Introducing the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' approach

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The '   ' approach is a resource, or tool, intended to facilitate critical interrogation of public policies. It starts from the premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change). Following this thinking, policies and policy proposals contain   ,   , representations of what is considered to be the 'problem' ('problem representations'). For example, if forms of training are recommended to improve women's status and promotion opportunities, the implication is that   ,   ,   ,   ,   , is the 'problem', responsible for 'holding them back'. The task in a '   ' analysis is to read policies with an eye to discerning how the 'problem' is represented within them and to subject this problem representation to critical scrutiny. This task is accomplished through a set of six questions and an accompanying undertaking to apply the questions to one's own proposals for change:

1. What's the 'problem' (for example, of 'problem gamblers', 'drug use/abuse', 'gender inequality', 'domestic violence', 'global warming', 'sexual harassment', etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

Question 1 assists in clarifying the implicit problem representation within a specific policy or policy proposal. Subsequent questions encourage:

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form of critical thinking that extends well beyond the study of government and public policy. For example, the six questions prove useful in identifying the underlying presuppositions and forms of problematisation in theoretical and methodological propositions, which are

References

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