Towards Meaningful Learning in a Developing World: Assessing Learning Needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

A Discussion   AECT 2003

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Project Background

- **Part of larger USAID initiative: dot-EDU (one more related pilot project in DRC)**

Brief:

- **Assess and pilot complementary instructional interventions to support classroom instruction in selected thematic areas and grade levels of the national curriculum.**
  - Needs assessment + implementation of pilot

Reason for Needs Assessment

- *Get clarity on the problem and the nature of the problem.*

- *Don't fool yourself.*

- *Avoid being led by preconceived solutions.*

Overall Project Development Philosophy

- **Be innovative + take appropriate risks to create opportunities from which we can learn.**

- **Avoid replication of what is already being done or simply use technology to replicate outdated ineffective learning models.**

- **Be diverse.**

Key Questions

Gap between *what is* and *what should be,* and *how can we close it?*

A matter of asking the right questions

- What is the current situation of a particular community? (The '*What is?*' question.)
- In what respects does the community in question – or do stakeholders in the well-being of that community – perceive the current situation to be different from what they would like it to be and for what reasons do they aspire to change? (The '*What should be?*' question.)
- By what alternative means can the transition from '*what is*' to '*what should be*' be achieved? (The *'How to change?'* question.)
- Does one or more of the above alternatives involve learning?
- If so, is this a preferred alternative and why?
- If it is a preferred alternative, is technology an option to facilitate/enhance the required learning?
- If so, is technology the best way to facilitate/enhance the required learning, what specific technology would best do the job, and in what way(s) can it best be employed?

Method, Approaches and Sites

- **Method**
  - Interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Observation (schools; projects; community

- **Approaches**
  - Going from the broad/general to the narrow/specific.
  - Keep questioning what seems to emerge as the picture.

- **Three sites for the research**
  - Luozi (Bas Congo)
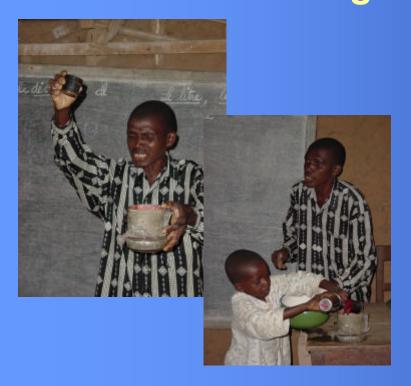 - Vanga (Bandundu)
  - Kikwit (Bandundu)

Major Problems Identified
(as related to learning and teaching)

- **Severe lack of relevance of what is taught in school for daily life:**
  - Unrealistic/irrelevant examples.
  - Abstraction not informed by concrete experience.
  - Missed opportunities to deal with problems that approach the level of interconnectedness characteristic for daily life.

- **No concern with applicability of acquired knowledge/skills to contribute to constructive participation in developing the well-being of one's community.**

Loud and Clear Message

- *Use local technologies and resources for project-based learning!*

Proposed strategic response

- **Improve capacity of those who teach:**
    - reducing <u>rote learning</u>.
    - establishing relevant <u>links with the environment</u>.
    - establishing <u>framework of problems</u> to serve as integrating context for teaching and learning.
    - identifying <u>local knowledge/technology base</u> relevant in context of above problems to build on.
    - <u>creating skills</u> to creatively operate in context of all of the above.
- **Develop relevant technology hybrid and related processes (such as community of practice) to optimize above capacity building process.**
- **Link up with related work by others (such as UNICEF life skills program).**

P.A.P.A.* Goals

- **To improve *pedagogy* and *quality of didactic materials* through capacity building in the application of innovative instructional strategies, focusing on:**
  - Relevance to local development problems
  - Local knowledge, technologies
  - Integration w/ health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, agriculture
  - Gender equity
  - Using practice and concrete experience
  - Reducing rote learning
  - Increasing learner-centered instructional processes
  - Appropriate use of information and/or broadcast technologies.

)* P.A.P.A. = Projet d'appui à une pédagogie active

P.A.P.A. Desired Outputs

- **Cadre of 20 teacher trainers and community leaders developing, applying and experimenting w/ innovative complementary instructional strategies (CIS) and materials that:**
  - support and enhance the meaning of the national curriculum and
  - address ways to interact constructively with local problems.
- **Kits developed and being used in 10 target schools to support and strengthen CIS**
- **Supporting learning and learning development opportunities through community radio and/or ICTs.**

WORK IN PROGRESS