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CONSCIENTIZING THE EVALUATOR

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"In my conversation with educators, I have always stressed the need for political clarity - especially with regard to whose interests they are serving - rather than techniques and methods. Militancy teaches us that pedagogical problems are, first of all, political and ideological...."

Paulo Freire

"The outcomes of specialist conferences, therefore, tend to be more practical than ideological"

Commonwealth Secretariat

No education is neutral

In the recent writings on non-formal education, we have witnessed a return to stressing the links between education and political struggle.

"There is no such thing as a neutral educational process" writes Shauli in the introduction to Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

And in the main body of the same text, Freire has drawn the important distinction between banking and liberating education.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing.

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition... involves a constant unveiling of reality...(and) strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.

Similarly, Green has defined:

The first task of education is to create both an understanding that change is possible and the knowledge of alternatives leading to desire for change. The second is to enable individuals and communities to identify what types of change they wish to achieve and how to set out to attain them. The third - not the first - is the training in particular skills and the provision of particular pieces of knowledge.

Political factors are also evident in Lovett's discussion of community education in Northern Ireland, where he distinguishes between community education as the "arm" of community action and as a general educational service. As an "arm" of community action, education was concerned with,

group discussions, reflection and acquisitions of practical skills in an atmosphere removed from everyday pressures....viewing it as a social movement which bridged the sectarian divide and offered some hope of eventual working class solidarity.

By contrast, community education as a community service,

emphasizes a commitment to the working class as a group so they can avail themselves of adult education resources and opportunities.

While this may serve individual advancement it does not relate to the "resources and services required to inform, strengthen and develop a community action movement".

As a final example, Werner has distinguished a continuum of programs of rural health extending between two poles: community supportive and community oppressive.

Community supportive programs or functions are those which favorably influence the long-range welfare of the community, that help it stand on its own feet, that genuinely encourage responsibility, initiative, decision making and self-reliance at the community level, that build upon human dignity.

Community oppressive programs or functions are those which, while invariably giving lip service to the above aspects of community input, are fundamentally authoritarian, paternalistic or are structured and carried out in such a way that they effectively encourage greater dependency, servility and unquestioning acceptance of outside regulations and decisions; those which in the long run are crippling to the dynamics of the community.

Moreover, he notes that,

... with certain exceptions, the programs which we found to be more community supportive were small non-government efforts, usually operating on a shoestring and with a more or less [secretive] status.

No social research is neutral

Similarly, there has been a growing awareness of the political role of social research. For example, in discussing who social researchers choose as their objects of study, Nicholas has argued that:

Sociologists stand guard in the garrison and report to its masters on the movement of the occupied populace. The more adventurous sociologists don the disguise of the people and go out to mix with the peasants in the 'field' returning with books and articles that break the protective secrecy in which a subjugated population wraps itself, and make it more accessible to manipulation and control.

But, he challenges,

What if the machinery were reversed? What if the habits, problems, actions and decisions of the wealthy and powerful were daily scrutinized by a thousand systematic researchers, were hourly pried into, analyzed and cross-referenced, tabulated and published in a hundred inexpensive mass-circulation journals, and written so that even the fifteen-year-old high school drop-outs could understand it and predict the actions of their parent's landlord, manipulate and control him.

There are also political considerations in the choice of how social research is carried out. The use of the normal methods such as interview and questionnaire in adult education have been criticised on such grounds as

- o oversimplifying social reality
- o asking for fragmented opinions or knowledge rather than a holistic view of their life
- o talking to individuals rather than groups
- o difficult to link to subsequent or immediate action
- o benefitting the researcher rather than the researched
- o disguised with an appearance of objectivity
- o an over-emphasis on what is quantifiable - ie. head-counting surveys

Clearly, the uncritical use of the usual methods of social research will distort an evaluation. As a final point, we should remember that we normally occupy a different position in society from the participants of most programs of non-formal education. As the Oliveiras put it;

How can a social scientist be objective toward society if he or she be integral parts of that same society and if the social position which he or she occupies causes one to think in such and such a manner?

Political choices in evaluation

The evaluation of non-formal education involves, therefore, the use of a politically loaded process to study a politically loaded activity. As evaluators of non-formal education, we cannot pretend to be neutral in how we work, nor on what we work nor about the potential uses to which our work may be put. Moreover, pretending there is no decision to be made is in itself a choice. As Freire points out

Refusal to take sides in the conflict of the powerful with the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.

Traditionally, social evaluation has been viewed as a tool to assist decision-makers to make better decisions about the modification, continuation or termination of programs designed for those effectively precluded from the decision-making process. The first, and crucial, political decision to be made is "whose side are we on?" For evaluators it would seem that this has been clearly answered by the role definition above - we are on the side of the powerful, the decision-makers and the state. Consequently, we are not on the side of the oppressed, the powerless and the poor.

This then leads to a dialectic of evaluation - is it possible for us to serve the decision-makers and economically survive as evaluators, while at

the same time contributing, through our work to the political struggle for social justice? The dilemma is intensified when it concerns evaluating programs with which one has no sympathy. On one hand evaluation may assist a bad program improve and become perhaps more oppressive or give it a certain unwarranted credibility. On the other, as Berk and Rossi point out;

to avoid evaluations unless one can work comfortably with the people for whom the research is being undertaken is clearly a political and moral decision with political and moral consequences. By failing to participate one has loaded the dice so that results will likely reflect the preferences of the active parties. Clearly, withdrawal may be equivalent to implicit support.

There are a number of points that can be made. 1. Most programs of skill-based non-formal education are based upon an analysis of a problem informed through conventional wisdom. For example, that the unemployed are unemployed because they lack the appropriate skills. Some would argue that the mere inclusion of an evaluation component implies some uncertainty about that analysis or how it has been operationalised. To the extent that this uncertainty is confirmed then this conventional and limited wisdom is thrown into question. As, for example, when an evaluation shows that even with skill training, the unemployed remain unemployed.

The Canadian Accountant General has recently spoken of

'an understandable temptation to avoid any attempt to evaluate effectiveness because the evaluation may reveal findings unfavorable to a program. Any attempt to evaluate effectiveness in the Government environment is an act of courage.'

Evaluation is a (minor) risk to the state, and that risk increases with a skeptical, politically aware evaluator. Moreover, with public sector 'cut-backs' the pressures to evaluate are increasing.

2. It is almost always insufficient to limit the evaluation to consider only how far the programs' goals have been met. Many programs of non-dialogical education can achieve their limited objectives without effecting the underlying social structure nor making any impact in the problem that spawned the program in the first place.

For instance it is possible to increase knowledge of nutrition or change attitudes towards fertilizers without increasing health or food production. A token evaluation might judge such a program a success but a politically aware evaluation would want to go further and consider, for example, the political economy of nutrition or agriculture.

3. It is my experience that decision-makers are often unclear about the objectives of a program of non-formal education and the method by which it will work. They are even more unclear about what questions the evaluation should answer or how it should go about its task. There is, therefore, a certain amount of free space to ask politically important questions such as "who gains at whose expense?". It is impossible for everyone to benefit through any program and probably not to be welcomed if it did. As Green states:

...to say that 'everyone gains'...is an ambivalent (result):
should slum landlords, coercive petty bureaucrats and predatory
companies, gain too?

This free space may also permit us to follow a method of participatory evaluation and to accord more weight to the opinions and judgements of the participants than, say, administrators or employers.

4. Many of our evaluation tools are drawn from mainstream social sciences with their emphasis on studying and labelling individuals. With this legacy we are far more able to measure an individual's knowledge or skill than an organization's oppressiveness or flexibility. As an attempt to shift the focus

from individuals to the program in which they study we have developed an instrument for use by students of adult education here in Canada which provides a rather crude yet telling way of judging the objectives, content and method. It is based on the insights of various writers on the politics of education (and, in particular Freire).

Part of this instrument is reproduced below. It isolates a number of important themes, and introduces the extremes of each theme with a short quotation. The exercise is then to locate the approximate position of the program on each scale from the evidence available and provide a rationale for this position.

The teacher-student relationship

A careful analysis of the student-teacher relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character.

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach.

teacher-student dialogues
with student-teachers

teachers narrate
to students

Collective or individual advancement

We have to say today "we think, therefore we are". Because I cannot think, if you do not think. Secondly if I cannot think with you we cannot know.

Without collective advancement there can be no genuine individual advancement, but only uprooting.

collective

individual

The origin and control of content

For the anti-dialogical banking educator, the question of content simply concerns the programme about which he will discourse to his students; and he answers his own question, by organizing his own programme.

The starting point for organizing the programme content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people.

We must teach the masses clearly what we have received from them confusedly.

bottom up

top down

Effect of the education

The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process (of the practice of freedom) will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society.

The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

tension and conflict

adaption to the world as it is

From limited use, we have found that it works first as an educational tool, assisting us to understand and apply these various insights.

From an evaluation point of view it has the potential to move the task from a solely research activity to one of research and critique. Data is no longer collected to only measure or even illuminate the program but to be critically judged against specific criteria.

5. The evaluation of small scale programs of consciousness-raising differ significantly in a number of ways:

5.1 Goal oriented evaluation is inappropriate for, by definition, the program starts with a commitment to a dialogical method but not to a fixed goal. The goals are determined by participants during the course of the program as a dynamic and continuing process.

5.2 Formal evaluation is often precluded by the process of praxis, with its emphasis on reflection, which thus makes evaluation explicitly part of the program.

5.3 By exploiting the free space that exists within liberal pluralist societies it may be possible for radical consciousness-raising programs to receive some state support, to survive and perform effective work for some years. It is in this period that an outside evaluation could serve as intentional or un-witting espionage. This may mean the politically aware evaluator choosing not to ask some questions of a program or suppressing some results for some audiences. For, as Rahnema has observed:

It is....naive to suppose that an elite-ruled, technocratic and modernizing society will for long tolerate an education system which threatens to become a powerful instrument of internal subversion.

6. For countries committed to the full and democratic involvement of their citizens in development, consciousness-raising programs will not normally pose such a subversive threat to the state. Evaluations in this setting then appear to serve such functions as (a) describing the program to encourage its appropriate replication; (b) illuminating its workings to inform future programs of its experience and lessons; (c) measure its worth through value judgements of participants, physical results, participation rates, etc.; (d) defining who has benefitted at whose expense.

7. Conscientizing the evaluator

Freire has recently written of education:

...in concerning myself with what should be known, I am also necessarily involved with why it needs to be known, how, to what end, and in whose interest, as well as against what and whom.

As evaluators or researchers, involved in the process of deciding 'what should be known' these thoughts clearly apply to us. And as educators we know the

importance of continuing our personal learning. With our concern for conscientizing 'others', we should also be concerned with raising our own consciousness. There is no other solution to the dialectic of evaluation.

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