

The Question of Curriculum Fidelity: Intent and Implementation

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*T*hinking about the state of our community and its problems is both an intellectual as well as an emotional work. Without the intellectual component, it can dangerously become merely a feel-good process. Without the capacity to empathize and the capacity to love, it can also dangerously become a merely academic exercise that does not translate to any real social progress. Rationality, hence, never mean that we have to exclude thinking about the irrational components of humanity.

Many intellectuals in history have thought about how to improve the conditions of humanity. Prophets, politicians, leaders, philosophers and scholars have frequently identified issues, raised problems and proposed suggestions for purposeful change for their societies. Many have written many works for their followers. But the intellectual rigor put into their articulated wisdom can and has often been translated into actions that are not congruent to the intent of their articulations. Followers, sympathizers and activists who derive ideas from the work of these intellectuals, engage at many different levels and at many different times. They can often produce their own interpretation of what was written. Each transmission of a progressive idea from one follower to the next, has the possibility of slippage, or even omission, of the actual content and intended values transmitted.

Though such slippages and omissions do and will occur for many reasons, a major contributor would often be due to the consequences of our intelligentsias continuing to treat theory and practice as separate domains, similar to the ‘dual theoretical consciousness’ phenomenon that Gramsci (p. 333) pointed out in his context of the ‘active man-in-the-mass’. He pointed out how a common man’s practical activity can have no clear theoretical

consciousness. Likewise, I am arguing that many of our activists and those who do volunteer work in our community have no theoretical understanding of what they are doing and how they fit in improving the situation within a bigger context. Hence, the fidelity of ideas and values is lowest at the activist and event management level, where the distance between the intent of the proposed changes and the actual implementation of such ideas is furthest away. Not knowing or having a superficial understanding of the theories, philosophy, the body of research and the intellectual tradition that have existed before them, prevents maximizing fidelity of ideas and values. How can the proposed changes be implemented as it was intended if even its original intent is not fully understood? Likewise, a shallow contextual understanding of the issues being discussed also prevents proper curriculum implementation and evaluation. It is often assumed that the intelligentsias have the necessary capacity to understand the political, ideological and philosophical context to the proposed changes.

But “slippages” can also be caused by intellectuals upstream as well as program organizers, who have not taken into account practical issues of implementation and the economic and political realities on the ground. The competing rush by different organizations, to put yet another program out when there is already an abundance of poorly monitored initiatives out there at any given time pushes even the most enthusiastic intelligentsia and the most hopeful member of the public, closer to the tipping point of disillusionment. The problem, then, lies not in the supply of new ideas, but in the demand for them. When advocates of change and thinkers of the programs for social change are isolated from the daily struggles of the people, with economic needs to meet and beleaguered with whole string of historical, political, cultural impediments, these curriculum planners for the intended progress lose their sense of actual battlefield reality. Some intelligentsia overcome the steam-rolling effects of un-engaging reforms through developing an extraordinary ability to escape into a zone of proximal cynicism. They take the third option that Freire (1998, p. 68) mentioned. When they do not see the consistency of what is said and what is done, they ‘assume cynicism, which consists of opportunistically incarnating inconsistency.’

Others do so through by embracing the opportunity for pedagogy of display. Fuelled by egocentric needs and political aspirations, they proceed into translating and enacting these

curriculum plans within their organizations with the mentality of a technician observing senior technicians. With the presence of ineffective, unaddressed false clarity of the real intent of these reforms, these activists use the new suggested materials and imitate new recommended behaviors, without addressing the original problem that started the reforms, if they are even aware of what started the reforms in the first place.

The problem of curriculum fidelity is thus not mono-causal. Intellectual and political leadership in the community must thus ask themselves the question of who is at fault when the community at large is not engaged or not interested in the reform initiatives. The need for a proper well thought of, non-sporadic curriculum for the intelligentsia, one that is both intellectually coherent and emotionally meaningful for them, is thus crucial for effective curriculum change to occur in our attempts at progress.

Bibliography

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