

"WHAT IS POPULAR EDUCATION?" DEFINITION OF THE MONTH from back issues of THE POPULAR EDUCATION NEWS (edited)

<http://www.popednews.org/newsletters/definitions.html>

NOVEMBER 2005

What exactly is Popular Education, anyway?

The idea of popular education (often described as "education for critical consciousness") as a teaching methodology came from a Brazilian educator and writer named Paulo Freire, who was writing in the context of literacy education for poor and politically disempowered people in his country. It's different from formal education (in schools, for example) and informal education (learning by living) in that it is a process which aims to empower people who feel marginalized socially and politically to take control of their own learning and to effect social change.

Popular education is a collective effort in which a high degree of participation is expected from everybody. Teachers and learners aren't two distinct groups; rather, everyone teaches and everyone learns! Learners should be able to make decisions about what they are learning, and how the learning process takes place. A facilitator is needed to make sure that new ideas arise, progress, and don't get repetitive, but this isn't at all the same thing as a teacher. In popular education, then, we can't teach another person, but we can facilitate another's learning and help each other as we learn.

In popular education, the learning process starts with identifying and describing everyone's own personal experience, and that knowledge is built upon through various activities done in groups. After the activity, a debriefing process allows us to analyse our situation together; seeing links between our own experience and historical and global processes in order to get the "big picture". Through the generation of this new knowledge, we're able to reflect more profoundly about ourselves and how we fit into the world. This new understanding of society is a preparation to actively work towards social change. In fact, in popular education, the education process isn't considered to be complete without action on what is learned; whether it be on a personal or political level.

From: **Bob Hale Youth College for Social Justice : Participants' Handbook.** [Peace and Environment Resource Centre](#)

OCTOBER 2005

Popular Education is a learning process which:

- Is inclusive and accessible to people with a variety of education levels;
- Addresses the issues people face in their communities;
- Moves people toward a place of action;
- Develops new grassroots leadership.
- Is based on the lived experience of those participating in the learning;
- Incorporates non-traditional methods of learning – such as poetry, music or visual arts

...From Project South's revised web site

http://www.projectsouth.org/pages/Programs/program_intro.htm

SEPTEMBER 2005

...popular education--the education component of community organizing.

From the www.comm-org.org website

APRIL 2005

Learner-centered participatory education where groups of people explore and exchange their lived experience and ideas about social, political and economic problems. The explicit purpose of popular education is for groups to gain understanding of their common problems and to develop, implement and evaluate solutions.

The agenda of popular education is democratic change and the empowerment of the disempowered... Some principles which make popular education different from mainstream, teacher-centered education are:

- everyone teaches; everyone learns
- learning begins with the learner's own experience
- people want to learn knowledge that is relevant and valuable to them
- adults will make time for learning that has immediate results
- learning is a cyclical experience of knowledge, reflection, action

...From Susan Moir, UMASS Boston, labor educator

March 2005

Paulo Freire's work developed as a response to cultural silence. (Others have suggested that in industrial countries noise, not silence, is the reality.) Freire developed techniques for giving voice to people submerged in a culture of silence; it was the culture of silence that he saw kept people powerless, that kept them from seeing themselves as fully human.

What has the popular education tradition brought to our attention?

- Tools and techniques based on – interlocked with – a set of ideas (some would call them principles as does the praxis project in Chicago, for example, or the Training for Transformation books)
- Knowledge from the majority world of the global South – they are more advanced than us in the North, can we recognize it and learn from them?
- Art, music, theater, song as a tool of voice – beyond their role as tools of cultural expression, as solidarity building, as tools for storytelling, for transmitting knowledge and wisdom – as a way to name the world, to shape and make our culture; and as a form of codes for educational practice.
- Tools of social and political analysis – at their core class analysis and the analysis of power and other social relations.
- The importance of establishing the humanity of participants
 - Giving voice, a chance to speak
 - Respect and recognition of all
 - Treating people well, respecting their knowledge of their situation
 - Creating contexts where people have the right to speak, can discover their humanness
- And Deborah Barndt's framework for popular education is succinct and helpful
 - Starting from people's experience
 - Understanding analyzing that experience, finding commonness in our experience
 - Connecting that experience to others, broadening and deepening our understanding, adding social analysis
 - Leading to action

From "Notes on Popular Education" by Larry Olds - written while attending the Cobscook Community Learning Center/IPEA institute in 2001 in Cobscook Maine

February 2005

The Ah-hah Seminar's approach to education is through dialogue. It is a forum where the participants talk together about their own experience and make decisions about their own learning. It is rooted in the principles developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire distinguishes his approach to education from the traditional "banking" approach where participants are treated as empty vessels that must be filled with information. The underlying implication of the traditional approach is that students are "uneducated" and in need of knowledge that can come only from teachers or experts. This need creates a dependency and reinforces a sense of powerlessness. People learn to distrust themselves, their own knowledge and intuitions and this can lead to confusion. They often feel there is something wrong but they are not sure what. Freire's method encourages participants to see themselves as a fount of information and knowledge about the real world. When they are encouraged to work with the knowledge they have from their own experience they can develop strategies together to change their immediate situations.

Excerpt from "Chapter One: Our Approach to Popular Education," ***AH-HAH! A New Approach to Popular Education***, p.13.

January 2005

"a method of education that is specifically concerned with the liberation of the people who are a part of it" - It sees all participants as learners AND teachers - teacher as student & student as teacher

What is Praxis? "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it"

Goal is Humanization: What is important is the discovery of the oppressor-oppressed dialectical relationship, and to transform it. Otherwise, oppressed people can fall into the trap of striving to become the oppressors within the same structure.

LEADERSHIP (We cannot use monologues to convince oppressed people about the necessity of struggle - they must act and reflect for themselves. The work should not be FOR oppressed people, but rather WITH oppressed people.)

Key Ingredients: Trust & Dialogue

...Produced by Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), quoted in Power Tools • Appendix A: Additional Social Change & Organizational Tools, Page 4.

October 2004

"Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But the best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves."

...604 B.C. Lao Tzu ...From CPEPR website homepage www.cpepr.net

September 2004

....popular education, that is, to educate in such a way that people are able to grasp deep concepts and make sense of them, so they can have effective practices to govern their lives. So they can create a world of justice and peace, inclusive, non-sexist, respectful of nature, caring for the planet. A non-racist, non-homophobic world, mindful of the oneness of all, based on the concepts of sustainability, thus internationalist - this is Highlander's contribution.

...From *Reflections on Being a Horton Chair* by Marta Benavides. HIGHLANDER REPORTS, April - July 2004

August 2004

Popular education is the term applied to a series of principles that have their roots in the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Community educators, classroom teachers, trade-union educators and many others have been inspired by Freire's theories. There are other terms that are some-times used including liberatory education and critical pedagogy, but essentially all these terms denote education that is working toward the helping people analyze their reality and work toward the transformation of society...

There are many times in your practice where you will see the principles of popular education intertwined with the methodological aspects. Although you never want to reduce popular education to a series of techniques, it is good to know that some of the methods that people use come from these principles. The belief that all people have the capacity to become critical thinkers and to work to solve their own problems lies at the heart of popular education methodology. Participants in a popular education setting are active

subjects, not passive objects. Taking an active role helps people learn better. It helps them care more about what they are learning. A facilitator who works this way becomes a co-learner with the participants. Indeed, the facilitator should take guidance from the participants throughout the planning and workshop process. Whenever possible the facilitator should incorporate the personal experiences of the participants into the work....

In our view the best way to help to strengthen the movement for social change is to help create leaders who are critical thinkers. But it is important to note that we work to develop leadership from within the communities we work with. Why is critical consciousness so important? We believe that for people to begin to work to change the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors, they need to be able to analyze the world around them in order to see beyond hegemonic forces. For this reason, we spend a lot of time helping people learn analytical tools that they can apply in a variety of situations. But because we are working within the context of social change, analysis is connected to action.

Excerpts from ***Economics Education: Building a Movement for Global Economic Justice*** Mary Zerkel, ed. American Friends Service Committee, 2001, pages 6-9.

June-July 2004

Education as social practice is focused specifically on production, circulation and transmission of specified knowledge, norms and behavior. As a social practice it is not neutral; it is rooted within the perspectives of a given model of social organization. Popular education is defined as a social practice that clearly is at the service of popular groups and their interests. Historically, popular education has been characterized by dealing with this knowledge, those norms and behaviors within projects that are more or less explicit in social transformation.

As an educational process it deals with content and method. The contents refer to social struggle analysis and strategies. The methodology of popular education, in a specific manner, has dealt with active and participatory modalities, where the action of the entire group, educators and educatees, occurs horizontally and democratically, without reproducing forms of domination and individualism. It is also within its perspective, as educational work, that social groups gain autonomy for learning as a methodology to promote the independence of social players.

From "The World Social Forum As A Place of Learning"

by Sergio Haddad. *Convergence*, Volume XXXVI, Numbers 2-3, 2003, P. 57

May 2004

popular education, n. 1. [Education for liberation] Syn. Popular education is essential in developing new leadership to build today's bottom-up movement for fundamental social change, justice and equality; see liberation, revolution, social and economic equality

2. [Accessible and relevant] - Syn. We begin by telling our stories, sharing and describing our lives, experiences, problems and how we feel about them.

3. [Interactive] - Syn. We learn by doing, participating in dialogue and activities that are fun, e.g., cultural arts such as drama, drawing, music, poetry and video.

4. [Education with an attitude] - Syn. We are not neutral-- through dialogue and reflection we are moved to act collectively to solve the problems of and with those at the bottom in our communities, those who are most oppressed, exploited and marginalized.

5. [Egalitarian] - Syn. We are equal, all of us have knowledge to share and teach and all of us are listeners and learners, creating new knowledge and relationships of trust as we build for our future.

6. [Historic] - Syn. We see our experience within history; indicating where we have come from and where we are going.

7. [Inclusive] - Syn. We see ourselves in relation to all people of different racial/ethnic groups and nationalities, social classes, gender and sexuality; and ages.

8. [Consciousness raising] - Syn. We critically analyze our experiences within history; explaining the immediate causes of our problems and understanding the deeper root causes in the structures of the economy, power and culture.

9. [Visionary] - Syn. We are hopeful, creating an optimistic vision of the community and global society we want for ourselves and our families.

10. [Strategic] - Syn. We are moved to collective action, developing a plan for short-term actions to address the immediate causes of our problems, and for long-term movement building to address the root causes of our problems.

11. [Involves the whole person] - Syn. We use our head for analysis, reflection and consciousness; our heart for feeling and vision; our feet for collective action for the short term and the long haul.

.....From Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide

2004

Popular education: the methodology – a set of political and pedagogic principles to use in the process of production of knowledge

POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

- The first principle of popular education is the need to democratize power relationships in our society.
- The means to this end is the creation of mechanisms of collective power over all the structures of society.
- The methods used in creating these mechanisms cannot be in contradiction with the first principle – a democratic society cannot be built through authoritarian methods.
- Popular education is a political process in which the projects, strategies, and tactics used are produced collectively by the participants themselves.

PEDAGOGIC PRINCIPLES

- The learners are the SUBJECT, not the OBJECT of the learning process, and through this approach can become the subject of society.
- The educators and the learners are equal participants in the learning process – all are the producers of knowledge. The learning process is developed through a continuous dialogue between the educators and the learners.
- The objective of learning is to liberate the participants from the social pressures and internalized ideas that hold them passive in conditions of oppression – to make them capable of changing their reality, their lives, and the society they live in.

From *Making Sense of the Media: A Handbook of Popular Education Techniques* by Eleonora Castaño Ferreira and João Castaño Ferreira, page 19.

February 2004

The popular education movement seeks to address world literacy. We use the word literacy in the broadest of definitions. Popular Arts Education utilizes the language of imagery, words, movement and sound to pass on knowledge. “Pop Arts Ed” takes into consideration the holistic environment. This pluralistic approach to pedagogy seeks to liberate students from oppressive systems of education, assimilation and cultural memory wiping. We listen to oral traditions and mythology to decode a people’s story. Through the integration of local aesthetics and stories combined with borrowed techniques

and artifacts from other cultures we integrate ideas and concepts into a single work of art. This might be a mural, sculpture, film, theater work or game. Popular Arts education is an approach, and can be adapted and eventually taught by participants. To some degree this approach seeks to canonize an approach to cultural animation. I say this because I feel that for future generations to build upon this work we need a series of benchmarks, of which this definition is one.

While it may be ultimately impossible to set boundaries around "Pop Arts Ed" an attempt to do so will contribute to a global movement that advocates for peace, justice, education and a healthy environment. In fact the pursuit of democracy itself is infused in the struggle to provide adequate arts education to all the world's learners."

"Seeking to Define Popular Arts Education" by Michael B. Schwartz
(MFA) ArtBrigade@aol.com

January 2004

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Introduction to P. Freire; Pedagogy of the Oppressed

November 2003

In our opinion, Popular Education is fundamentally defined according to its objective. In other words, the teaching/learning processes acquire the trait of "popular" insofar as these respond to the needs and interests of the vast majorities. We have seen these needs systemized in three dimensions, namely: dimension of base, of development, and of social change.

"popular" education has to radically (and from its roots) become an instrument of change. For this reason, its target should be to raise awareness and organization levels of popular sectors in such a manner that popular power gradually gains a co-relation of strengths in the social movement and that it collaborates with the social revolution demanded by our peoples.

Excerpt from : "Popular and Adult Education" by Sigfredo Chiroque, President of Instituto de Pedagogia Popular, Lima, Peru, in Adult Education and Development

October 2003

Popular education, developed in the 1960s and 1970s by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, is a nontraditional method of education that tries to empower adults through democratically structured cooperative study and action. Popular education is carried out within a political vision that sees women and men at the community and grassroots level as the primary agents for social change. It is a deeply democratic process, equipping communities to name and create their own vision of the alternatives for which they struggle. The popular education process begins by critically reflecting on, sharing, and articulating with a group or community what is known from lived experience. The participants define their own struggles. They critically examine and learn from the lessons of past struggles and from concrete everyday situations in the present. The process continues with analysis and critical reflection upon reality aimed at enabling people to discover solutions to their own problems and set in motion concrete actions for the transformation of that reality. Organizing guided by the following principles at the core of popular education helps to address two key interrelated challenges many organizations face how to make our organizations more democratic, and how to get people involved who will work to make the organization represent their interests and achieve its goals.

- Encourage participation.
- Develop democratic practices.
- Promote participants' control of the process and actions.
- Focus action around the issues in people's daily lives.
- Involve the entire person, including the heart, mind, body, and spirit.
- Respect the histories and cultures of those involved.
- Take power relationships into account.
- Integrate a gender and race perspective.
- Challenge all privileges (e.g. race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, age).
- Affirm identity.
- Emphasize movement and/or organizational base-building.
- Have long-term goals and visions.

Excerpted from "Popular Education" by Steve Schnapp. THE GLOBAL ACTIVIST'S MANUAL LOCAL WAYS TO CHANGE THE WORLD edited by Mike Prokosch and Laura Raymond. Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2002.

September 2003

Popular education is the educational work in ordinary people's democratic social movements against all forms of oppression and for economic and social justice, sustainability, human rights, and peace. ...Larry Olds

August 2003

Popular education is defined as people's education; it is not the education of the system. It is defined as an alternative to the dominate system. It is not new.

It has importance today in two contexts (1) revolutionary societies like Nicaragua (2) repressive situations like Chile. Why is it important? In the dominate system people's subjectivity is ignored. Capitalist development under fascist dictatorship atomizes people there is a loss of faith, identity, personality as they are integrated into the marketplace. In this situation popular education can be defined as an effort to reconstruct the people. Popular education characteristics

- It starts from the concrete, from popular culture
- It is a process of creating knowledge (related to participatory research)
- It is directed to the specific kind of action called "praxis" (directed toward structural social change)
- It avoids manipulation popular education is a process consistent with the new social order which is to rise
- It is a collective affair. Solidarity, cooperation, and organization are encouraged
- It is a permanent and flexible process

The goal is that people themselves become actors in creation of an alternative society. Popular Education doesn't reach its potential limited to popular organizations, but is located within economic power and power over daily life. This is all participatory and different than a party or attacking hierarchy. It leads to step-by-step, gradual appropriation of all the small spaces that exist in society.

"Pinochet is there not only because he has an army but because also we have a small Pinochet in us."

.....From a presentation by Francisco Vio Grossi of Chile, then the General Secretary of the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL), at a meeting at the Highlander Center in Tennessee in 1983

June-July 2003

Popular Education - a translation of the Spanish *educación popular*, and a form of social change education with roots in Latin America. It starts with the experience of oppressed people, links new knowledge to what people already know, and leads to an expression of that knowledge through collective action for social change. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, pioneered its theory and practice. Social Change Education - the term we use to describe the work of union or popular education in general. It signifies an approach to education that is in the interests of oppressed groups. It involves people in the process of critical analysis so that they can act collectively to change oppressive structures and practices. The process is participatory, creative, and empowering.

From EDUCATION FOR CHANGING UNIONS

May 2003

Popular Education is

- Rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people
- Overtly political and critical of the status quo
- Committed to progressive social and political change in the interests of fairer and more egalitarian society

Popular Education has the following characteristics

- Its curriculum comes out of the concrete experience and material interests of people in communities of resistance and struggle
- Its pedagogy is collective, focused primarily on group as distinct from individual learning and development

From PEN, the European Popular Education Network

April 2003

The principles and philosophy of popular education are often associated with the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, but the practice of popular education predates Freire. The historical roots of popular education can be found in several areas of the world, including the folk school movement in Scandinavia and the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee. While there is no single definition of popular education, CPEPR characterizes popular education according to three central themes. First, popular education is community education, aimed at empowering communities through cooperative study and action. Secondly, popular education is political education, with the goal of collective social change toward a more equitable and democratic society. Finally, popular education is people's education, traditionally aimed at those communities who are excluded or marginalized by dominant society.

.. ...From the Center for Popular Education and Participatory Research website

March 2003

KEY PRINCIPLES OF FREIRE

- a. No education is ever neutral - education is either domesticating or liberating
 - b. Relevance - issues of importance now to participants - issues with strong feeling - excitement, hope, fear, anxiety or anger
 - c. Problem-posing - contrasting to the banking approach to knowledge
 - d. Dialogue - co-learners, a mutual learning process
 - e. Reflection and Action (praxis) - the ACTION/REFLECTION SPIRAL
 - f. Radical transformation - of communities not only individuals
- From: *Training for Transformation A Handbook for Community Workers* by Ann Hope and Sally Timmel.

February 2003

The term popular education, a translation from the Spanish *educacion popular*, defines this approach. Freirian popular educators, promote "conscientization" as a key aim of this type of education. For radical educator Paulo Freire conscientization refers to a learning process in which people, as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality. In Southern and Eastern Africa the term "people's education" or "education for self reliance" are in common usage. In Asia activists speak of "education for mass mobilization" and of engaging in "participatory research." In Europe we often hear of "cultural animation" work,

while in Canada and the United States "transformational education" has influenced development education, feminist pedagogy, community-based adult literacy programs, anti-racist education, and union education programs.

From "First Enliven, Then Enlighten Popular Education and the Pursuit of Social Justice" by Lee Williams

January 2003

POPULAR EDUCATION WHAT IS IT?* Educación Popular or Popular Education forms part of a current in adult education which has been described as 'an option for the poor' or 'education for critical consciousness'. Most of the methodology and techniques of popular education are also those of adult education. But while many adult education programs are designed to maintain social systems, even when unjust and oppressive, popular education's intent is to build an alternative educational approach that is more consistent with social justice. Popular Education is called 'popular' because its priority is to work among the many rural and urban poor who form the vast majority of people in most Third World countries. It is a collective or group process of education, where the teacher and students learn together, beginning with the concrete experience of the participants, leading to reflection on that experience in order to effect positive change. *We have chosen to formulate the definition primarily in terms of who is taught. Other ways of defining the term relate to what is taught or the objectives...or the characteristics of popular education.

.....From Rick Arnold and Bev Burke in A Popular Education Handbook