Human Inquiry
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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The democratization of research in adult and non-formal education

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Much of the recent international research in adult and non-formal education could be categorized roughly as follows:

Overviews and Surveys

Overviews and surveys have done much to stimulate an interest in non-formal education and to raise critical issues of a practical, economic, and political nature. While the work of Philip Coombs, Manzoor Ahmed, and Roy Prosser are perhaps the best known, Sheffield and Diejomaoh were the first to complie and classify the varieites of programmes and raise a number of critical issues for Africa (see Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; Sheffield and Diejomoah, 1972; Ahmed, 1975; Coombs and Prosser, 1973; Kidd, 1974). In the United States, Michigan State University (Niehoff, n.d.) and the University of Massachusetts (Gillette, 1977; Evans, 1972; Moulton, 1977) have worked on some experiences in Commonwealth nations.

Literacy

One of the important secondary effects of the UNESCO/UNDP literacy programmes, and the proliferation of national programmes which resulted, was the stimulation of research into the factors which were important to

success in achieving literacy. The International Institute for Adult Literacy Methods has played the leading role in cataloguing and disseminating information about this ongoing research (Gorman, 1977; Versluys, 1977; Clason-Hook, 1977). UNESCO itself has produced an overall evaluation of their Ten-year programme which reviewed some research and evaluation (UNESCO/UNP, 1976). The International Council for Adult Education has, in cooperation with the International Development Research Centre, compiled a study of research findings from many national literacy programmes (Kidd *et al.*, in press).

Media usage and campaigns

The research and evaluation of the use of radio and television in various non-formal education settings has expanded quite rapidly in the past few years. There has been evaluation of the mass campaigns in Tanzania (Hall, 1978) and research and evaluation of similar campaigns in Botswana (Ministry of Local Government and Lands, 1977). In the UK studies are available on the effect of media in the literacy scheme. The use of television through satellites has been studied in depth in India (Dannheisser, 1975). General surveys on the use of radio in educational programmes in several commonwealth countries have been done by the specialists from the University of Manchester (see the work of M. Pilsworth and G. Weddell; also Legge 1976/77) and the International Extension College based in Cambridge, England, has studied a variety of experiences in Mauritius, Ghana, Botswana, Tanzania, and Lesotho and published broadsheets on its experiences.

Action Research

The term 'action research' has referred to several variations of activity. On one hand the term has been used by Bowers (UK) and Garforth and Warr working in Botswana. Their use suggests a concept based in Third World practice which in many ways represents the logical application of the concept of appropriate technology to the world of research and evaluation.

Another quite different application has arisen primarily from work in Latin America and Europe and now being seen in the UK (Stringer, 1978; Holmes, 1976), Canada (Stinson, 1977) and elsewhere. This version is based on explicit political choice in which the researcher is aligned with working-class interests for structural transformation. Research is conducted with the people and is written up in a language and form which can feed directly into the ongoing struggle.

Participatory Research

The use of the term participatory research, first used in Tanzania (Hall, 1978), has spread in part through the efforts of the International Council for Adult Education which has established a network amongst persons working in the field. The term covers a variety of experiences in which those people who are experiencing a social situation identify, analyse, and act upon their problems. Examples of this approach can be found in many commonwealth nations including Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana, UK, Canada, Australia, and India (ICAE, undated).

The Trend Towards Democratization of Research

Perhaps it is best to begin with a quotation which illustrates one side of the situation:

> Here I stand, my name is Jowett
> There's no knowledge but I know it.
> I am the Master of this college
> And what I don't know isn't knowledge.
> (Attributed to Prof. B. Jowett, former Master of Balliol)

There are of course different trends which might have been identified. The trend towards democratization has been chosen for a more detailed look because of its particular importance to those whose primary concern is the means by which non-formal education can better serve the needs of the poor and exploited majority. It represents an important force for increasing the chance that research will serve those whom it is intended to serve. It should be noted that the identification of a trend does not imply that the majority of research reflects this tendency, but some positive tendencies are visible.

We are all too aware of the volumes of research in all fields, non-formal education included, which serve no purpose at all except the professional interests of the researchers. We are also aware of many cases when research is done by various institutions in order to take decisions for people who are not allowed to make decisions about their own lives. Our record as researchers is not a proud one. It is important that analysis and creativity in seeking solutions will be centred amongst those who need it most.

If research is more democratic, both in the way it is done and as regards the people with whom interaction occurs, it is likely that there will be better links between policy and practice, and between research and action. By having more involvement of those people who experience on a day-to-day basis the reality of the problem concerned, it is more likely that the research will reflect that

reality. In addition much of what we know about the formation of knowledge suggests that it is only through the interaction of theory and practice that truth in the more general sense is discovered (Cornforth, 1955).

Evidence that Research is Becoming more Democratic

(1) *Shift in the Location of the Research from Metropolitan Countries to the Third World*

In terms of the volume of research, numbers of persons engaged in research, and funds expended on research, the balance is still tipped heavily towards the richer nations and the international agencies as regards the location where most research about non-formal education in Third World countries is initiated and carried out. There is, however, a quite general agreement that research really should be done by persons actually living and working in the countries where the education is taking place. The continuing delay in turning this task over completely is said often to be due to lack of appropriately trained local researchers. Through the institutional push of organizations like the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat with their emphasis on 'TCDC' (Technical Cooperation amongst Developing Countries), the International Development Research Centre in Canada and SAREC (Swedish Research Agency in Developing Countries) in response to the political arguments in Third World countries, a growing emphasis has been placed on financial support to Third World researchers and research institutions.

(2) *Shift from Expatriate to Local Researchers*

Related to, but lagging somewhat farther behind, the question of the location of research, is the question of who actually does the work. The first stage in the democratization of research is to shift it to the place in question. The second stage is having someone from that country in control of the work. There is a general agreement and a visible tendency towards consolidating this second stage. More and more research in non-formal education is being done by the men and women in the country concerned.

(3) *Increased Involvement of Untrained Persons in Professional Roles*

The need for evaluation of results in the various literacy efforts associated with the UNESCO/UNDP literacy programme and the many national efforts

which have developed at the same time have meant that many persons who did not have formal training in research or evaluation were recruited to work in research and evaluation units. In most cases it has been found that, after some experience, these untrained individuals have proven to be perfectly satisfactory. In some cases these persons have proven to be much better than their colleagues with formal qualifications, especially in terms of working with local people or explaining why a certain set of statistics have turned up.

Another way in which untrained individuals have gained experience and in a few places permanent status as researchers has been through the institution of the research assistant. It has been a common practice for years in most Third World countries for expatriate researchers to make use of local research assistants to do the actual interviewing, as the expatriates do not usually have the language necessary to actually talk with local people. As anyone will tell you who has worked either as a research assistant or with one, these people very often have a better idea about the research results than the formal researchers.

(4) *Increased Interest in Making Research Accessible to Local Decision-Makers*

While too few research results or studies have found their way into a form which allows them to be used easily by policy-makers, there are some efforts to do so. When one talks of accessibility it most often refers to the efforts to translate the reams of paper in a research report into the language and style of the upper level decision-maker — the senior civil servants in the various Ministries or busy administrators in the educational institutions.

This tendency most often takes the form of short one- or two-page summaries of longer reports, or the form of seminars or workshops where the results are shared with appropriate persons.

Another aspect of making research accessible which is not as common is increasing accessibility for the people whom research is most often written about... the exploited, the poor, the landless and underschooled.

(5) *Increased Involvement of the Poor and Exploited in the Research Process Itself*

The movements of participatory research and related approaches such as action research and militant research have emphasized the importance of involving those persons whom the research is intended to benefit in the research process itself, from the identification of the problem to the analysis and interpretation of the results.

Examples of this approach can be found in several of the non-formal education experiences including:

Botswana:	evaluation of a cooperative weaving project.
Kenya:	village socio-economic analysis as the basis for literacy programmes.
Tanzania:	analysis of grain storage problems for construction of storage silos; evaluation of literacy programmes; analysis of music in strengthening and transforming culture.
Canada:	analysis of water usage and disposal — community involvement and health issues in an isolated Indian community in Northern Ontario; development of curriculum for English teaching in the work-place; analysis of housing problems in a working-class residential neighbourhood.
England:	evaluation of the effects of media in the English literacy campaign; analysis of learning needs in an urban working-class housing estate.
India:	planning education for poor industrial workers in New Delhi; education of literacy programmes in Udaipur; development of women's clubs in Madras.

Practical Issues and Implications

The experiences which have taken place to date have allowed us to identify a number of issues and implications of a practical nature. In some cases we have suggested some approaches; in other cases we have pointed out continuing difficulties.

(1) *Use of Language*

One improvement which should be reinforced is to make sure that, at the end of any study, the materials are written up in a short and easy-to-read format for the attention of those persons who should know about the results. This takes a very short time to do and gives researchers practice in reading their own studies. Another step is the organizing of a seminar or workshop with the same persons where the results can be presented and the findings discussed. Some ministries and institutions now require the fulfilment of these requirements as part of the research contract.

The question of communication of interim results to the people with whom one works in a community in order to increase their participation in the

research process is still another challenge. Assuming that a written form is useful at all, it *is* possible to put results in a local language and a form which most people understand. It is useful to look at other forms of popular communications which are already being used as models. Photo novels, newssheets, booklets, and brochures have all been used. A local committee can usually find an adequate way of getting the results into a usable form *if* they have been involved from the start.

(2) *Use of Alternative Research Methods*

Perhaps one of the most dramatic shifts in research is the realization that research methods need not be limited to the paper-and-pencil styles that are most common. The involvement of non-literate populations in analysis has led to the application of a wide variety of other methods for group or collective analysis. Some of the methods which are now being used include:

(a) drawings either drawn or interpreted collectively (or both);
(b) still photographs — used similarly to drawings as codifications for in-depth analysis;
(c) people's theatre — when the community itself analyses structural relationships and portrays them in dramatic form;
(d) song — collectively written or analysed;
(e) community meetings/dialogues;
(f) development of community self-portraits;
(g) video-tape recordings.

The focus on methodological aspects is growing rapidly. This does not of course invalidate methods which we have traditionally been using in research but it has both pushed us to re-examine our methods for collective analysis and opened up the possibility for using a large number of methods which previously would not have been considered possible.

(3) *Time Needed for Research*

While it is quite difficult to discuss this point in abstract, it is fair to say that, in general, a research process which is truly democratic will take longer than the quick one-off surveys which we are more used to. It takes time to organize meetings, to explain objectives to different groups, have discussions about interim findings, develop the analysis, and discuss subsequent action. The balance of time spent in the village, or with the people compared to time spent in an office, is altered very much. This has obvious implications for language,

type of person hired to do the work, costs, and necessity of integrating the research process into other ongoing activities and actions. The counter-arguments, of course, are that an effective process is worth the time taken and that in the long run the time taken may even be less because the research process combines an educational and action phase.

(4) *Costs and Funding Patterns*

As noted above, increased time spent in a research process can have financial implications. It is true that while researchers and administrators are paid to go to meetings and carry out research, ordinary people are not. For villagers or other working people to take time out to attend meetings they must be highly motivated and quite certain that the efforts will bring some direct benefits. Some projects have begun to build in an amount of support for local participation, either directly or indirectly.

On the other hand there are possibilities of keeping costs in research down through a more democratic approach. If there are fewer professionally trained middle-class researchers involved, and more non-professionals involved, the savings can be quite appreciable. Further, if the research is incorporated into other local action programmes, the costs might be still more reduced.

(5) *Balance Between Grass Roots and Macro-Analysis*

While it is true that no-one intuitively understands the social reality of a rural village better than those who live there, there are nevertheless some facts about the control of life in those villages which are usually beyond the knowledge of those living there. If the cost of fertilizer is controlled by transnational corporations outside the village in some other country, then any analysis which involves fertilizer costs and usages will need to have some information about the ownership and price policies of the external producers and the relationship of the external producers to national or local suppliers.

The analysis of local problems must be linked to larger structural issues and the total analysis *shared* with those at the local level. In this way both the overall analysis is improved and the knowledge becomes a product which is jointly owned and produced.

(6) *Use of Class as an Analytic Tool*

Concepts of social class and the relationships of various classes to the dominant mode of production are central to the process of understanding the

effects of various educational programmes and the place which varying programmes hold within the overall socio-economic structure. While this concept has not played a prominent role in non-formal education research to date, the concern which we have of the rights of the poor is making the political economic viewpoint more common. If democracy implies involving the classes which have been excluded then a class framework of analysis is useful.

More sophisticated and detailed work in the understanding of community class structures is needed. In an era when community participation is urged in every action and policy, we need to know more about the class structures within villages. We need to know more about the ways in which rich peasants maintain control and about ways to engage those in the village who are not as well off. How can non-formal education stimulate accumulation in the village? It is not enough to say simply that the community should participate in the research process. How is it possible to assure that the research process serves those who need it most?

(7) *The Blurring of the Distinction Between Research, Learning, and Action*

Participatory research, for example, is usually described as having three characteristics: it is at the same time an *approach* of social investigation, an *educational* process, and a means of taking *action.* This combination of characteristics has caused some difficulties in the academic world where reality has been divided into separate disciplines and fields of work.

When research involves a group of people in a common analysis and search for meaning it is the same thing as learning. This is not a problem in the workplace or the community where artificial separations have little meaning, but it does present some difficulties both for researchers and administrators who are trying to find where this kind of work fits into the official structure. In one case, valuable participatory research programmes have been put aside because the two administrative offices concerned could not figure out how to fund the work. The research agency said that what was being proposed was not research and so could not support the work. The educational agency said it was not education so that they could not support it either. To the people concerned it did not matter what it was called, but they still were delayed.

Conclusions

The role which research has played in the struggle for social justice has not been generally supportive. Research has more often been used to support decisions made by central authorities which were not in the interests of the

majority. The process of research itself has been mystified and confused in such a way as to serve on the researchers themselves. As time has gone by the qualifications which enable persons to contribute to knowledge have risen higher and higher. More and more people have been excluded from naming their world.

The tendency towards more democratic forms of research and more democratic relationships of research to other forms of action is an important one for us to support. The belief that ordinary people have both an ability and a right to interpret their problems and be involved in solutions is a fundamental element in any development of non-formal education and the key to long-lasting solutions.