

WEDNESDAY PM WORKSHOP #7: HOLISTIC EDUCATION POLICIES

Workshop: Holistic Education Policies

Presenters: K.K. Krishnakumar, Director, Towards Total Literacy, Kerala, India; John Taylor Gatto, Educator and author of *Dumbing us Down* and other books, US.

Date: Wednesday, June 22nd

Rapporteur: Wilma van der Veen

K.K. Krishna Kumar using a powerpoint presentation available on this website.

Innovative Practice:

Total Literacy Program began as a project in the Ernakulam District in the state of Kerala in India in 1989. Some demographics of the area were provided: low per capita income but high per capita happiness according to KK!! History of caste system in Kerala: social movements developed many decades ago to educate and organize the people to address the caste system. So population was always very active, participating in general strikes when certain situations eventuated.

Mainstream practice:

Government run programs were not successful

Alternative Vision:

Goal to have all involved; literacy not just about reading and writing, literacy in all areas and about all subject matters using all orientations of backgrounds of people involved; recognized that not the peoples' fault they were not literate so entire society has to take responsibility; patriotic literacy program not one where people were paid to do the training – all volunteers;

Success Factors:

Flexibility, open minded, innovative methods of teaching; creativity; used cultural programs, instruments to get people involved – e.g. cultural caravans and festivals – festivals of all kinds adapted, e.g. festival of floral letters, singing, writing songs; constant dialogue to develop techniques and adapt to circumstances, e.g. address seasonal factors in people's lives; address gender issues, men teaching women issue; used global events as teaching tools, e.g. Kuwait war where many went to work after in rebuilding; program as it grew began to be not just about literacy but became a development movement, e.g. people's parliament was developed; recognizing need for eyeglasses and finding ways to obtain the necessary technology

Key Challenges:

For those who were teachers – needed to unlearn how to teach in order to become good teachers; how to get those involved that were not, those already educated or elderly, certain authority figures – politicians, police, parents

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Overcoming Challenges:

Those who were inspired were asked to bring along those who were not, songs were written and sung in places so gain attention; their children undertook actions to convince their parents to get involved; politicians were invited to give inaugural addresses, spaces were used to allow education to take place outside of schools, recruitment booths (like the military) in many places; enrollment festivals were developed

Moving from fringe to mainstream:

Events took place simultaneously across the state, e.g. over a weekend; festivals took place throughout state, recognizing that highest form of participation in the community was through festivals, using existing cultural tools, e.g. festivals, as a primary organizational mode, participation was active not passive

Lessons learned:

If are humble, open-minded, creative, adaptable, flexible then can develop strategies and techniques so that ALL can/will participate, it was a binding force, a platform for collective thought and action; beginning of a lifelong education and learning society; offshoots from this program have gone into all areas – e.g. women's groups, land movements, micro-credit programs, etc...

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John Taylor Gatto provided some background to his life and how he ended up as a teacher. His central argument is that institutional education is about economies of central control – population has to be molded, bent to take orders, method of oppression, fundamental flaw of capitalism is overproduction so to prevent this create subordination. Institutional schooling is the most single radical undertaking to prevent the development of intellect and talent in youth (see his website for a paper about this <http://www.johntaylorgatto.com/>) The point of education is only to develop a passive literacy, not an active one – the latter is reserved only for the few who learn to use the language to persuade others. Youth are purely seen as a resource.

He recounted several stories of famous historical figures, e.g. former US presidents and what they accomplished at very young ages. Development of idea of childhood is the cause of shutting down people at a most important time in their lives, and locking them away for 10-12 years. Also recounted stories of some of his young students, aged 12-14, who came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and undertook actions outside of their schooling and not as a result of their schooling (or despite their schooling) that saw them being very successful in their lives at this young age and into the future.