Participatory Evaluation
A Perspective for Human Rights Education

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The Evaluation Challenge

The claims and realities of evaluation lay worlds apart. Evaluations are used extensively to identify and eliminate shortcomings and problems and to optimize organizations and projects. The compulsory integration of evaluations in the expenditure of public funds ensures that results and effects can be systematically recorded. Evaluations increasingly form the basis of decisions to continue or abandon projects. The need for evaluations to usher in overdue reforms and create more flexible adaptability to social realities is particularly great in the area of education.

By contrast, the reality of evaluation is this: the concept is blurred to the point of shapelessness by its broad usage and describes widely variant activities, from participant feedback ("What did you like about the seminar?") to total quality management (TQM), which encompasses and evaluates an entire organization. The title of "evaluator" for the person in charge of such processes has been localized into vastly different professions, from sociology, psychology and education, all the way to business management and engineering. Up to now, standards for evaluation have mainly come from the US American discussion and have been insufficiently applied to the debate of issues in human rights education. A serious, critical examination of the theory of evaluation rarely occurs in a practical setting.

Evaluations are often only ordered to justify actions in the face of changed financial conditions or new social discourse. Thus, evaluation is often tainted by distrust from those being evaluated. Furthermore, the evaluation exists in a situation of unequal power. The persons commissioning evaluations require the disclosure of processes and programs in order to evaluate them. At the same time, those persons remain intransparent themselves—along with their higher-ranked initiatives and guidelines—and are scarcely affected by the evaluation. This seems to be in opposition to the efforts of human rights education to observe human dignity and learn to interact respectfully with one another.

Evaluation stakeholders are often then faced with a challenge that is both unknown and threateningly approaches a project or organization from the outside. Evaluation is perceived as a "judge." Evaluations lead to irritations—particularly in the highly difficult to measure sphere of social learning—when project developers have doubts whether the evaluation question "Which long-term behavioral changes have your participants demonstrated?" can even be answered as such. This type of question confronts educational processes with enormous difficulties if they are not integrated into the very conception of the evaluation. For this reason, opposition and conflict are common characteristics of many evaluations.

The relationship specifically of human rights education to evaluation questions is unclear. Human rights education is recognized as far more than the instrumentalistic adoption of laws and patterns of behavior. At its core, it is oriented toward the choice of each person to show personal responsibility for others. But how can sense of responsibility, maturity and autonomy be evaluated? Is evaluation in opposition to human rights education and its educational foundation through an over-simplified mode of inquiry? These questions are seldom theoretically explored. Pragmatic arrangements predominate, and as a consequence the evaluation results—whether positive or negative—are not fully utilized in practice or often only to satisfy the interests of those ordering the evaluation.

We would like to take up the "evaluation challenge" and offer the first solutions for human rights education and the field of political education in general. We have begun a systematic collection of data and conceptualization of this field from the experience gathered during the three-year evaluation of our project on Education for Democracy and Tolerance. We are introducing an evaluation concept that offers possible orientation and classification options for practical application. It neither offers a final solution for concrete evaluation procedures, nor alleviates the drama of the evaluation's consequences in the working world. Rather, it should open up a new perspective on the opportunities and possibilities for evaluation within human rights education, and particularly transform the tension and fears associated with evaluation into productive opportunities for learning and reflection. This concept arose from systematic observation of practices for practical application. Its goal is not to become an evaluator in itself, but rather to take part in evaluations as an informed participant and stakeholder.

Historical Development—From Measurement to Negotiation

Concepts such as monitoring effectiveness, quality assurance and quality management have been growing in significance since industrialization. At first they were principally associated with forming the basis of business management and administrative decision-making. Egon Guba and Yvonne Lincoln[1] separate the history of the evaluation into *four generations* that assign vastly different functions to evaluators.

1. Measurement—The evaluator as an external data collector

2. Description—The evaluator as a neutral observer

3. Judgment—The evaluator as a judge

4. Negotiation—The evaluator as mediator

[1] Guba / Lincoln (1989): Fourth Generation Evaluation, pp. 21–49

The history of evaluation shows three things here. First, the ambient conditions prevailing during the evaluation must be increasingly scrutinized and viewed with a critical eye. This can be considered a *dissolution of the obvious* that assigns evaluation a critical-instructional position. Evaluation becomes a symbol for the difficulty of understanding, planning and interpreting the world in a linear manner. It is no longer a neutral sensor, but in fact decisively influences that which it aims to examine. "Permanent" scientific conclusion must increasingly be renounced.

Second, the evaluator's function has changed to include an ever-increasing amount of responsibility. The evaluator requires a more extensive methodical repertoire to describe practices than for simple quantitative measurement. In order to render a judgment, accepted standards and background concepts are needed as a basis for comparison. Finally, the evaluator must also bring social skills—along with scientific abilities—into an evaluation, which should be considered an open process by all participants. It must be acknowledged that evaluations take place in an environment fundamentally shaped by divergent interpretations and conflicts.

Third, there has been a shift—at least in the education field—from quantitative to qualitative evaluation. Whereas measurements and numbers were originally in the foreground, the increasing awareness of complexities has brought qualitative processes such as interviews, group discussions and analysis of open learning processes to the fore. However, due to the current high demand for evaluation and limited options, people often retreat to supposedly simpler and more easily represented quantitative evaluation that slips behind developments in evaluation research.

The Evaluation Process of Participatory Evaluation

An evaluation is always initially stimulated by the intervention of the person commissioning the evaluation, or a pressing issue that poses a cause for ordering the evaluation of a human rights education project. All involved parties must be aware that evaluation creates its own form of reality right from its initial purpose: the formulation of an evaluation's purpose focuses like a beam of light on certain aspects of the outside world, thereby leaving other aspects out. It provides a specific perspective on the world that could turn out quite differently. This fact is compensated for by the inclusion of other perspectives throughout the evaluation. The democratic—or equal—participation by evaluation stakeholders brings up different perspectives, sometimes those that perhaps were previously not considered or are even uncomfortable. Participatory evaluation means dealing with these conflicting perspectives in a constructive manner. It is vital that a concrete initial question is posed from a single perspective, and that it is drawn up in a contract to ensure a negotiable starting point.

The initial contract for an evaluation should also include the identities of the individual stakeholders and their equal right to introduce their perspective in answering the question as well as addressing the question itself. Stakeholders are all those who have a vested interest in the evaluation, are participating or excluded from an educational measure, are negatively or inversely affected, so to speak. They all

have different perspectives and different questions for the evaluation that must be considered. Therefore, the essential characteristic of evaluation lies in the inclusion of as many stakeholders as possible, and the evaluation process must begin with their identification. New perspectives thus eliminate the blind spots of one-sided observation or assessment. This process becomes politically explosive, because it often allows those who were previously excluded from program development or participation to speak up or present a contrary opinion specifically to this education program. Similar to the human rights education under evaluation, participatory evaluation is oriented more toward differences than concurrent opinions. Once the stakeholders have been identified and have contributed their different perspectives, the initial negotiation processes can begin. It is practical at this point to create an intra-stakeholder group composed of representatives of the different stakeholders, and to extensively include this group as an intensive working core. On the one hand, this ensures that the evaluation process remains negotiable, and on the other hand, it allows intermediate steps to be fully passed on through the group to the stakeholders.

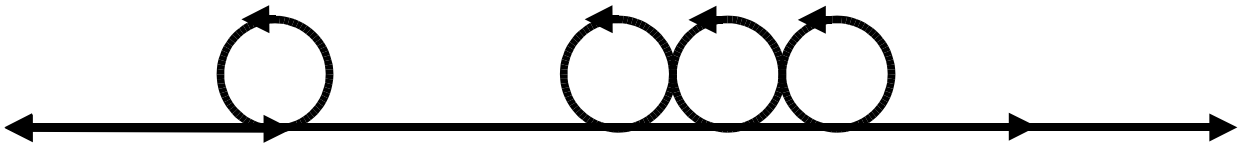
The first aim here is to find acceptable goal criteria and appropriate objects for evaluation. Ideally, the original evaluation question is at their disposal, because there ultimately can no longer be any rigid conditions if earnest participation is the goal. Usually the persons commissioning the evaluation start the evaluation process with a specific intervention, which continues in an exploratory fashion and works together with the participants on the relevant issues. This is characterized by a primary emphasis on the evaluation *process*, and not—as with a scientific experiment—on answering pre-defined questions. This also means discussing pre-determined or written proposed objectives for programs and projects from these different perspectives. In pedagogic practice these are often applied without thinking and incorporated in widely divergent ways within the individual world and human concepts of human rights education. Other evaluation participants often have completely different objectives in mind that have been formulated, but not expressed, during the course of a project.

Data are then collected throughout the course of the evaluation. It does not matter if the data are quantitative or qualitative. The assessment of the data should not be thought of in the traditional sense of a scientifically independent process, but rather as a gathering of different perspectives in relation to the object under evaluation. In this context other evaluation participants—aside from the evaluators—can also gather data. But it is essential that the collected data and the conclusions based upon it must always be incorporated into the negotiation process with the other stakeholders. New points for research and new partial inquiries to collect data emerge wherever disagreements, differences or conflicts arise. This kind of *emerging process* creates the opportunity for all participants to propose differing perspectives and methodical process in a negotiation process that is accompanied and mediated by the evaluator. The negotiation of interests and interpretations of the data must be considered a cyclical process that continually repeats itself.

The end of the process is not marked by the publication of objective data, but by a sensible communal construction that has emerged from the democratic negotiation of differing points of view. So the goal of the evaluation is not to bring the “truth” to light. Here, evaluation has a constructivist fundamental character that is expressed not by predefined or discovered perception of meaning, but rather in concrete

processes respectively developed anew. Common assignments of meaning may be written in the final report, as well as the differing and conflicting perspectives. The ending point of the process naturally depends upon the financial and staffing resources. However, the authenticity of the process is essential. If redundancies emerge from the common perspectives, and no new gain in knowledge can be expected from further communal exchange, then these common interests may be set aside. But as this is not possible in some cases, there is the possibility of citing the mutual recognition of differences (*we agree to disagree)* in the report. In any case, the final report must include all perspectives, with possibly a version written up for each of the different stakeholders with regard to its individual usefulness. This should on no account be done to serve individual interests, but to ensure that the consequences of actions emerging from the discussions and negotiations are transparent and clearly formulated. Furthermore, the final report must clearly describe the *process* of the evaluation, including its difficulties and conflicts. This is a decisive part of the results, because the route the communal path took is important for the evaluation's credibility and is also an expression of the harmony (existing or insufficient) between the evaluation and the claims of the human rights education project that is under evaluation.

The Phases of the Participatory Evaluation Approach



0. Stimulus	1. Exploration	2. Differentiation	3. Assimilation
Initial context Initial statement	Identify stakeholders Create intra-stakeholder group Discuss purpose Set goal criteria	Data collection Interpretations Negotiation process New inquiry Orientation toward differences	Construction of the results Citing open differences Final report

The participatory, and thus time-consuming, approach is suited for the long-term projects, because it offers results in the form of common recommendations for action, where all sides share in the implementation, hence running the smallest risk of frictional losses during the transfer into practice. This type of process can be considered *participatory evaluation*, as it ensures participation and aims to create practical relevance within the evaluation report's consequences. This process is particularly important with regard to the social and interactive context of human rights education, because it is oriented toward human freedom.

The process described above attempts as a whole to play a part in countering the widespread misuse of evaluation to establish legitimacy for continuing or abandoning education projects. When all stakeholders are truly included in an evaluation process leading to the (temporary) result of questioning an education project, new and creative solutions can be formulated together. In practice, inequality at accountability and decision-making levels—especially with regard to job positions—must be assumed for an evaluation's consequences. But specifically including those commissioning and funding the evaluation can lead to a new mutual understanding of different perspectives and necessary actions.

The Skills and Tasks of the Evaluator

Participatory evaluation changes the evaluator's role in a fundamental way. It not only assigns the evaluator the task of collecting "scientific" data, but also that of bringing the largest possible number of participants and stakeholders—as well as their perspectives—into a communicative negotiation process. In this process, which the evaluator mediates, the initial purpose, the process and finally the interpretations of collected data are all agreed upon. The evaluator recognizes and addresses conflicts. His or her negotiating skill is crucial to the overall result. In addition, knowledge of appropriate methods—including those in the visual and creative arenas—is necessary so that all participants may introduce their perspectives. This becomes particularly clear when the participants come from different cultures, educational or linguistic backgrounds. Here, the role of the evaluator is to act as an initiator and offer

methodical options for collecting data in an equal manner.

In this way, the evaluator becomes an advocate for divergent—but equal ranking—perspectives. This complements the traditional collection of data and requires a heightened sensibility for the different positions (of power), hierarchies and blind spots. The evaluator bears responsibility for the success of the evaluation process and must be able to constantly consider openness and goal-oriented process. This can be considered protecting the basic democratic conditions of an evaluation. His or her personal credibility is shown by serious consideration of every matter, as well as in the balance of security and necessary confrontation.

An evaluator's credibility, authority and competence are shown primarily in the theoretical reconstruction[2] of the object under evaluation. This places the evaluator within the historical and social context of an education project, allowing him or her to gain a personal perspective. This cannot occur in an abstracted manner, but must take place during the involvement with the stakeholders. Nevertheless, it comprises another important dimension in itself, rendering the supposedly neutral data collector a participant as well. Additionally, the theoretical reconstruction allows better mediation of the different perspectives and interests in the evaluation process beyond relativistic equality.

The evaluator guarantees the participants the highest possible level of participation without losing sight of financial and time limits. In this way he or she ensures that the communal construction of the evaluation is usable for the different stakeholders, thereby leading to more or less "automatic" consequences to actions. Finally, it is the evaluator's job to shape the final report *subjectively*, that is, to capture the overall atmosphere of the evaluation process. More aesthetic skills are required here than scientific abilities.

The Evaluator's Skills and Tasks[3]

- ***Advocacy***: The search for and inclusion of the largest possible number of stakeholders in the evaluation process

- ***Theoretical Reconstruction***: The reconstruction of theoretical implications and basic assumptions of the project or program under evaluation, gaining a personal perspective

- ***Negotiating Skill***: The clarification of divergent perspectives and construction of a communal evaluation model

- ***Methodological Skills***: Offering appropriate methods to assess evaluation data for different participant groups

[2] See House / Howe (1999), p. 115

[3] The fundamental orientation of these tasks in the crossfield of *constructivist* evaluation comes from Guba/Lincoln, and in *deliberative democratic* evaluation from House/Howe, and they are specially designed for political education.

- ***Democratic Skills*:** The protection of basic democratic conditions through dialog and shared values

- ***Aesthetic Skills***: Creating a final report that reflects the dynamics, atmosphere, differences and common interests of the evaluation process.

The Political Character of Participatory Evaluation

Participatory evaluation enters into the context of negotiation processes, thus taking on a political character itself. Further consequences show that an evaluation of this sort—particularly if it enters into one-sided hierarchical or political contexts—also has a system or organization-changing character. In reality, evaluation is revealed not only as an interesting methodical process, but also as having implications for the context itself. Evaluation is not neutral, but in connection with human rights education should follow a democratic and participatory process. In this context, it is not abstract science either, but actually has a political advising character. In addition, participatory evaluation is a new opportunity to contribute to further politicization of not only the target group of a project, but also the organization context itself. So evaluation in our sense means an expansion of democratic processes that previously were reserved for supposedly neutral science. This must be clearly stated at the beginning of an evaluation process and established in a contract as well. This can become explosive in the context of a one-sided type of human rights education that considers itself in safe territory with its own value systems and aims to convince others of its fundamental values.

Evaluation can serve as an invitation to new communication in such contexts, but it must remain aware of its limits. When education programs operate on the fundamental differentiation of right and wrong, participatory evaluation can be seen as a powerfully manipulative destruction of this basic differentiation. From the perspective of those responsible for the program, evaluation would be forced upon them once more like a judge touting "higher" knowledge. This would be counterproductive to the actual purpose of participatory evaluation. In practice, evaluation must explore where approaches for differing perspectives already exist, and how these can be furthered.

When seen in that light, evaluation can no longer be applied to education projects from the outside, but rather it must always be interwoven with the project and its contexts from the start. Evaluation does not make an objective approach, but instead changes the social context and structures within an education project right from the beginning as an intervention that is fundamentally open in both process and consequences and fits into general social discourse.

Participatory evaluation, human rights education and democracy all interact with one another. Participatory evaluation is oriented toward the basic tenets of a multi-dimensional human rights education. But it is equally influenced by the accomplishments and fundamental values of democracy[4]; especially the negotiation

[4] See House / Howe (1999), p. 97: "The evaluation must be inclusive, dialogical, and deliberative"

process during the course of the evaluation cannot be thought of without reflecting on the democratic framework. This means in particular that the values of *equality* and *freedom* of all participants must be preserved, and views or perspectives that undermine these values cannot be considered valid perspectives for the evaluation.[5]

Inversely, the orientation of participatory evaluation toward a basic democratic framework also has meant repercussions for human rights education and its concrete projects and educational measures under evaluation. Participatory evaluation itself offers the chance here for human rights education to make progress toward a plural and discursive basic position.

The Status of Education Projects

Evaluation offers a chance to expand and broaden existing human rights education projects. The systematic inclusion of all participants often makes clear for the first time which divergent explicit and implicit assumptions predominate personal actions and experience. Evaluation enables a new level of reflection that can lead to an increase in quality within a project currently in practice. Theoretical conceptions are seen more clearly; other conceptions are classified and limited.

Evaluation also serves a further function of continuing education in that it does not only gather neutral data, but continually brings different perspectives into communal play. This leads to re-assessment of personal perspectives and the development of new points of view. By its status, evaluation can expand the area of activity for human rights education.

Participatory evaluation enables the participants of an education project to use the communal debate to more clearly describe to the outside how their "product" is defined and how it differs from other products of human rights education. This is necessary and productive, not least from a quality point of view.

The democratic and participatory process in evaluation connects internal and external effects of education. The oft-insufficient implementation of individual external expectations of education within the realm of its own organization can be achieved with participatory evaluation. This permits a substantially higher level of transparency—and with that credibility—in the presentation of the internal structure of education projects.

Participatory evaluation departs from the idea of proceeding in a neutral and objective manner. It not only influences that which it evaluates, but it becomes contextually incorporated and enters into a real interaction with each "object" being evaluated. It becomes a component in a project without being fully absorbed, because it begins with a systematic initial question that can be altered exploratively, but must lead to a specific communal statement about an education project.

[5] This is a differentiating characteristic from pure constructivist evaluation, which poses the danger of offering no form of orientation framework for divergent value systems. See House / Howe (1999), p. 60: "Suppose that a participant advances a racist view. Are we to hold that this view is as good as other views? It is no use arguing that other stakeholders would disagree...To say that we can have no way of resisting these views suggests why relativism is untenable"

Participatory evaluation has consequences. The participants and stakeholders receive answers to their individual questions and in this way become equipped to act appropriately. In contrast to many evaluations that provide impressive statistics and numerical data but have no actual consequences, the participatory evaluation approach itself is intended to formulate measures and implement them jointly.

The Possibilities for Participatory Evaluation

- **An Increase in Quality**: Conceptional broadening and classification of a project currently in practice
- **Educational Character**: Self-supervision and continuing education in pedagogic practice
- **Outlining**: Clearer "product description" and external presentation
- **Democracy**: Transparency and credibility of the strategic approach
- **Interaction**: Contextual involvement in the education project
- **Consequences:** Relevance of actions for all participants

We were able to experience some of these possibilities in a three-year evaluation process of our project, *Education for Democracy and Tolerance*. In the debate, participatory evaluation is certainly a conflict-laden process of arguments over interpretations and perspectives. Irritations, insecurities and the search for new methods and direction are part of the experience—and precisely this breaks ground for a new human rights education that is committed to human freedom and responsibility.

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