

SHORT CONTRIBUTIONS

EDUCATION PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION: THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in relating Education for Sustainability (EfS) to management and transformation developed as my role changed from hands-on environmental educator into a management position. For a time I felt that I had been removed from my first loves of teaching and resource material development, and described myself as a 'reluctant manager'.

In recent years, however, I have started to see the management role as an exciting environmental education opportunity. At the Gold Fields Centre, Kirstenbosch, we have been exploring what EfS means to us in daily practice in the workplace. In other words, if we say we are an environmental education unit, and our role is to encourage sustainable living, what are we doing to apply these ideas practically in our own work environment? And if EfS is not informing our daily practice, do we have the right to insist that others live according to its principles?

ORGANISATIONAL METAPHORS

In his book *Images of Organisation*, Morgan (1986) introduces the idea of organisational 'metaphors'. He notes that:

- * many ideas of organisation and management are based on a few taken-for-granted images
- * we can create new metaphors or ways of thinking about organisations and management.

Metaphors are ways of thinking and seeing. Some frequently used organisational metaphors include:

- * organisation as machine: describes the typical bureaucratic system consisting of interlocking parts carrying out specific roles
- * organisations as cultures: in which we construct shared meanings and develop an organisational identity and rituals (e.g. certain American fast-food franchises)
- * organisations as organisms: this biological metaphor may be comfortable for those of us working in natural areas. It emphasises organisational processes such as growth, life cycles, evolution and the ecology of organisations.

In our context in the Gold Fields Centre, I have found it valuable to use EfS processes as a metaphor for our department. A simple but useful definition of EfS is that it is education that promotes ecological sustainability and social justice (Fien, 1993). These two principles have become criteria guiding the development and evaluation of our unit and programmes.

In this paper I shall describe the context in which this framework has developed, explain why it has proved to be particularly useful, and allude to a few concerns which should be borne in mind when implementing such frameworks.

CONTEXT

Since the first non-racial democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, transformation has been central to the agenda of South African society. With political change has come, inevitably, any amount of inspirational rhetoric. But whether we succeed in the task of social transformation depends in large measure on whether we can translate this rhetoric into the reality of daily practice. Thus the demand for accountability and transparency requires that both workers and management maintain open, dynamic communication. The reality of a participatory democracy is that we all accept responsibility for what we have the authority to influence. Developing a culture of learning requires a willingness to be lifelong learners, whether that means formal study or the sometimes painful practice of reflecting on and learning from action. And if we demand empowerment we must be willing to empower ourselves - as nobody can actually 'empower' another person. However, we can all help to create an environment conducive to learning and personal and professional growth.

Kreisberg (quoted in Ferreira, 1997:25) defines democracy as

a form of social organisation in which voices of all members of a community are valued and in which community members participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

The National Botanical Institute (NBI) has, like most South African organisations, been exploring what is meant by transformation to a democratic workplace. The dominant culture is a bureaucratic one: NBI is a large national organisation subject to the conditions of the public service administration. Certain departments are strongly stratified, with distinct professional and labour groupings. Many managers have adopted an autocratic style in order to try to control their widely disparate departments.

The NBI has been developing a transformation policy, but the actual process of transformation to a democratic workplace has been neither smooth nor rational. Despite stated institutional aims, some departments and individuals trying to implement democratic practices have found themselves becoming sites of discomfort within a reluctantly changing organisation. Levy & Merry (1986) note that 'bottom-up' transformation is more characteristic of social movements than of organisations, as social movements are by nature political and revolutionary. As Efs is a social movement with a strong concern for social justice, it is not surprising that where environmental education units exist within larger organisations, they may become sites of discomfort, attempting to implement participatory processes which are characteristic of their functioning and networks.

My thinking as manager of the Kirstenbosch Environmental Education Programme is informed by an ecological world view and a political perspective of Efs which questions dominant knowledge interests and structures in society. We have been fortunate to have been sufficiently independent as a small, geographically isolated unit in the Garden, so that we have been able to explore and implement organisational systems which are congruent with these perspectives. In the words of Capra (1982:53), we have been endeavouring to move "... away from the traditional reductionist, mechanical world view to a holistic, ecological, systems paradigm".

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF Efs

So, having sketched the context of transformation in the NBI, how has Efs helped to inform the development and transformation of the Gold Fields Centre, Kirstenbosch?

Efs links social and ecological issues. Since 1993, the motto of the Gold Fields Centre has been "Growing people for green environments". This implies that we need to start with the needs and aspirations of people before trying to address green issues. Or, as Le Roux

(1997) has pointed out, if we want to address issues of conservation, we must start with conversation.

It is this issue of conversation or communication that has been central to our learning. The workplace is society in microcosm, where issues of power, diversity and aspiration cannot be ignored. Inevitably one encounters interpersonal disagreements and crises. This may be exacerbated in a multicultural workplace where the varied backgrounds of staff make assumptions even more risky than usual.

Ramos (quoted in Levy & Merry, 1986:64) calls for a paradigm of organisation which will "incorporate moral considerations" and not just values of profit and growth. Levy & Merry expand on what constitutes moral leadership: it is leadership *with* rather than *over* people; it is empowering and nurturing, encouraging personal responsibility rather than compliance with authority. Finally, moral leadership helps people to discern inconsistencies between stated values and actual behaviour.

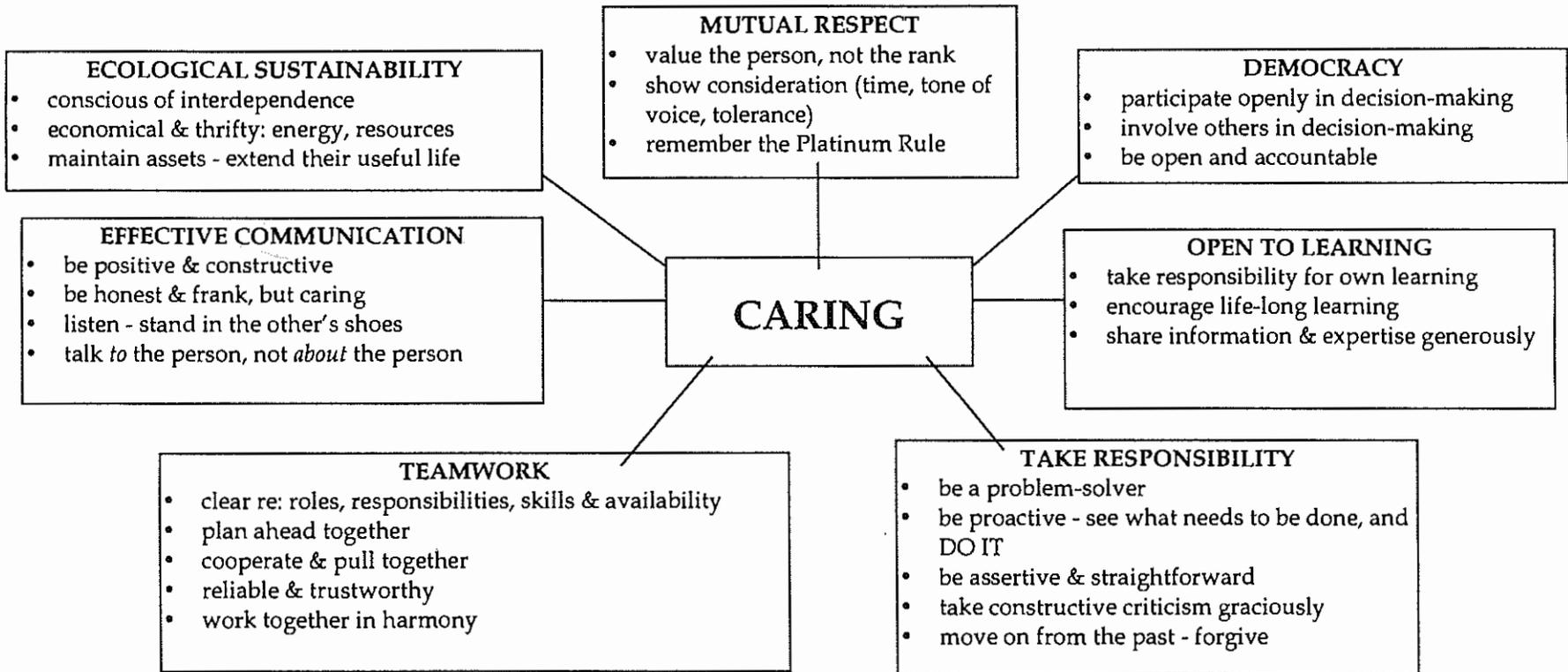
The twin principles of Efs, namely social justice and ecological sustainability, provide a clear moral framework for behaviour. However, it is easy to espouse these values without living them in practice. Furthermore, a characteristic of the postmodern condition is an unwillingness to subscribe unquestioningly to absolutes.

In an attempt to work more sustainably with our colleagues at the Gold Fields Centre, we had a series of workshops to develop our own set of values (what we call our shared principles - Figure 1). Reflecting on actual interpersonal or structural problems we had experienced, we decided together what behaviour we expect from one another. A common feature of all the points raised was caring - whether for one another, for our resources, or about processes and procedures.

Levy & Merry (*ibid*) caution that the danger of shared values is that often they are decided on by management and expected to be implemented by workers. The existence of a set of shared values and the absence of dissent can represent a false or manipulated consensus. In our case, however, all staff were involved in developing our shared principles, and we have agreed that they will be tested (and revised if necessary) in the light of experience.

The challenge of Efs has also resulted in a review of the nature of programme design at the centre. In the past, although environmental issues were highlighted, they were often dealt with implicitly rather than

Figure 1: Gold Fields Centre, Kirstenbosch: Shared Principles



explicitly. Indeed the influence of teachers requesting syllabus-related school outings sometimes resulted in us offering programmes that more closely resembled biology practicals than environmental education encounters. We were fortunate to be evaluated by Willison (1997) as part of her Masters dissertation and her insights challenged us to revise our programmes to focus more explicitly on environmental issues.

Feedback from her review came at the same time that some of the education officers requested that we undertake a thematic approach to programme development. This year, therefore, we have focused on three themes only (*Water & Wetlands, People & Plants and Biodiversity*) and have made environmental issues more central to programme development.

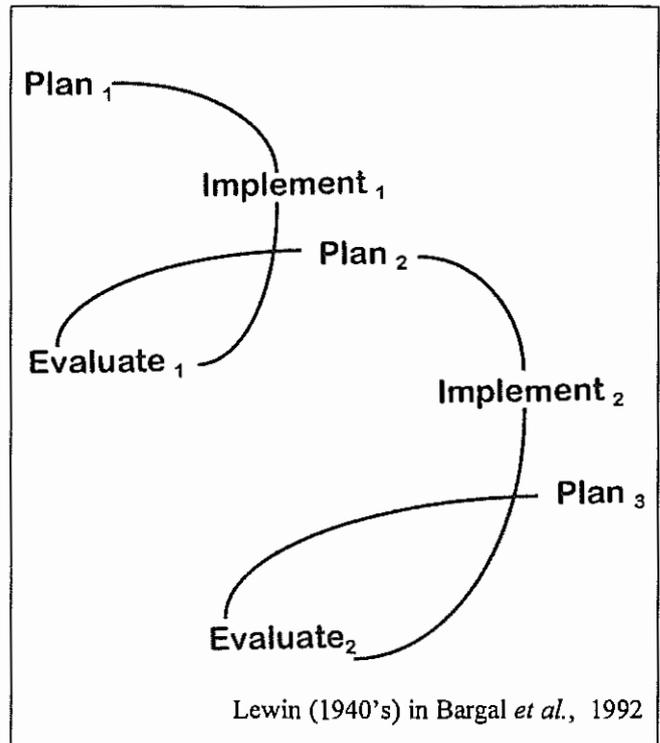
A further way in which the centre has been responding to the challenge of EfS is through our own environmental practices (i.e. the ecological sustainability aspect of EfS). In collaboration with the University of Cape Town, we have been conducting an environmental audit of the Gold Fields Centre. Initially this will assess our use of water and energy, and later we hope to extend it to consider use of other resources, management of waste, and social processes. We intend through the process to develop our own skills of environmental auditing, so that we can both monitor our impact at work and at home, and help schools to implement similar processes.

ACTION RESEARCH AS A MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The Kirstenbosch Environmental Education Programme is a relatively new and growing department in the NBI. The sociopolitical environment in South Africa has been changing rapidly in the last few years, and transformation is at the same time a heady but threatening process. In such a climate, a bureaucratic or autocratic management style becomes inappropriate. Instead, management practice in the Gold Fields Centre has been strongly influenced by a participatory orientation to action research as a flexible and responsive approach to professional and programme development.

Action research was developed in the 1940's by Lewin as a systematic way of studying social problems and trying to resolve them (Bargal, Gold & Lewin, 1992). It has been refined and adapted by numerous researchers since, and entails a cyclical, and often participatory process of planning, implementing and evaluating action (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Action Research: A Cyclical Process



Action research as an underlying approach to programme development has led to the development of a 'learning culture' in which staff are encouraged to try new things, to reflect on their practice in order to make improvements, and to treat so-called mistakes as opportunities to learn. Assessment and evaluation are generally viewed as positive tools for improvement, rather than threatening, judgmental interventions.

I believe that this action research approach, within a guiding framework of EfS, has enabled the staff to engage positively and proactively with transformation in the context of the NBI.

CONCLUSION

In the words of Levy & Merry (1986:214) "the rebel is continually struggling to make the society into community". Perhaps environmental educators are, at heart, rebels with a cause, suspicious of systems which create knowledge-power disparities, but inspired by a vision of a caring community conscious of the links between people and people and between people and the earth.

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