

**SW 504**

**Popular Education as an anti-  
oppressive strategy**

Fall 2017

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# Popular Education

- “Popular education” was originally developed by a Brazilian activist-scholar named Paulo Freire
- Popular education is a political, collective learning process based on facilitated dialogue that places the learners’ voices and lived experiences at the heart of the learning, weaving in a deeper analysis of power to sharpen critical thinking and link to organized community action.
- It is an empowering educational process helps people develop a critical awareness of their community and society and gain a sense of their collective power for creating change.
- It can be powerful process for leadership development, organizing and movement-building because it combines critical thinking, visioning, self-empowerment, relationship-building, action, and, when done well, hope and energy.
- Ref: <https://justassociates.org>

# The Nature of Popular Education

- A learning process that validates what people already know from experience yet challenges them to examine their preconceived notions more deeply through:
  - new ideas and information,
  - empower them to think critically and collectively about the inequality and injustice they suffer
  - seek out information on their own,
  - and act together with others to make a difference.

# Mutual Learning & Dialogue

- involves joint discovery and helps learners to gain confidence in their own ability to sort things out
- enables people to see that they are not alone, or “to blame” for their predicament and opens them up to a deeper analysis of the social forces shaping injustice
- an iterative, structured process without predictable steps and outcomes
- head to heart
- Uses codes such as skits, stories, movies, drawing, role play, games, song to facilitate dialogue, that presents a familiar problem in a concrete way without providing explanations, answers, or moral
- These codes become the subject of subsequent dialogues and a “decoding” of the group’s life circumstances

# The Popular Education Process

- Confidence and Relationship and Trust-building, group solidarity
- What is happening? What does it look like?
- Why is it happening?
- Does this happen in your community? In real Life?
- What problem does this lead to?
- What are the roots of these problems?
- What can we do about it?

# Levels of Critical Consciousness

## Levels of Consciousness

### From Passive to Questioning Consciousness

- You assume class status, race dynamics and gender roles- duties are "natural"
- You believe you are to blame for poverty, economic and social problems
- You are not familiar with other perspectives about what's wrong and why; if you are, you find them threatening and you criticize them
- You begin to have access to information and experiences different from what is familiar to you
- You begin to question aspects of your life and to search for answers to your problems

### From Questioning to Analytical Consciousness

- You begin to name and analyze situations that you have lived
- You begin to confront and place blame; you feel angry
- You begin to discover how your predicament as a worker, mother, young man, (race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) is a social, cultural, economic and political construction; not a predetermined role incapable of change
- You reaffirm your self-worth and potential for change
- You connect with others who share similar problems and interests to explore how to resist and change things

### From Analytical to Active Critical Consciousness

- You develop your critical analysis, question yourself and your world; you seek out more information to explain things
- You begin to be a more active part of a group or community
- You take political actions
- You face the interpersonal and social conflict that your changes and political view generate
- You create spaces to negotiate fundamental areas of life - work home, family, and related changes
- You become increasingly involved in organizing for political change

**For apart from inquiry,  
apart from praxis,  
individuals cannot be  
fully human.**

Paulo Friere, 1970

- Critical consciousness sustains people's active involvement and capacity to self-organize in response to injustice
- It is about learning to question and challenge the explanations for why things are the way they are and what is "normal"
- Perpetually seeking a deeper understanding of power and inequality from the personal to public realm
- It flips mainstream ideas of education and organizing on their heads by insisting that true knowledge and expertise already exists with people – they need no deposits of information (Banking Education) or propaganda to convince them of their problems.

# Resistance as a reaction to conflict

One reaction to conflict is resistance.

1. Claim that the status quo is part of a natural order.
- 2. Invalidation of target group member's experience.
- 3. Agents' need to have own pain and hurt recognized.
- 4. Protection of agent group members by target group members.

# Common Forms of Resistance

- Immobilization, due to a sense of powerlessness to change oppressive conditions, fear of being perceived as a bigot, agent guilt about their agent status, fear of conflict and disagreement
- Distancing, including the need to see the most extreme bigots as agents of oppression, willingness to focus on oppression of target groups but not one's own privilege
- Conversion, including correcting others, romanticizing target groups, reversing power dynamics, demonizing agent groups

# More reactions to conflict

- 6. Agents focus on an identity in which they are members of a targeted group.
- 7. Invalidation of the teacher
- 8. Invalidation of the class.
- 9. Anecdote raised to the status of generalized fact.
- 10. Domination of class discussion.
- 11. Hostile silence.

# Strategies for Dealing with Resistance

- Confront people on their resistance. It's difficult, but no one said it would be easy. Hold individuals responsible for being allies, rather than supporting status quo.
- Ask questions—what is making you ask that question? Where is the silence coming from?
- Use of self as a model for change—explaining your struggle for critical consciousness and every day examples, owning your own unearned privilege.
- Acknowledging agent groups as humans who have the capacity for change, examine commonalities among agents and targets, encourage peace and justice for all as common goals, encourage reconciliation.