

Garth Allen writes,

"The Political Education Research Unit is located in the Department of Education at the University of York. It was established in 1974 as part of the Nuffield funded Programme for Political Education. Its basic functions are:

- (a) to delineate the various aspects of political literacy, and to discover appropriate means of assessment of political learning;
- (b) to identify the possibilities, problem areas, and limitations of formal programmes of political education available on an open access basis to students in six case study institutions.

The Unit also runs a documentation service. Any articles, discussion papers, etc. which the Unit feels might be of interest to people concerned with political education are sent free of charge of people on this mailing list. If anybody wants to join the mailing list and is interested in further details about the work of the Unit, please contact:

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John Utting writes:-

I note that you are editing the next RadStats newsletter and it occurs to me that you might like to include news of the Survey Unit research staff, as RadStats has shown so much interest in our closure. In any case, you may like to know where people can be contacted.

If you put anything in the newsletter, you could say that none of us had any help from SSRC in finding the new jobs and/or (more important) that we hope to maintain an informal network for advice on survey research.

Mark Abrams	Director of Research, Age Concern, 60 Pitcairn Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3LL
John Utting	Assistant Director (Research), National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley St., London EC1V 8QE
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Jeff Evans writes:-

Geoffrey Randle's letter to RS<sub>7</sub> raises a number of issues. One of these is whether or not the "political attitudes of the statistician could affect his design or analysis of experiments" in "small-scale, well defined, 'problem-solving' research" on e.g. the nourishment yield of various plants. He contrasts this sort of study with larger scale, more diffuse projects which could be criticised both on political and on "methodological" grounds.

If he is saying that we need to be sensitive to a wide range of possible methodological criticisms of any study, then I agree. If he is trying to demarcate studies which are problematic in terms of "political attitudes", from those which are not, then I think this is difficult.

One can often demonstrate, or invoke, a "consensus", within an audience, a social class, or a society, that seems to make a certain research study, or a decision within the strategy used, "politically" unproblematic. For example, who would disagree that we should investigate variations in nourishment yields among food-plants?

What I think is important to acknowledge, however, is that every study will involve certain conceptual and practical "commitments". Thus, in the nourishment study, we need to ask: for whose use (i.e. for which countries and which classes) are these foods being considered? How labour-intensive is the production process of the foods being evaluated meant to be? And so on: the "values of the independent variable" are never unproblematically given. Nor is the list of dependent variables "given": (as Ian Miles pointed out) a decision has to be made as to whether or not to take into account the different extents to which these different plants impoverish the soil. You could say that the decision about how to measure nourishment yield would exhibit conceptual or practical commitments too (there is no point in rigidly distinguishing the two, since all human "conceptual"/theoretical activity arguably has a "practical" aim).

What I am suggesting here is that these commitments, whether or not you call them 'political', are part of every research study.

John Bibby has heard from Patricia Holland, Editor of Society Today which she says "is a new sociology magazine for schools. It is an offshoot of New Society and mostly reprints articles that have already appeared there. However, I am hoping than an increasingly important section of the magazine will be its "Feedback" pages, where teachers and students of sociology and allied subjects can write their own pieces. I heard of your interest in the "Radical Statistics" group, and wondered if any sociologist teachers among them would be interested in contributing. Perhaps a good idea would be to look at a few issues and them to comment on them?" Anyone interested please contact Patricia Holland direct, on 01-261-5000.

John Bibby writes:-

POSE is the Schools Council Project on Statistical Education. Based on the University of Sheffield, they are writing material for the 11-16 age group. Their first ten project papers are now available at 10p each, and they might send you some draft materials if you ask them nicely. I'm going up to Sheffield early next year to help write material on inequality and/or housing. If anyone has ideas on this I'd really like to hear from them. P.S. Spent a day last week at the Maypole School, Birmingham. The POSE material seems to go down quite well, perhaps a bit on the heavy side.