

POPULAR EDUCATION

What is Popular Education?

Popular education is education as a practice (or praxis) of freedom. It is an approach to education where participants engage each other and the educator as co-learners to critically reflect on the issues in their community and then take action to change them. The words "Popular Education" are often referred to to describe any education "for the people" where the educators take complex information and simplify it or make it entertaining in order to facilitate easy "absorption" of the material for people. *But this is **the opposite of popular education**.* This simplifying and "dumbing down" content is rooted in the idea that the educators are experts while the students are empty and passive receptacles. With popular education, the educator and learners are all peers, exploring together and making meaning of their personal and collective challenges in order to overcome them.

Principles of Popular Education

- ★ **Praxis:** Reflection *and* action. The process is not complete until it leads to informed and reflective action
- ★ **Relevant:** Start where people are at: begin with their experiences, knowledge and skills and then move towards finding common ground and shared problems.
- ★ **Horizontal:** Create a felt and experienced equality with the "facilitator" and other participants, who all bring something to teach and something to learn.
- ★ **Balanced:** Connect the personal with the systemic and the systemic with the personal.
- ★ **Contextualized:** Connect to the history, present and future of the topic.
- ★ **Respectful:** Trust in people, the knowledge people bring and value each unique perspective, voice and personal process.
- ★ **Slow:** Make space and time for the diversity of backgrounds, opinions, and perspectives that everyone comes with, not just parts of people.
- ★ **Generative:** Create as you go and use multiple creative means to provide everyone opportunity to develop new ideas, knowledge and strategies.
- ★ **Loving:** Resist the cold, hard colonial habits of disconnection and domination and seek to actively love each other's humanity.

Principles written by Levana Saxon, by both paraphrasing sections of Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire, The Long Haul by Myles Horton, class notes from the Popular Education course taught at Berkeley by John Hurst, and personal experiences working with groups

EDUCATION AS A PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

One of the many ways that popular education has been articulated, is through the many



books of Paulo Freire's. In particular, a "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" contrasts "Education as a Practice of Freedom" with "Banking Education" or "Education as a Practice of Domination". Popular Education is an education as a practice of freedom. Here are paraphrased ideas of Freire's that further clarify the differences.

Problem-posing Education; Education as a practice of freedom	Banking Education; Education as the practice of domination
Primary goal is conscientization	Primary goal is to adapt people to their oppressive conditions
Both educator and educand (<i>Freire's word for student in an attempt to convey a more equitable relationship</i>) teach and learn from each other as partners	Teacher attempts to control thinking and action of the students, who are treated as passive objects
Assumes the world is an unfolding historical process; everything and everyone is interrelated	Assumes that people are merely in the world, not connected to it or each other
Begins with context; the educands' "historicity", "dynamic present" and incomplete future	Removes students from their historical, current and future context. Teaches reality as complete and unchangeable
Primary Method is dialogue about topics that the educand has some prior experience of	Primary Method is lecture about topics the students have little connection to
Words are thick with meaning and have transforming power	Words are empty and alienating
Educands are posed with problems that relate to their lives and respond by creatively posing new challenges and new understandings	Students are meekly filled as empty containers (and tested to see how much leaked out)
Seeks to transform society to rehumanize both the oppressed and oppressor	Treats oppressed people as on the margins of a healthy society who need to be incorporated into it
Integral to the revolutionary process - not something to get to after the revolution	Integral to maintaining systems of oppression as they are

If you have come
to help me you are
wasting your time.
But if you have
come because your
liberation is bound
up with mine, then
let us work together.

ABORIGINAL
ACTIVIST'S
GROUP
QUEENSLAND, 1970s

This quote is often attributed to Brisbane area activist leader Lila Watson who was a member of the group that created the statement.

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