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TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Oxfam is guided by "Universal and Equitable access to Quality Education" and also the fact that "lack of access and poor quality of education have serious consequences for especially girls and women" (Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019).

In November 2016, in Copenhagen, in a meeting convened by Oxfam IBIS, Oxfam constituted an "Education Community of Practice and Influence" agreeing that "Strengthening transformative public education for all to fight inequality" is the overall goal of our future education work. Achieving this goal will:

1. Have a straight redistributive impact – putting 'virtual income' into the pocket of poor and marginalized people – particularly in relation to girls and women.
2. Enhance social mobility.
3. Strengthen political mobilization - a transformative, quality education leads to knowing your rights and responsibilities, having a voice, being able to participate and organize, and building active citizenship for children, youth and adults.

This series of Oxfam IBIS concept papers define the Oxfam IBIS' understanding and approach in key areas.

Each paper contains the following sections:
A) Justification for Oxfam IBIS' work on the issue
B) Brief overview of relevant theories and definitions
C) Presentation of Oxfam IBIS' approach and lessons learned
D) References to further documentation

JUSTIFICATION

Transformative Education is a central concept in Oxfam IBIS' Education for Change Strategy, where it is defined as follows: 'Transformative education empowers learners and enables them to constructively consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives in dialogue with others and gives them the skills to engage in social actions'. From Oxfam IBIS' point of view, education is never neutral, but is a powerful political instrument to create either exclusion and oppression, or positive change, such as increased equality, peace and democracy. For education to contribute to positive social, cultural and economic development, it needs to be transformative. For Oxfam IBIS, quality education is transformative.

Education may have several different goals and functions in a society, defined through its curriculum, content and methodology. One important goal of education is to play a socializing and political role. Education can play a conservative role by socializing learners into already existing power relations, or it can play a transformative role in preparing learners to become active and responsible citizens who are able to question existing social structures and to take part in changing them. However, education is sometimes designed merely to suit the economic and instrumental needs of society. In some contexts, a market-centric imperative influences education content and methodology, striving for technically-oriented citizens and, in other contexts, the education system puts a great deal of emphasis on promoting purely academic skills. The teaching profession has traditionally been equated with the transmission of knowledge. Many educators still consider the learners as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and prescribe procedures for learning the required information. Education and learning, in this traditional and conservative perspective, consist of receiving and accumulating knowledge and information. Gaining knowledge and foundational skills such as reading, writing and mathematics is essential, but education should not stop there. Education should also integrate the values and attitudes of learners in order to unlock its truly transformational power.

Oxfam IBIS has over the years developed a transformative education approach that addresses both the curriculum and content of education as well as teaching methodologies. It is a challenging approach that involves changing mind-sets among actors in education, and Oxfam IBIS seeks to promote this approach, step by step, as an ideal in its education work. The approach takes its point of departure in the local context and prepares learners to be able to question their own viewpoints or frames of reference and to look at issues more objectively and in a broader social context. Through transformative education Oxfam IBIS aims to develop abilities and values needed for active citizenship, peace, democracy, gender equality, respect for human rights and intercultural understanding. Transformative education also promotes learners' academic and practical skills, life skills and different technical/vocational skills in order to prepare them for the world of work. The transformative teaching/learning process leads learners to reflect upon and re-evaluate their former beliefs and experiences. If new values and ways of thinking and behaving are a result of reflection and re-evaluation, they must be embedded in the broader context too. This can be done by promoting democratic educational environments, including democratic relationships between learners and between learners and educators, democratic management structures and the participation of parents and local communities in education.

THEORIES AND DEFINITIONS

TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGIC METHODOLOGIES

Transformative pedagogic methodologies are 'learning centred'. Oxfam IBIS uses the expression "learning centred methodologies" and this concept embraces the whole idea of learning as both an individual process, and a process where the individual is always understood as part of a social group, linked to current and historical political, economic, cultural, social and linguistic contexts. From a transformative point of view, the learner has a fundament of knowledge when entering any educational activity. The educator's duty is to generate engaging and relevant learning experiences where learners examine their prior knowledge and modify, review, affirm or change it into new knowledge based on their interactions with the world and use of different learning resources. To make this possible, the learner will need tools to become effective change agents. This is only possible through a participatory critical learning process. Unlike the transmission approach, or the "banking model", where knowledge is considered as a body of information to be deposited into the learner´s head, in transformative pedagogy, knowledge emerges from doing and reflecting upon what is done. Hence, the extent of the learner's new knowledge is defined by the depth of his/her inquiry or experimentation.

In this view, educators should seek to help learners shift from being passive recipients of information to becoming active producers of knowledge. A change in thinking about knowledge leads to changes in the teaching and learning processes, the educator's role, relationships and interactions and how to measure teaching/learning outcomes. An educator engaged in transformative learning takes his/her point of departure in the learner's different experiences and in thematic approaches - a way of teaching and learning where many areas of the curriculum and subjects are connected and integrated within a theme. The educator should aim to:

- Facilitate the learners' identification of questions

- In cooperation with the learners develop a plan for how to investigate and answer the learners' own questions

- Create a learning-centred and participatory environment that enables learners to question, reflect upon and examine important resources and authentic examples which can help them conduct their inquiry

- Motivate the learners to uncover facts and concepts both in interdisciplinary contexts and within individual subjects, by observing, predicting/ hypothesizing, experimenting, investigating and discovering

- Encourage learners to take risks and explore multiple viewpoints by interacting and collaborating with one another

Learners should ideally be challenged to reflect on their work and their own process of learning (metacognition) so that they can identify and recover the learning path that they took. In addition to the cognitive process taking place during the organized educational activity, both the rational and the affective sides of the learner play a role, and educators need to consider how they can help learners to use their feelings and emotions in both critical reflection and the establishment of compassionate interpersonal relations, and as a means to understand the world.

The range of resources and interventions that the educator uses and the quality of his or her skills in facilitating learners' self-directed inquiry and cognitive/emotional transformation also depends to a large extent on the educator's understanding of his or her learners' diverse learning styles and his or her sensitivity to their interests, personal concerns and learning situation. This awareness enables the educator to tap into and realize the potential of the learners. In a transformative learning process, the educator clearly communicates a genuine concern for their success. He/she actively monitors the students' performance and provides varied guidance and helpful interventions to ensure mastery and proficiency. The educator also serves as a role model by himself/herself demonstrating willingness to learn and change.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Active citizenship education aims at strengthening learners' inclination to participate in society and to engage in policy debates around issues of concern for them. This includes holding local and national governments accountable and helping make sure that public funds are distributed fairly and that marginalized groups are moved away from the margin to an equal place in society with other groups. Citizenship education includes a curriculum on themes such as human rights, the rights of children, democratic values, gender equality, tolerance and non-discrimination. It also includes learning the skills of democratic dialogue and participation and also engaging in advocacy towards decision makers for the fulfilment of one's rights. To learn democracy, it is important to combine a relevant curriculum and learning content with transformative and learning centred methodologies and practice. If learners do not in practice experience a democratic culture in the classroom and school environment, the learning process becomes counterproductive to the content of teaching.

Democratic culture consists of several levels or categories that need to be addressed by education. The following framework seeks to illustrate this by dividing democratic culture into four categories, all of which are necessary for citizenship education to work best. The framework can be used by educators to assess pedagogical methods and activities in terms of how they will specifically affect their learners' development of democratic mind-sets, and it can be used when making school development plans. The framework provides educators with a tool to determine in what way specific pedagogical instruments are intended to influence the learners' engagement in a democratic society - that is, how they are intended to cultivate democratic culture within and between learners. For example, an educator who wants to conduct a group discussion on a relevant issue can use the present framework to plan how the exercise should work on all four dimensions of the framework, including both the gaining of knowledge of the issue, the development of democratic skills, the promotion of values such as tolerance, and the building of social capital in the form of trust among the learners.

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Knowledge

You cannot act in a democratic society if you do not have knowledge of how institutions work, what elections are, who can vote, what the channels of information are etc. Knowledge is the basis of the model. This could be knowledge of democratic institutions, elections and legislation or all other types of knowledge relevant for democratic life. The concrete content should always be decided upon in relation to the needs of the specific local and national contexts.

Skills

People need skills to act in a democracy. Literacy is a democratic skill, since it is nearly impossible to obtain relevant information without it. To engage in political debate is another one, since not everyone knows how to present arguments or listen openly to others. Learning and practicing these skills are necessary if learners are to be able to take part in democratic life and policy dialogues – in other words, to be active citizens.

Values

A democratic culture is based on democratic values. By democratic values is meant the norm set that guides how people view each other. The prime democratic value is tolerance, by which we mean that people accept differences, but also that they challenge views and practices which they oppose and that they will always challenge and counter intolerance. Tolerance should therefore not keep people from discussing or challenging political views or traditional practices that they disagree with. On the contrary, people should have an opinion about things and voice this opinion when they deem it appropriate and necessary – and listen to the opinions of others.

Resources / social capital

Democratic life consists of constant transactions of knowledge and opinions. In a democracy the capital needed for these transactions is called social capital. The main type of social capital is interpersonal trust - how much people in a society generally trust each other. Democratic life essentially involves cooperation on issues of mutual interest towards a common goal using democratic means of action. If you trust others to participate along with you and either support your goal or peacefully disagree with you, you will be more likely to engage in political life. Another type of social capital is networks and frameworks for cooperation.

OXFAM IBIS' APPROACH

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Methods to stimulate transformational learning

Transformative education is interactive and learning centred. It involves learners participating actively in the learning process. Interactive teaching can include the following activities: working in groups or pairs, journal writing, role play, working with dilemmas and case studies, research, drama, songs, dances, debate, creative writing, project work, games and physical activities, field trips, use of audio-visual materials, interviews with outside resource persons etc. These methods should stimulate critical reflection, empathy and autonomous thinking in the learner. These are also essential when the goal of education is to strengthen tolerance in students or to build trust between them. Only if learners interact with their educator and each other will their learning experience be truly transformative.

Ensuring inclusion, tolerance and gender equality

In transformative education it is of great importance that all learners are included and respected equally, both by the educator and by other learners. Typically marginalised or discriminated groups are girls and women, ethnic/linguistic minorities, disabled people or other vulnerable groups. The school management and educators should make sure that all learners have the same opportunities to participate and learn. The educator needs, for example, to ensure fair distribution of questions to all, involvement of all learners in discussions, and the relevance for them of all themes. Mutual respect should be addressed also in the content of teaching, and should include discussing gender roles and how to avoid gender stereotyping.

Methods to promote tolerance and trust

Strengthening tolerance through education involves empathy exercises that help learners to put themselves in somebody else's place. This could be done through acting out cases as role play, where one has to put oneself in the place of someone from, for example, a marginalized group or a person with whom one disagrees. It is the ability to change one's viewpoint to that of someone with whom one disagrees that is core to education for tolerance. The most efficient trust-generating activities create an environment where learners feel that it is safe to participate and give something to the group. One example could be that the learners together vote on the code of conduct for the group and that the educational institution guarantees that there are consequences if the rules are violated. This will create an environment where learners feel safe enough to voice their opinion and contribute towards reaching a common good. It is not only a democratic nation that is dependent upon good legislation and a well-functioning judiciary. This also goes for classrooms and all other types of social situations. Trust-generating education can be applied in all types of subjects/ themes since trust is generated as a bi-product of other activities. Trust is not the subject, but arises from the way the education is conducted, the learning environment and the type of exercises chosen.

Measuring learners' transformative growth

There is a tendency to assess only learners' academic performance and, as assessment criteria have a tendency to influence the teaching and learning going on in the 'classroom', the curriculum, content and methodologies then to a great extent merely focus on academic knowledge. Assessment of learners' transformative growth is therefore essential and best performed by the educator in as much cooperation as possible with the learners. However, an external supervisor observing learning activities can, to a certain degree, perceive whether or not learners are manifesting some of the desired "non-academic" qualities: fluency, confidence, critical mindedness, creativity, etc. The educator should (ideally) regularly conduct a planned formative assessment together with the learners, a process in which evidence of the learners' progress and achievement is used to adjust the teaching/ learning process, or by learners themselves to adjust their current ways of learning. The educator could also emphasize real-world application and promote divergent thinking, by asking learners to apply skills and abilities as they would in real life. The educator could also do a performance assessment. Performance assessments require learners to demonstrate their ability to complete a task by integrating their knowledge and skills from several areas. The choice of the type of performance assessment should fit the curriculum framework's learning goals.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION AT THE SCHOOL/COMMUNITY LEVEL

How to create a democratic school culture

If democratic values and respect for human rights and active citizenship are to be learned, the teaching approach needs to take into consideration the whole life of the school/educational institution/organization. The educators themselves need to act as role models, and the way that staff relate to each other should reflect the same values. School management/project coordination should include democratic and horizontal structures involving staff, learners and parents. These structures and processes should be used as a learning space through the establishment of participatory councils. If there is no coherence between what the learners are taught and what they experience in their environment, it is difficult to transform and to discover new values in practice.

Ideas as to how to involve parents and local communities in transformative education

Parents and local communities should be involved in dialogue as to which values are taught to their children. Methods and ways of working at school/in an education activity should be explained and discussed with parents and the community, so that they understand what the aims of transformative education are. One also needs to engage the community in dialogue about any norms and values in their society that may be contradictory to human rights. Parents and local communities are important and integrated members of any educational activity and therefore they have to be involved in all activities. Invite parents/community members to participate actively; they could contribute with themes related to culture, such as storytelling, dances, songs, handicrafts, knowledge about herbal medicine, etc. but also themes like childhood then and now and gender in a historical perspective, e.g. men's and women's roles. Afterwards, the learners could discuss whether gender roles have changed and the relevance of having different roles. Let the learners gain knowledge about their communities by interviewing their parents and members of the local community. Open up learning processes by inviting parents and local communities to promotions, exhibitions, and theatre. Invite them to meetings, and let them, in cooperation with learners and educators, discuss changes in education and the future development of education.

Involving learners in promoting active citizenship at school level

A very efficient way to learn active citizenship is to engage learners in democratic activities at school level. This can be done by establishing student/learner associations where learners engage in dialogue and decision making about their own education. Another tool is school clubs on different issues relating to active citizenship, rights and democracy, or special clubs for girls to learn about their rights and responsibilities and be empowered, and special clubs for boys about their rights and responsibilities, gender roles etc. Children's parliaments can teach children about democracy through role plays and discussions, and allow them take part in decision making.

Transformative Education at policy and program levels

Transformative education needs to be part of education policy and planning at all levels. Oxfam IBIS therefore also works through advocacy at policy level to influence curriculum, content and educator training. Oxfam IBIS' advocacy is based on program experience in piloting models for transformative curriculum and educator training. Experience is used as evidence to influence decision makers at both local, district and national levels to engage in policy reform. At local levels the community is involved in advocacy, and Oxfam IBIS partners with civil society organisations and education networks raise their voices also at district and national levels.

FURTHER DOCUMENTATION AND REFERENCES

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