, 2003, p. 2)

Following completion of the report EES funding was provided for the English Regions in five-year phases with a tentative commitment of £15 million for DECs to carry out their work. This EES funding proved to be a significant moment for development education as the funding not only provided a significant level of stability for the sector but also provided development education with a mandate to deliver development education as part of a national development awareness drive (Cameron and Fairbrass, 2002). It is this period in development education's history that I will argue is shaped by neoliberal professionalisation and, ultimately, results in the near destruction of the sector following the 2008 financial crash and the election of the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010.

### *3.1 The 'NGO-ization' of Development Education and the Identification of Expertise*

Whilst the EES funding provided stability what it meant was that DEOs underwent a process of, what we might call, DfID-ization which, as outlined above, followed a recognisable trend within development NGOs in the global South of becoming service deliverers (Pearce, 1997). However, like NGOs operating in the global South, the major challenge this presents an organisation is around autonomy:

Now that our agenda is more popular and has apparent government support, and financial support ... then in some ways it is more difficult to be as we want to be. (Case Study Staff Interview)

One of the things is that you can't work without money and DFID was important regardless of the money but actually it's become important because of the money. (Case Study Staff Interview)

Staff recognises the challenges in demonstrating success and, ultimately, value for money:

There is this perception which is another government problem, that you buy results - DfID have got this problem - because they spend so much more, there is this notion of what they should get back for that in a rather straight forward way. (Case Study Staff Interview)

The notion that professional organisations in exchange for funding will lead to tangible results is fundamental to DfID's approach, and in line with a neoliberal target driven approaches to development (Tender, 1982; Clark, 1997; James, 2016). A significant problem when the fundamental aims of development education are aligned to awareness raising and attitudinal change with the aim of bringing about global social change aligned with Freirian idea of education as a mechanism for emancipation (Osler, 1994) the reality of DfID funding was the narrowing of focus on educational practice, underpinned by the aim of 'building capacity' in the education system (Humble 2013).

The implications of this are stark. Immediately after taking office the Secretary of State for International Development in the coalition government, Andrew Mitchell, announced an "immediate freeze on DFID UK-based 'awareness' projects" (DfID, 2010) and the immediate cessation of funding to a range of active projects. Direct quotes at the time from the Secretary of State in the press release online signalled the precarious position for development education practice in the future:

People want to see British aid money saving lives and educating children in the world's poorest countries. There is a legitimate role for development education in the UK but I do not believe these projects give the taxpayer value for money. At this difficult economic time, it is crucial that our money is spent where it makes the most difference. (DfID, 2010)

This chimes with an earlier critique of DfID's approach to development education. Cameron and Fairbrass (2004) argue DfID's approach has shifted from an enabling approach to through the funding of DEC's to a closing of the "space for deliberative democracy between 2000 and 2003 through its treatment of DEC's" (2004, p. 739). It is, therefore, not surprising that the frustrations and challenges of such a refocusing of what counts as practice as a result of DfID's involvement in development education was succinctly captured by one interviewee: "The current incumbents [at DfID] seem to [want to] institutionalise it like some great big NGO – I'm not saying there is no value in that but they've lost the vision of what it might be" (Case Study Staff Interview).

What development education organisation became, for DfID, were expert deliverers of development awareness within the UK education system. This is in keeping with a key indicator of neoliberal

professionalisation identified in the wider literature - the recognition of the 'development expert' as a professionalised often western-educated development actor (as discussed in Kothari, 2005; Laurie, Andolina and Radcliffe, 2005; Nightingale, 2005; Jenkins, 2011). Through the process of professionalisation, expertise is created and celebrated and very quickly the expert's voice becomes the only audible voice. It is usually the voices of western development professionals (or that of the global institutions they serve) that are recognised and valued over and above that of indigenous peoples (Kothari, 2005; Laurie, Andolina and Radcliffe, 2005) and has come to shape dominant development discourse (Escobar, 1995, 1997; Kothari, 2005). Whilst the emphasis placed in the literature of the dominance of western discourses over that of the global South isn't applicable in the funding of development education. The funding of development education expertise does mirror the experiences of development NGOs in the global South.

### *3.2 Responding to Donor 'Fashions'*

The co-option of DEO into the mainstream DfID development agenda, underpinned by principles of new managerialism, reflects a similar process experienced by development NGOs in the global South (Miraftab, 1997; Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley, 2002; Mawdsley, Porter and Townsend, 2005). New managerialism is recognised as a key component of neoliberal professionalisation, and is focused on 'governability' (O'Reilly, 2010) through the implementation of selected private-sector systems of management (Townsend, Mawdsley and Porter, 2003) such as regulation, auditing and inspection (Clarke, Gerwitz and McLaughlin, 2000). For organisations engaged in 'doing development', the imposition of new management principles is based around the neoliberal ideological assumption that efficiency and equality are inextricably linked and poverty reduction (and its associated challenges) can be achieved through the application of private-sector standards, mechanisms and models.

DfID's interest in promoting new management techniques in its partnerships with development education organisations was in keeping with donor-NGO funding trends (Desai and Imrie, 1998). As one member of staff noted:

There were a lot of people [at DfID] motivated by this kind of stuff, the management agenda, and they started to put a lot of time into it. (Case Study Staff Interview)

A major area of concern for staff was the imposition of new strategic frameworks that were developed by the organisation as a mechanism to organise projects and activities and communicate the aims of the organisation in a coherent way. Staff team members recognised that new strategic objectives were seen as a mechanism of constraining the organisation and its creativity and were, ultimately, representative of the organisation's acquiescence to DfID's controlling managerialism:

[We] are quite open to new thinking ... but I think [they are] becoming less so as they are becoming more and more driven by these [new] objectives which are, ironically, in turn driven by an evaluation criteria that has been set by DfID. (Case Study Staff Interview)

We are constantly being told as staff and project workers and as partners not to worry about what DfID want, you know this is about thinking outside of the box, this is about not conforming. But the further they go down the route of trying to develop a program of work that they can just lift and fit into an evaluation form accordingly, the more and more structure and boxed it becomes. (Case Study Staff Interview)

Evidence from the broader voluntary sector literature demonstrates that the shift towards a neoliberal outsourcing or commissioning of civil society organisations has resulted in these organisations being shaped into business-like service providers serving the needs of funders. Clarke captures the impact of this:

The voluntary, independent, not-for-profit or 'third' sector occupies an ambivalent place in privatisation – being not-public, being not-for-profit; and being expected to behave in a more 'business-like' fashion (Clarke, 2004, p. 32)

This drive to be more business-like was something that came across in interviews, with staff and management committee members reflecting on the changing nature of the organisation following the acceptance of DfID EES funding:

It is now without a doubt ... much more business-like. That is not in the sense of a derogatory statement at all, like business I don't mean profit making, but it has developed structures and its ways of working and the demands it places on individuals and also how it responds to individuals. All of those are much sharper than they were at the very beginning. (Case Study Management Committee Interview)

It is important to note that this isn't necessarily perceived as negative and that the sharpness that is noted in the above quote captures the essence of an organisation wanting to be professional.

Furthermore, the need to be more business-like and more strategic in order to meet the aims of DfID meant that the organisation's activities (on which its history, expertise and reputation is based) have shifted, over time, towards a more strategic focus. Thus, delivering DfID's agenda to 'build capacity in the education system', development education organisations originally commissioned because of its expertise with schools and educators groups shifted their practice to meet the needs of the funder:

Increasingly things happen because we look at an overview plan of what we are trying to do strategically as an organisation at the moment, and look at the kind of things that will enable us to do that best. That is where a lot of the key events and liaison groups feature, and so those things originate in that kind of way. We've moved quite a long way from most of the work being about creative teacher groups, small groups, doing creative work on an individual focused project, to it being much more about those bigger events, [working] groups and those kinds of interventions. (Case Study Staff Interview)

Arguably this shift reflects the needs of the donor and, again, draws broad parallels with the experiences of development NGOs:

... the cooption of expansionist NGOs by the status quo ... is not simply the result of changes in organisational characteristics. Rather, it is an outcome that is consciously sought by those who hold power as they respond to the growing popularity of NGOs. (Edwards and Hulme, 2002, p. 60)

The wider impact of funding and new management principles was also conveyed in the interviews as an aspect that was previously alien to the organisation and was not inherent in the original approaches of development education:

If you are talking about management structures and a scale of operations, that requires funding and has required funding. In some ways, that has also distracted us from clarity of purpose [as] funders are getting you to jump through hoops and changing their mind about things. (Case Study Staff Interview)

The focus of this discussion has been to demonstrate that the experiences of development education organisations in the UK broadly replicate the experiences of development NGOs in the global South. Furthermore, that these experiences are increasingly shaped by neoliberal professionalisation as a condition and outcome of development, and in particular DfID, funding.

Whilst this section recognises the applicability of neoliberal professionalisation debates that focus on development practice in the global South to development education activity in the UK, it will argue, in the next section that neoliberal professionalisation is preceded by a self-legitimising professionalisation that is driven by a different agenda.

#### **4. SELF LEGITIMISING PROFESSIONALISATION**

As the previous section has demonstrated, from the late 1990s onwards development education was subject to significant professionalisation as a result of neoliberalism and the requirements of the funders, this section will explore the professionalising experiences of the case study organisation in more detail. It will go on to argue that a self-legitimizing form of professionalisation created the structures, systems, processes and expertise – indicators of professionalism – that paved the way for new forms of neoliberal professionalisation. It will demonstrate, through key steps in the process of professionalisation, that professionalisation was seen as not only a positive but desirable outcome by the staff and management committee members, as the following quotes demonstrate:

The whole notion of wanting to be taken seriously ... that grew out of wanting to be taken seriously and that we were an organisation that was noticeable and worth engaging with, signing up to or, trusting to go [overseas] with. (Case Study Staff Interview)

There used to be the shop that was run by volunteers, it was only one step away from the charity shop, it was a charity curriculum shop almost. Now you can't call it that, it's professional. I am not saying that it wasn't professional then, but it's more professional now than it ever was. (Case Study Staff Interview)

Within the organisational management literature, legitimacy is recognised as a complex concept (Suchman, 1995; Stryker, 2000; Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2006; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008) with Suchman (1995, p. 574) defining it as a: "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions".

Implicit in this definition is that legitimacy is subject to the perceptions of others, recognising the desirability or appropriateness of an organisation and its actions, in line with a broader set of standards ('norms, value, beliefs' in the above definition). Deephouse and Suchman (2008, p. 66) captures the external nature of legitimacy in more detail, identifying the interlinked nature of legitimacy, status and reputation. They also recognise the origins of each in external and internal factors such as ascription by outside or relational groups, conformity to recognised guidelines and practices and the subsequent importance of reputation building. Evidence from the case study demonstrate that these factors are realised in three key ways in the context of development education NGOs establishing their organisations and legitimacy in the UK in the 1970s and into the 1980s, these are: the process of establishing the organisation, the creation of a practice and the positioning of the profession.

#### *4.1 Establishing the organisation – Space and Staff*

Key to establishing the organisation was the creation of a Development Education Centre and the staffing of that centre. Both central to understanding how the organisation was established; they



demonstrate a professionalising agenda that foregrounded the organisation as an active professional organisation in the 1970s (and more so into the 1980s), that was both ‘visible and credible’. Here these two issues are explored through data from interviews with the case study staff.

The location of the centre was significant as the space had to provide office space and meeting space that would appeal to teachers. There were cost and availability issues however a key factor identified by staff was focused on how the centre would be perceived by the target audience, in that it either met teachers expectations of a teacher centre or resembled a school staff room:

The fact that the building we were in looked a bit like teacher centres’ looked in those days, which was like old houses which had been converted. It was partly an image thing. The place you were at was in a college, it was on a campus but in an old house and that was what teacher centres looked like in those days (Case Study Staff Interview)

You go to most staff rooms, they are not the glitzy air conditioned pristine clean buildings, they’re scruffy back cupboards with piles of papers everywhere which is a bit, I know you didn’t see [the old centre], but that was what [it] looked like. (Case Study Staff Interview)

As these quotes demonstrate there was a drive to at least match the professional expectations of teachers and to ensure that the organisation looked appropriate for its purpose. Extracts from an early annual report show that, whilst the location had its drawbacks, it provided further legitimacy benefits by being suitably located to attract volunteers that could offer associational legitimacy to the organisation:

Although [the centre] is not generally accessible, since it is some distance from the city centre, it has proved to be a fruitful locality for recruiting numerous volunteers. In the long-term, this may prove to be a more important factor than accessibility to teachers. (Case Study Organisation Annual Report: p2)

Within three years of forming the organisation had “a register of 60 volunteers” from “the local community, student bodies, lecturers wives or other associate of the colleges and development

movements” (Case Study Organisation Annual Report: p5-6). Reflections by staff and trustees demonstrated that the perceived importance of using volunteers was that it afforded the organisation a clear credibility and legitimacy as well as access to significant people that might support the organisation:

They helped our local access to things as they were quite well connected and many of them were women and many of them were married to quite significant players in the local community in one way or another, whether through the church, education or in the community and so on. Indirectly that gave us access to all kinds of stuff. (Case Study Staff Interview)

The nature of associational legitimacy was essential to the organisation’s formation and, whilst over time the appropriateness of using volunteers came into question, it served the purpose in setting up the organisation and developing systems of training, supporting and managing volunteers (Case Study Organisation Annual Report). This use of volunteers was not and still is not uncommon in development practice as the use of volunteers has a long history within development NGOs, particularly the use of expatriate volunteers with experience of volunteering in the global South, bringing their local knowledge and contacts back to projects based in the UK (Edwards and Fowler, 2002).

Despite the value placed on volunteers, within the first few years of the organisation being established, there was some unease with of the use of volunteers and, in particular, their relevance to and understanding of development education issues:

There were two types of volunteers, some of whom had experiences overseas actually, more mature people. There were some student groups but that was a different matter but those that ran the resources base were more mature people who had either been professional ... a lot of them had had experience overseas, but by and large they didn’t. I don’t know that they were the cutting edge of education. (Case Study Staff Interview)

I think in the early days it was a bit more sort of casual and it was a bit more sort of everybody's hobby, there were a lot of volunteers and people who worked a few hours a week. (Case Study Management Committee Interview)

These quotes shows concern for being at the 'cutting edge of educational work', which was an important challenge for the founder whose position within the organisation, as an ex-teacher, captured the more professional aims of the organisation and the legitimacy this added when talking to teachers about international/development issues. The importance of this is captured in the following quotes which evidence, albeit anecdotally, the reality that many development educationalists at the time were active because they had travelled to the global South, or had completed a voluntary placement with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO):

Most of the people that did work [in development education] at that time were ex-VSOs, but I was a teacher so I used ... to talk about myself as a teacher that has the privilege of spending more time on this work, knowing full well that a teacher has many more pressures. (Case Study Staff Interview)

Over time, as the organisation established its position as a professional provider of development education, the approach to volunteers shifted; by the early 1980s the organisation underwent a reviewing of staffing and decided to move towards professional paid staff or professionals on secondment. This shift captures the idea of what the organisation, its founder/director and management committee, perceived as a professional organisation and the need for the people who were the face of the organisation to be more professional and, ultimately, appropriate. This forms part of the idea of self-legitimation driven by an internal desire to be professional, but also shaped by the perceptions and perceived perceptions of others, not least the local authority:

By the early 80s we'd become a charity in our own right ... we strengthened our relationship with [the City Council], who became almost a co funder ... We had people seconded, one of whom was [a local head teacher]. That was quite a landmark. (Case Study Staff Interview)

The NGO literature recognises that there is a value in bringing people into an organisation who are ‘insiders’ within the field, as they have local knowledge and offer “deep insight into the community in question, as well as trust and acceptance by them” (Fowler, 2002, p. 444). Such advantages, along with the low-cost implications, capture the importance of these secondments to the case study organisation and why they would be considered such a ‘landmark’. Seconded staff members from the local authority were always well established within the education sector, they understood the city’s educational challenges and were also aware of the organisation and its work. As a result the centre, the key member of staff (an ex-teacher) and seconded education professionals were able to present the organisations as a professional, well trained and legitimate authority within the local area on development education.

#### *4.2 Creating a Practice*

The notion of identifying a need and establishing a specific yet professional practice were central to the professionalisation of the organisation, and in particular the process of self-legitimization. At a time when professional development for teachers beyond initial training was limited, the idea of an organisation providing new and innovative ways of engaging with teachers around relatively unknown areas (development education) further added to the legitimacy of the organisation. This was, however, also a challenge – but one the organisation would overcome:

I think one of the early advantages was this it was seen as new and innovative and therefore people would be surprised if anything worked. The idea that we’d have a resource shop – people said that wouldn’t work – I literally remember that, or the idea that you might get teachers meeting together – that won’t work but we had the motivation to prove it! (Case Study Staff Interview)

Significant within this practice was the participatory and democratic approach the organisations took, inasmuch as it was not providing instruction, more a case of engaging teachers in their own learning, then an innovative approach and one that the organisation hoped would filter back, as a methodology, into the classroom:

The whole idea of not describing [ideas and practice], debating things and conscientisation and all that was, in a sense, much hotter than it is now. So the idea that there might be different ways of doing things – there was a lot of interest in that. (Case Study Staff Interview)

In essence teacher groups creating the resources (and this providing a major selling point for the finished materials) added a currency and legitimacy to the work of the organisation:

Thirty odd years ago ... we were the place to come to when it came to development education resources. There wasn't much or anywhere else to go to. (Case Study Staff Interview)

The results of this 'new' approach was identified by management committee members as essential to understanding the early success of the organisation and of development education:

Teachers were attracted to the ideas because it was about good teaching and learning, good classroom practice. (Case Study Management Committee Interview)

[As] a catalyst, a focus for teacher debate, a way of making this happen, of creating energy, bringing people together and of stimulating debate by being close to the forefront of thinking. Of adventurous thinking. (Case Study Management Committee Interview)

A further component of the professionalisation of the organisation was the way in which it positioned itself in relation to other sectors. In relation to the local education sector, it was essential for the organisation to be defined in a way that related to the education sector at a time when international or development issues were not recognised as a priority. This was of significant importance when presenting itself as a professional organisation relating to educational professionals as the first annual report recognised:

The centre should work towards developing a high standard of professionalism and a solid reputation. It is essential that the DEC's standards relate to those expected by the educational system and professional bodies. (Case Study Organisation Annual Report: p2 italics in original)

As this quote demonstrates, central to the organisation's identity and how professional it should be was the recognised professionalism of the education sector and the professional status of teachers within it. The notion of identifying with teachers, and being seen to be associated with them, offered a legitimacy that the organisation could use to demonstrate their professionalism and place in relation to the education sector. The idea that the organisation's staff were teachers, as was the case with the director and with several project workers was enhanced, and so part of the profession afforded them a greater legitimacy within the sector:

I think initially the notion was that we were teachers who were part of that profession and that is still seen to some extent, but I think more recently I've had a growing awareness that there is another level of professionalisation in the role we play – and that is coming through the label of the enabling function, as it were, and facilitating processes and the designing of projects, or whatever, that are processes. I have more of an understanding of the professionalisation of that, that I didn't have - I just used to see that as something we got on with. Now I think that sharing the ideas ... has made me realise that that is a professionalism that I've had and taken for granted and seeing as an obvious thing that you've got to do. (Case Study Staff Interview)

Yet key to this, at the time, was avoiding being dismissed as an academic engagement:

we were being accused of, oh, we are just going to be like all these places, we are going to produce academic publications and so bloody what, and so I would say 'no we're not, we're producing practical stuff'. (Case Study Staff Interview)

The legitimacy that the organisation sought was also bound up with the need to see itself as part of a broader development education profession. This process of self-legitimation not only required the creation and subsequent professionalisation of a regionally rooted development education organisation, but it also required the establishing and development of a wider development education profession. The first year report of the DEC sought to share 'the preliminary thinking which gave rise

to the establishment of the DEC' but also to "encourage and contribute to the establishment of similar centres" (Case Study Annual Report: p1).

By 1978 this was recognised as a real achievement of the organisation, so much so that the Overseas Development Ministry (the precursor to the Department for International Development) agreed to fund a major development education centre event:

Our experiences, and the first Development Education Centre Report, have played an important role in the development of new centres in different parts of the country ... we are hosting a major conference ... which is sponsored by the ODM. (Case Study Publication: 86)

This focus on practice is in keeping with a growing interest in making sense of practice (Jones and Murphy, 2010a, 2010b; Yarker, 2017) and its value to geographical enquiry. This work, drawing on sociological theorists such as Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979), seeks to recognise the value of focusing on practice as a way to "complement other theoretical approaches ... where the study of everyday activities is used, in part, to describe or explain socioeconomic phenomena and processes" (Jones and Murphy, 2010b, p. 386). Thus in this context, these practices are allowing for an understanding of alternative forms of professionalisation that go beyond the neoliberal.

#### *4.3 Establishing Legitimacy*

Self-legitimacy for the case study organisation became the mechanism that propelled the organisation into the forefront of development education practice in its local authority region and in the UK more generally. The professionalisation that underpins and directs this self-legitimacy through the 1970s and 1980s saw the expansion of the organisation from a group of well organised volunteers to a team of dedicated staff members; the development of more than 60 teaching resources; work with a range of regional, national and international voluntary organisations, NGOs, local authorities, government departments and educational institutions; and the establishment and maintenance of a reputation for providing innovative development focused professional development opportunities for teachers and educators. It is this reach that enabled the organisation to establish itself as a credible professional provider of teacher training and educational support to the extent that government was, following the

creation of DfID in 1997, willing to fund the organisation (and the wider development education sector) to build capacity in the education system through development awareness activities with teachers and educators.

In many ways the process of self legitimizing professionalisation was a success for the organisation, not only did enable the organisation to establish itself but it created opportunities for stable funding and was able to ensure that, to some extent, development education was able to form a central plank of government policy. Further exploration of the types of legitimacy the organisation had created for itself prior to 1997 can be understood through an application of Brown's (2008) six factors that influence the legitimacy of social actors in global civil society. The following table draws on and adapts Brown's framework to demonstrate areas in which the organisation demonstrated its legitimacy:

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Evidence in the case study organisation</b>
Legal legitimacy	Compliant with legal and regulatory frameworks	Building an active and legally formulated organisation: securing charitable status and the development of appropriate organisational structures, accountability mechanisms, accounting regulations and annual reporting processes.
Normative legitimacy	Shared norms and values	Of development rather than the perceived values of teachers. Here the organisation was attempting to transfer shared norms and values from the emerging development sector (linked in part to the work and ideas of Oxfam) to the education sector.
Political legitimacy	Representing members' interests	Creating a network of teachers and volunteers: with supportive teacher groups with a view of supporting groups to develop new approaches and



		test new ideas in the field of education. The securing of teachers as part of the organisational management group.
Pragmatic/technical legitimacy	Technical expertise, capacity to deliver etc	Developing a reocgnisable development education practice: around a set of activities unique to the education sector at the time and developing a reputation for such practices. In this case, reproduced and situated encounters but also the method of providing space for creativity.
Associational legitimacy	Links to other legitimate actors	Positioning the organisation: linking to other key actors, such as local universities, NGOs and educational publishers
Cognitive legitimacy	Expectations about the world	Defining the organisations values through publication and educational materials.

Table I: Applying Brown’s legitimacy factors of social actors to the case study

Table I offers a overview of the multiple mechanisms through which the organisation was able to develop legitimacy for itself and its practices and, in doing so, draws on examples from the founding of the organisation, the establishment of the centre, the formation of a practice and the positioning of that practice. Thus, the drive to be seen as a professional organiation was self-perpetuating and was about developing a status and a reputation that would enable the organisation to expand its approach and to challenge the perceived orthodoxy, or way, of doing things. This, to some extent, reflects the nature of the organisation and what was deemed a priority when it was marginal to the education sector, seeking to allign themselves with what they perceived was the needs to teachers. Priorities then, were about building the organisation (and its legitimacy) in the local area with educational

professionals, whilst also focusing on establishing development education as a profession with ‘control over the determination of the substance of its own work’ and the ability to become ‘autonomous or self directing’ (Friedson, 1970, p. xvii).

## **5. CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF SELF LEGITIMIZING PROFESSIONALISATION**

A central rationale for the self-legitimising professionalisation that the organisation created is bound up, as demonstrated above, with achieving levels of legitimacy and authority: legitimacy in the eyes of teachers and educators and the authority that this legitimacy gives the organisation to create and develop its own form of development education practice. From the outset the organisation was focused on empowering teachers and educators to use innovations in education to positively change the world with the key aims of developing the “skills necessary for effective participation in the world” (Case Study Organisation Publication: p1) to “promote a new political and social awareness of the world leading to action and commitment to change” (Case Study Organisation Publication: p83) by “recognising our involvement in world affairs; raising our awareness of our own potential for influencing them, and developing the skills necessary for effective participation”. It is by acting as professionals, by being linked to wider network of professionals and, as a result, being perceived as professionals that the case study organisation sought to achieve these aims.

The power that this form of professionalisation gave the organisation would, in theory, lead to positive social change that recognised the role of teachers as change agents through a process of consciousness raising conscientization that Freire (1972) argues for in his liberation pedagogy. This ability to develop and use participatory methodologies to enable teachers and educators to understand, encounter through resources and study visits and communicate ideas of development and positive social change provided a mechanism, in Gramscian terms, for civil society organisations to challenge the post-war, post-independence global hegemony. By seeking to be professional, teachers would voluntarily engage with development educational organisations and would, as a result of this, validate development education.

Whilst section two outlined the subsequent challenges that neoliberal professionalisation brought with it, it is this initial phase of self-legitimising professionalisation that created a platform for appropriation or ‘ngo-ization’ (Alvarez, 1998) in which DfID were able to fund and make demands of development education organisations in much the same way as it was funding alternative forms of development practice in the global South.

At the heart of this paper is the recognition that conceptualisations of professionalisation have failed to fully explore the wider professionalisation agenda that is at play within civil society organisations. The result of this relatively specific focus is an over emphasis on neoliberal drivers of change within NGOs rather than on more complex, internal drivers of change. After all, as an organisation initially trying to create a new agenda with teachers, educators and schools, the emphasis was on ‘pitching’ a professional narrative that professional teachers would understand and relate to. Not responding to a top-down ‘ngoization’ that came later. What this paper is, therefore, arguing for is a more nuanced, holistic understanding of professionalisation that recognises a link and transition between self-legitimising and neoliberal professionalisation. Whereas the debates around neoliberal professionalisation often cast civil society organisations as powerless to the pressures of neoliberal ideologies, this paper argues that organisations also professionalise purposefully and with their own long term goals in mind.

What this two stage process of professionalisation offers is recognition that professionalisation is a complex process shaped by different drivers and that these processes can overlap in the narrative of development actors. What is key, however, is not just understanding the multiple narratives of professionalisation that emerge for development actors but to understand the impact of these narratives and the resultant challenges that emerge. Developing, maintaining and negotiating spaces in development practice see organisations walk a tightrope between seeking funding yet responding to the needs and demands of funders; expanding and growing capacity and capabilities yet being at risk of the demands institutional growth brings with it and also recognising that influencing policy can, as in the case of development education, result in policy shifts that rule a certain approach or practice out of favour. Understanding these challenges are important if we are to understand the way civil society

organisations develop and to broaden our understanding of the professionalisation of civil society actors, activists and radicals engaged in seeking to change the world for the better.

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