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Production of Knowledge:

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In the overall context of transforming social relations among classes, the intellectual growth of the working classes is a key element in the organization and strengthening of the working classes. The intellectual growth of the working classes for providing leadership is a task of popular education, and the process of popular education must include the production of new knowledge. The dichotomy between popular knowledge and "scientific" knowledge has helped to perpetuate the domination of the working classes.

What is the relationship between ideology and epistemology in the struggle for popular hegemony?

Schematically, knowledge is produced out of a process of reflection on actions, problems, and solutions of the working class. However, all knowledge is approximate and provisional - there is no definite knowledge. Therefore, there is a need for constant investigation. Knowledge remains provisional until it comes in contact with practice. This is an on-going process. The notion that new knowledge comes only from practice is not valid. It comes from reflection on practice. Historically, knowledge has illuminated reality but also it has obscured reality. There is never an absolute fit between knowledge and reality.

The appropriate instrument for producing popular knowledge is participatory research, incorporating working classes as subjects of the research process. The objective of this process of research is to draw from both scientific knowledge and popular knowledge and confront reality in order to bring about social transformation. While scientific knowledge has been well documented, popular knowledge has very little documentation. The confrontation between scientific knowledge and popular knowledge has to be understood as a confrontation between these two logics in the context of the demands of the need to explain reality.

Participatory research needs to grapple with how to approach the question of gender. Normally, gender in the working classes is understood as an economic question. The feminists look at gender in the larger framework of patriarchy. Men in popular classes think of women as being inferior. In participatory research, there is a need to bring these three understandings of gender together.

After clarifying the ideological and epistemological position in the production of popular knowledge, the next step is to concretize some kind of political engagement of the popular classes. The question that remains is how to extend the localized struggles into the broader process of social transformation.

Links between Participatory Research and Social Movements: John Gaventa

The reflections on this subject are based on the experiences of a First World country, namely, the U.S.A., where social movements have not been victorious, particularly in the poor and depressed parts of the U.S.

The problem of the control of knowledge is key to the control of power. The problem of knowledge and power is increasing in its dimensions as the economic apparatus of U.S. is used in the production of ideas, information and images and their coercion on the world. More than 50% of GNP in the U.S. is spent in the sector of information production. In the face of this new reality, the working classes must evolve new knowledge strategies for social movements.

Popular groups have made two mistakes over the problem of knowledge:

1. Because experience with dominant knowledge has been oppressive, popular groups have underplayed the importance of knowledge resulting in blind action or action without analysis.
2. An opposite tendency has been to accept and internalize the dominant class knowledge and make choices of action on that basis of the dominant knowledge.

Participatory research has to be conceived as a new model of knowledge strategies for popular movements. Within this model, three strategies have evolved:-

1. The re-appropriation of official knowledge by the people.
2. The process of recovering people's own knowledge on their own history, culture, health, traditional medicine, traditional economy, etc.
3. Reflection of the people on their new experiences, that is, creating new knowledge altogether, as for example, the process of popular education in Nicaragua. The women's movement is another example of this model.

Participatory research still faces many difficult questions:

1. To what extent has the experience of participatory research ~~has~~ led to a common analysis of a common understanding of a common working class?
2. While participatory research is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for social transformation, what is the role of participatory research when other conditions for social change are not present? For example, when popular groups are not mobilized, or when domination is very strong.
3. Is the only valid form of progressive research participatory?
4. How can participatory research reproduce knowledge over a long haul?
5. How do we pass on <sup>our</sup> ~~over~~ new knowledge to new generations from our micro-project experiences.

If we are not able to broaden participatory research projects either to build broader unity among working classes or consolidate our gains of new knowledge, then our work will remain marginal. We cannot overcome this problem without the existence of broader conditions of social transformation, but where these do not exist, our work and practice should create those conditions.

### Edgar Sylva

In the context of Nicaragua, one cannot separate the work of participatory research before and after the revolution. One of the tasks of participatory research in a post-revolutionary society is to consolidate and refine political consciousness. In Nicaragua, participatory research should help the masses to struggle against formal institutions that may become oppressive, for even in a post-revolutionary society, not everything necessarily goes along revolutionary lines, and therefore deviations have to be checked.

Knowledge produced by participatory research is to help in making strategic decisions for the mass organizations and the State.

Is participatory research, as practised in Nicaragua, merely popular participation? It is difficult to make a differentiation in the present-day Nicaragua faced with a lot of urgent tasks. Participatory research as a means of producing knowledge for popular classes is not sufficient. Both participatory research and popular education have to be immersed in the entire political struggle.

History has shown that in a revolutionary process, the popular classes have to learn how to defend their revolution, and therefore, participatory research has to be clearly related to economic, political and military struggles.

Yusuf Kassam

If the distinct and holistic character of participatory research is not well understood, recognized and differentiated from the notion of a mere popular participation, there is a risk that the process of participatory research could be hijacked and used for reactionary purposes.