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**PARTICIPATORY TRAINING : PHILOSOPHY AND PERSPECTIVE**

**Where Are We ?**

The starting points for the elaboration of the philosophy and perspective of Participatory Training is our assessment of the contemporary socio-economic reality on the one hand, and our view of a better world, on the other. If we look around today, we find that unequal systems at home, at work, in organisations and society, across nations, throughout the world are being systematically perpetuated and reinforced. Power and control in the hands of the few is being utilised to advance their own limited, narrow, economic and political interests, many a times at the cost of the interests of those who are many. This system of inequality, of continued exploitation, marginalisation and underdevelopment is increasingly being manipulated through control over the minds and thinking of ordinary people. This control has become widespread in recent years, as it makes ordinary people believe in and accept the systems of inequality and injustice. In recent years, media television and radio, have been a major tool in controlling the minds and thinking of ordinary people. In early period of history, religion, literature produced by the learned and scholars, socialisation in the family and in the schools, use of language, symbols, cultural, rituals, mores and traditions have all being utilised to reinforce the perpetuation of unjust and unequal systems in our society. Over the last hundred years or so, the formal system of education has also contributed to the same trend through its "banking" concept of education and formal schooling which has treated ordinary people as recipients of formally produced experts' knowledge which is supposed to be good for them. Ordinary people have been treated as objects of "dumping" of all kinds. The rise of the expertise and the knowledge enterprise has devalued popular knowledge and experience of people as the basis for guide in social and economic actions. Over the past hundred or so years, people's experiences and popular knowledge have been devalued, derecognised and deligitimized and monopolistic control over production, distribution and use of knowledge has increased manifold. Ordinary people have lost faith in their abilities to understand and transform their world. They suffer from low self-esteem and shaking trust in themselves and those around them. This system of education and production of knowledge has also been perpetuated throughout history where certain forms of knowledge acquisition and reproduction were not even accessible to the poor and the marginalised; and that the knowledge producers were the "jewels" in the kingdom of the Rulers, and encouraged to remain so.

If this is our assessment of contemporary reality, then it provokes us to act in ways that will begin to weaken such forces of power and control over the minds and thinking of ordinary people.

## WHERE CAN WE TRAVEL?

In order for us to act in ways different from the contemporary dominant scenario, we need to be inspired by a view of a better world our own view of what a humane, just and equal society should comprise of, should be characterized with. It is in that world and the vision of a better world that we have to ask ourselves: what is the place of learning, of inquiry, of growing, of self-esteem, of the use of people's own critical, analytical abilities, their own knowledge, experiences and capacities? Where is the place of people's own dreams and their ability to dream and redream? What is the place of people's creativity, their articulation of their vision? Is that our view of a better world? What is our view of a better world? Is our view of a better world strong enough to inspire us to do something about our contemporary reality?

## WITH WHAT ROOTS?

With our assessment of reality and inspiration of our view of a better world, we need to act and in that acting we need a set of anchors. We need some articles of faith which will ensure that we act consistently with our assessment of reality and our view of a better world. What are these articles of faith? Primarily ordinary people, their ability to learn, change and grow; faith in the capacities of ordinary people..... capacity to understand, to learn, to act, and trust others; faith that people know, that they are capable of knowing, and that they are interested in knowing, in order to transform their realities. These are our articles of faith. These are the anchors in which we need to find the roots for our actions.

## WHAT DO WE DO, THEN?

But having faith is not enough. If we need to act, we need to create conditions for the translation of our faith. If our assessment of reality mentioned above is valid then we find ourselves in a dilemma. If peoples minds have been effectively controlled and manipulated, if ordinary people have been made to believe that they are incapable, they lack expertise, knowledge and capability, that they must depend on others, the experts, the bureaucrats, the decision-makers, the rich, for finding solutions to their daily problems and if formal system of education has successfully 'brainwashed' them, and if they have been appropriately 'dumped' with all kinds of information, disinformation, confusion in concepts, then we find that our faith is shaken. We find that ordinary people do not demonstrate their capacity to learn, grow, change. They do not articulate what they already know or show any sense of confidence in knowing more. It is this dilemma which is at the roots of creating opportunities and conditions for creating countervailing forces to those forces which maintain and reinforce control over minds of people.

What are then some of such conditions and opportunities? Opportunities are those which are deliberately structured to counter the forces of hegemony, the forces of control, over the minds of ordinary people, the forces that derecognise, stultify and delegitimize the capacities of ordinary people to think, act, feel and to learn, grow and change. These opportunities may be called reflections, training, workshop, or merely events----events in a longer passage of time and space. Not one, but a series of events. Not one intervention, but a chain of interventions. Why? Because forces that have operated in controlling the minds of people are not going to go away, may even come back with a vengeance then, in response to such events or interventions from us, and have been perpetuated over centuries and centuries. Therefore, we have to conceptualize an intervention which is ongoing, an intervention which is long-term, an intervention which is futuristic and within that strategy of interventions, we have to operationalize the series of events which are limited in time and space, purpose and scope. These may be emphemistically called 'training programmes'. But they are parts of the chain of events of a larger strategy of interventions to counter the hegemonic forces engaged in controlling the minds of ordinary people.

#### ARE THERE GUIDELINES?

And then these events have to be deliberately structured in order to create conditions which will start the countervailing forces. What are those conditions?

1. Respecting people, respecting learners, respecting group of ordinary people, respecting their experiences, what they know, who they are, what they may become, and wish to know. Valuing the experience of the learners, recognising that learners have experience, knowledge, capacities and then deliberately creating mechanisms to show their value, demonstrating that we value their experience, their knowledge, their capacities and then encouraging them to share their experiences.
2. Sharing experiences for what? So that they can see that they have insights, wisdom, knowledge which they have accumulated over the years and from which they can learn afresh. Sharing experiences for critical reflection and analysis of those experiences. Sharing experiences with others so that others can become the mirrors, the 'bouncing boards', the catalysts in the process of reflection and analysis. Sharing of experiences will not occur if valuing learners, their experiences, knowledge and capacities is not felt by them. If learners in a group do not experience they have been valued, they will not share their past experiences, they will not themselves value their past experiences. Acknowledging learners' experience, capacities and knowledge and valuing it is a precondition for an effective sharing of experiences.

3. An effective sharing of experience is a precondition for critical and analytical reflection, reorganization, reconfiguration and developing fresh insights from it. In essence, learning from one's experience is based on its effective sharing, critical reflection, and reconfiguration. Therefore, under what conditions experience will be shared by people? Conditions where they think that the sharing is in their own interest, that they will not be hurt because of sharing, that others will be willing to pay attention and listen to their experiences, that others will respect their experiences, that others will try to understand their experiences without passing judgments on themselves, that others would be sensitive to the mode and form of expression of their experiences, and that there will be some others when they are sharing their experiences.

These are the conditions of an effective small group functioning, where sharing and critical reflection on the experiences of the learners has to be encouraged. This is why the need for an environment conducive for learning, for sharing, for analysis. It is a process where reflection is not left to the individual, but carried out in cooperation and collaboration with others, a process of collective reflection and, therefore, a process where not just one person shares his experiences, but all do the same; because it is not possible for me alone to share while you are only listening and reflecting. Sharing, listening, reflecting have to be done by each and all of us, in a group, in a context, that we feel comfortable, capable and strong.

4. Therefore, strengthening the self-esteem of learners, finding ways to intervene in encouraging them to have a greater confidence in themselves and their abilities is an important condition for such an opportunity. A variety of ways may have to be invented to help learners regain their self-esteem feel strong about themselves.
5. It is in this context that a variety of learning methods may have to be designed and implemented to create conditions for structured sharing of experiences, conditions for developing shared experiences and mechanisms for their critical reflection and analysis. It is also in this sense that the mutuality of the learning process between learners, between the learner and the trainer, has to be established and demonstrated. The trainer learns, the learner trains.
6. To become both the learner and the trainer in different ways, on different issues, in different aspects, the self-confidence of the trainer is a basis for encouraging the self articulation of the learner. It is not merely a matter of creating conditions for increased self-esteem and confidence of the learners, in their ability to think, to feel, to act.

7. It is not merely learner-centred, but also learner-controlled. The process moves at a pace and speed that learners find comfortable, manageable to control and regulate. They exercise their choice in being in the learning process or withdrawing from it.
8. And an outcome of all this is creation of knowledge based on the process of that event. New articulation of insights, both by the learners and the trainer, and new basis for action in order to transform the reality, to begin to resisting the forces of hegemony, of control over the minds of people.

### SO, WHAT?

It is in this perspective that we have to look at the tools and techniques, the methods and the ways of designing and conducting an intervention called 'training'. It is in this framework that we have also to examine our roles as trainers, as facilitators of this process ..... of questioning, of critical reflection, of learning, of growing, of changing, of empowering. Therefore, as trainers, it is our business to create opportunities with conditions that will initiate and reinforce counter hegemonic forces, forces which will question, challenge, resist and overthrow the forces controlling the minds of ordinary people.

And therefore, it is important that each one of us begin the process of assessing the reality around us, of articulating our own vision of a desired and better world, and then situating our role within that framework. Discovering our own articles of faith, reinforcing them for ourselves and acquiring the wherewithal needed to make our limited contributions..... In creating the opportunities and conditions for such a critical, reflection, analysis and learning to occur by ordinary people.

Therefore, the starting point is me and us. Not they and them. We need to figure out our own capacities, conceptual frameworks and above all vision and articles of faith. That has to be the starting point, as well as the over arching framework and perspective within which to guide our daily intervention of designing and conducting training programmes.