IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION EVALUATION METHODOLOGY IN A CONFLICT RESOLUTION STUDIES COURSE

A paper for presentation at the Innovations in Evaluation Conference

World Wide Web, September 14 - 18, 1998

by

Stephanie P. Stobbe

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the rationale and use of Action Evaluation in helping to promote a more participatory education, in this case using a college-level introductory Conflict Resolution Studies (CRS) course. Action Evaluation, developed by Dr. Jay Rothman, encourages self-reflection, active participation, and empowerment of all participants. It assists participants to define, monitor and reevaluate their goals. "Sharing their ideas while they are still formulating them promotes a constructive scrutiny of these ideas... when such goals are implemented, they can be systematically tracked and monitored. As they evolve and change... self-conscious and educated choices about such changes can then be made" (Rothman, 1997). At the completion of the course, a criteria for success can be established through the achieved goals. An Action Evaluation was implemented within this course, and the baseline, formative and summative stages of the evaluation are discussed and analyzed.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional education focuses on transferring information from teachers to students in such a way as to maintain the status quo of society. During this process the students sit quietly recording, memorizing and storing the information so that they can transfer the data onto examinations. Paulo Freire, in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, refers to this type of education as "banking education" where the teacher provides knowledge and the students passively accept what is being taught (Freire, 1993). Personal experience with traditional education systems has led me to see the importance of "education for social change" (Arnold et al, 1991) where people develop knowledge and understanding by critically evaluating both the sources and their own understanding in a larger social context.

As a beginning educator I wanted to encourage a more participatory type of education between instructors and students. In order to do this, I wanted to implement a process that would help create a relationship where professors and students were partners in the learning process. This interaction would encourage the students to become active participants and critical thinkers where they could analyze and reflect on the information presented in class, and share their thoughts and experiences. As an instructor, student participation would help me relate to them more effectively as I learned to understand them through meaningful interaction. I was introduced to Action Evaluation by its creator, Dr. Jay Rothman, at Antioch University where I am currently completing a Master's Degree in Conflict Resolution. After looking over the theories and procedures involved in Action Evaluation I

thought that this could be an effective way in helping me achieve those goals. Further discussion with Dr. Rothman convinced me to implement Action Evaluation in an introductory conflict resolution studies course that I taught at Menno Simons College/ University of Winnipeg during the 1998 Spring Term.

Action Evaluation Methodology

Action Evaluation is an evaluation methodology emphasizing the importance of praxis, the integration of theory and practice (Rothman, 1997). It assists researchers, intervenors, educators and participants to interactively develop clear, concise and shared goals about what they want to achieve in a particular project, intervention or course. Once the goals have been established, they are used to track, monitor and assess whether the goals have been accomplished. In doing this over time, researchers, educators and students can begin to define standards and success in the course. Action evaluation encourages participation from all people involved so they can work together to elicit shared group goals and design effective methods of achieving them. This differs from traditional education practices in that it includes an authentic discussion between the students and instructors about the teaching process, goals and methods for the class where all are respected as equal partners (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

In education, I believe it is important to empower students who are traditionally passive receivers of information and give them the opportunity to actively contribute to their own knowledge. Action Evaluation seeks to integrate subject and object, knower and known, fact and value, and science and act of interpretation (Rothman, 1997). All participants are researchers, subjects, partners and co-creators of social change. A participative classroom can be an agent of social change in that it encourages people to share their thoughts and experiences. In sharing and hearing others' perspectives, we learn a more complex view of the world and change the things that we no longer believe. The reflective process includes the interaction between the teacher, students and the classroom environment. Through Action Evaluation, which encourages self-reflection, students and teachers become aware of their own responsibilities in the educational process and learn to make constructive changes. Here, teachers and students become both the subject and object in research, and the classroom setting becomes the context for self-awareness or interactive introspection (Rothman, 1997). This interaction can produce greater understanding and involvement between participants. Reflection, inquiry and action are interrelated in teacher research because teachers are thinkers, learners and practitioners (Patterson & Shannon, 1993).

ACTION EVALUATION PROCESS

I refer to Dr. Jay Rothman's paper (Rothman, 1997) and presentation at this conference for a more detailed description of the Action Evaluation theory, process and database system. I will discuss the process of Action Evaluation only as it relates to this research project. This project has differed from the typical process in a few minor ways, and I will discuss the changes and my reasons behind them as they come up.

Identifying the Groups

The instructor, myself, and students from section 61.1200/6-001 of Introduction to Conflict Resolution Studies course at Menno Simons College/University of Winnipeg all agreed to volunteer in this study. The participants were divided into two groups based on the following criteria: those teaching the course and those taking the course. The professor group, therefore, consisted only of myself. The student group consisted of those enrolled in my class and totaled 23 students (7 men and 16 women). The participants ranged from high school graduates to those pursuing a career change, and ranged in age from late-teens to early-fifties.

Procedures

Paper and pencil questionnaires were given to each participant (see Appendix A) to ensure that hard copies would be maintained for future reference. The paper and pencil format was familiar to the participants and gave them adequate time to make revisions before entering the information into the database. I kept the hard copies for future references during the analysis. The questions were designed to be open-ended and encouraged participants to identify three *goals* for their involvement in the course, three *reasons* why these goals were important to them, and three *methods* they would like to use in achieving their goals. After completing the questionnaires, a computer lab session was scheduled so each participant could transfer his/her information to the Action Evaluation web-based database system on the Internet (http:// www.ariagroup.org). Going to the computer lab and entering their personal responses into the database system was exciting for many students. It was a chance for them to be in a different environment than the regular classroom. Some were unfamiliar with the Internet and this gave them the opportunity to learn about its application. I think they felt they were really a part of Action Evaluation research, both as researchers and participants.

Once the information was in the database, I organized the student group responses into shared, unique or contrasting categories (see Appendix D). Categorizing the information provided the action evaluator with a conceptualization of the group. It was important for the participants to see the things they have in common as well as the things that were different in order to better understand the group dynamics. Shared categories contained responses that were common to two or more people; unique categories contained responses that nobody held in common; and contrasting categories contained responses that opposed each other. I did not categorize the responses for the professor group because I was the only participant in that group.

After the responses were categorized I brought the results back to the class for discussion. This gave the group an opportunity to see what I had done and provide me with feedback. I wanted to confirm that my interpretation of their responses was correct and ask if they wanted any revisions as we were all partners in this research. I facilitated the discussion and went over each of the categories with the students. They were able to look over the categories to ensure that all the information from their responses were included in the categories, and that they approved of the wording of each category. The following example demonstrates three individual responses and the shared category that I created for them.

Student Responses:
1   I'd like to learn how to deal with conflict in general and especially at a personal level.
2   To develop some more skills in the area of personal conflict resolution.
3   I hope to become better at resolving conflicts on a
personal level.

Resulting Category:

To learn how to deal with conflict and ways of resolving it, especially at a personal level.

I also asked students if they agreed with any of the unique or contrasting categories. Requests to have unique categories moved to a shared category were granted. A consensus was reached when each member of the student group agreed to the shared categories for the class. The individual responses were put aside and the study focused on shared categories. These categories formed the information to be analyzed.

At this point, I took the student group's shared results and compared them with my own data. I kept the student group and professor group information separate in order to monitor myself and the student group as the course progressed. I looked at the student group's shared and unique results to see if they corresponded with my own. This helped me see how I could relate to the students and prepare lessons that would meet their needs. Many students identified role-plays as a method toward helping them achieve their goals, so I incorporated them into related course content as often as possible.

This process was administered at the beginning of the course to form the baseline stage (Appendixes C & D), repeated at the midway point of the course to form the formative stage (Appendixes E & F), and repeated again with slight modification at the end of the course to form the summative stage (Appendixes G & H).

The summative questionnaire (see Appendix B) was changed to incorporate met and unmet goals, reasons behind the importance of these goals, effective methods for reaching accomplished goals, and finally suggestions for future methods that may be effective in reaching unaccomplished goals. It was important to include these other categories in order to identify the specific goals, reasons and methods that were or were not successful. Copies of the formative results were given to the participants when the summative questionnaire was administered. They were permitted to refer back to these goals, reasons and methods so they could comment on the specific results previously identified for the course. This information was useful in determining the overall success of the course and how the course could be changed in the future.

After the information was entered into the database system, I followed the procedures used in the baseline and formative stages to create categories of shared, unique and contrasting results. However, in this stage there were subcategories as well, such as shared accomplished goals and shared unaccomplished goals, or unique accomplished goals and unique unaccomplished goals (see Appendix H). In trying to obtain a fair evaluation of the course, I had to give the participants the opportunity to identify areas that did not meet their needs. This information was also helpful in identifying areas of improvement. Because the responses were entered into the database on the last day of class there was no time for class discussion. I then compared the professor and student group results which were finally compared with the formative stage results.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Baseline Stage

The first time that an Action Evaluation is completed becomes the baseline stage. This stage was used as a reference point upon which future stages would be compared. As an instructor this information was already useful as an instrument for setting standards of course content, style and activities. I was able to get a solid grasp on student backgrounds and prior knowledge. For the students, they began to monitor their interests for the course.

Professor Group. The baseline stage data for the professor group can be seen in Appendix C. As I was the only member of the professor group there was only one questionnaire to analyze. Ideally, I would have liked to have more than one professor participating in this study. Unfortunately, there were only two classes in the summer session and the other professor, a visiting scholar, arrived too late to participate in the study. Seeing other professors' questionnaires and categorizing them with my own would have given me valuable information about their teaching goals, theories, and styles. Part of the benefit of using Action Evaluation is that the thoughts and experiences of individuals are combined together with others creating a larger and more unified pool of ideas from which to draw. As a new teacher, I would have liked to have had other professors' experiences and insights into teaching. However, even as an individual the questionnaire was useful in helping me articulate my thoughts and ideas for the course. It allowed me to monitor myself and make necessary changes as the course progressed. It is

still heuristic and I hope to test this with other professors at another time.

Student Group.The baseline stage data for the student group can be seen in Appendix D. The information was most useful in providing me with an idea of the students' backgrounds and needs. For example, the number of people who responded that they were interested in making a decision about areas to pursue as a major and career indicated that I needed to discuss career opportunities in this field. Many of the students were looking into the traditional helping professions, such as social work, law enforcement and teaching. They thought that this course would provide them with useful skills for work in those fields. This data also gave me a good idea of what students already knew about conflict resolution as well as what they would like to learn. It was encouraging to see that the planned content of the course was similar to their goals. Generally, the students wanted to learn how to resolve conflicts in their lives in more constructive ways.

I found that many of the reasons behind the goals identified were actually goals in and of themselves. It seemed the students had a difficult time separating the goals and the reasons. In conflict resolution studies we strive to identify and meet underlying interests. Therefore, learning to articulate one's own motivations is critical in this field. I do not think that the questionnaire was ambiguous. Perhaps they did not know how to analyze their own goals, and therefore had difficulty articulating why their goals were important. Again, traditional education has concentrated more on the passing of information to students rather than asking students to develop their own understanding of why and how certain goals are important in meeting personal and societal needs.

Analysis of the methods section showed that most students shared a few of the common methods found in traditional teaching styles, such as lectures, readings, and assignments. By the time students entered the university, their understanding of instructional methods was already fairly established. Their experience taught them that certain activities were expected in the education system. I was encouraged to see that some students listed other methods, such as role-plays and group discussions as being important to help them achieve their goals. This showed that they were open to various methods of learning. The course syllabus outlined many of the activities mentioned by the students and this may have affected their answers.

*Student Group Discussion.*During the student group discussion, I found the students to be very quiet and agreeable. I would have preferred a little more interaction and feedback from the students regarding the categorization of the group's results. The students were probably a little nervous and scared at this point in the course. One person mentioned that some students may feel uncomfortable agreeing or disagreeing with certain items in front of the class, so we agreed that requests could be written down on a sheet of paper. However, no requests in wording were made either in class or in writing. This may be one of the effects of "banking education" where students sit back and give the instructor control of the process (Freire, 1993). I think that because the students were unfamiliar with the process they preferred to sit back and observe. Perhaps, in a future project it would be useful to divide them into smaller discussion groups to review the results before the class analysis. That way they might feel more comfortable with each other and more confident with the support of their small groups.
*Professor and Student Group Comparison.*In comparing the student group with the professor group, I found that I shared all of their goals, reasons, and methods, but from a slightly different perspective. For example, as an instructor I did not need the course as required credits for graduation, but certainly wanted the students to do well and receive credit for the course. The group comparison helped me be more aware of the concerns of each student. Some students wanted to learn certain topics in more detail than an introductory course could offer, so I referred them to more advanced courses dealing with these topics.

*Change in Methodology.*I elected to keep the unique responses as part of the study rather than concentrate only on the shared results. These individual responses were listed in the unique category in the group's results and

discussed in class. Although this differs from the usual methodology, I felt that this was an important way of empowering the students individually to work toward meeting their own needs. It was vital for students to realize that they were still unique individuals and allowed to monitor goals that may be important to them, but not necessarily to everyone. Simply identifying issues that were unique to students was useful in helping them realize their own individuality in a larger class, and how they need to work toward their own solutions.

I found responses that remained unique interesting in another way as well. Most of the unique responses were specific to the needs of students with different backgrounds and experiences than the majority. For example, "ethnic tensions in home country" was a reason for a foreign student, and "cultural differences in dealing with conflicts, particularly those involving Aboriginal issues," was a goal for an Aboriginal student. The unique responses gave far more insight into student backgrounds than the shared responses, and because those individuals tend to come from different backgrounds, it was even more important to empower them by allowing them to keep track of these issues. This also provided an educational potential for students unaware of such concerns.

Formative Stage

The formative stage repeated exactly the same procedures, only this time midway through the course. This stage was designed to be compared directly with the baseline stage. This repetition accommodated evolving goals and gave participants the opportunity to modify certain responses to better meet their needs. They could also reflect upon responses that had remained constant from the beginning and see how well their goals were or were not being met. A comparison between baseline and formative results was useful in assisting participants to analyze how their goals had changed or stayed the same over time.

Professor Group. The formative stage data for the professor group can be seen in Appendix E. The content of the responses in this stage did not change much from the baseline stage. Having previously been a student and teacher's assistant in this course, I believe that I had developed a clear understanding of what the content should include and what I thought was important in teaching the class. I had sufficient opportunity to think about goals and reflect upon their significance to me and how I would achieve them, and felt supported by the fact that the student group responses were similar to my own. This is why the data remained relatively stable.

Student Group. The formative stage data for the student group can be seen in Appendix F. The goals did not change much from the baseline stage to the formative stage; however, in the formative stage the students were able to be more specific about the type of conflict resolution methods they would like to learn, such as mediation, negotiation and nonviolent action. This is probably due to the fact that as the students learned more about conflict resolution, they were able to distinguish and specialize toward areas that interested them. For example, in class we had studied the process of mediation and *Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991), and in the formative stage the students were able to identify that they wanted to learn mediation and negotiation skills in order to resolve interpersonal conflicts at home and work. Students began to realize that conflict resolution was not just about resolving conflicts but that it could be used in specific situations in their lives.

The reasons behind those goals were also similar to the baseline stage. Perhaps these results were due to the fact that both the students and I studied the baseline information and geared our efforts toward meeting those needs. When I analyzed the individual responses from the questionnaires I was encouraged to see that the students were better able to distinguish goals from reasons. For example, a student in the baseline questionnaire identified a goal as "learning to resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways." Her reason behind this goal was "to teach younger children peaceful ways to solve problems," a reason which I would consider a goal. However, in the formative stage she

identified the same original goal, but stated her reason as "violence is growing and is very destructive in our society." This response expressed the reason behind her needs and interests. She had begun to internalize the process of creating and understanding her own knowledge by learning to identify what her basic needs were. Many of the students had improved their analytical abilities and seemed to be more comfortable articulating their personal needs.

The methods for achieving goals in the baseline and formative stages were similar. Activities such as group discussions, role plays and relevant exercises had been utilized in class since the baseline stage and seemed to be effective for these students. It was no surprise when these methods were identified again as ways to achieve their goals.

Student Group Discussion.Overall, the students were more active in the formative stage discussion than they were at the beginning of the semester. Different students were willing to assert their opinions about certain responses. I think they realized that it was safe to share their thoughts in this classroom environment because everyone was treated with respect. I was able to be more sensitive and personal with students as they became more than numbers to me. At this point I was able to call them by name and understand where some of them were coming from in terms of education and life experiences. During class discussion of the formative results, the students requested that all the unique goals be moved into the shared category. This was a surprise to me as only one of the unique goals was moved in the baseline stage. Perhaps as the students learned together, individual goals were taken up by the group as a sign of support and as a sign that they were beginning to share a more unified idea of conflict resolution. As the students became more comfortable with each other and myself, and our participatory style of interaction, they became more confident in expressing themselves and in showing support for their classmates. For example, the unique goal of wanting "to contribute to resolving conflict in my country" was originally referred by a student from Burundi, but was taken up by the whole class as a shared goal. This became important not only for students from warring nations, such as Sudan, Burundi, and Nicaragua, but also for students from relatively peaceful nations, such as Canada. They all wanted to contribute to their country. In learning together and sharing their goals the students' concept of conflict resolution became more cohesive.

*Professor and Student Group Comparison.*I found many of the students' goals, reasons and methods were similar to mine. Even the goals of deciding which major or career to pursue, obtaining credits and prerequisites for graduation, and good grades became common goals for the project. As an instructor I wanted my students to achieve these goals. As I am also a student, I understood how important this was to them, and how important it was for me to do everything I could to help them in this. There was one English as Second Language (ESL) student in particular who worked very hard on every assignment. He turned in his second paper, and after reading it carefully I realized large parts of it were plagiarized. After talking to him, I realized that he felt he did not have enough time to properly write his paper, and without fully realizing and understanding the seriousness of plagiarizing he made a potentially fatal mistake to help maintain his grades. I told him that if he needed extra help he could phone me at home with any questions and that if he needed some more time I would try to be flexible. After that, he called me at home for every assignment to make sure that he understood what was required and how to approach it. He never handed an assignment in late. The assistant CRS coordinator at college agreed that we did not need to pursue this matter further.

Summative Stage

The summative stage at the end of the course discussed if and how the group goals from the formative stage had been accomplished. The achievement of goals was used to evaluate the success of the course. In addition to evaluating the course, it provided the instructor and students with feedback regarding what activities were

constructive in assisting them to reach their goals. In future courses the instructor could incorporate such activities to help all participants interact and develop knowledge and understanding.

Professor Group. The summative stage data for the professor group can be seen in Appendix G. At the completion of the course, I believed that the three goals I identified for teaching the course had been accomplished. I was able to provide students with a better understanding of conflict resolution theories, research and practice, teach them practical skills, and help them learn about themselves and how they relate to conflict. Being able to specifically identify the goals, reasons and methods for the course helped me think about what I wanted to do in the class and gave me a focus. From the initial stage I was able to tailor my activities to better meet the needs of my students. For example, there was one student who particularly enjoyed doing role plays and this was evident in his speech, mannerisms and ability to "ad lib." He really got into the roles of the characters in the conflict situations and often volunteered to play a part. Seeing the enthusiasm of the students encouraged me to include more role plays in the lessons than I had planned.

Student Group. The summative stage data can be seen in Appendix H. The formative stage goals were used to evaluate the success of the course. In the summative stage most of the students identified the shared goals from the formative stage results as being accomplished at the end of the course. As an instructor, it was encouraging to see so many goals that were accomplished by the course and/or student. There was one unique goal that was unaccomplished by a student. She wanted to become more confident in public speaking and felt she had not achieved this. This was one of the students who suggested that self-initiative could be a future method for achieving goals. Through Action Evaluation she became more aware of her own responsibility in the learning process.

There were two students who felt that two of the group goals were unaccomplished when most students felt they were accomplished. These were listed in the contrasting accomplished / unaccomplished goals category as "obtaining good grades and maintaining grade point average," and "contributing in resolving conflict in my country." It was not a surprise that these goals were contrasting. The grading system is a delicate issue as various departments at the University of Winnipeg have different grading systems. An 89% in Conflict Resolution Studies means a letter grade of A, whereas, a 95% in History means a letter grade of A, and in some other departments an A is 86%. One student mentioned that she usually gets around the same percentage in the various courses but they mean different letter grades.

The goal of "contributing in resolving conflict in my country" was interpreted differently by different students as seen in the reasons behind the goal. There were a couple of reasons for the failure to accomplish this goal: one student felt that it was important to have peace and that it was up to those with skills to take the first step, and another student felt that it was too broad a task at this time. It seemed that both of these students were looking at a larger, national picture of resolving conflict, and therefore this goal could not be achieved at the end of the course. However, other students were looking at a smaller, individual contribution to resolving community issues which they were able to accomplish. The differences in interpretation explained why this goal was identified as a contrasting item.

In appearance, the reasons behind the goals looked similar to the formative stage results. Unfortunately, in the summative stage the results were not as useful because the reasons did not relate specifically to the goals. The students had too many goals from the formative stage to write specific reasons for them. Many students simply listed the numbers that corresponded with the formative goals that were accomplished or unaccomplished. For example, one student listed all 20 numbers except number 14 as being achieved goals, and then only gave one general reason for the importance of these goals. In the formative stage I was pleased to see how the students had

improved in analyzing their own goals. However, in the summative stage I was discouraged to see some students become more general in their analysis. This was probably due to the format of the questionnaire rather than the students' analytical abilities. In hindsight, it might have been more useful to follow the same format of allowing only three responses for each category. In this way the students would have identified only their most important met or unmet goals, and therefore provided more specific reasons and methods for each.

The methods for achieving goals in the summative stage were similar to the formative stage. Most of the students found all the methods from the formative stage as being effective toward achieving their goals. However, there was a surprisingly high number of suggestions for future methods in helping the students meet their needs. At the beginning of the course there was more structure hierarchically between the students and myself and the students readily accepted what I had planned for the course. As the course progressed the students became more comfortable and confident in expressing themselves and what activities would help them learn better. These suggestions were not new ideas, but encouraged a more liberal use of the methods already in place. Obviously, the students realized that many of the activities suggested could not be implemented in an intensive 3-months' introductory course. I encouraged the students to take more advanced courses in order to learn certain topics in depth. To me, the suggestions were a meaningful affirmation of the activities that were incorporated in the course.

Professor and Student Group Comparison.As an instructor it was encouraging to see that both groups thought the majority of the goals had been accomplished. Having shared so many goals, reasons and methods in the previous stages we were able to work with one another to achieve them. It was easy to build a relationship and learn from each other as there were no contrasting responses between the two groups. The number of shared accomplished goals in the student group gave me confidence that the course had made a difference in the lives of the students. A few students mentioned that they would like to major in Conflict Resolution Studies. Through the completion of the summative questionnaire, the course came to a close for the students and myself. It gave us an opportunity to reflect on what we had learned and how our interaction had influenced one another. The summative stage provided useful feedback on the course, teaching, and Action Evaluation by allowing the participants to monitor themselves throughout the course. The results showed how goals had or had not been achieved, how they changed or remained stable, and how effective or ineffective Action Evaluation had been as an observational tool.

Future Projects

The students said that in the baseline and formative stages they were unable to list all of their responses on the questionnaire or database because there was only space for three responses per category. Creating room for more responses may be an option for future projects, but care needs to be taken to ensure that the amount of information does not become unmanageable, and that students are only listing their most important goals. Having more than three responses may be useful in projects where there is a smaller number of participants.

In the summative questionnaire the students were instructed to refer to the formative stage results and identify the goals that were achieved or not achieved. This proved to be confusing for the students in that some only identified three goals while others numerically listed all the goals they achieved. This created some inconsistency and complicated the analysis in that the students who just listed all the goals as being achieved could not identify those that were most important to them, and therefore gave general reasons that were not specific to any particular goal. The results of the questionnaire were disappointing because monitoring the relationship between goals and reasons was an important part of this study. For future projects, it would be more useful if the students had no reference to the formative results and followed the 3item procedure as in the baseline and formative stages. This would encourage them to identify their three most important accomplished and/ or unaccomplished goals, reasons and

methods. I think that this format would still be useful in determining the achievement of goals and success of the course, and would allow the students to be more specific with their reasons behind each goal. Having more consistency between the stages would help in the organization and analysis of the data.

It would be useful to have a subcategory in the summative questionnaire asking participants for the methods they thought were ineffective. They had the opportunity to comment on methods that were effective in meeting their needs and suggestions for future activities, but did not have a chance to say what methods they thought were unhelpful. Again, a few students who listed all the methods as being useful did not distinguish which activities were most effective in helping them learn. This information could assist me in planning future activities for the course.

Another concern is that in having the actual researcher teaching the course may influence the students. For example, during the summative stage some students may have felt uncomfortable criticizing the course, teaching, or study because they had yet to write the final exam and receive a final grade. Even though participatory education was encouraged, the instructor still has the power to assign grades. It may be useful to experiment with using a student or teacher's assistant to facilitate the discussion process.

As a researcher the database system needs to be refined so that there is less repetition in transferring information from one category to the next. For example, it would be helpful if there was a section at the beginning of the questionnaire that would allow the participants to check off which project they are in and what stage they are responding to. In this way the researcher would not have to go back into the database and transfer the information into the appropriate stages of the study.

It is important that a larger professor group be incorporated into future projects. In the fall and winter terms when there are more sections and professors teaching the introductory conflict resolution studies courses, perhaps a more comprehensive study can be done.

CONCLUSION

Action Evaluation has helped me as an instructor to think, identify and reflect upon the goals, reasons and methods for the course. It has allowed me to monitor myself and take direct action to meet my goals as well as the needs of my students. I was responsible for achieving my objectives and assisting my students in accomplishing their goals. I learned it was important to be flexible in order to meet everyone's needs. For example, I gave one student who was in the middle of a divorce extra time for her assignments as well as allowed her to write her final exam earlier than scheduled to accommodate her court date. This helped her accomplish some of her goals for the course, including getting a good grade. In monitoring myself throughout the course I gained a better focus of where I was currently at and where I wanted to be at the time. As my goals became stable I realized the importance of actualizing them by the end of the course. The analysis of the various stages and monitoring encouraged me to reflect upon activities that were effective and ineffective in helping the students learn conflict resolution. I gained self-awareness or interactive introspection (Rothman, 1997) through the interaction with my students in the classroom environment.

In the final exam I included a question on Action Evaluation and many of the students' responses were very positive. One student said that the results of Action Evaluation helped in making the course the best it could be by giving the instructor an idea of the students' needs at the beginning of the course and allowing the participants to monitor them throughout. Another student said that even though the questionnaire was tedious at times, it gave him satisfaction to see many of the goals achieved and also pointed out which goals would require initiative outside the classroom. The students were also able to think, identify and reflect upon the goals, reasons and methods for

the course. Action Evaluation helped them to express what their thoughts were for the course and to share them with their peers and instructor. The expectations were clearly identified at the beginning of the course. Through Action Evaluation the group became more cohesive at the end of the course. One of the group's goal was to do well in the course and a few students created a study group to support one another in their learning process. Another student typed out all her class notes and shared them with other ESL students in the class.

The students were able to see that learning to understand and express why things were important to them was necessary in their development. Conflict resolution studies strives to understand the underlying causes of conflict and meet those essential needs. One student said that the questionnaires helped her prioritize her goals. A second student said it helped her learn about herself as a person who was capable of changing and making progress in her life. Another student said that by identifying her goals she became responsible for achieving them, and often found herself asking what her goals were for other classes. The students have learned how to critically analyze themselves and take responsibility for their education. It seemed the students were also able to apply what they had learned about Action Evaluation in the classroom and apply it to other areas in their lives. This was the integration to theory and practice that is critical in Action Evaluation methodology.

This research methodology was useful in encouraging students to actively participate in their education experience. In having the opportunity to express their interests for this class to their peers and myself, they were empowered to make real contributions to the content and activities of the course direction. One student's unique reason in taking this course was that it provided an opportunity for self expression without penalty. This student felt that her previous educational experiences did not allow her to freely participate in her own learning process. In the classroom, I wanted students to become involved in the activities and discussions, and to share their thoughts and experiences. Participating in Action Evaluation with the class showed the students that we were all researchers and participants learning together. Ross Snyder says that "Life is meant to be lived. All of us are meant to be participants, not merely spectators" (Crosby, 1991). One student described Action Evaluation as essential in education because it encouraged growth from both the students and the instructor, and facilitated a continuous and inclusive learning process.

Eventually I hope this study will help lead to a more concrete standard by which success can be measured for introductory courses in Conflict Resolution Studies. Upon completion of this project, Action Evaluation has provided information on how successful this course has been. The number of shared goals that were accomplished and methods that were useful in helping the professor and students confirmed this. As an instructor I was satisfied in how the course progressed and I believe the students were also satisfied with the outcome. Perhaps over the course of a few more similar projects we can develop standards for content and criteria in conflict resolution studies. Providing consistency and creating a standard which others can use will assist the field of conflict resolution studies to receive more recognition and status.

REFERENCES

Arnold, R., Burke, B., James, C., Martin, D., & Thomas, B. (1991).Educating for a Change. Toronto: Between the Lines and the Doris Marshall Institute for Education and Action.

Crosby, R. P. (1991). Living with Purpose When the Gods Are Gone. Ojai: Times Change Press.

Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (1991). Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In (2nd ed.). New York: Penguin Books.

Freire, P. (1993). <u>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</u> (New Revised ed.). New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). <u>Experience, Research and Social Change: Methods from the Margins.</u> Toronto: Garamond Publishers.

Patterson, L., & Shannon, P. (1993). "Reflection, Inquiry, Action." In Patterson, L., C. Minnick Santa, K. G. Short, & K. Smith (Eds.). <u>Teachers Are Researchers: Reflection and Action.</u> Newark: International Reading Association.

Rothman, J. (1997). "Action-Evaluation and Conflict Resolution: In Theory and Practice." Mediation Quarterly, 15 (2, Winter).

Rothman, J. (1997). "Action-Evaluation and Conflict Resolution Training: Theory, Method and Case Study." <u>Journal of International Negotiation</u>.

Rothman, J. (1997). <u>Resolving Identity-Based Conflict in Nations, Organizations, and Communities.</u> San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc..

APPENDIX A

INTRO TO CRS AE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE BASELINE OR FORMATIVE STAGE