

Missing Voices: Can NHRD be a form of social activism?

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ADHR Vol.6 No.3 makes a case for NHRD improving the social justice of nations and advocates it as national policy. As a nascent discourse within this academy it requires debate and critical analysis. This concept piece examines critically the “excellent attributes and outcomes” of NHRD as reported in ADHR 6/3. The intent is to broaden the discourse, to support NHRD’s foray into civil society and to encourage critical research and theory building within this academy.

Keywords: NHRD, Social Activism, Social Transformation

The subject of national human resource development (NHRD) has been gaining notoriety. For example: In 2003, at the 2nd Asian AHRD Conference in Bangkok Thailand, McLean presented a keynote address on the topic (McLean, 2003), as he did in 2004 at the 3rd Asian AHRD Conference in Taiwan (McLean, 2004a) and at the Euresform conference in Limerick Ireland (McLean, 2004c). In 2004 the journal Advances in Developing Human Resources (August 2004) theme was NHRD. At the 2005 Academy of Human Resource Development International Research Conference in Estes Park, Colorado there was a day and a half pre-conference on the same topic. This author contends that the literature on NHRD supports a notion that the practitioners in the field of human resource development (HRD) are extending their thinking beyond the utilitarianism of organization/corporate life and learning/performance. Furthermore, the proponents of NHRD seem to advocate and document the extension of HRD beyond the walls of the corporation or the constructs of economic organizations into broad society. If NHRD is to break out, to expand its thinking, into broader society, then to what extent will it include aspects of normative social construction as well as aspects of transformative constructs?

Normalizing, from the point of view that NHRD activity will support existing power structures and their constructs suggests that society remains relatively unchanged, with the exception of more economic development and an equivalent improvement in living conditions. Or, will NHRD develop aspects of a transformative force, one that attempts to fundamentally change the distribution of power within society? The redistribution of power has the potential to increase the probability that social justice is defined through broader participation of all peoples, and thereby forms a more equitable economic development plan. As the intellectual and academic creation of this field is occurring within this academy’s discourse, this notion of power, within the context of participation, becomes a defining issue.

The theme of the journal, Advances in Developing Human Resources (Vol. 6 No. 3, August 2004), is human resource development (HRD) as national policy. In this journal the editors and contributors describe several countries’ HRD activities and link them to, or refer to them as, national policy. This series of articles comprises the data field. In an attempt to define, understand, and develop the theme of NHRD the editors go on to form five emerging models and list several excellent attributes and several excellent outcomes for NHRD. The editors state that these cases, and by extension, the associated excellent attributes and outcomes are to serve as examples for “elevating HRD to national policy” (McLean, 2004b p. 273). Within the purpose of this issue the editors state a desire to answer such questions as: “How is NHRD defined? What are the goals of NHRD at present? What are the issues facing NHRD? ... What are the basic directions for NHRD policies and major NHRD reform? What policies would help strengthen their NHRD?” (McLean, 2004b p. 273). The editors go on to state that from a practical perspective this issue of ADHR “has the potential to affect the development of NHRD dramatically around the world (McLean, 2004b p. 274).

Furthering practicality, a debate of NHRD is required. The developmental nature of the discourse that ADHR 6/3 will potentially have on NHRD, and by implication the policy of sovereign nations, bind us morally to consider the consequences, intended or otherwise. The intent of this article is to expand the discussion that surrounds NHRD. The discussion must extend beyond the primacy of developing the resources of human beings solely to improve the economic development of nations. If HRD professionals, within the rubric of NHRD, are concerned with reducing HIV/AIDS, eliminating undesirable occupations, eliminating child labor and other social injustices (Cho & McLean, 2004 pp. 387-391), then they must consider their role in the development of civil society. They must consider that

the privilege of their positions within the economic, as well as the educational realms, requires them to act with reflexivity in the construction of the NHRD discourse. Anything less suggests that HRD is a handmaiden to the elite in the maintenance of the current socio-economic structure.

The General Discourse

Each country represented in this issue of 6/3 ADHR defined NHRD policies that are in terms of improving economic development. While not unusual in itself, these definitions go far in indicating the primacy of the economic discourse and HRD's position within it. The economic development discourse has utility and benefit for society, it is a way in which the people of a country, at a minimum, sustain themselves and hopefully improve their existence beyond bare subsistence. The editors (Cho & McLean, 2004 pp.283-85) extract five models from the contributions: state-centered, transitional, government initiated model towards standardization, decentralized/free market and a small-nation model. These representations of the eleven national case studies represent models based in a political-economic framework. From this categorization, one senses a preferred progression (or perhaps one that replicates the current notions of the free market), from [1] the state model, to [2] a transition model to either a [3] free market model or [4] government sponsored model. The final model, which would not seem to directly fit this progression is the [5] small nation model. The choice of structuring these eleven case studies along this framework tends to support a normalizing discourse where the existing power structures remain essentially intact. This may lead future researchers in this field down a normalizing research agenda. This path, while continuing to provide insights and solutions to truly important questions will do so from a point of view grounded in the prevailing political economic framework. Continued research on how to organize the data may further alternative points of view with regard to the structure of power.

In each case study, the authors established a linkage between education and NHRD. Most stated this as a primary function of NHRD, some are significantly intended for economic development (Lee, 2004 p. 335; Osman-Gani, 2004 p. 277), and some to a lesser degree (Yang, Zhang & Zhang, 2004 p. 297). Others lean more in the direction of social support (Rao, 2004 p. 290). Each linkage focused on educational processes that were basic literacy; and/or math, science and technology; and/or some form of managerial/leadership training. Therefore, within the discourse of NHRD, education is advocated for the purpose of workforce development. Even though education can and does result in other useful benefits to society and may promote some level of social awareness, this NHRD discourse establishes the purpose for the investment in education as instrumental to economic development. It is a point that can not be minimized, nor is it one that should pass without question. Education is a political act, one that either supports the status quo (normalizing) or an alternative perspective (transformative). Issues of literacy, numeracy and the ability to read one's world are embedded in the pedagogy of choice and therefore cogent to this discussion on defining/modeling NHRD.

Going Beyond the Organization to Civil Society

Cho and McLean list 12 outcomes of excellent NHRD which they extract from the contributor's case studies (p. 389-90). Of these, five deal with societal change and notions of social justice. The editors state that NHRD will cause a decline in "socially undesirable professions (prostitution, drug dealing and illegal activities) because of the availability of attractive, alternative employment and a personally and socially supportive environment" (p.389). NHRD will eliminate the "need for child labor; all children will receive adequate education while having their physical needs met along with those of their families" (p. 389). "There will be zero population growth, except for immigration. Although some nations will resist this outcome on the basis of religious or cultural values, most countries, as they develop economically, will move towards this outcome" (p. 390). "Education and training will bring about improvements in the health situations of countries with NHRD, especially relative to HIV/AIDS - in spite of religious or cultural restrictions" (p. 390). And finally the editors draw on a quote from Briggs, cited in McLean (2004b, p); "if human resources are truly the 'wealth of nations', their development carries with it the parallel responsibility to recognize that their contribution to the economy must enhance the quality of life on this planet and not lead to its enslavement, impoverishment or its extinction".

In these five outcomes of social justice and social change, Cho and McLean make space, provide an opening, for HRD professionals and academics to broaden their thinking beyond the benefits to an economic entity. McLean and McLean's (2001) defining of cross-national HRD "... for the benefit of an organization, community, nation or, ultimately, the whole of humanity" and the Briggs quote above would seem to place a moral responsibility and obligation on the work of HRD professionals to assure that these lofty ideologies do not become subsumed within the hegemonic discourse of market driven societies.

Missing Voices

As stated above, the context in which the discourse of NHRD is being framed allows for the study of human resource development to move from the confines of the workplace to the expanses of society itself. This context opens the doors for other voices to be heard. The voices of the unskilled, those relegated to poverty, women, and other marginalized voices must be present as co-equals in the creation of NHRD. These voices need to be supported with resolve, otherwise the dominant power structure will continue to silence them, and they will remain among the “missing voices”. While several authors in ADHR 6/3 reported on the consultive nature that was used in forming many of the programs (Lee, 2004; Lynham & Cunningham, 2004; Osman-Gani, 2004; Rao, 2004), there is still a hierarchy of businessmen, politicians, government officials, academics and other elite that “permit” and filter this consultation. For the most part, the field of human resource development, while typically dealing with the worker (which also includes management “workers”), is arguably a management function, and as such, it exists to serve the pleasure of management. Therefore it is an elite voice, one that may be broadly inclusive, but never-the-less one influenced, and at some level, controlled by the most privileged within society. If NHRD is to move into broader segments of society and hopefully produce more desirable outcomes, will there be boundaries drawn? Will boundaries limit the reach of NHRD? And if so, who will decide which boundaries? Where will those boundaries be placed? If there are to be no boundaries, will it only be the voices of the privileged that will chart NHRD’s course?

What seems to be missing is the true voice of the citizen and worker. Over time there have been many programs where workers have had some input or influence in the programs and decisions that are being made in the workplace or enterprise level. In these programs, there is much evidence to show that the voice of the worker has enhanced labor/management cooperation and has produced improved efficiency, productivity and profits and generally improved working conditions (Adler, 1995; Bluestone, 1989). The voices of the worker/citizen are needed to articulate a discourse of industrial democracy (Blumberg, 1968; Pateman, 1970). Over time industrial democracy has held two fundamental tracks: the first addresses issues of fairness, control, and a meaningful existence at work; the second addresses issues of governance and the workplace (and the means of production) as part of greater society. All stakeholders, on somewhat equal footings, share decisions requiring the positioning of the workplace/workforce within society (Bluestone & Bluestone, 1992 pp. xii-xiv). Though both notions are of importance, it is in this second notion where the transformative aspect of NHRD supports the “missing voice”. NHRD adopting a normative stance maintains the vested interests of the elite and in all likelihood continues the status quo within civil society. Because this volume of articles, and the included analysis, will probably have a significant influence on future work in the field, it is important to ask critical questions and pose transformative solutions that will provide space for the missing voice in an expanding discourse on social justice within NHRD.

Critical Questions of the Excellent Attributes of NHRD

Consider for the moment that NHRD accepts the charge of being active in civil society. When examining Cho & McLean’s excellent attributes of NHRD (pp. 387-389), questions arise concerning these attributes. The editors listed the attributes with no particular categorization. One way of organizing these 20 attributes is by functionally; with respect to leadership, method of implementation, structural requirements and social issues. Below are some considerations of the specifics within these categories. The questions are asked from the perspective of clarifying the operational definition or at minimum, opening a discussion/thought on the issues.

Social Attributes

“It will not be constrained by the culture of the country but will still consider country culture”(p. 388). “Social factors must be addressed. When workers and potential workers are confronted with poverty, illness (such as HIV/AIDS), family abuse, discrimination of various sorts, political oppression, and so on, it will be impossible for the population to thrive and for NHRD policies to succeed”(p. 389). “Work-life balance will be encouraged with family-friendly policies. There must be recognition that with a holistic perspective of HRD, economic development alone is not enough.” (p. 389) These are the attributes that contribute to NHRD social voice. It is through these aspects that I have come to believe the discourse surrounding NHRD requires transformative action versus normalizing rhetoric. It is also where I see tension between many of the structural, leadership and methodological attributes that seem to support a “don’t rock the boat” tone in many of the case studies. In this academy one ought to embrace these tensions as a means to broaden the discourse and to be inclusive.

Leadership Attributes

“NHRD will require leadership to be interdisciplinary and drawing from the best minds available (not limited to cronies, political friends, or politicians, civil servants and not necessarily even just citizen *unless* they are truly the best minds available)” (p. 388). On the face of it, there is little to argue here, but consider the phrase “best minds”. Who will decide that? The social elite? The academics? The business community? Is there space for Gramscian

organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 5-14)? And what does “best” connote? Is it from within the framework of traditional education? Must they be “right” thinking in that they accept the imperative of a market-driven economy? Will divergent and politically polar viewpoints be “allowed” into the leadership? Or will the need for expediency and efficiency filter out these possible “best minds?” Another term requiring scrutiny is interdisciplinary. While it is assumed that the “best minds” from business, government, academia, and politics are to be recruited, will other disciplines be openly welcome, perhaps even recruited? Will radical union members have a place at the table? Social activists? Popular educators? Radical economists?

A normalizing discourse within NHRD would tend to look for general commonality, people who share the notion of the positive effects of globalization or perhaps just acceptance of its inevitability while retaining a fairly constant and unchanging distribution of power. It is the underlying codification of leaders and their basic broad ideologies that often provide direction and guidance for any movement. To be transformational, leadership selection must be an inclusive process that speaks, at a minimum, to the issues of what are the criteria for selection of “best minds” and who participates in selection of these “best minds.” The selection of the leadership will shape the discourse of the NHRD policy. The practicality of one’s environment must also be considered. Where power is concentrated and decision-making more regimented to the status-quo, by both governmental systems of state control and via modern plutocracies, the selection of leadership may not be as broadly inclusive as hoped for above. That current reality should not limit the ideological construction of NHRD.

Methods of Implementation

NHRD as an instrument of national policy would seem to have utility. Cho and McLean conclude from the case studies that “There is no one ‘right’ way to do NHRD”, and “NHRD will dynamically encourage rather than mandate” (p. 387) both of these indicating strong preference for less autocratic implementation ideologies. They also see NHRD “having a heavy bias toward research and theory while remaining thoroughly practical.” Given the ideological foundations of the AHRD, the bias towards research and theory is understandable and not problematic. This would change if the products of the research and theories are unavailable (either physically or conceptually) to the practitioners, implementers and beneficiaries of NHRD. The notion of being “thoroughly practical” is grounded in a true American philosophy debuting in the late 1870’s around the time of the American Industrial Revolution: pragmatism (Menand, 2002). This leads to a question. Practical from whose point of view? If conditions of leadership mentioned above are ignored, then the market-driven regiment of “thoroughly practical” has a significant probability of adversely impacting Brigg’s dictum to “enhance the quality of life on this planet and not lead to its enslavement, impoverishment or its extinction.” Therefore, the notion of practicality must be tempered against the goal that NHRD appears to be developing a “better” world for all humanity. I realize that the term “better” is value-laden. With truly inclusive leadership, the values that are to be utilized are representative of broader society (local, regional, national and globally) and will go far in creating NHRD policy that will transform societies for greater social justice while implementing practical programs.

“NHRD must be flexible, allowing for quick responses to change in worldwide, regional and local economies and labor markets” (p. 387). This is an attribute of concern. It is understandable how Cho and McLean extracted this attribute from the case studies presented. By definition, case studies are backward-looking and concerned about what is, was, and has been, the hope being that these insights will inform future idea development. The case study provides a basis to project forward, into the future, a basis to create a new, or extend an existing discourse. The “NHRD must be flexible...” attribute presupposes that NHRD is, and should remain, a response to the market, one that maintains the status-quo of economic hegemony. By extension, it can infer that NHRD, as a national policy, should remain a dependent variable to economic “necessity” (bearing in mind which elite define necessity). It would seem to accept, as an established fact, the supremacy of the market over the state and civil society. Many would consider that problematic and possibly contributory to the economic oppression of much of the world. It would seem plausible that if NHRD, as national policy, were to enter civil society as an agent of transformation, it ought to have greater influence and independence over the market. Otherwise, without that independence and influence, NHRD’s entrance to civil society would appear to function normatively and maintain the status-quo. Normative discourse would seem less effective in attaining the deep social transformations that the editors desire. Of course, that is a matter of opinion and a fertile area for researchers to expand upon.

“Objectives will be established based on the capabilities of the system, not by wishes, desires, and needs.” “NHRD will be short-term while remaining visionary. This means there will be no 5-years plans! They are too far out and inhibit flexibility. At the same time, considerations must be given to possible scenarios for at least 20 years ahead – with the hope that the best minds will be able to surface scenarios that might be close to what will actually happen.” (p. 388). These attributes seem to give NHRD freedom to maneuver. Creating a possible efficient utilitarian model of this attribute may look like the following; the collection of attributes are operationalized by a normalizing leadership, who draw on normalizing methods of implementation, while attempting to hold short term

tactical thinking at the fore, and while at the same time hoping for a strategic plan (not really needed because more of the status-quo is all that is required). These plans could be utilized to mandate that NHRD “follow the money” and preserve a neo-liberal economic agenda. This would look to short-term benefit at the expense of long-term change (for examples see (Harrison & Bluestone, 1988)). This preference of short-term over long-term thinking/planning is reminiscent of the economic strategy, popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, of “built to flip” vs. “built to last”, a process of extracting value versus one of sustained creation of value (Collins, 2000). In these short-term ways of thinking, the lack of concern over the far reaching consequences to broad society, or the inability to think in terms of those possibilities has contributed greatly to the inequities that NHRD wants to change (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Zerkel, 2001).

On the other hand, if flexibility and nimbleness is a competence of NHRD that serves the community by creating well paying jobs that sustain the community over time; that enhances opportunity through education, the ability to read ones environment and upgrading of skills; expands the base of power by giving voice to a broad base of actors; enables the visions of future scenarios with broad social justice (some of social goals espoused by NHRD) then these attributes will help transform society (Swinney, 2004). In either case, these are mere tools and the outcome of their potential lies in the hands of those who use them. One can maintain that the learned use of these tools could/ought to be influenced by the HRD community so as to support the social change that is indicated within the developing discourse of NHRD.

This group of attributes, which was categorized as a set of method attributes, reads much like what it is: an analysis of case studies that, for the most part, describe the national efforts to develop the workforce in support of the economic goals in that country. As such, it would appear to reproduce the thinking of the current centers of power. In a few case studies, there was critical mention of the shortfalls of such methods (Lee, 2004; Rao, 2004). In general, the editors drew from current success of market driven economies (or those wishing to model themselves to attain the outcome of those economies). The editors argue that for NHRD to be successful, the social goals listed below must be implemented – the methods of implementation require critical debate within the academy in order to construct the society to which we aspire.

Structural Attributes

“The role of the political system is well defined.” If, as mentioned above, the models of NHRD are based on geo-political systems (and there appears to be some sort of progression that is, centralized/state to transition to decentralized) then it would seem to me that NHRD could be instrumental in the progression. While the role of government cannot be ignored, these attributes seem to accept the role of the political system without question. There may be other forces in society whose role is political change, and it would appear by the lack of commentary within most case studies that HRD (and by extension NHRD) is not to be involved with these forces. While it is understandable that openly participating in socio-political change (some may call it revolution) has inherent risk, one can argue that to debate/research/theorize about these fundamental changes in the structural policies of nations is a course of action to which the academy is well suited. It is a competence the academy possesses, and can contribute to transformational change. What is most disconcerting is the silence in that respect.

Critical questions of the excellent outcomes of NHRD

The excellent attributes of NHRD lead to excellent outcomes for NHRD. Cho and McLean provide a list of these outcomes from their reading of the 11 case studies. Reading through these outcomes it was possible to coalesce them into three broad categories; Workforce outcomes, educational outcomes and social outcomes.

Workforce outcomes

“The “right” mix of people will emerge from excellent NHRD. Creative approaches will be needed to attract people to occupations and preparation programs that are not deemed to be socially acceptable, for example, plumbers, construction workers, hotel workers, and the like.” (p. 390) The pre-eminence that has been placed on formal education, and especially higher education, has led to the social devaluation of craft-skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled work. In the United States, the political processes of de-industrialization has obliterated many occupations and work of lesser economic value has replaced it (Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Mishel *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, elevating skilled/semi-skilled/ job and promoting them as sustaining desirable jobs is of value and will promote greater levels of self-esteem and participation.

“There will be increased legal and encouraged flow of labor across national boundaries to seek labor market equilibrium. This will likely continue to be fought by developed countries that have a disproportionate share of the world’s economic wealth.” (p. 391) Uprooting families, fracturing the cultural binding of communities, and the general homogenization of society in the service of economic development, and the intentional designing for that outcome, seems to be wrongheaded. NHRD ought to encourage wealth creation within the communities and only resort to flowing labor (i.e. people) as a last option (Swinney, 2004; Swinney & Bennett, 2005).

Educational outcomes

“Functional illiteracy will be eliminated—among youth and adults.” (p. 389) “The quality of primary and secondary education will improve and be more comprehensive in its curriculum; teachers will be adequately paid, and appropriate facilities and supplies will be provided” (p. 391). “The quality of higher education institutions will improve as their quantity decreases; again, faculty will be adequately paid, and appropriate facilities and supplies will be provided. In addition, academic freedom will be affirmed and carried out with the blessing of the political system.” (p. 391) People of a country ought to have the basic survival skills that literacy brings, however, the manner in which that literacy is defined may be problematic. When an educational system depends on academic freedom, which is “blessed” by the political system, that academic freedom must be questioned. Further I question what literacy will prevail. The tone of these outcomes for education that NHRD will bring seems to be normalized and supportive of the status-quo. The attributes of leadership and implementation may have an effect on these outcomes. One might argue that this educational process, while providing for good employable, flexible, adaptive and resilient workers who will contribute to the economic development of their country, might also have the consequence (intended or otherwise, depending the ideology of the elite of the country) of maintaining a hegemony. The operationalized definitions of these outcomes require debate within the academy.

NHRD as Social Activism

The process of forming the NHRD discourse within this academy is a political act. As academics, we gate-keep, tightly or loosely, what enters into the discourse of our field. The articles we write, the research we conduct, what we permit within our journals, who gets to speak (present papers) at our conferences, who is permitted to stand guard at the gates, and beyond that, what is presented in our classrooms and how we train the practitioners, what stance is taken in curriculum reviews, all form who we are in relation to this field.

NHRD has education at its core. The process of educating people will change the conditions under which they live, economically and socially. Because it has an outcome of inducing change, education is not a neutral act, and it works to either reinforce the relationship between the elite and the masses or promote social change; therefore, education is a political act (Zerkel, 2001, p. 10). Extending the argument, and using language not normally associated with HRD, practitioners and academics within the field of HRD are political activists operating within the social arena by either working with the elite and maintaining the status-quo or working with the populous to transform what “is” to what “could be.” It is important to be cognizant of this as we shape and form this nascent ideology of NHRD. The decisions on what is included and what is omitted in the discourse surrounding NHRD ought to be conscience acts, informed by critical thinking and critique of the political economy in which they reside. This political activism is currently being played out within the Academy of Human Resource Development by its members and the research they conduct, the papers they write, the keynote addresses they make and the classes they teach. As this topic matures, it will become institutionalized within the field.

Summary and Conclusion

Summary

The purpose of this conceptual piece was to add to the existing literature on NHRD. Much of the literature base is summarized within the pages of ADHR 6/3. Reading this journal and reflecting on years of practice, study and involvement with several professional organizations, the body of literature in AHRD 6/3 leads me to conclude that the powerful tools of HRD were being used in a fairly normative manner. Of particular interest, is the final chapter written by Cho and McLean. In my point of view, and with my own limitations of a predominately U.S. point of view, the editors set a tone for future development in the NHRD discourse that is strongly embedded in the socio-economic status quo as framed within the home nations’ current political constructs. It would appear that literature supports this action. Many of the authors in the case studies presented likely believe in wider notions of social justice. As either a function of the field or the panopticon of the broader academy and political systems, there seems to be an overt silence in these texts on critical issues of power. It has been taken as a matter of faith, a premise of the philosophy of free enterprise, that as the fortunes of a society’s economic power improve, these changes will lead to evolutionary political change toward more democratic systems; recent work has questioned this article of faith (Mesquita, 2005). The attributes and outcomes from current practice appear not to challenge political power directly. The notion of education is one that is primarily at the service of the economy. References in the case studies to consultive processes may be based in deeply critical inclusive discussions, but the texts fail to reveal them. Whether a function of editorial space limitation or other taken for granted assumptions, silences about the character of these consultive processes is problematic.

There was also another notion that emerged from the editors’ final chapter. Either from their personal practice and research or coming from an inner philosophy, their attributes and outcome also seemed to reflect more notions

of social change than the 11 case studies would seem to support. There was mention of the HIV/AIDS issues in both the Lynham and Cunningham article (2004) as well as the Lutta-Mukhebi article (2004). The authors' discussions of these issues were important but were not central to their case studies. Issues of undesirable employment (prostitution, drug dealing) and child labor were side issues. The editors elevated these issues to the level of excellent attributes or outcomes for some reason. I am choosing to interpret that reason as a desire for social change. In this notion, between the explicit and the implied is a pregnant thought, eight centimeters dilated. NHRD, as Cho and McLean are framing it, depends on the elimination, or at least the mitigation of adverse social factors (HIV/AIDS, prostitution, drug dealing, child labor etc.) to be successful (p. 387, last bullet of Barriers to Establishing NHRD). This would seem to indicate that NHRD requires mechanisms that will shape the culture, or influence social institutions, or promote governmental change. This suggests three possible avenues that NHRD can utilize. [1] NHRD would only operate, in nations where there is a receptive political/social/economic environment; why choose to operate where it would not be successful? The changes induced might or might not stimulate the changes in society that editor's desire, but NHRD could operate in those environments. [2] NHRD would wait for other actors to induce the changes and "prepare" the ground to make it fertile for NHRD to grow and succeed. This would mean that only nations with the proper political/social/economic environments would benefit from NHRD. [3] NHRD is a social change mechanism. NHRD would utilize the tools of libratory adult education, and therefore HRD professionals and academics are social activists introducing the changes where the resources of human beings are developed so that they become autonomous, self-effacious and the directive, with equal status to that of the elite, determining national policy.

Conclusions

There is much within the discourse of NHRD that is uplifting, promising, and that utilizes the skills and competence of the members to create a more socially just world. Many who are grounded in adult education or who are practicing in that context will find value in NHRD and will probably see this strand of work within the academy as exciting, rejuvenating, worthwhile, and I would agree with them. Along with the good intentions, there must be serious discussion around the underlying ideologies of this discourse. Cho and McLean state that, contrary to F.W. Taylor, there is no one right way to do NHRD and I would agree. A polyphony of voices, that is, perspectives, must inform this discourse.

Reading all 11 case studies and the editor's comments I got the sense that while there is a desire for social change, there was also hesitancy in these papers. HRD, as reported by these authors, is embedded within a corporatist/economic frame, and seems to position social betterment (e.g. literacy, HIV/AIDS eradication/prevention, removal of socially undesirable jobs) in several ways. One, as an investment, with an associated return on that investment in the nation's economic development; a tool for wealth creation. Another, the improvement in society is viewed as a pleasant incidental outcome of other economic development activities. And of course some integration of the two. From these 11 case studies and the analysis of the editors I did not get the sense that the creation of NHRD processes is to balance the power between the elite and the masses; this concept had little overt voice in this emerging discourse. It may have been their heart felt belief but it did not resonate with the normative discourse of economic development.

I believe that as researchers and theorists in the preeminent Academy of Human Resource Development we have a responsibility to explore all aspects of what we advocate; to embrace an intellectual honesty that includes the critique of our work and to pay particular attention to the least powerful in society, especially when we are advocating for processes that will affect them most directly. We have a responsibility to assure that all voices have a place at the table, especially because of the far reaching impact of our actions within the realm of national policy. To act otherwise is irresponsible.

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