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KEY ASPECTS FOR TAKING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN RESEARCH, PROGRAM DESIGN AND INSTITUTION MANAGEMENT

Eriko Nakaza

INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines key theoretical aspects for using participatory approaches to conduct an educational project. The content is divided into three phases corresponding with phases of implementation: 1. Needs assessment, 2. Program design, and 3. Institutional management. In practical terms, the phases are first, to conduct a study of the targeted area where the project takes place, preferably using participatory research; second, to design an educational program, in this case containing participatory theories in the curriculum and teaching methods; third, to introduce learning organization theories where participatory aspects are included for the management of an educational institution. The first phase discusses the human resource selection, mentality of the researchers, and attitudes for conducting participatory research. The second phase addresses an innovative educational curriculum that can be used as an extra curriculum activity, or incorporated in the sogo gakushu hours. The third phase discusses aspects of bringing about learning in the institution, focusing on decision-making procedures, communication, and the cycle process of management. This paper aims to initiate dialogue among educational
researchers who are willing to develop and implement new theories in educational settings.

1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT
An education project begins by first learning about the environment, or the targeted area where the project is planned to take place. Recently in Japan there is a policy where specific skilled teachers are contracted to teach at educational settings. Especially for the implementation of the sogo gakushu hour, part-time teachers or specialists in fields away from education are hired to bring in outside knowledge. However, it seems that time and effort are not provided to conduct training for part-time teachers to learn about the new environment and to provide chances for them to interact with the full-time teachers. I believe there is a need for a needs assessment before the part-time teachers start conducting lectures in schools, and for this to be done in conjunction with the future beneficiaries of the project. This will help to prevent a disconnect between the outside knowledge provider, in this case the contracted part-time teacher, and the inside worker, in this case the full-time teachers.

Speaking from my experience in India, the first thing I had to learn was to unlearn the stereotypes that I had formed before arriving in India. For example, I found out that Indian women were strong rather than oppressed, that the pyramid structure did not help to explain the levels of participation but that it only emphasized authority, that the map drawn by the villagers used an orientation and a way of communication that were completely different from what I am used to. I had to learn that I, the outsider, was the one bringing the stereotype problems of the villages from an outside point of view. What are the key concepts for creating a productive environment among researchers? I believe important aspects of participatory approaches are in involving leadership that possesses great knowledge about local characteristics before any work is done. It is essential to create open working spaces where multiple types of dialogue are found, dissemination of information is seen, conflicts are openly discussed, decision-making is transparent and, most importantly, it is an area where collaboration takes place among the researchers. This is the first step for learning to take place among the researchers and towards better understanding of the area where the work takes place.

For the selection of personnel, wide-ranging advertisement and dissemination of information are important to be able to accelerate participation and to raise people's interest. Preferably more than half the personnel working on the needs assessment
group should be local citizens. Another important aspect in the selection of personnel is to have diversity in the field of expertise. For example, the needs assessment group needs different perspectives such as economic, anthropological, sociological, and political analysis from local and non-local researchers to be able to keep the diversity and balance of the analysis. To return to the part-time teachers mentioned earlier, part-time teachers can be part of the needs assessment group together with other specialists (ministry of education, policy makers, technical specialists) to participate in the research work beforehand. In this case, the content of needs assessment would be analyzing the area and also receiving training in the objectivities of the program they are supposed to conduct in school settings.

In general, to conduct a needs assessment for program design, the economic approach focuses on economic growth, human resource development, gathering data on human poverty, gender equality, child survival, health, food security, education, urbanization, population, and economic performance of the area. The expected outcome for this analysis is in reaching the cost benefits and cost effectiveness of the program for the policy analysis. An anthropological approach focuses on the research of family relationships, values and beliefs, religious background, race, immigration, culture, and any other information affecting the creation of values of the area. For the sociological approach, researchers look at various contexts related to school-aged children of the area using indicators such as wealth, population, race, language, culture, unions, government structure, institutions, schools, families, gender roles and others. The political approach focuses on understanding different party issues in their power relationships, relationships between the nation and global organizations, and financial negotiation looking at indicators such as portions of governmental expenditure on education, defense, health care, international affairs and others. Each of these perspective groups looks through their different lenses of expertise to consider different facets of the area.

The following is a brief example of types of data gathered to answer certain kinds of questions from a sociological perspective:

Data
1. Wealth: economic growth (GNP, GDP, annual growth), regional gaps (north vs. south), demographic gaps (urban vs. rural), class levels.
3. Race: black, white, Hispanic, Asian, European, other.
4. Language: dominant language, local, foreign languages, access to information technology. What is the most common second language? Are languages taught in school and, if so, which languages? How many people speak each language?
5. Culture: festivals, art, music, recreational activities, play habits, patriotism.
6. Unions: What kind(s) and what is the rate of participation (teacher, parents, children, commercial, other)?
7. Structure of government, institutions, schools, families: centralized, decentralized, gender balance, decision-making, representation, meetings, communication.
8. Relationships: gender, parent and child, head of household, race, teacher and student, and so on.

Analysis
1. What are the poverty profile, basic needs, cost analysis for the project, balance of wealth distribution?
2. What is the trend of school age children?
3. What is the cause of oppression?
4. What are the levels of communication, capability of gathering broader information?
5. What motivates a child's interest in his or her life?
6. How much participation and help can be expected from the society?
7. What is the structure of institutional management?
8. What are the daily conflicts among people (gender, race, age, class status, professions)?

The methods of research differ depending upon their perspectives; however, participatory research attempts to present people as researchers themselves in pursuit of answers to the questions of their daily struggle and survival. In the Foreword to *Voices of Change*, Paulo Freire writes, "the sense of the problem arises from the people who are affected by it and whose interest demands that it be solved." The important aspect of participatory research is that the problem, if any, is raised by the local people themselves and that it is not created by outsiders' stereotypes.

Collaboration and exchange within the groups, including participation of local people, are also essential. During the research process, researchers set aside an open space in general meetings in order to share their information and perspectives. For example, to address the sociological perspectives as shown above, sociologists need
advice from economic and policy analysts and vice versa. Researchers not only solve the temporary superficial causes of the problem raised by the local citizens, but also reach the roots and consider the long-term impact of their work. For this, it is essential to have interaction and collaboration between researchers from different perspectives. Meetings addressed above are one of the ways to create spaces where congruence in all perspectives can be discussed.

Groups are complex organisms that interrelate closely with other organisms. The task and their specialties of each perspective are distinct, but there is a need for congruence among them in order to work as a whole. According to Morgan's organization theory:

Organization theory has become a kind of biology in which the distinctions and relations among molecules, cells, complex, organisms, species, and ecology are paralleled in those between individuals, groups, organizations, populations, (species) of organization, and their social ecology. (Morgan, 1996)

Participatory theory may be problematic, in that it brings together participants who have different values. An injurious use of diversity can be judging different behavior as inferior or, at worst, destroying it. However, embracing diversity not only helps the bottom line, but also fulfills potential, activates creativity, liberates talents, enriches the groups, and makes the working environment more fully human. Participatory theory does not utilize an authoritarian structure for learning to occur among co-workers. The structure is a decentralized, complex one as expressed by Morgan in his organization theory, and it can only work with the individual motivation, voices and actions raised with accord among co-workers.

2. PROGRAM DESIGN: Non-formal education program

This section proposes a non-formal educational program with a participatory approach design where participants can develop skills to work in their own institutions through self-directed learning. It can also be applied in any processes where the non-technical personnel are empowered by the technical personnel. The goal of "participation" is to reach "empowerment." Easton describes empowerment as "the process by which individuals and groups acquire the means and capacity to control their own destinies to a greater degree than they had previously thought possible" (Easton: 1998). The important aspect for this to occur is for the individuals to gain
motivation, self-esteem and self-directed learning during the process.

The personnel for working on the non-formal education program are made up of the needs assessment groups and other program design specialists. The program design specialists are selected according to their experience in fields of educational reform, program planning, research and evaluation, management, teaching and training backgrounds. Regarding participation in planning, Fagence addresses two key concepts: (a) representation and (b) public interest.

(a) a vehicle for the expression of popular aspirations, desires, needs, and so on, related to the conduct of everyday living, and as (b) a process in which various forms of vehicle are used to achieve a meaningful degree of consumer satisfaction. (Fagence, 1964)

Participation in the project automatically means being involved in a process of finding ways to achieve local satisfaction. Representation takes various forms such as descriptive, symbolic, or ascriptive types (Fagence: 1964); however the ultimate issue is that the representatives always listen to the voices of the public as the work moves along and also report the same back to the local people. In addition, representatives carry interests that can be divided into three categories: individual, group and public (Fagence: 1964). What are the voices of these three categories? These are the questions that all the researchers, especially local participants of the project group keep in their minds. In this program, individual interests are brought into the program through local community surveys. For example, in the development process of non-formal school programs, local people, including students, have a voice to report to the representatives, in this case towards researchers that are conducting the surveys. The reports are brought to the meetings to discuss the individual, group and public interests with a purpose to agree upon a common subject and benefits of all. As Fagence notes:

There are occasions in which there are conflicts (or a potential for conflict) between the interests of different groups, and that in satisfying one interest, it becomes impossible to satisfy the interests of another group (if not impossible, then at best the possibility is seriously minimized). (Fagence, 1964)

Although hard and time-consuming, this is a very important aspect to digest for the implementation of a participatory approach.
Program design specialists learn first from the needs assessment group about the environment. Next it is preferable to receive participatory theory training to help the project team to discuss and share a common goal of the program. The following is a sample of a non-formal education program that goes beyond the frame of current formal education programs. The purpose of it is to stimulate creativity, and it can be adapted into a current education institution or be a part of additional program activities.

Sample: a non-formal education program with the following three groups. Each group has a couple of educators with help from adolescents from group C (shown below). Tasks of the educators are in classroom and institution management, and in taking a role as a facilitator during the classes. The program preferably takes place where plenty of space is available, such as on open land or an area of nature next to the institution. Students work and play on land growing crops and plants, and they receive cards that can be changed into other products they choose. The purpose of this is to experience the value of work and appreciation of nature. Students decide the products to be grown in the garden. Although the production would not be large, the food produced will show up in their meals, and plants grown will surround the individuals. The purpose of activities involving nature is to give them joy in growing plants, motivating their ability to learn while using their own hands in an environment surrounded by nature.

Group A (pregnant mothers/parents, and children aged 0-5): it will be held in an open environment where playing is possible and where parents could learn from others, and receive lectures in parenting and other subjects. Children in the age group 0-5 will have a place to play and will spend most of their time with educators and parents. They will be surrounded by adults interested in learning, and in an environment full of nature and joy. Parents could work in the garden, playing with children, and would be able to attend regular classes in other Groups or provide their knowledge according to their interests.

Group B (6-12): literacy, math, social science, morality, music, art, physical education, and nature activities. The nature activities consist of planting, watering, picking and checking the plants. The level of this group is equivalent to the national standard levels of education for children aged 6-10. Learning outcomes could be, but are not necessarily the same as national, standardized outcomes, equivalent to the subject matter learned in formal educational settings. For example, in a social science class,
instead of textbooks oriented towards memorization, students can pick up a social issue or raise problems that they face in current society to be able to discuss openly with their classmates. Educators facilitate the children’s interests in learning and open opportunities to expand their interests. The goal is to help students to find subjects that interest them the most and to accelerate the joy of knowing more.

Group C (13-18): free curriculum, access to the Internet, travel, and marketing. At this level, activities involving nature consist of using a scientific way of thinking, researching the soil, climate, and surroundings to make use of observation and practice. Subject levels are the same as group B, but it does not mean that children at a certain age must study at their age level. The curriculum is flexibly changeable according to the voices of the students, educators and the management personnel. Students have a free choice in determining their subject matter, class schedules, and travel concerns. The focus of this level is in accessing the Internet and learning how to use it as a research tool. Students can visit other institutions, participate in conferences, and/or create their own meetings and invite other participants. For example, if an adolescent is interested in being a painter, an art class will be held and he/she can, by using the Internet, find a museum he/she wants to visit and actually plan a trip with others. Moreover, classes can be extended to a class of institution management, learning skills to manage their own institutions. These professional skills will help students to develop their skills in participating in a work place, including community service of the area.

Improving the opportunity of learning is not achieved by controlling the environment, subjects and actions of the children, but it is best to let them act freely, believing in the ability of the individual and respecting individual differences. Key concepts adapted in the above curriculum are firstly in bringing hands-on experience to the field, a learning-by-doing scientific way of thinking where scientific education knowledge can be gathered by the normal lifestyle from interaction with nature.

Secondly, it provides a relaxed alertness environment with “low threat, high challenge” (Caine: 1997) preventing downshift mental effects to occur. According to Caine:

*When we feel threatened, we downshift our thinking. Down-shifted people feel helpless; they don’t look at possibilities; they don’t feel safe to take risks or challenge old ideas. They have limited choices for behavior.* (Caine: 1997)
What kind of downshifting conditions exist in the classroom? Downshift conditions could be seen when narrowed correct outcomes are expected from an agent other than the learners; rewards or punishments are clearly controlled by an agent other than the learner through grading systems; clear division of the specific knowledge provider and receiver are set with limitations on time for learning. In these conditions downshifted individuals tend to escape, to seek protection for themselves, sometimes choosing to please the teacher, changing the understanding gained through exploring and questioning for memorizing for tests. According to Caine:

*Down-shifted people can do some things well, like memorizing, because the brain perseverates under threat and likes to do things over and over again-repetition provides a sense of safety when you feel helpless. Memorization is compatible with traditional teaching. But real learning-making connections, higher order thinking and creativity-is incompatible with that kind of environment.*

The sample a non-formal education program is proposed with a consideration of respecting individuals' levels of readiness and understanding by taking out the age barriers-intergenerational learning.

Thirdly, it is designed to stimulate self-directed learning with a focus on individuals' interests and motivation of learning. In this institution, educators are facilitators to create an environment for learning to occur. Facilitators do not consider students as an empty vase to pour knowledge in, nor are they there to control student's behavior. Facilitators have an important role to listen, interact and expand the paths around the students that best suit their interests; to create an environment where intellectual stimulation and challenges are seen through multiple understanding.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT

The third phase of this paper describes elements of institution management. What are the key aspects for participatory approaches in institution management? The basic elements are in creating an atmosphere for learning to occur in an institution, in other words, the institution has to be changed into a learning organization. According to Honold, "a learning organization is one whose members are continuously, deliberately learning new things" (Honold, 1991). Looking back at the program design sample, students have opportunities to put their studies into practice inside their institution. At the same time interaction with the outside environment such as field
trips and building networks creates an open environment where mutual understanding occurs for further learning in institution management.

Sample of the personnel and their tasks (each division contains more than half local participation):
Board Members-recruitment and decision-making (with participation from other task divisions).

Advisory Committee-evaluation of the whole project.
Needs assessment research group—researchers conduct an environment analysis of the area in the first phase and survey to evaluate the program from the second phase of the project.
Program design specialists—specialists design the program curriculum according to the survey results of the local community in the first phase and work on an improvement of the program from the second phase of the project.

Institution management group.
President—recruitment and decision-making (with participation from other task divisions).
Office staff—administration and management of the institution.
Educators—facilitators of class subjects.
Technicians—office equipment maintenance.

An important aspect for the governance of the institution is in the frequency and quality of its meetings for the creation of dialogues and communication. Challenges in new communication channels such as in vertical, lateral and external dimensions are seen (Easton, 1995). The purpose of the meeting is to report the work of the institution and to be able to reconfirm the shared vision from different communication channels. According to the description of shared vision by Marquardt, "when there is a truly shared, genuine vision, people tend to excel and learn, not because they are forced to do so, but because they sincerely want to" (Marquardt, 1996).

Meetings are conducted with participation of all or at least by including one representative from each task division. At the same time, participation of those from the community itself is open and well advertised. For the purpose of decision-making, representatives are selected when each agenda arises. One representative from
each group participates in the decision-making meeting; this can also be one of the students that received training in a relevant subject. Ultimately, who decides, by representatives selected by whom, for what purposes, are complex questions that arise quite often during decision-making procedures. Easton defines it as the degree of participation, suggesting the following three dimensions of effective participation:

The breadth of participation, or the number of facets and phases of the work that are opened up to popular decision-making; the depth of participation, or the number of different strata in the organization or institution who are involved: just middle level staff, or local personnel, beneficiaries, and their families or communities as well; and the height of participation, or the level of issues in which participants are given a say. (Easton, 1995)

These degrees of participation and levels of sophistication of the representatives are carefully chosen by the board members and by the president according to each agenda. For instance, students can work on gathering materials for their classrooms, learn about the selection procedures, request funds, and grant management. In this case the breadth of participation is high for openness of the subject and capabilities of bringing various people to discuss the issue for decision-making. Discussions on the value of education, on the other hand, require greater depth of participation involving rather middle level staff and local personnel discussing curriculum contents. Human resource management requires height of participation, where higher sophistication of knowledge in specific areas is required to determine, for example, the contracts and selection of the personnel.

The governance of the institution is not only a one-circle process in planning, implementing and evaluating, but it also contains another circle to evaluate the specific division or even the whole process itself. According to Morgan, for an organization to be able to learn to learn, it will have to go to single-loop learning and double-loop learning processes.

Single-loop learning rests in an ability to detect and correct error in relation to a given set of operating norms. Double-loop learning depends on being able to take a “double look” at the situation by questioning the relevance of operating norms. (Morgan, 1997)

For instance, the single-loop learning of this project passes the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes; and the double-loop learning is the
extension of identifying specific parts of the problems, or it could also be the theoretical
issues of the whole project for its re-evaluation.

The participatory approach creates self-sustainable institution management, for which
a continuation of learning environment is essential, thereby building a learning
organization itself. A learning organization includes active dialogue and
communication, positive levels and degrees of participation, stimulated learning and
training under a shared vision, open spaces for diversity and conflicts to be discussed,
and double-loop learning to be processed by the stakeholders.

CONCLUSION
The overall objective of this paper is to describe aspects of participatory approaches for
the empowerment of local people. The first phase discussed participatory ways for
conducting the needs assessment. Researchers' attitudes should be focused on
trying to understand the environment by working and sharing their ideas with
researchers and participants with different viewpoints. The second phase discussed
developing a non-formal educational program with unique ideas, including a free
curriculum with interaction with nature. Key aspects incorporated in the content of the
curriculum were in bringing diverse levels of participation to the program using scientific
ways of thinking, learning-by-doing methods of education, roles of facilitators,
intergenerational learning and prevention of downshift effects from occurring in the
learning process. The last phase of the paper discussed the whole process of the
project including aspects of a learning organization. A learning organization contained
different levels of participation stimulated by self-motivated personnel in an open
environment where open dialogues exist, and double-loop learning is often processed
during the management. Innovative ideas that can only be brought about by having
diversity and participation of local citizens in institutions are a promising key aspect for
21st century educational programs.
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