

# Understanding Popular Education: the Practice of Democratic Freedom

*“Empowering People to Rebuild their Lives”*

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“The best education is action and the best action is the struggle for social justice.”  
- Myles Horton

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## 1. PROLOGUE

*“But of the best leaders, when their task is accomplished and their work is done, the people all remark, ‘We have done it ourselves.’”*

- Lao Tzu

My interest in popular education happened accidentally. I actually had no idea it was popular education until after writing this comp and understanding why I am so passionate about this subject matter. My first experience with the idea of popular education was similar to Myles Horton’s first understanding of how learning should not be limited to academia but is a part of everyday life. It all started the summer of 2005; I wanted to return to Antigua, the Caribbean island where my mother grew up, to work with kids. My Aunty Donna, who still lives on the island, made the contacts and eventually informed me that I would be teaching at the Good Shepherd Home for Children with a group of girls primarily between the ages of 7 and 12 years old. The girls live at the Home because they have been abandoned or their families cannot support them. Some of the girls have emotional disabilities. The topic of the class would be up to me. Since jewelry making is a personal interest and hobby of mine, I choose to do an arts class that focused on different types of jewelry making skills.

I developed a close bond with many of the girls, in particular, Akeesha – a rowdy 7 year old who cannot keep still. She loved puzzles and I would help her, but her hands would shake so much that it would be difficult for her to place the pieces. Akeesha loved my long hair and she would often pull it, sometimes rather strongly! During the last few days of my stay, Akeesha asked me many times if she could come and live with me. Working with the girls was very rewarding and it felt good to be able to bring something fun to their days. The girls at the Good Shepherd Home for

Children taught me many things. Most importantly they taught me about love. I am so grateful to have earned their love and to feel love for them. I saw how the girls' faces would light up when they would receive a call from a parent to schedule a visit and it made me appreciate my own family even more. Although I mostly helped the girls with miniscule problems like how to tie the end of a string, I wanted to be able to help them with life's larger problems because they all seemed to trust and love me. But the main thing I learned was that it was not just an experience where I taught them how to make jewelry, it was an experience where we all learned from each other. The learning was not just restricted to the children learning from me. Throughout my teaching experience, I was nervous before every class because there was never a fully developed curriculum besides the art project of the day. Every class where we sat creating art would provide another learning topic in the class, whether it was discussing family issues or learning reading skills. We would all be engaged in the dialogue, and the girls often had more to say than I did. That summer the girls felt empowered from the ability to create art but also by learning how to communicate effectively with one another. The program also helped them learn how to love themselves and know that they can do anything. It was this experience that shifted my interest in education as a tool for empowerment where people do not just learn from the teacher within the classroom but from each other.

Later on in high school, I would read about the Highlander Center in Tennessee, which was the first place in the South, before the Civil Rights Movement started, where Blacks and Whites could come together to discuss, analyze and address critical issues within society. The dialogues had empowered them to move beyond seeing a country

dichotomized by race but they realized that through collective action they all could recreate a future of America that would not be doomed to racial hatred and prejudice, and the oppression of minority groups. Ever since reading about the Highlander Center, the word popular education has been on my brain and lead me to undertake different internships and jobs that work with the ideas of popular education.

*FALL 2009*

In the Fall of 2009, my internship role with the Downtown Women's Center (DWC) changed from Volunteer and Development Intern to Community Outreach Intern where my duties were extended to be an educator for the DWC's popular education workshop "Solutions Exist" and to create a new section to the "Solution's Exist" program that established an action component to the program. DWC wanted to have an educational program for community members to acknowledge that homelessness is not just an issue that homeless women need to overcome but a community issue that will only be effectively addressed with collective action and power among community members.

By pursuing its own vision: *to lead the implementation of innovative solutions by creating committed communities that work together to end homelessness for women*, DWC worked within the community to develop an educational campaign to engage Los Angeles residents about the growing crisis of women's homelessness and to actively promote one of DWC's solutions, *Permanent Supportive Housing*. Through the research of Maureen Purtill, a UCLA graduate student, a popular education curriculum was developed. To understand the root causes of women's homelessness in Los Angeles; learn what supportive housing is, and is not; and inspire individuals to personalize and humanize the daily struggles of homelessness to then become public agents of social change. Through

developing relationships with schools, organizations and social groups who would go through and use the “Solutions Exist” education model, DWC would be able to develop relationships and build new leadership within the community to become active participants in advocating for an end to homeless. Through participating in the workshops and possibly attending a “Solutions Exist” advocate training people can become inspired to collectively come together and learn how they have the power to change policy and help strengthen positive growth within the community.

The program sounded amazing to me and I jumped on the chance to be a part of the development of the program. I was trained to be an educator for “Solutions Exist” and trained to facilitate the advocate training, which trains volunteers to become educators of the program. Despite the impact and value of being in the classroom and facilitating the discussion and activities of the groups and seeing the participants realize that homelessness is not just an issue that can’t harm them, my favorite role was as the facilitator of the dialogue where people realized that people within their group were once homeless, this fact came as a shock to many people. Through discussing the root causes and identifying solutions such as Permanent Supportive Housing people left feeling like new experts on the issue. But there was one part missing: the action component and that was my favorite part of the job because I created a new section of Solutions Exist that would promote action, called “Empowerment through Art.” This new portion of Solutions Exist strives to provide mainly young teens a sense of power to make a difference through various art projects such as mural making and putting on events that can inspire change about the issue of homelessness within their communities. The multiple levels of learning within the Solutions Exist program showed me that learning is not just a one-dimensional thing that

happens through lectures in the classroom but through active discussion and problem solving by using art or the tools of dialogue.

During the same time, Fall of 2009, I also had the opportunity to work with SAJE, on a campaign called UNIDAD (UNITED NEIGHBORS IN DEFENSE AGAINST DISPLACEMENT) where popular education tools were being used to help community members create their own community development plan to counter USC's Master Plan. The USC Master Plan would devastate the culture and economics of the current neighborhood, leading to increased numbers of residents and small businesses being pushed out of their community due to higher rents and property taxes. By using popular education, community members were able to participate in urban planning activities where they had the opportunity to restructure the landscape of their community to fit the needs of their community. By using these resources, community members felt empowered that they could have a role in protecting their community, as well as having the power to envision a community that fits the community's needs. Through my work with the UNIDAD campaign I saw how popular education can actively bring forth change by constantly being proactive to provide community members with a final product that is for the direct benefit of their community to tackle such big issues as gentrification, displacement and economic isolation.

#### *SPRING 2010*

Traveling across the world to Ghana, West Africa I was fortunate again to find myself using popular education with the organization I was assigned to, the Alliance for African Women Initiative (AFAWI). When I walked into the steamy, un-air-conditioned office of AFAWI in the remote town of Taifa I was unsure of what job I could possibly be assigned.

I sat down with the director and he went through their projects. Once, I started talking about my interests in education he told me about a previous project they had done in private schools called Teen Club that looked at youth development and health issues facing teenagers. My eyes lit up and I knew this was a project where I could use tools of popular education. I told him I would be interested and he mentioned that they had wanted to introduce the program to public schools but didn't have the resources, so he said the project was mine. He gave me the name of a public school close by called Taifa Community School that I could undertake outreach. I researched the program, evaluated it and added my own spin by adding popular education ideas that would have the program be more learner focus to what is relevant to the needs and wants of the student's learning interests and youth leadership development – where students would have a chance to lead discussions and community group projects. A week later I found myself in the Headmaster's office of the Taifa Community School discussing Teen Club and the organizational support that AFAWI would provide to the school. This is the Public Service Announcement I gave the Headmaster:

*Teen Club is an afterschool program that works to empower students to become leaders within their communities through learning how to build supportive communities, developing problem-solving skills and educating students on important issues affecting their communities. AFAWI will partner with local public schools – Taifa Community School being the first – to provide additional support in developing responsible students who are knowledgeable about issues affecting the youth today. Through the implementation of Teen Clubs in public schools, more students will have the opportunity to enhance their reading, writing and oral skills through a vast variety of activities available to the students during*

*the Teen Club meetings like poetry, readings, debates and creating dramas. The Teen Club is meant to build a supportive atmosphere to allow for open dialogues on certain issues that are not touched upon in the classroom or at home like information about reproductive health. The club creates a safe space where teens can share their experiences to understand issues ranging from domestic abuse and sexually transmitted infections within their community in order to try and understand how to create solutions to these issues.*

The Headmaster was excited and let me talk to the teachers and then four weeks later after talking to the students and having elections for student positions within the club, I was developing curriculum and starting to work with the students. The classroom provided the space to talk about serious issues such as reproductive and sexual health, sexual assault and rape. Since popular education works by sharing personal experiences to then understand how to “root analyze” the experiences, the stories were often hard to bear, especially when dealing with rape, but the open discussion allowed everyone to understand the severity of the issue. The full analysis of the issues provided a space for the students to start addressing what the conversation needs to look like to start talking about how we can work towards change. The students loved the ability in shaping their learning experience through deciding the activities and topics of discussion. This responsibility that popular education places on the students to be actively involved in the learning process is why, after I left, they felt that they had the skills to continue the program on their own with the help of their teacher who acted as an advisor to the club. Before leaving I told them that they could do whatever they wanted to create learning spaces, and that included writing their own plays to perform, writing songs and poetry, or doing active sports activities, all of which could get a message across. Their eyes lit up at the endless possibilities of how they could shape their learning,

and it was because of their excitement that I knew I was not leaving them empty handed and unprepared, that they had realized and understood their power to build change.

The various interactions I have had with popular education have shown me that it is an effective tool not contingent on one particular issue, and can be used for countless issues from urban planning to health education. The tools of popular education can be used to address multiple community concerns to allow space for people to come together and critically examine their issues to uncover the root issues contributing to a particular concern. After examination comes the development of new knowledge which can contribute to new problem-solving ideas that can lead to a new vision of social change. The democratic process within popular education is what invigorates people to become stronger community leaders. Through the process of critical analysis of personal experiences and looking at these experiences in historical context and then identifying strategies for action, people's voices ultimately feel validated through the new idea of knowledge they are producing throughout the program.

I have always been one who actively becomes engrossed in stories, especially whenever my mom tells me stories about her life. It is these stories that provide a context to understanding history and the issues of that time that may still be visible today. I love popular education because it allows all of us to become storytellers and reflective of our lives and know that our lives are a part of the history of this world, and that through understanding our history and those of others we can work to build a better future for ourselves and one another. When we feel a part of the world through self-expression, and we feel validated through our ability to speak, and we validate and listen to others when they speak, then we can feel more connected to the world and the need to be a part of

making the world a better place.

## **2. WHY POPULAR EDUCATION?**

### ***BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE***

America is a nation founded on the ideals of freedom and democracy. The American values and rights defined in our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, illustrate a society where citizens are expected to use their voice as a powerful tool to participate in democracy. The first amendment, the freedom of speech, is the defining freedom of America; without it, the citizens of America would not feel that they have the potential to be actively engaged within their society. When you respect the voice of every being, then there is room to believe in the possibilities of equality and justice, because everyone is contributing by translating ideas into action. Democracy is a continuous process of decision-making in which people work together to create a fair and more equal nation based on continuous reflection and re-evaluation of history and personal or group experiences to promote social change. If a true democracy is a society that promotes the well-being of everyone, it is important that all voices are heard. America prides itself on acting democratic in national and foreign relations; however America has fallen short of its commitment as a true representative democratic society where all voices are equally heard and all needs are addressed nationally and internationally. Today, the American government does not seem to be guided by the majority of the American people but instead is under the control of corporations that are stifling the growth of equitable development within all sectors of the American society, including economic, environmental, health, and social welfare. Former President Franklin D. Roosevelt predicted America's fate regarding the power of private industries and corporations during

his April 29, 1938 speech to Congress, “The liberty of democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism – ownership of government by an individual, by a group.”<sup>1</sup>

As we have moved into the 21st century, the work of popular education is ever necessary as President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s words have resounded louder than ever before – we are at a point in time where private corporate interests have swayed the power of the government and caused an economic collapse. The sectors that have been profoundly affected are education, income disparities and our healthcare system, to identify just a few. Popular education is a tool to tap into the resources of the community to levy its power in creating change first on a local, then further on a national level.

### ***IDEA OF POPULAR EDUCATION***

The idea and philosophy of popular-education continues to be an evolving term but based upon the main ideas, as Linda Delp argues, of “empowerment of adults through democratically structured cooperative study and action, directed toward achieving more just, equitable, and peaceful societies. It seeks to build people’s capacity to create democratic change through education. Its priority is the poor, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised of the world – ordinary people.”<sup>2</sup> Building people’s capacity to understand that they have the innate power as human beings to demand, create and sustain social justice is what is imperative to starting and maintaining a movement for real lasting social justice.

Confidence in the voices, minds and capability to make decisions is a powerful tool, which

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<sup>1</sup> “Democracy Quotes.” *Find the Famous Quotes You Need, ThinkExist.com Quotations*. Web 09 Dec. 2010. <<http://thinkexist.com/quotations/democracy/3.html>>

<sup>2</sup> Delp, Linda. *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002. P. 11. Print.

is the action the elite powers fear. The higher levels of hierarchy (the one percent of society holding the wealth of the nation, “the bourgeoisie”) have successfully diluted the “proletariat,” ordinary people, into believing they are useless and submissive when in reality they are the backbone of society which sustains the economic structure of America. Bringing people together to explore their experience of oppression, discuss root causes, develop a critical analysis of their experiences and identify strategies for action in popular education workshops catalyzes true democracy where people are a part of the process of challenging old structures of oppression to rebuild structural change. The power of popular education comes with the workshops’ ability to give participants the tools to analyze their situation and understand what steps are necessary to transform themselves and the conditions of their environment. Exploitative systems previously demoralize any ideas of change. Since the exploitative system is based on alienated publics, people tend to feel powerless and place blame on individual failure rather than on the systems of oppression. However, with people actively in charge of their education, they have the power to build change, create a novel validation of self that was never previously offered. The new tools and resources exposed to participants within popular education programs allows for mainly everyone to leave the program feeling validated and empowered by the fact that they do have the power and ability to build change, leading to a reaffirmation of self that can create more motivation to be involved in creating a new vision of life and community.

Education can offer two different opportunities for young people to become integrated into society; (1) it can function as a way to assimilate people into the present day system and result in conformity and homogeneity or (2) education can serve as a practice of freedom where critical analysis is a continuous tool that allows for creative growth for

individuals to transform their world. Within American society where the gap between the rich and poor is drastically widening, education should be used as a tool “to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them. It must take account of the needs of existing community life; it must select with the intention of improving the life we live in common.”<sup>3</sup> Popular education facilitates the discussion of privilege because without examining it then we ignore the question of who and why some people benefit from the current economic system and we can ask ourselves the questions of how, where and why oppression exists within our society. Education is meant to be a liberating practice that prepares students to be active citizens within the world, and education is meant to be an inclusive program that invites all people to be a part of critical discussions. When all voices are heard then there is acknowledgment of the different experiences of people throughout the country and allows for more valued examination of the world we live in and whether it is a world that values everyone or just some and questions if this is fair. Critical examination of society through reflection and listening to oneself and others allows people an opportunity to begin to expose and recognize the unfair privilege that is held by an unequal few in America. Through acknowledgement of this privilege that exists for few Americans, the acknowledgement of injustice and inequality is recognized within society. These realizations lead to new discussions of ideas of positive change that can be pursued through action to rebuild a society based on equal access and opportunity for everyone to be free. With people coming together to talk things through, they are participating in the basic foundations of what America is built on; the idea of democracy where many come together as representatives of our communities to construct an idea of

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<sup>3</sup> Adams, Frank and Myles Horton. *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: the Idea of Highlander*. Winston-Salem, NC: J.F. Blair, 1975. 13. Print.

society that is livable for everyone. People will begin to feel a part of a local, national and global community and will be empowered by this communal sense of existence and unity. It is the work of popular education that maintains a sharp focus on sustaining democracy within a society – where all participants are valued and heard.

People feel empowered when they are motivated by a sense of power and purpose, which increases their involvement as active citizens to transform society. People are socially and mentally transformed when they can come together in a space and understand that they have the power and knowledge to solve their own issues. Education is the key to social transformation and the development of humans to be a part of an active democratic process where critical thinking is cultivated to allow for a gateway through which understanding reality, transforming society, and promoting social change through a group-based dialogue formation, can be established. Popular-education therefore connects people with the founding ideas of democracy and citizenship where to be an active citizen, you must feel empowered to be a part of the democratic process. Popular-education through its grassroots purpose of developing individual and group power creates knowledge inspired by the people, allowing participants to feel empowered by their citizenship and actively seeking to improve conditions deemed unfavorable.

### **3. HISTORY OF POPULAR EDUCATION**

The term “popular education” is credited to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who coined the term during the mid-twentieth century when he was developing adult-literacy programs for the poor and politically disenfranchised people of Brazil. Through his literacy education work, he noticed that people are not receptive to programs unless they feel that their presence and voice in the classroom is validated and respected. If people who are already socially, politically and economically disenfranchised feel the same way in the classroom then they will not be engaged in the program. Instead, if a space is created where there is a breakdown of the power structure between the teacher and the student, then the participants will feel more engaged. Freire rejected the current education of his time calling it “mass education,” a term that can be associated with the industrial overproduction of goods in a capitalist society, where not much thought and attention is put into the product as it is being constructed. He believed “mass education” imposed silence and passivity among individuals. To compare education to the mindless production of goods, Freire argued that humans are at a loss in connecting to themselves, to one another and to society, if they continue to be a part of a society where people are made to be objects instead of subjects of their own lives.

Popular education “is 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 are 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,"<sup>4</sup> which builds an idea of collective solidarity among the group where individuals are within the group but not separate from the group.

At the time that Paulo Freire was working in Brazil, Myles Horton was doing similar programs consistent with the ideas of Freire at the Highlander Folk School in rural Tennessee, America. Highlander started with the "intention of educating rural and industrial leaders for a new social order and enriching the indigenous cultural values of the mountains."<sup>5</sup> Paulo Freire's name is famous but an examination of Myles Horton's work shows that his popular education models have worked in developing a sense of power among highly disenfranchised people in America and has also sustained different movements like the labor and civil rights movement - most notably the civil rights movement. "The direct education and training that leaders within the labor and civil rights movement received at Highlander often led to new organizations and actions but also as a space to strategize, to organize action, to share scarce resources, and to bring like-minded white folks together with movement leaders."<sup>6</sup> Horton got his inspiration for a safe place for dialogue during his trips to Ozone, Tennessee where he was an organizer for Bible schools. However, while he was there he realized that the population came to his meetings not only to discuss the Bible but to dialogue about issues they were dealing with in the

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<sup>4</sup> "What Is Popular Education?" *The Popular Education News*. Web. 23 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.popednews.org/newsletters/definitions.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 2. Print.

<sup>6</sup> Delp, Linda. *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002. Print.

neighborhood, like farming techniques. Horton soon observed that “once neighbor began meeting with neighbor, they learned that many answers to their questions were available right there in Ozone. They did not need experts. They just needed to start talking to each other. He had learned that the teacher’s job was to get them talking about those problems to raise and sharpen questions and to trust the people or this way of learning.”<sup>7</sup> These educational experiences growing up, combined with his experience in Denmark and knowledge of the ideologies of Bishop N.S.F. Grundtvig, pushed Myles Horton to try to build a place where people could sit together and learn from each other. It is with the ideas and work of Bishop N.S.F. Grundtvig that an understanding of the history of the growth of the idea of “popular-education” begins.

Bishop N.S. F Grundtvig (Denmark 1783 – 1820) promoted the idea of residential adult education programs to enlighten and enliven the Danish peasantry after centuries of exploitation under a feudal system. Grundtvig believed that rehabilitation and development would best result if the cultural traditions and language of Denmark were preserved to ensure that all walks of life felt a part of the re-building of Denmark. If the teachers create an atmosphere where people are learning from each other and thinking of how to build from the lessons of Denmark’s history, then there would be a strengthened sense of being a part of a collective national identity. Creating schools for the purpose of learning about key economic and political interests developed into the Folk Schools of Denmark which “sparked rejuvenation of the economy, growth of political sophistication, revival of Danish patriotism.”<sup>8</sup> The opportunity for creating a space of individual expression associated with group cooperation allowed for ideas to flourish and democratic change to occur for the

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<sup>7</sup> Adams, Frank, and Myles Horton. *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: the Idea of Highlander*. Winston-Salem, NC: J.F. Blair, 1975. 3 - 4. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 5. Print.

benefit of the country. The success of the program had countries like Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland and England developing similar programs. “By the late 1920s the folk schools were widely credited with improvements in agricultural practices and the growth of intellectual activity and political participation among the rural population in Denmark.”<sup>9</sup>

The creativity, group solidarity and sense of power through participation within the Folk Schools of Denmark led Horton to create a similar program in America where he felt there was a lack of teachers who emphasized one’s capacity to learn, and instead merely instructed others to push an idea on someone. Horton talked about the necessity of a program within America that could inspire people to be continuous active learners and a part of a social enrichment program. Horton argued that “a folk school in America, as in Denmark, would probably center about a personality of some real teacher; a man who is capable of learning, and who can teach, not so much by his teaching, as by his capacity to learn. America’s great lack at present is the lack of men of this sort. We have plenty of men and women who can teach what they know; we have very few who can teach their own capacity to learn.”<sup>10</sup> The capacity to learn is dependent on a voracious appetite for new ideas, to test our experience and knowledge to push us to develop socially in a world that is ever changing and demands our attention to be a fair and equal place for all. The capacity to learn only works if people are strengthened by the idea that they can be leaders so that they can feel able to fully participate. In order to create a space where everyone feels equal, privileged people also need to be part of the dialogues, to change their perceptions of status, power and wealth. This movement involves all people in developing and understanding social change. Most importantly, the Folk Schools taught Horton that for change and

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<sup>9</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 16. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, Frank, and Myles Horton. *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: the Idea of Highlander*. Winston-Salem, NC: J.F. Blair, 1975. 23. Print.

innovation to occur the population that is always assumed ill-fitted must be a part of the process; their experience cannot be dismissed. Horton identified a group that needed help becoming active agents of social change – the rural poor were his first target group. As his ideas of how education can be integrated to develop community development, his ideas grew into the development of the Highlander Folk School. The purpose became “to get behind the common judgments of the poor, help them learn to act and speak for themselves, help them gain control over decisions affecting their daily lives. The answers to the problems of the poor must emerge from the poor themselves. The sooner the poor were trusted to develop and express their own ideas – their own creative ideas – the sooner America would begin to achieve the kind of social structure that could end poverty and racial prejudice, set aside exploitation and the reasons for war.”<sup>11</sup> In essence, he saw the Highlander School as a place to help disenfranchised communities become an “educated radical labor leadership.” With this vision of creating a space for empowerment, Highlander saw its vision of “a socialized nation in which a social order based on human justice, cooperation, a livelihood for every man and a fair distribution of wealth would replace the existing system of graft, exploitation, and private profit.”<sup>12</sup>

The Highlander Folk School was founded in Monteagle, Tennessee, in 1932 to work for social and economic change. “Highlander’s earliest campaigns were interwoven with the growth of union organizing in the South, from organizing bogwood tree cutters in Grundy County to coal miner organizing in Davidson and Wilder, Tennessee. During its first two decades, the Highlander staff were sometimes organizers, like Zilla Hawes who worked with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers to organize the union’s first local in the South.

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<sup>11</sup> Adams, Frank, and Myles Horton. *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: the idea of Highlander*. Winston-Salem, NC: J.F. Blair, 1975. 24. Print.

<sup>12</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 25. Print.

More often they were educators and cultural workers supporting union organizing and providing, as early as 1940, one of the only places where blacks and white could come together.”<sup>13</sup> The school believed that education is a stepping-stone to transforming society. With this belief, the curriculum of Highlander was altered to fit the needs of the students. “The curriculum focuses not on the symptoms but on the causes of problems facing black and white southerners, and it both anticipates and responds to larger movements of change.”<sup>14</sup> With a curriculum focusing on integrating personal stories, history, and experience the facilitators hoped to push the participants to look at how their lives have been shaped and what solutions they have used to mitigate the injustices within society. The empowerment found among individuals pushes people to see each other as members of a common community, leading to a building of relationships and a desire to keep working towards change to benefit the collective community they identify with. Staff members of Highlander have been primarily concerned with developing community leadership, organizing the economically and socially oppressed and creating broad-based coalitions to push for a more democratic society. “The objectives of the Workshops are

1. People have more control over their lives.
2. Achieve a higher standard of living
3. Gain unrestricted access to community services and institutions
4. Associate with whom they choose without penalty
5. Make government responsive to the popular will
6. Exercise individual creativity that contributes to the common welfare.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Delp, Linda. *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002. p. 19. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 6. Print.

<sup>15</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 4-5. Print.

To have the participants feel in charge of their education, staff members are there to act only as facilitators of discussion and introducing relevant material when the participants show interest. “Staff members refrain from imposing a preconceived set of ideas and use consultants, movies, audio and video recordings, drama, music and written materials to build on the students’ knowledge and introduce new values, options and perspectives. Participants evaluate their findings, assess their new understanding of their problems, and develop plans to initiate or sustain activities when they return to their communities. Highlander personnel measure the value of a session by how well the students carry out the decisions they made at school and staff transfers responsibility for the programs to organizations with larger resources.”<sup>16</sup>

Staff members did not create projects for communities – all ideas were generated from the group. The classroom experience for participants was different all the time and inspired different skills. Zilphia Horton developed writing workshops and drama programs that acted as a voice for social change where songs for the Labor and Civil Rights movement were created. Highlander worked primarily with labor unions in the beginning but since Highlander was the only integrated space in the South for blacks and whites to come together to discuss issues, Highlander became a very important space during the Civil Rights Movement. Highlander’s star program that came about during the Civil Rights Movement was the Citizenship Schools which was a literacy program to increase the voting power of black Americans who could not vote during this time because the poor quality of their schools and other economic and social barriers imposed by racist Southern governments at that time, blacks could not pass the literacy test to vote. “The program

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<sup>16</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 4 – 5. Print.

contributed to the growth of black political power in Charleston County – between 1954 and 1961, Highlander sponsored 37 education programs in South Carolina, involving nearly 1300 participants.”<sup>17</sup> Ms. Bernice Robinson was the teacher hired by Highlander to teach the first Citizenship School program. The curriculum of the Citizenship Schools was always based on meeting the students on where they are at and then when they are comfortable introducing new ideas. The goal of the classes quickly evolved from a focus on passing the voter registration test to a focus on understanding how to be more engaged citizens. Originally they were studying difficult words related to the voter registration application and then moved on to work on “basic arithmetic by studying items like grocery store advertisements, providing copies of mail-order forms and money orders and instructed them to read the directions, fill in the blanks and compute the amount of money they owed.”<sup>18</sup> By the end of the program, the class had “produced a workbook on voting, social security taxes and functions of the county and school board.”<sup>19</sup> The discovery of new words gave the participants perspective about understanding and speaking about their lives. Also the program increased the literacy and writing skills of this community, increasing personal, social and economic development since the lack of literacy and writing skills had previously prevented them from performing basic citizenship skills like voting. The success of the first Citizenship School catalyzed the development of new leaders to become facilitators to organize and run the literacy classes. This further developed the power and confidence of the once disenfranchised black community. Eventually the program changed hands to the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) run by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and by “1970, SCLC estimated that approximately 100,000 blacks had learned to read and write

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<sup>17</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 197. Print.

<sup>18</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 195. Print.

<sup>19</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 195. Print.

through the Citizenship Schools.”<sup>20</sup> Participants of Highlander’s programs like the Citizenship Schools motivated people not only to learn more about the problems they faced but also to use that knowledge to involve others in social-based work to improve human conditions on Earth. Highlander gave a space for people to congregate and understand their knowledge and allowed for programs to be developed that increase the social welfare and power of previously disenfranchised people and lead to ally building, which crossed cultures.

Highlander continues to be a space where people can come together not only to learn about the nature of the problems they face but also to engage in actions that can help create the world we are proud to pass on to future generations. Today Highlander’s new role “no longer involves a single issue or constituency; it must bring together people and build common ground, nurture voices and spaces of resistance and help educate for a multi-issue, multicultural, multiregional movement to create change in grassroots democracy, economic empowerment and environmental justice.”<sup>21</sup> It is programs like Highlander that build the capacity for people to interact with duties of being an American citizen to ensure equality and justice for all. Highlander’s use of popular education techniques enables people to see the connection between their own lives and wider political and economic structures, to help community members understand their problems, to learn how to take action, to reflect on their practice and to become more empowered agents of change. It is the empowerment that people feel after a popular education workshop that pushes them to consciously live and act in a way that can help transform the world into the place they envision. It means having the ability to think critically but also having the confidence that you can create solutions which

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<sup>20</sup> Horton, Myles, Brenda Bell, John Gaventa, and John Marshall Peters. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990. Xxv. Print.

<sup>21</sup> Glen, John M. *Highlander: No Ordinary School*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996. 252. Print.

will result in people feeling more motivated to work towards change and improvements in individual self-esteem which is a prerequisite to taking greater control of one's life.

Highlander recognizes that popular education is an important tool for people to understand how to shape social life. Popular education brings credibility to the idea of valuing community-based knowledge as a legitimate source to understanding why and how change can be achieved. The validation of personal experience through critical analysis allows for people to feel a part of the process of creating knowledge and understanding that their experiences show patterns of inequality and injustice, which needs to be addressed. Popular education will challenge the structure of how we expect to acquire knowledge by understanding that we are all Subjects in creating history and no one group dictates over the knowledge and history of mankind. This simple acknowledgment allows for people to be able to engage in conversation more often, forging relationships across and within social classes, which creates greater economic and political power among individuals and groups to build broader coalitions and movements.

Today, geographical isolation is often accompanied by institutional and political isolation, leading communities to feel marginalized, alienated and ultimately powerless regarding the lack of resources and support within their communities. Currently alienation and isolation of communities is the leading cause of the disconnect from society that most inhabitants within these communities feel. Attention is lost on their communities leaving them to continue to live in conditions that are detrimental to their health and safety. In bringing popular education to these communities that are mainly urban zones or former farming and industrial sites in rural areas, people can analyze their communities and understand that they deserve support, power and solutions and that their community

deserves more because of the benefits it had in the past. Critical root analysis of knowledge: how knowledge is produced, who produces it and the process of production will open up ideas that new knowledge needs to be distributed to reinvigorate American society and that overall change comes from understanding the experiences of the disenfranchised. If popular education is not used as an intentional intervention to make the oppressed aware of society's inequalities then the oppressed will remain unaware of the causes of their oppression, forcing them to fatalistically accept their exploitation. Through popular education, people will be awakened to understand they have the will to become whatever they envision; this keeps them from internalizing the opinion of the oppressor which is intended to destroy them. bell hooks writes of "connecting the will to know with the will to become" this alone can be the tagline of popular education because it pushes people to reflect on their experience in order to understand that they can intervene and eliminate barriers that are set up to keep them inferior. Popular education through understanding the value of self-worth of all human beings provides a mandate for no longer being submissive to the oppressor. Popular education provides people with a space to understand that their voices hold a new truth and knowledge that is of value to redefining our society. It is the catalyst that can provide research institutes, think tanks and any organization looking for policy and structural change with valuable insight and information that can be used to construct change.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

Popular education continues to be a topic of interest specifically because of its emphasis on empowering people through the use of dialogue, debate and analysis of personal experiences. Myles Horton once said “to have democracy, you must have a society in which decision making is real, and that means replacing, transforming and rebuilding society so as to allow for people to make decisions that affect their lives.” The power of popular education as a catalyst for rebuilding individual and group relationships in order to recreate a world worth envisioning is what leads me into analyzing the process of popular education and how it is used in different organizations.

My process of research has heavily been involved in reviewing the theoretical discussion about popular education. I have read not only books that are at the foundation of popular education such as Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire but also dissertations by graduate students about how knowledge is impacted through the use of popular education. I also examined the curricula of popular education from organizations such as the Pacific Institute.

The books and curricula I looked at helped me to understand the key points and foundations for building popular education programs, allowing me to describe the essentials of how to plan for a popular education program. Another important aspect of my research was analyzing how organizations use popular education. From conducting phone interviews with two specific organizations, the Pacific Institute in California and the Catalyst Centre in Toronto, Canada, I was able to begin a discussion within this paper on the different organizational uses of popular education. The valuable resources that the organizations provided such as curricula, project development outlines and readings materials allowed me

to further analyze why the organizations use popular education and the challenges that they face.

## **5. PROCESS: HOW DOES POPULAR EDUCATION WORK**

With understanding the process of how to build popular education programs there are some fundamental terms that build the foundation for planning a popular education program. Popular-education is a learner-centered environment and the following terms will help sustain a workshop that values the voice, experience, ideas and critical thinking of the learners in order to promote a new sense of ownership of personal experiences. Through collective sharing and root analysis of personal experiences, learners will understand the patterns of oppression and discrimination found in some communities. Most importantly, the program will encourage learners to work together to learn how to react and create actions that build change.

### ***“Horizontal Relationships”***

Popular education begins with understanding the power dynamics within the program. In a traditional educational learning environment there is a lot of attention placed on the teacher of the class. The assumption that the teacher has power and knowledge belittles the experience and knowledge of the students. Therefore the power dynamics within the classroom shift, to one where high regard is given to the voice of the teacher not the students. The professor becomes the judge of what is right and wrong, which can be detrimental to the idea of free thought, creativity and production of new knowledge within the classroom. Popular education adjusts the power dynamics of the classroom by moving from a vertical relationship of power to a horizontal relationship of power where now both students and teachers can educate and learn from each other. A horizontal relationship can lead to building power collectively where everyone’s voice and power is validated instead of just the teacher’s sense of what is right and wrong or what is possible and impossible. If we are to persist in the traditional vertical relationship of power within the popular

education workshop, then there will be a continuation of people relying on someone else to have the answer. No one will feel empowered that they have the tools to solve problems, if it is understood that the right answer is to be determined by one person, the teacher. Instead people may begin to feel resentment towards the learning experience and feel more alienated due to feelings of powerlessness and lack of authentic participation.

### ***“Banking Education versus Problem Posing Education”***

Vertical relationships of power within the classroom also lead to another dilemma which is defined as the “banking system” of education which is an “approach to learning that is rooted in the notion that what all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize and store it.”<sup>22</sup> Paulo Freire compared the banking system to a depositing system where students simply store the deposits presented to them by the teacher. Through simply receiving, memorizing and repeating information learners lose critical thinking and analysis skills. Paulo Freire states in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed “if it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.”<sup>23</sup> Students learn to become submissive to the idea of power held by the teacher, instead of developing into reactive people who will challenge the world. Instead, the banking system attempts to control the thinking and action of learners, inhibiting their creative power.

Education can only be liberating when learners are active participants within the classroom. For people to learn problem-solving skills, the teachers must allow for learners to have the space to use new information and skills to practice being a part of building solutions. The ability to make decisions is a part of practicing freedom and developing a

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<sup>22</sup> Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 14. Print.

<sup>23</sup> Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [New York]: Herder and Herder, 1970. 64. Print.

sense of self-control, self-worth and confidence in knowing that people hold the power to respond and make decisions. The power of popular education comes from being a “problem posing education” because with the educators posing the problems, it allows for people to feel a part of a validated democratic process where everyone’s voice and presence is respected in identifying solutions as reality is constantly being unveiled. If the educators talk about the solutions without recognizing the voices of the participants then no learning will occur where people feel powerful and motivated to think and act. Instead learners will lack responsibility to deal with the problem, since there always seems to be someone who can offer a solution; making people feel disempowered and ignorant. Real changes occur when people are given the opportunity to communicate and voice their opinions and ideas; this is the result of a true democratic manner. Problem-posing education pushes people to not just see education as a confined space within a school but see life as an ongoing learning process where they are constantly being challenged to observe, act, reflect and problem-solve to transform and bring change to the world.

### ***“Facilitator”***

Within popular education, there is no teacher but rather a facilitator who promotes the idea of horizontal relationship. Since the program is “learner-centered” it is the role of the facilitator to preserve a learning environment that offers affirmation and support along the way by bringing in new resources (such as reading texts or information regarding a decision-maker) and raising critical questions to keep the students engaged in the learning process. The facilitator is never to give answers but only to pose the problem and have the participants figure out how to use the new information and skills they have learned

throughout the program through the process of dialogue to be able to deal with finding solutions in tough situations.

The facilitator needs to know when “to step back and to step forward” in order to allow for the participants to feel in charge of their education and that they are being transformed by understanding their self-worth through their participation and voice. If the facilitator does not know how to “step back and step forward” when deciding when the group is ready for new questions, then the facilitator will become intrusive in the learning environment and not allow for the growth of the individuals within the classroom. It can be difficult to “step back” from situations within the workshop, especially, when in the learning process, a participant is bound to say something that may be offensive and outrageous. If this occurs, the facilitator can not act like a preacher and attack the person’s statement but in fact should “step in” to the situation. The statement needs to be acknowledged because if it goes unaddressed then the facilitator could take out his or her anger later in a more inappropriate way against the participant. This leads the participant to feel unsafe because he or she does not know where the facilitator’s anger is coming from. That is why outrageous statements must be addressed. The facilitator, in addressing the issue, should show respect to the person’s participation but present a clear statement of where he or she stands on the statement and why the statement upsets and makes the facilitator feel uncomfortable. This point of conflict can be a learning environment and will show others that we must all remain open with each other when we disagree so that everyone can show respect for each other. The space can then still be a place of active participation but displays of that conflict can not and should not be avoided because it can provide a space of new thinking, learning and growth. bell hooks writes in her book Teaching to Transgress that

empowerment can not happen if facilitators refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging learners to take risks.”<sup>24</sup> Facilitators must remember that they are a part of the learning process and should expect to learn as well, through always being open to change and understanding that conflict can be a place for learning to occur.

### ***“Subject versus Object”***

Control of the mind is a freeing reality that can confirm someone’s freedom. However, if mind control is lost and placed within the control of oppressing forces, then a person’s self-worth and confidence will disappear into an abyss of destructive forces of negative self-internalization. To understand the world we live in, we must know ourselves as subjects within the world. If people remain as objects they will forever be dependent and dominated by the voice of someone else who may lack the value of that person, group or community. Seeing yourself as an object means you lose the power of decision-making, which is vital for true participation in a democratic society. Popular education works to rebuild the sense of worth a person has in the world. Popular education does not give participants the answers to their problems but makes them think critically of their “silenced” experience which needs to be heard to rebuild a vision of them transforming the world into a place that they and their community want to live in. In order for popular education to result in creating democratic citizens within society, people must first be transformed to see themselves as Subjects within the world. Subjects are decision-makers, who believe that they have control to transform their world. Human beings are not created to be dispensable objects – who don’t complain, no matter how they are used and abused. Instead, humans are destined to live in a world that is humanizing and rejects the notion of dehumanization,

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<sup>24</sup> Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 21. Print.

which is to deny the worth of human life. Freedom is created when each of us have ownership with our lives, and participate in decision-making where our voices are not silenced. Once learners reject the idea of being a object they can know that they can take charge of their own future. Ultimately the role of participants within popular education is to examine their world, their place in it and the power that all humans hold to change it collectively.

***“Naming the World:” Articulating a person’s experience***

“The privileged act of naming often affords those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place.”<sup>25</sup> Within popular education, the privilege and power to “name the world” is extended to the people who believed this was not within their place. “Naming the World” is taking control of your vision of the world, using new language to unmask the true reality that is going on and what you envision as a new place through the use of language. Within popular education, it is necessary to provide the space for people to critically rename the world as a place that includes their voice and especially what their silenced experiences mean in terms of the reality of the society we live in. Through reconstructing knowledge and modes of communication, we are building a new sense of power, and shifting power to be more inclusive within society. If there is no space for “naming the world” then it can be assumed that people are not in charge of directing their learning experience and fully engaged in working towards actions to improve society. Being in control of language signifies a transformation of self – a sense of the power in creating knowledge that can exist

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<sup>25</sup> Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. 62. Print.

within this world, transferring power to people by virtue of them being able to find new meanings in words to articulate new arguments, new critiques, and new ideas which is powerful. The ability to give names to things around you can create new meaning for someone's life. Humans are a part of creating history and participating in society's historical process which involves having the privilege to "name the world."

***"20 % we only use 20 % of what we hear, 40% of what we hear and see, 80% of what we discover for ourselves."***<sup>26</sup>

Popular education is meant to be a learning environment that is interactive not only with communicating with other people through discussions but through using visual aids like maps, photography and other tools to always have people energized and using all of their bodies stimulus. The mind is not the only venue through which we learn. Through processing things by watching movements with our bodies, acting with our bodies, and looking at visual aids we can stimulate a learning process that always keeps learners engaged in the topic and able to fully participate since their whole body is involved, increasing the chances that people will remember and think. The facilitator wants to keep the learners engaged and interactive and this means keeping the body moving. "Role-plays" where people act out scenarios is a great example of how to keep learners actively engaged in learning.

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<sup>26</sup> Vella, Jane Kathryn. *Learning to Teach: Training of Trainers for Community Development*. Westport, CT: Save the Children, 1989. p. 22 Print.

## **GOALS**

Understanding the above-mentioned terms will result in having a basic knowledge of what builds the foundation for popular-education programs. When deciding to move forward with a popular-education project it is important to identify what goals will result from the process. The ultimate goal of popular-education is to “bring people together. Facilitate the process until people can do it themselves, to articulate and enable the basic principles; to raise timely and critical questions; to point people to resources when it is appropriate and when they are requested.”<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, popular education’s goal is to bring people together to start creating a critical base of people who are empowered to fight for change. When people are empowered and understand that humans are meant to be the Subject not the object of their realities, then they will understand that change is dependent on how they envision and will act out the future. The intent of popular education is also to build a critical mass of people who now are consciously awakened to organize and promote organized action for change.

Although it is important to improve the self-esteem of individuals so that people can gain more control of their lives and know that control comes through being reflective, conscious and aware of how their experiences are interconnected to the power system of society; improving individual self-worth is an important first goal, but ultimately through people loving themselves they can further learn how to love other people. Popular education works for individuals to see themselves but also to see how they are interconnected within a greater collective community. Being a part of a collective community and having the voice to participate and be heard and also the importance of

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<sup>27</sup> Delp, Linda. *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002. p. 13. Print.

listening to each other allows for a real democratic process to occur where everyone sees themselves as a leader with a skill to promote social transformation. Communication is an essential skill developed within popular education because through understanding when to talk and when to listen is essential to maintaining systems of equality, care and love. Also, with America continuing to grow into a multicultural melting pot, it is necessary to have the tools of communication in order for all people to maintain their right to place within society, without fear of being excluded.

Building people's capacity to learn, to know and communicate through a cyclical process of "observation, reflection, action, reflection" will ensure a community of learners who understand that the most effective leadership is one that comes from democratic groups who can work together over a long period of time because of the clear communication between people and the appreciation and acknowledgement of all humans. Constant re-examination and communication will allow for action to always flourish which will build the capacity of people to know that to speak and act are fundamental to securing a community that is in the best interest of everyone. To produce these goals a program needs to be planned that has an emphasis on critical thinking of society through exploring personal experiences of oppression, then a point to analyze people's personal experiences by discussing the root causes and understanding how the patterns of oppression work within society. Through critical analysis of people's experience in relation to understanding the interconnectedness of people's experiences then people can begin to understand through the new knowledge being produced how to identify strategies for action which can result in the idea of envisioning a future we all are willing to fight for. Through creating a mass of people committed to fight and who are empowered to fight, they will leave feeling that they

have the power and tools to act and will ultimately become leaders who are self-sufficient in doing things not just for themselves but for a group as well.

In the end these collective goals work to develop “base-building” for movements. Through raising the consciousness of people by their acknowledging that they have the power and knowledge to act and make a difference, then people will be more engaged to work for social justice causes whether it be a doctor, organizer or teacher. That helps to create and support democratically governed grassroots organizations capable of addressing the problems facing their communities and joining with other groups in a broad-based collaborative movement for social and economic change.

### ***TOOLS / STRATEGIES***

Popular education is often critiqued for appearing to have no structure since there is a strong emphasis on reflection and evaluation. Generally the structure of popular education models is based around a cycle of planning, observations / dialogue, reflection, action, reflection. Within this cycle there is not always a guaranteed linear path since constant reflection is needed to provide deeper meaning to what is happening in the process and ensuring that learners feel productive and a part of the collective experience. The “structure less” appearance of popular education can be a challenge for people to embrace and find the process legitimate. However, planning is an important tool in popular education to make sure that the program will be an effective learning environment that will have outcomes. Also, planning an education program that is centralized around the learners will always be difficult. But once planners understand how to do proper outreach before the program, they can prepare themselves in starting where most people in the community are at and preparing the curriculum in understanding what questions, activities are necessary to end with

positive, affirming results. The beginning steps of popular education include setting goals, examining the agenda, outreach to the community to understand the community's history in order to understand what materials need to be prepped and answering the main questions that can guarantee understanding the purpose of the program: *who, why, when, where, what for, how*.

**Who:** this names participants, community partners, research partners, facilitators, etc.

everyone who will be involved in the development of the workshop and participating within the workshop. In other words, defining the audience.

**Why:** Understanding the reason why there is a need to design a popular education will help in building the specifics of the curriculum. By naming all the facts about the situation then it will be easier to develop and clarify the purpose of the workshop, intended goals and outcomes. Understand that details are good to get specific details in the curriculum clear, especially what activities and discussions to do, but know that more detail and information will come when the program starts and discussions begin. Community outreach can help in this section especially to make sure that the topic will be relevant to the community.

**When:** Defining time frame of planning and the schedule, location and times for the workshop or workshops. The length of the program will be dependent on how much funding is available and doing community outreach again to figure out the best possible times for community members, and all other participants of the program.

**Where:** Defining the location specifics of the event. It is important that this is an accessible location for all participants of the program. Also, having a location that has a strong relationship with community members can help in creating a safe and comfortable space. It is important to understand if this space is handicap accessible as well and if there may be

space to provide a safe area for kids if the program mainly deals with adults who have children.

**What for:** Define ideas of the goals of the program, skills, knowledge and attitudes you wish to develop through the program.

**How:** What “learning tasks” are necessary to maintain goals at the end of the program to understand further the situation in the community and what actions can happen.

Everything is bound to change but it is the planning that can provide the most structure to a program that is bound to change especially once the learners start evaluating the program, while they are still within the program. Another part of the workshop that needs structure are the elements within the workshop activities. Within each workshop, it is also important to have all the logistics figured out like what are the learning objectives of the activity, materials needed, is it a small group activity and how much time should be allocated for the activity. It is good to be aware of time but do not feel pressured to end a thought-provoking point in the workshop if time does not permit it. Jane Vella, author of Learning to Teach: Training of Trainers for Community Development had another interesting section to the workshop itinerary, called “Proof of Learning,” which can be a small concluding activity or question throughout the different activities to make sure that everyone is taking away something from the workshop and also retaining any information and messages shared at the workshop.

### **Inside the Workshop**

Often times popular education programs can bring groups together that are for the most part homogenous (i.e. same cultural identity, age group) or a fairly heterogeneous group. For either situation, since popular education deals a lot with examining personal

experiences it is important to create an inclusive space from the start of the program to ensure that people feel comfortable to participate and share their opinions even if they may be different or opposing. In the beginning, creating an inclusive environment means making sure all the basic needs of the group are met in terms of providing child day care services on site if necessary, making sure translators are available in case there is a group of people who do not speak the dominant language that will be spoken by the majority of the participants and the facilitator. That includes a sign translator in case someone in the group is deaf. Those are important tools to consider for the beginning of the workshop to grasp everyone's attention that the workshop will be a collective space for sharing are:

*Ice-Breakers*: The name ice-breaker is synonymous with the purpose of the activity which is to "break the ice" to get people to know each other and comfortable with interacting and talking in front of each other. Ice-breakers can be used throughout the program to introduce people to thinking about new topics and concepts within the workshop.

*Ground rules* are an effective way for learners to learn what is expected of them. Ground rules allow learners to understand what they are getting into, what the program looks like, what the learning objectives are, and most importantly what are the expectations for the learners. The expectations for learners generally fall along the lines of how to provide a space where people can communicate effectively; speaking and listening. The expectations for the learners can be defined by the learners – another way to give them power to their learning environment. Everyone throughout the program is held accountable to the created list of ground rules not only by the facilitator but by everyone participating within the group. Holding people accountable to the ground rules will ensure that the ground rules are in effect and that everyone is in a comfortable group where they feel safe to participate.

## 10 Examples of Potential Ground Rules:

1. Honesty
2. Step Up (to speak) – Step Back (to listen) – Step Sideways (involve people to participate)
3. Use “I” statements (A way to not attack other people in the group and to emphasize a personal point of view based on your experience.)
4. Respect the sincerity of comments
5. Don’t make assumptions
6. Ask clarifying questions
7. Respect each others silence (Although, popular education wants everyone to participate it is also a space where people need to feel safe to participate and shouldn’t feel forced to do anything they do not feel comfortable discussing. Allowing for silence can provide spaces to rephrase questions and discussion points to think if they are inclusive statements or if they need to be worded differently to provide participation. Silence can signify something important that needs to be realized.)
8. Affirm each other
9. Be open with yourself
10. Don’t fear conflict – make conflict productive

Meeting Resistance: It is not an easy task to create an inclusive environment because resistance is bound to happen throughout the program. Resistance can often occur if no ground rules are created and the learning environment does not hold people accountable. But another type of resistance can occur within the classroom due to some people feeling

uncomfortable and unable to move beyond their comfort zones, which can signify a lack of understanding of the topic. To learn is to submerge oneself in an environment that pushes you to think outside of your experience; to learn is not an easy task especially when conflict arises. However it should be understood that conflict can be a creative space for self-reflection, reflection on what is really happening in the world and to face it even as ugly as it may be. If we don't challenge ourselves we remain within a bureaucratized space of thinking which unfortunately is what keeps us submissive and we remove ourselves from the process of becoming. If this occurs, it is important for the facilitator to either slow down because the resisters may be resisting because a process of learning was not made clear so it is important that you clarify the task. You can "cold call" on specific resisters and ask them to participate because their resistance may have been due to them feeling uncomfortable to answer a question. If you work with them, it can help them feel comfortable that they can contribute, it is just that clarifying questions must be asked to build the person's thought and process of speech. Also, identifying the issue of resistance within the environment and asking the participants to comment on it can lead to a fruitful discussion on clarifying why a particular idea or concept may be difficult to discuss and why.

Resistance is bound to happen during heterogeneous groups, especially if privileged people are present. Privileged people can be defined as anyone who benefits from an oppressive society and this can be based on someone's racial, economic and cultural status. Discussing one's privilege is often a difficult task to acknowledge but it is critical in order to be an effective participant within the dialogue to fully understand the realms of privilege and oppression in society and how they are perpetuated within society. If a person does not acknowledge their privilege then they are taking up space and can prevent for a fruitful

discussion to occur that can fully examine the roots of injustices in society and how to rebuild an equitable society.

“Learn how to listen:” By learning how to listen fully to people and to ask clarifying questions to statements we do not understand then people can become more engaged to other voices within the classroom. When we are able to listen effectively we can push our ability to learn to either challenge our thinking and most importantly to learn how to pick up on new things and build further on ideas critically. bell hook writes “hearing other’s voices, individual thoughts, and sometimes associating these voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other.” (bell hooks, 186). By learning how to listen we can build a learning environment where people feel respected and part of a learning experience that validates their presence and voice, which can help stimulate full participation within a workshop.

Dialogue: is a valued tool of popular-education that is central to providing a space of authentic participation. Dialogue is a social process where learners begin to understand the importance of true democratic and egalitarian spaces. Dialogue provides a space built on democratic ideals because it is a place where all people are expected to participate since it is an open space for people to openly communicate and discuss their life experiences. The beginning discussion that shares personal experiences is bound to morph into a space where people, through listening to each other’s experiences can see patterns of privilege and oppression within society. This analysis is a democratic space because it provides a space for the freedom of speech and expression to lead people to start building actions for change to the systems of society which are unjust.

The integration of learners within dialogue allows for people's experiences and knowledge built upon those experiences to be heard, validated and allow for people to no longer feel silenced. To understand that it is not productive to assume silence is a transforming point where participants understand that they are Subjects within society not objects. Once there is recognition of being a Subject then people will assume more power in understanding that they can be in charge of bringing positive change to themselves and their communities. The dialogue within popular education has a clear purpose to provide a space for people to think about solutions, then people can understand that the social barriers and current situation is not "fated and unalterable, but merely as limited." A true democratic, egalitarian dialogue also provides a space for new knowledge and learning to take place where social change can be realized.

For dialogue to be successful, the facilitator must ensure an inclusive space. The facilitator is not just responsible for validating the participation of learners but the facilitator's lead role is to create an inclusive space by recognizing productive participation. The leadership of the facilitator in ensuring that everyone has a space to participate will allow for the participants to learn how to encourage each other to participate. This can offer a renewed sense of respect to everyone in the group. An inclusive environment should also imply an environment built upon respect; the learner must feel heard, honored, respected as a person, not for what he or she knows but for themselves and their participation. If a person does not feel included or respected, he or she will not fully participate in the learning experiences or may become destructive to the process, especially if they feel that people are not taking them seriously or listening, which is detrimental to the goals of popular education being accomplished. "If there is not a desire to be in the space then the space can

deteriorate.” In growing into a space where people feel included, accountability must be held for all people to ensure that movements are always productive and not moving into a space where people feel that their safety is under question. The facilitator once again is not the only person who holds everyone accountable but everyone in the group as well; this ensures that everyone feels equal within the group.

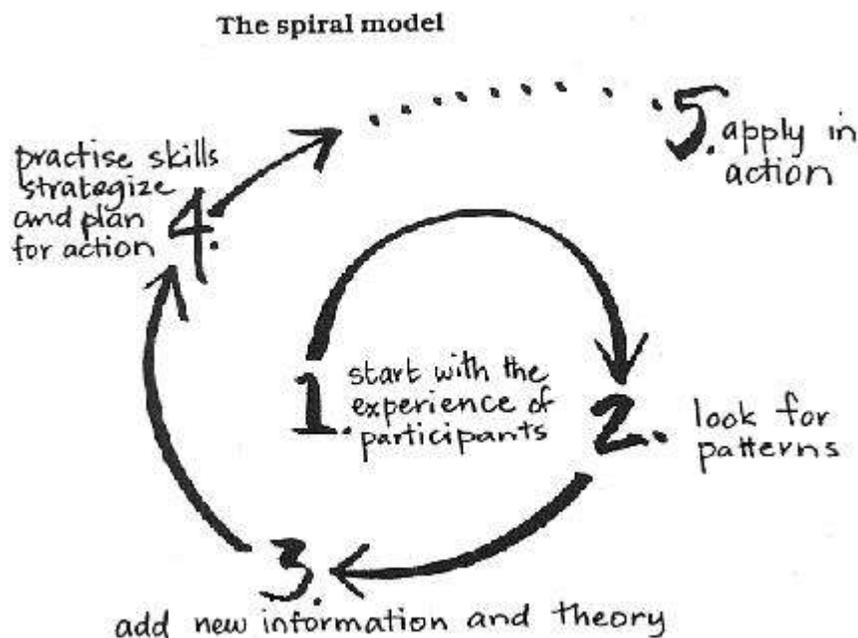
The outcome of knowing how to effectively use dialogue involves people learning how to participate democratically. Through participation within a setting where all voices are validated and need to be heard to move forward to critically understanding the issues, people will begin to see that the effectiveness of dialogue can move beyond the classroom for the purpose of transforming society. For dialogue to be effective and since its premise is based on democratic participation, the process sends signals to students that their participation is expected and needed.

To many, dialogue may seem to be counterintuitive to popular education which is focused so heavily on building action because some critics may only see dialogue as a place for people to get angry or sad about the injustices of society. It is important for facilitators to understand that people within dialogue groups can not simply be validated for sharing their experiences but should be validated on how participants actively address how their experiences are connected to patterns of oppression and privilege. Validation on using critical analysis is a critical step to uprooting the key causes of privilege and oppression to understand clearly what needs to be done in terms of action. If facilitators simply lead a dialogue that is based on a sharing of experience then critics are correct in their statements that dialogue is flat and unproductive because what is lacking in the conversation is the struggle to identify patterns. Identifying patterns is not an easy task and will bring up

contention, argument and conflict but learners must understand that conflict is a learning experience and needs to be addressed. Dialogue's power and popular education's power lays in "getting dirty" and acknowledging that conflict will happen and should happen in order for people to fully understand the complexities of the interlocking systems of oppression within some societies – these can mean confronting all relationships within society including family structure, job structure and work environment, etc.

When dialogue is linked to the spiral model (Figure 1.1, see page 47), another important tool of popular education, participants will move within a process that builds awareness to the experiences of community members and understanding how to analyze the situations to build new information to create action. Dialogue builds a constructive work environment based on clear communication and trust that can enable people to work together to build action. If dialogue is not used as a point of reflection and self-expression then popular education would not be a valuable resource for building the capacity to learn and building a mass population of agents of social change. The link between the spiral model and dialogue allows for people to continue to be engaged in an interactive form of education that allows for their whole being to be involved in the learning environment: mind, body and soul.

Figure 1.1 “The Spiral Model”<sup>28</sup>



### *Breaking down the Spiral Model, Step by Step*

#### *Step 1: “Start with the Experience of Participants”*

This is a very important part of the workshop because it will set the tone for the rest of the program. Step 1 establishes the notion that the participation of everyone is crucial since the core of the program is built upon the personal experiences of everyone in the group. If people participate then the group will be more successful in understanding the patterns of oppression and privilege that exist within society. Most importantly, step 1 allows people to understand that they have valuable knowledge from their lived experiences and that they can learn from one another in the group. People feeling validated for the

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<sup>28</sup> The Spiral Model

<http://webpub.allegheeny.edu/dept/envisci/ESInfo/comps/ishizaa/pages/TheWorkshop/SpiralModel.htm>

information they have to offer will understand that their active participation is necessary to make the program successful. Step 1 works to build trust among participants since sharing personal experiences can seem daunting and difficult at first. Building trust among members will establish a collaborative working relationship that will allow a democratic dialogue to flourish.

Critical analysis of society through sharing personal experiences will open people up to understanding how problems are created historically, and how various groups are marginalized from society's mainstream. Most importantly participants will start to become conscious of their own perception of reality and how to deal with it critically. Themes will emerge from the discussion which will build the context of the popular-education program allowing people to think of 4 key ideas "where we are, who we are, how we got there and where we want to go." A discussion surrounding these 4 key ideas will transform people into thinking how to build solutions and start envisioning their future through reflecting on the past.

### *Step 2: Look for Patterns*

Step 2 can also be considered a *root analysis* where people learn to identify the key root issues that create the injustices people face within society. Through the root analysis people begin to understand relationships of power within society that perpetuate systems which may benefit some or oppress a majority of others. Understanding the patterns within the issue will allow people to understand how their experience is interconnected to a system based upon disempowering many to the benefit of a few through using tools such as racism, sexism and classism.

Through identifying key terms that describe the issue and understanding the key institutions and decision-makers who hold power will allow participants a fuller understanding of how these problems work or are perpetuated, where do the problems stem from, who benefits from these problems. Having a deeper understanding of the creation of the issues will provide people with historical context to not only understand when and why these problems started but also to understand the history of people's movements so that participants can begin thinking of what needs to change to produce effective individual and community action.

*Step 3: Add New Information and Theory*

In every popular education program there is a time when people's experience runs out and new information must be presented. When this happens, it is the role of the facilitator to not just present new information in a lecture format but to ask provocative questions that can provoke new ideas from the group. The realization of the need for new information will allow learners to start asking everyone in the group questions, including the facilitator, that define what new tools and information they need to build new models of change about the issues that the participants face within their community. This moment allows facilitators to bring in new relevant information that is connected to the experiences of the participants and to the needs that the participants are articulating to the facilitator so that they can continue to build new knowledge. By using creative methods that tie new information to the participant's knowledge will help the participants retain the new information; allowing participants to use this new information and skills for future problem solving.

*Step 4: Practice Skills, Strategizing, and Planning for Action*

For popular education to be a valuable experience for the learners, there needs to be a space for people to practice the skills and knowledge they developed within the workshop. Building solutions on individual and group levels will build the confidence of participants since they understand that they have the power to think of great ideas instead of having to rely on an expert for the solution. Learners understanding that they have the knowledge, tools and skills to plan their own actions will feel that change is always dependent on such actions if people see it as worth fighting for. That freedom is not granted; it is fought for and demanded.

*Step 5: Apply for Action*

For education and action to be interconnected, action is necessary for people to understand their skills and their power to build change. Action proves that we are practicing what we are learning and actively engaged within our education and the belief that we are actors within our reality, not pawns for someone else's disposal. Action can be developed within the workshop or outside the popular education workshop. Action can be as small as individual life changes to treat people with more respect or to start a campaign against segregation. Whatever the action is, if it brings about positive life change for individuals and groups then it should be considered as developmental changes within an individual.

Reflection: An important tool that cannot be forgotten within popular-education is the tool of reflection. Reflection builds critical consciousness because through reflection we can remain aware to always be present within society by understanding how our actions can shape the world we live in; allowing us to understand if we are perpetuating the system or abolishing it through reflection of our actions. Without reflection then we are not aware of our world and how we are actors within it. Reflection can be used throughout the spiral

model to allow learners to really understand what is going on and to think critically about how and what they are learning.

*Evaluation:* is critical to the development of popular education. Without evaluation then there is no clear consensus on whether the participants are learning or if they are enjoying the learning process. Since popular education relies on being a learner-centered environment the opinion and evaluation of the learners throughout the program is essential to the productivity of the program. Also evaluation is important to ensure that people feel in charge of their learning process. Without evaluation there is no understanding of how successful the action was and then we will not ensure that we are still continuing to be critical minded people.

*Tool: Using Methods that may be relevant to the population of the learners: art, music, writing, etc.*

Within popular education, activities are very important in shaping the learning environment of the participants. Using tools such as drama, art, music and writing can be effective in providing an alternative venue of learning which can provide just as critical a lens into examining the world. Also, using different activities can keep the participants engaged and their energy levels high, especially activities that get everyone moving around and interacting. Using drama can give visual representation for people to understand and revisit certain experiences they have lived through to be able to further critique and evaluate the experience. A favorite activity within a lot of popular education pieces is “role-play / sociodrama” where participants are given a certain situation and need to act it out. Visual aids also help in directing participants’ focus to a different component of learning besides listening to people talk. An example of an activity is “community mapping” where people

can discuss and point out on a map the history of what used to be in their neighborhood, where a particular incident took place or even identify new things they want in their community. Having participants “do” as they learn will help them understand further that they are capable of doing things and performing actions because they already did similar tasks within their learning process in re-drawing maps or putting together art and other visual aids which depict the knowledge and information they are discussing.

### **DEVELOPMENTS**

“Popular education rests on a lived faith that people have the capacity to come together collectively to solve their problems and have the right to be in control of decisions that affect their lives.”<sup>29</sup> Popular education leads to the validation of voices, the ability to build campaigns around what people feel most strongly about, allows people to feel the importance of being included in a collective community, increases the numbers of leaders, promotes the collective construction of knowledge, builds an understanding that reflection is key for progress, and creates a new found motivation through a new sense of power and legitimacy. The end result of popular education is to empower people to be a part of the will to know and the will to never become subject to oppression.

The true value of popular education comes through the idea of transformation of self where individuals are empowered by their innate human powers of not submitting to live in a dehumanizing world, the building of relationships and creating a legitimacy of community-based knowledge.

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<sup>29</sup> Delp, Linda. *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002. p. 12. Print.

## **Transformation of Self**

Freire writes “in an alienated society, marked by a culture of silence, people apathetically accept what they are told, do not speak up and tend to use the dominant, oppressive language to refer to themselves.”<sup>30</sup> The culture of silence that Freire refers to turns people into machines rather than living, enlightened human beings. This is problematic because through using the language of the oppressor, people alienate themselves from their true sense of self and their own power, which is held within each human life. Removing a sense of consciousness to the living experience of a human, which is built upon creation and an active role in creating history, leaves people little understanding of the power they hold to be their own actors in the world. Being invited to take part in popular education allows people to think critically, to perceive the many dimensions of one’s life and to exercise the power of decisive action. Taking part within a process that values critical analysis, reflection and action allows people to build a sharpened idea of who they are and what they stand for. Especially partaking within the process of “naming the world” people are able to rebuild, construct, create a new language that is expressive of one’s own needs, ideas and identity all related to the communal world they live in. The ability to create a language that is more reflective of an individual’s and group’s lives allow for people to give new meaning to one’s own experience of reality which is a very transformative process that allows people to see positive changes in their self-esteem and self-worth. Finding a new sense of power in humanity motivates people to create a new society that believes in endless possibilities and change, since we all have the power to act for the change that we envision.

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<sup>30</sup> Herrera Hovey, Rebecca. *Knowledge and Education: toward an Epistemology of Popular Education*. Diss. San Francisco State University., 1986. San Francisco State University, 1986. p. 30Print.

### **Movement Building**

Popular education programs are not just great at rebuilding a sense of self and empowerment within people but the ability to discuss, analyze and build solutions through the process of dialogue allows people to build lasting relationships. Depending on the make-up of the group, if the group is heterogeneous then people can build relationships across and within social classes to gain greater economic and political power when they plan actions together. The ability for popular education to forge friendships across economic and racial classes can lead to a greater chance of building coalitions that can have great political power and affect structural change that can transfer power to many different groups. As relationships build the movement will increase in size.

### **Community-Based Knowledge**

Knowledge emerges from popular education as participants critically analyze personal experiences and experiences of other participants within the group. The knowledge produced from popular education is not an individual perception, but the collective acknowledgement of the discussion and debate between participants who through a roots analysis of personal experiences can begin to create theories of social, environmental or economic realities within society. Knowledge is not built in isolation but through the collective effort of groups coming together to discuss, analyze and rethink the realities of human experience within a given society or the world. The spiral model of popular education provides the beginning of critically examining the world to build new theories of social change. Within popular education, individuals and groups begin to understand that their experiences hold valuable knowledge to understanding a problem.

Popular education allows all types of people, whether formally or informally educated, to understand that not one group can hold on to the development and production

of knowledge. As a human, everyone contains the capacity to create and re-create. Paulo Freire expresses that “we begin with the conviction that the role of man was not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations with the world – that through acts of creation and re-creation, man makes cultural reality and thereby adds to the natural world, which he did not make. We were certain that man’s relation to reality, expressed as subject to an object, results in knowledge which man can express through language.”<sup>31</sup> Language is an essential part of the construction of ideas and the ability to communicate with others. To deny humanistic instincts to be creative beings that interact with other beings, as Paulo Freire mentions, then humanity is limiting the freedom of humans. Popular education addresses the issue of freedom through the transformation of people understanding that they are a part of the process of creation and more specifically the history of the world. Through mastering new skills and motivated by human power, people will become more involved with their existence and communal existence. Through dialogue people begin to understand that knowledge is a product of human creation and that each human can hold the tools of creating knowledge through collective communication, analysis, debate and reflection of life experiences. Comprehending that knowledge is the result of “actively coming to know the world”<sup>32</sup> then people will begin to critique knowledge by analyzing who controls the process of production and who benefits from or receives the product.

In order to control the sense of power and control the masses, society has placed great emphasis that knowledge can only come from places of high status like the government or universities. Emphasis that knowledge can only come from these two places

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<sup>31</sup> Herrera Hovey, Rebecca. *Knowledge and Education: Toward an Epistemology of Popular Education*. Diss. San Francisco State University., 1986. San Francisco State University, 1986. p. 7Print.

<sup>32</sup> Herrera Hovey, Rebecca. *Knowledge and Education: toward an Epistemology of Popular Education*. Diss. San Francisco State University., 1986. San Francisco State University, 1986. p. 7. Print.

one creates a false dependency on this knowledge. Often times we forget that researchers get most of their knowledge from the community members who they interview for their projects since, as Torry D. Dickinson writes, “those who have been internally marginalized within their communities and within the global society often know the most about how community problems manifest themselves and how they can be addressed in effective ways.”<sup>33</sup> It is then the community members who give researchers the inspiration to write their work and how to write their work. Popular education breaks this notion through its process where people can build the skills to develop and create new knowledge.

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<sup>33</sup> Dickinson, Torry D. *Community and the World: Participating in Social Change*. New York: Nova Science, 2003. p. 4. Print.

## **6. HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE POPULAR EDUCATION**

This section examines how two different organizations use popular education as a tool for research and/or community empowerment or development. The first organization is the Pacific Institute where I interviewed Catalina Garzon, co-director of The Community Strategies for Sustainability and Justice (CSSJ) Program at the Pacific Institute. The second organization is the Catalyst Centre in Toronto, Canada where I interviewed Chris Cavanagh, a staff member of Catalyst.

### ***PACIFIC INSTITUTE***

#### *(1) Organization*

Pacific Institute is a research institute located in Oakland, California that “conducts interdisciplinary research and partners with stakeholders to produce solutions that advance environmental protection, economic development, and social equity – in California, nationally, and internationally.”<sup>34</sup> Since the institute’s founding in 1987, they have continued to use innovative research techniques to build new ideas and ways of identifying information and solutions.

#### *(2) Why Popular Education?*

In 1995, the Institute launched The Community Strategies for Sustainability and Justice (CSSJ) Program because they saw the need for people to become involved in particular issues affecting their communities. The Institute understood that the way knowledge is confined to being solely produced and developed by governments and

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<sup>34</sup> "About the Pacific Institute." *Pacific Institute: Research for People and the Planet*. 2008. Web. 13 Apr. 2011. <[http://www.pacinst.org/about\\_us/](http://www.pacinst.org/about_us/)>.

universities is why people become dismissive about the knowledge and information they hold from their personal experiences. The Pacific Institute wanted to demystify the idea of the research process being a one-way flow of information in order to have people empowered to be social change agents who know how to produce research that can support the person or group's work and advocacy. Popular education was the perfect tool to provide a space where community members could realize that the production and control of knowledge is not an exclusive activity limited to academia but can even be produced by community organizations who may have the fewest resources. Popular education also had value in people understanding that they can hold valuable information and knowledge that needs to be tapped into, to understand the many layers of particular issues.

Catalina Garzon, co-director of CCSJ said that the initial decision for Pacific Institute to expand resources to create a department within the institute which focuses exclusively on using the tools of popular education was that the principles of popular education are similar to environmental justice principles – “we speak for ourselves, we challenge existing forms of knowledge and we challenge experts.” The Pacific Institute sees popular education as a vital tool that creates a space to value and document community knowledge, which offers a different approach to advance community vision and a new way to leverage power. Community knowledge which grows from people's ability to come together democratically to share and discuss personal experiences and analyze these experiences to understand the compounding and interconnected systems of oppression and exploitation is a form of information that is more challenging due to its accuracy. Catalina Garzon states, “if someone's testimony combines the power of community generated data with authoritative representation of research agencies - the comparison between these two

sets of information can be very valuable in advocating during a campaign. Not only will this information be effective to use for arguments but also for individuals to have a clearer understanding of problems which will lead to having a sense of how to create theories of change based on action.

The relationships established with community organizations throughout the program's history has led to seven major research projects which don't just bring credentials to the work of the Pacific Institute but also recognition of the hard work, ideas and knowledge of community members from various community organizations. Two examples of the seven major research projects "include the creation of a truck route to get cargo trucks off residential streets in West Oakland (Paying With Our Health); the closure of Red Star Yeast, a manufacturing facility in West Oakland that was among the Bay Area's top polluters (Neighborhood Knowledge for Change); and the stalling of high-end development plans for Breuner Marsh in Richmond, California."<sup>35</sup>

### *(3) How Do They Use Popular Education?*

Pacific Institute does not use popular education exclusively for the benefit of themselves and a way to absorb the knowledge of the community. Instead, they see popular education as a way to build networks of community and institutional support. For Pacific Institute, popular education allows the research institute to build transforming relationships where the Pacific Institute is able to provide technological, research and advocacy assistance to community groups with the ultimate result being community members and organizations building the skills and knowledge of collecting research to build the capacity of community organizations. Each member of the relationship, whether community or institutional base,

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<sup>35</sup> "Pacific Institute." *Pacific Institute: Research for People and the Planet*. 2009. Web. 13 Apr. 2011. <[http://www.pacinst.org/topics/community\\_strategies/](http://www.pacinst.org/topics/community_strategies/)>.

collectively work together to develop networks and coalitions that develop community based solutions.

More often Pacific Institute approaches the community to learn how the institute's research can fit into the existing work of community groups to facilitate more tangible desired outcomes such as learning how to document knowledge on a particular issue and creating new resources. One specific example of how popular education was used to engage residents in a research process was when CCSJ worked with the Neighborhood Housing Project of Richmond to learn how the residents could use research methodology to figure out how to improve the run down parks within their community. Pacific Institute and the Neighborhood Housing Project of Richmond collaborated to weave popular education into a research project to build experimental opportunities for community members to become involved in the collecting of data, analyzing the research and producing new knowledge. This project allowed community members to not only develop research skills but also have power over the research methods in terms of evaluating and critiquing what works well.

Another successful project that developed after close to 4 years of compiling successful popular education activities used with different communities is the Gearing Up for Action: A Curriculum Guide for Freight Transport Justice. The goal of the project is “to reduce the adverse health impacts of freight transportation on low-income neighborhoods of color closest to freight transport hubs, and to increase the share of benefits that residents of these communities can enjoy.”<sup>36</sup> The curriculum has already helped build the capacity of residents from different communities like in West Contra Costa County to “meaningfully engage in transportation and land use planning decisions related to changes in land uses,

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<sup>36</sup> De Lena, Ariana, and Catalina Garzon. *Gearing Up for Action: A Curriculum Guide for Freight Transport Justice*. Rep. Oakland: Pacific Institute, 2010. p. 5. Print.

proposed increases in freight train traffic on area rail lines, and planned expansions at the Port of Richmond, California.”<sup>37</sup> The building of networks created between institutional and community levels allowed for a sharing of resources that can lead to the development of empowering projects that can be accredited to the supportive relationships between institutional research institutes and community organizations. Through collaborating, the supportive relationship between institution and community was able to create a productive resource that can lead to more communities finding solutions if their community is affected by freight related health issues.

*(4) Production of knowledge: How is the knowledge justified that comes from these programs?*

Working with an institution can grant validation and legitimacy to information. Pacific Institute usually has a technical review team that reads over methodology and provides input on how the community group(s) should collect and analyze data. The ability for community groups to work with a technical review team from the Pacific Institute increases the feelings of confidence and empowerment within community members because the community members feel even more validated that esteemed researchers from a highly valued research institute are allocating time to listen and assist the community members in providing them the tools to move forward with the community’s not the research institute’s valuable research. The outside lens that the technical review team provides allows the community groups to receive a critical analysis held without bias to ask critical questions so that the process of evaluation is always present to have people learn. Validating and granting legitimacy simply does not come from the research institute saying what needs to

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<sup>37</sup> De Lena, Ariana, and Catalina Garzon. *Gearing Up for Action: A Curriculum Guide for Freight Transport Justice*. Rep. Oakland: Pacific Institute, 2010. p. 5. Print.

happen but through developing a relationship where community members grow with confidence as they are in charge of the process of the research; having their voices heard and respected as the research institute just helps in assessing that the right research tools are being utilized helps the community understand that their work and production of knowledge is valued and needed.

*(5) Outcomes and Affected People*

The Pacific Institute mainly works with low-income communities of color organizations and coalitions that represent environmental and economic issues; generally people who are marginalized within society: educationally, economically and socially. Catalina Garzon believes that the reason popular education is so successful is because it helps people find their voice. “A lot of people we work with are people who have faced a lot of adversity and discrimination in their lives. That oppression has a silencing affect on people. Once you lose your voice and don’t feel like you are being heard, you become unsure if you have something worth saying” states Catalina Garzon about the devastating effects of marginalization on individuals and communities. The space that popular education creates allows for people to positively own who they are and that their community is not a place that is lacking but a place worth fighting for; this builds the basis for strength and the motivation to become leaders and create a community vision and idea of direction for the community.

Catalina has seen leaders develop who use the skills and knowledge found through popular education to create similar popular education programs to promote action. Catalina spoke of Margaret Gordon as a person who will always stand out. Margaret is the co-founder of West Oakland Indicators Project, and has been working with the Pacific Institute

for over a decade. Pacific Institute worked with Margaret and the West Oakland Indicators Project on a popular education project that would help mobilize and sustain a campaign to close the Red Star yeast factory in West Oakland. The popular education program and the campaign was a success because in 2004 the Red Star Yeast closed. Since the victory of the Red Star Yeast, Margaret's experience with popular education has shaped her into a multi-faceted leader who uses popular education as a tool to develop research and help mobilize people for campaigns. Margaret has also become an expert who travels, discussing the health impacts of industrial factories on communities and is now a Harbor Commissioner in Oakland. Margaret's experience shows that popular education is effective in creating leaders who are actively engaged in justice work not only through their work but in how they decide to live their lives as well. Popular education builds a sustained commitment, energy and consciousness to become active within your community since popular education gives individuals the tools to critically analyze patterns of injustices then the truth you have will set you in motion to actively seek justice for the situation at hand, to voice out against injustices as well to raise awareness of these injustices to others inside and outside the particular community.

*(6) How do you encourage integration of popular education within your community and other community groups?*

Catalina states, "Within our organization, it has been challenging to integrate popular education because Pacific Institute is a mainstream research institute. But the work of CSSJ program has been showing the larger organization of Pacific Institute how participatory resources can add value to the work Pacific Institute does." Through cross program collaboration and joint projects of CSSJ working with other departments in the

institute, there is, as Catalina said, a “cross-pollinating” of participatory tools brought from CSSJ with the expertise of all the staff researchers.

By approaching community groups, CSSJ publicizes the use of popular education and how it can be effective for organizations to consider in terms of strengthening coalitions and relationships among community groups. However, since the goal of popular education is to build multiple leaders and challenge hierarchies and leaders that exist, some community organizations are not ready to use popular education because they are not ready to possibly have to decentralize the leadership and ownership of their organization.

#### (7) Challenges

There are mostly outside challenges, in the sense that popular education is very undervalued, they make it hard to get funding for projects. Grants prioritize funding on measurable results, often times cold, hard numbers and it is hard to put a number on empowering and transforming someone on a personal level. Popular education is about quality not quantity, it is an investment that often means a longer process. Grant cycles are generally 1 to 2 years and leadership development takes time, “maybe 5 to 7 years to grow,” suggested Catalina.

Popular education is about human capital and realizing human potential is not something that one can easily put a number on. Also with some of the grassroots groups that Pacific Institute works with it can be for the groups to get funding because they may not have 501(3) status which means they are not eligible to directly apply for funding. Managing grants can result in a lot of time, resources and paper work.

People have very busy lives, hard to engage some residents to build capacity and action on a particular issue, which leads to limitations on developing relationships and a process where everyone can participate and benefit from.

#### (8) Concluding Thoughts

Pacific Institute works to find value in their work and to build an inclusive environment where everyone can be supported. Their recognition that popular education can be the catalyst to spark motivation simply through building self-worth and a collective sense of solidarity leads to the development of leaders who want to be part of a life process of change. The facilitation of popular education programming that Pacific Institute provides to communities allows for communities to build ownership of their knowledge. The feelings of ownership for a community will result in their being more attentive to changes in their communities that may be counter to the beliefs and values of the community. Pacific Institute also recognizes that popular education is very effective in building relationships among people, allowing communities to have more capacity to build change and to oppose developers who do not have the best interest for the communities.

Also, the Pacific Institute is an excellent example of how institutional groups and community groups can build trusting relationships, which can result in better communication between the two entities, which can lead to more fruitful projects and collaborations. When people feel a part of a process and a larger community than themselves then they will become more motivated to stay involved and connected to make sure that their vision of the future is not one based on oppression and violence. Having a relationship with an institution is an important part to feeling respected because it can begin

to guarantee that these institutions are actually working for and with the people. The relationships between community groups and institutional groups can give the community more leverage in terms of decision-making since there can be larger networks of relationships that are representative of both institutions and community organizations, which can provide a larger base of allies and an increase in power.

## **CATALYST CENTRE**

### *(1) Organization*

The Catalyst Centre is a popular education worker co-op in Toronto, Canada that works with the mission of “promoting cultures of learning for positive social change.” The group’s work is similar to organizations like Highlander Center because the Centre designs programs that can be used as templates for creating and implementing popular education programs that are used to look at a social justice issues constructively. The Catalyst Centre also works as consultants to organizations in understanding how to build better relationships in various locations whether it is a work or a community environment. The Catalyst Centre does not solicit their business and only work with groups through invitation only; signifying to the Centre that the groups have thought about what they want and know that popular education is a tool they want to try. When Catalyst works with a group, they only act as a facilitator of the process and give the group the power and accountability over the program so that the community groups know that they are in charge of the process.

### *(2) Why Popular Education?*

As Chris Cavanagh, of Catalyst Centre, says, “nothing works better in terms of respecting people, and building diverse coalitions of solidarity and support.” Popular education provides an open space for people to challenge one another, dissent and agree in

order to truly understand the world and learn from one another on how to build solutions. Popular education processes push the fact that everyone can make theory through being reflective and critically analyzing personal experiences and the shared communication of seeing patterns within all of our personal experiences. Popular education builds tools of resistance through understanding the power of solidarity, and how shared power and resources can build change.

Popular education also recognizes that everyone has the potential to make theory all the time. “Anytime we answer the ‘why’ of things, we are venturing into theory-making. Popular education recognizes that theory can be made through dialogue. But more than that, when we make theory this way, informed by social justice values, anti-oppression and anti-colonial patterns, we make better theory!”<sup>38</sup>

### (3) How Do They Use Popular Education?

Catalyst designs the process by which different groups can build inspired populations to join campaigns, build up community resources and start community development projects. Staff members work to facilitate the process by working with the population to understand the goals and outcomes in order to build a popular education project that reflects the desired outcomes of the community. Catalyst has a massive collection of materials, adult education and community manuals, which the Centre shares freely to help in implementing a design for a specific program. Catalyst believes that it is important to document the whole process in order to maintain a bit of history, knowledge and skills development within programs so that we can always look back at the past to gain sight of what tools need to be used, or revamped in building change. Catalyst also does

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<sup>38</sup> Cavanagh, Chris. "Naming the Moment & Community Development." Weblog post. *Comeuppance*. Web. <<http://comeuppance.blogspot.com/2009/07/i-thought-id-write-fresh-intro-to.html>>.

popular education consultation for not only communities but for universities and businesses as well. But mostly they work with groups who are organizing and need the tools of popular education to mobilize and organize people. Chris Cavanagh believes that when popular education and organizing are put together they produce an extremely effective model to build change. Popular education is a valuable tool for organizing because it pushes people to challenge themselves and always see the value in learning. Since organizing is more about process and goals, popular education can build incentives for people to always keep fighting and working for change because they see a broader scheme of social justice instead of just some goals within a specific campaign.

One of the most successful templates of popular education that Catalyst produced is the “Seize the Moment” (STM) agenda, which illustrates a way to help organizations develop their own popular education programming to help develop community building, organizing a population and understanding the real issues within communities. “Seize the Moment is a democratic way for groups to do problem solving around issues that affect the communities they serve. Using STM leads to stronger collective abilities to do social analysis for action, more efficient delivery of services to people in need, a more interconnected service and social movement sector, and a more informed and involved public amongst other things.

The basic steps of STM include

1. Setting the stage for Democratic Communication
  2. Naming ourselves
  3. Naming the Issues
  4. Assessing the Forces
  5. Planning for Action

## 6. Taking Action

## 7. Evaluation”<sup>39</sup>

The tools STM involves builds a self-reflective program that allows for critical analysis to be placed both on understanding our experiences that influence our decisions, ideas and movements in the future and reflecting on the action we decide to make after our reflective process. The program highlights the importance of “action-reflection-action.” “Action-reflection-action” allows us to be agents within our education and our place within the world. None of us are blank slates in this world; our experiences are transforming experiences that reflect our stance or position in the world. Through constant reflection on our experience we can understand our history, present condition and where we are likely headed in the future. Action must be interjected within this learning practice, first because we are beings that react to things making our movement in life always active and second, because through action are putting our learning to practice.

The STM program was developed after a similar program called the Naming the Moment project, which was started by the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice in Toronto. The program is based on the philosophical and pedagogical ideas of Paulo Freire that maintain popular-education as a democratically participatory program that analyzes power structures within society and push for participants to be consciously awaken through realizing their own power to build change individually and collectively. There were four phases of the Naming the Moment program: “the naming of ourselves, the naming of the issues, analyzing the issues and finally, planning and taking action.”<sup>40</sup> The four steps do not

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<sup>39</sup> The Catalyst Centre. *Seize The Moment: A Popular Education Process of Analysis and Action for Social Change*. Vol. 1.0. Toronto, Canada: Catalyst Centre, 2002. p. 1. Print.

<sup>40</sup> The Catalyst Centre. *Seize The Moment: A Popular Education Process of Analysis and Action for Social Change*. Vol. 1.0. Toronto, Canada: Catalyst Centre, 2002. p. 14. Print.

have to be followed in any particular order but generally “naming ourselves” and identifying key topics of concern can lead to further analysis which will address the action question of “what power / resources do we have to make an impact of positive change?” The program is dependent on bringing people together to share a collective space to engage in dialogue, which will address issues that need to be addressed, and result in a sharing of knowledge, which can begin the steps of creating actions.

The most unique part of Naming the Moment that ensures an empowered group of individuals after every program is it acknowledges the importance of everyone’s experience they are bringing to the program. This increases the potential and the right to of people to become actors changing their world and being objects acted upon within society. Placing importance on the participants of the program recognizes their ability and the necessity of them to be a part of the process for change. Especially, if they have lived through the experience then they already have solutions about their daily life that should be tapped into in order to uncover the current issues within the system and ways to resolve these issues. “Action-reflection-action” is another important tenet of the program because people live in the world and act within it – then it should be realized that every action or experience is a learning experience waiting to be analyzed. Nobody is a blank slate in this world and “we all have experiences that have shaped us and upon which we rely to explain the world to ourselves. In order to change the world in which we live, especially when it comes to resisting oppression, we must reflect upon that experience, analyze it critically for strengths and weaknesses and finally, bring out reflection to bear upon new action which in turn will need to be reflected upon.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Catalyst Centre. *Seize The Moment: A Popular Education Process of Analysis and Action for Social Change*. Vol. 1.0. Toronto, Canada: Catalyst Centre, 2002. p. 15. Print.

The success of popular-education programs like Naming the Moment is dependent on bringing a group together and providing the safe space for people to be engaged in working on resulting action projects which empower the participants that they are producing a knowledge that needs to be heard and acknowledged. An example of a successful Naming the Moment program was a workshop series called “Recovering Stories of Resistance” in May 1991 through October 1992. Each year the program would focus on a different aspect of social and cultural justice. Through understanding the struggles, groups were able to come together to reflect on the stories of resistance that are present today. During the spring of 1991, it was decided to do a program that examined the “celebration” of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas. The program decided to look at how the present condition of indigenous groups is affected, what are they fighting for, and look at how the past has shaped the present and to understand what the future may hold. Through the process of storytelling the group was able to share their stories with the public to raise consciousness on the contradictory view of Columbus’s visit to the first world and what it meant for the history of the people of First Nations.

Since the program’s manuscript has gone out of print, the Catalyst Centre has begun the new program of Seize the Moment to continue the work and extend the idea of the Naming the Moment program. Seize the Moment continues to be an important tool that Catalyst uses for most groups who want consulting in popular education because “using STM leads to stronger collective abilities to do social analysis for action, more efficient delivery of services to people in need, a more interconnected service and social movement sector, and a more informed and involved public amongst other things.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The Catalyst Centre. *Seize The Moment: A Popular Education Process of Analysis and Action for Social Change*. Vol. 1.0. Toronto, Canada: Catalyst Centre, 2002. p.1. Print.

*(4) Production of Knowledge: How is the knowledge justified that comes from these programs?*

Catalyst believes that documentation is central to knowledge. Documentation of the workshop is key because it is a lasting record of what was discussed and is an important resource for not only the people who couldn't attend the meetings but also for the future generations of people who will work on similar community development projects. With lasting accounts of the process and then the action that is linked to the process of going through the popular education program, the future leaders will not forget what generations before and after them have done. Documents help to build up the collective memory so that we can continue to move forward and not remain stagnant. The documents can include stories, art and testimonials, not just the conclusions of the process. Also, an important resource that Catalyst does for all groups they work with is to collect all the material from the group and produce a "zine" for the community members. A "zine" is short for a magazine. It is essentially a do it yourself booklet; a quick way to get information out fast. Catalyst's experience has shown them that zines are more resourceful and taken more often by participants than handouts. Chris Cavanagh has seen people not interested in taking handouts but with a zine he says that they will always run out because people will want an extra copy for a friend or a colleague. Why? Chris Cavanagh responds, "Books are amazing. The format of the book is a very powerful thing. It provides more ideological weight to the material and experience that happens within popular education." When people see a book that is representative of their experience and the new knowledge and language

created it is a proud moment that further emphasizes that all people have the ability to produce theory and knowledge and essentially have the power to do anything.

*(5) Outcomes and Affected Population*

The results of popular education are the capacity building of people who feel empowered to get their goals accomplished. Catalyst mainly works with marginalized communities, mainly immigrant groups like Somalians, Pakistanis, Iranians, Sri Lankans and Tibetans. As a popular education cooperative, Catalyst does receive payment for their services. However, since they believe in the idea of diverse economics they see that every group should pay what they can afford. Catalyst wants everyone to have the resources available to them to fight for greater equity in the world that is why they have a pay system that is based on the ideas of solidarity; where if you can pay, you pay and your payments can help fund other groups to utilize the services of Catalyst if that group can not pay, and if you don't have the means to pay then you don't pay but receive the same services. Catalyst mixes in between doing volunteer work and charging people for consultancy and applying for grants.

One of their recent projects included 12 workshops with a group of immigrant women from an industrial city called Hamilton, which is an hour away from Toronto. The women went through the "Seize the Moment" program to understand how to use methods of popular education to develop their own agency to support new immigrants, advocate for immigrant rights and to help improve family relationships, mainly ones that dealt with male violence. In the end, Catalyst saw exactly what they wanted to see, the women going back to their community and using popular education tools they learned from Catalyst to establish change in their community.

*(6) How do you encourage integration of popular education within your community?*

“Largely by being a good resource, participating in coalitions, sharing our time and knowledge freely and generously,” remarked Chris to this question. Catalyst Center loves to see when people use their tools and new skills created in the workshop, so that these groups will walk away with new knowledge on how to build their futures through the use of popular education.

*(7) Challenges*

Financial challenges are the hardest for Catalyst not only in terms of for funding projects but also in financing the livelihood of the organization. Catalyst wants everyone to have the opportunity to learn how to use popular education and the Centre is reimbursed based on the economic means of the group they are working with. Catalyst never wants money to discourage a group from learning and understanding the benefits of using popular education. Catalyst does expect groups with the means to pay to pay, like larger institutions, since it can be assumed that if these groups pay they can support the idea of solidarity to not only support Catalyst but also the other groups who can not pay for the services.

As Catalyst’s concerns with funding mirror those of the Pacific Institute, Chris Cavanagh wanted to make an additional point about the challenge of funding by saying “I’ll add one thing to the characteristic “funding” challenge and that is to see it not so much as a funding challenge – which is certainly the day-to-day common sense experience of things – but rather as an economics challenge. Which is to say that popular education functions

within a different economics than that of the dominant. We draw our understanding and politics of this from the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham who have articulated a theory coming to be known as ‘diverse economies.’ This gives us language and a framework that has been implicitly and from which, therefore, we have failed to draw support. To put it more pointedly: the economics of popular education exists at best in an uneasy tension with dominant (i.e. capitalist) economics.”

Chris Cavanagh also comments on another challenge. “Another huge challenge is confronting the power of the common sense of how knowledge is produced and how change happens. Briefly, popular education praxis is one of participatory knowledge-making, collective (amongst other characteristics) action for change. The dominant common sense is one ruled by the hegemonic notion that social change will happen with better, more perfect information – I call this “the truth will set you free” syndrome – i.e. education and action for change is all about better content and the process of delivering that content. It’s not about the more labor intensive, democratic (and therefore often slower) process of making knowledge together. It is, I believe a struggle of paradigms.”

Overall for the Catalyst Centre the biggest challenge is challenging society to see popular education as a valuable resource to the human existence that can shape and transform society. This is a challenge because society is resistant to the ideals of popular education, which challenge society’s view of how knowledge is created, and popular education re-examines the economic, social, political and leadership structure of society which can be troubling to a society and authority within society that does not want to change. Popular education provides an awakening for members of society that often times isn’t what the dictating power players within society want.

### *(8) Concluding Thoughts*

The Catalyst Centre is a true promoter of the ideals and strengths of popular education. The group's strong commitment to popular education is why they have successfully been able to excel in increasing the use of popular education tools among various groups they have worked with. Catalyst believes that popular education is one of the best resources to build better relationships across ethnic and economic lines, which can lead to bigger and more multicultural coalitions and networking of power for community groups.

Catalyst Centre recognizes that a new organic knowledge can be produced from popular education, one that can rebuild the true collective memory and knowledge of the past and present. The documentation of this information can acknowledge the truth and legitimacy behind community members. Documentation also means people taking charge of their history to make sure that it is accurate in order for the truth to always be spoken. This has been seen to be another important aspect of popular education where people can take accountability for their knowledge, action and history in order to constantly be a part of the creating of history.

## 7. CHALLENGES OF POPULAR EDUCATION

1. How do you measure popular education's success and growth?

*Challenge:* Through examining the work of both the Pacific Institute and the Catalyst Centre, the main reason these organizations use popular education is because popular education is successful at not only building relationships but also building leaders. Leaders are the people who challenge the thoughts and beliefs of the mass society through their actions and how they live their lives. Although people know that popular education is a venue that creates leaders. Leadership development is not something that can be easily measured; in fact it can be hard to measure, especially since it can be so hard to classify one particular form of leadership. To many, leadership can be someone who is loud, outgoing and very visible with their ideas and actions. However, a leader can also be someone who is quiet and doing all the hard work on the sidelines, which is just as essential to sustaining a movement.

Since popular education works with a diverse mass of people, the results of leadership development will be spread across a large scale as well. There will be those who will develop as leaders simply in the way they live their life in a more conscious and aware matter, which can involve: how a person chooses to eat, travel, treat people or where to work. On the other hand there will be those who will be the vocal advocates with the megaphones. To dismiss one form of leadership over the other is problematic because all forms of leadership compliment each other to ultimately build and sustain a social movement from the roots up. When people are

both living and fighting for the change they wish to see, more people are likely to take interest and take part in the movement. People need to see people living in the way of change to believe that it can work before becoming members of the movement.

The issue of the complexity of defining leadership development is a challenge because difficult assessment and complexity are not good terms when trying to get funding. With grants everything has to be precise and to the point. Conclusions are supposed to come through easily identifiable quantitative and qualitative results to make the process simple in how to distribute funding. Popular education is not a clean process and the results of popular education take time to flourish. Since leadership development is not an easy process to determine and may take anywhere between 6 months to 5 years to identify, this is too long a period for funders to wait to see their money going to effective use; especially since most funding cycles range from 1 to 2 years.

## 2. Popular Education Takes Time

**Challenge:** Funding is often very difficult for popular education because the process of popular education needs to take time. Time does not just refer to the length of the workshop, but also to the process of preparation for the workshop and then afterwards continued support for the actions and goals the participants want to accomplish after the workshop(s). Time is always the most precious resource because it is always hard to figure out a time to meet that works for all members involved in the project, and full participation and commitment is crucial to the success of popular education.

Information can be shared quickly but learning takes time. Democratic participation is at the core of popular education, and democracy is not known to be a fast process; issues need to be completely analyzed to understand the full history and complexity before people can begin to think of the steps to create change. This is the same with popular education. But the advantages of taking time is that there is more development on relationship building, collective analysis, theory-making, policy development and skills training and all the other goals of the particular popular education program. Taking time means more commitment to the idea of critical development where all sides are taken into account before ideas about solutions are put into action.

Again, the main concern with this challenge is money. With things that have a long process it means more money needs to be at hand to invest.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHALLENGES

Popular education is respected for changing the overall lifestyle of people to become more engaged with how they live their lives in respect to both other people and the environment. However, even though this fact is respected, funding continues to be a critical challenge when deciding to create popular education programs. Quantifying leadership development and improvements in the overall personal development of an individual or group can be a hard task. Since most funding from grants comes from quantitative results, there needs to be emphasis on easily identifiable measurements. To impact the change of funding to move towards one that accepts qualitative results, research could go into identifying key terms that identify leadership development or change in personal development, such as: *what job does the person hold that represents a shift in personal growth and emphasis towards justice, in what ways has the person contributed to the growth of their community in terms of civic engagement, what has been a fundamental difference in the person's relationship with society: better relationship with self (no longer self-destructive), better relationship towards family, community and work.* The key terms not only have to focus on individual development but also group development in terms of *what relationships were built through the popular education program and how have they used their new found power to build community development: environmentally, socially, or economically.* If there could be more key terms that could distinguish that popular education provided a shift in the overall well being of the individual, group and community then more funding may be available for popular education. These key terms would then define popular education as a key process that needs to occur to promote individual, group and community development. Popular education would then be viewed to have a strong link with producing more valuable long-term community development initiatives since it

focuses on building from the root – where people understand their innate power as humans, empowering people to believe that they can build change and a “built-in support system” is established to act in the benefit of all people involved in the popular education program leading to more sharing of resources and skills to a growing community of activists.

Funding going into popular education can be valued as building a long time commitment to social change and development. Also, most grants run on short cycles and since most of the benefits of popular education happen in the long term, including leadership development and community development projects if grant periods were extended to support long term projects then it would be easier for people working with popular education to get funding.

Since popular education can have such long-term benefits on community and economic development in such a way that new jobs can be created with the ideas coming out of the program, the government and other funders should give more money to organizations that use popular education. Popular education builds not only the confidence of individuals but also can build great job skills among a population. Skills will vary within topic and focus of popular education, however the number one guaranteed skill of development within all popular education programs is critical thinking. Critical thinking is essential to problem solving and since many jobs within the workforce deal with various forms of problem solving, the critical thinking skills practiced within popular education will produce a creative mass of people who can bring a new sense of efficiency and productivity to the workforce. Thus, the attributes provide a multitude of opportunities for people to become more engaged within their community and economy. New ideas can always create new jobs, especially when a new idea opens up a new market of thought.

## 9. CONCLUSION

We are at a critical point in history in the starting year of 2011. Currently revolutions are happening throughout the Middle East from Libya to Bahrain. Already this year, America has been stirred by masses of people taking over the Capitol Building in Madison, Wisconsin to demand that the public sectors' right to collective bargaining is not abolished. There are discontented people in America and why should there not be? America, a nation that prides itself on democratic freedom, spends more money on the military and incarcerating people instead of the vital social programs that are necessary for social, emotional and economic growth and stability. Just recently, as I was finishing my senior comprehensive report, I was listening to *Democracy Now* as Amy Goodman announced "new figures show the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the developed world, while ranking ninth worst in social spending. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United States imprisons 760 of every 100,000 citizens, more than five times the OECD average."<sup>43</sup> This is terrifying and illustrates that America has become better at locking people up than dealing with the serious societal issues that cause people to be incarcerated like poverty, racism, lack of affordable housing and food, and lack of jobs.

In society, one needs to be an actor to become a factor. Popular education has the power to wake up the consciousness of the population in order to fight for justice. Freedom is clearly not given but sought after. Popular education builds a critical mass of people; a mass of people who will become social actors who will demand, work and live for social transformation. This population will always call into question the power relations and

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<sup>43</sup> *Democracy Now*. Perf. Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez.  
[Http://www.democracynow.org/2011/4/18/headlines](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/4/18/headlines), 2011. Transcript.

nature of society to make sure that society is always representative and participating in promoting the well-being of the people who live within society. The Declaration of Independence states “that whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect Safety and Happiness.”<sup>44</sup> Popular education reconnects people with the sense of power that the founding father Thomas Jefferson writes about in the Declaration of Independence, which calls on citizens to always demand and expect more from their government. That is especially true if a critical mass of people find fault within the government then change needs to be demanded and the way the government is organized should be analyzed. The duty of citizens is to challenge authority in all its realms and popular education gives the starting tools of critical thinking and the power to develop solutions instead of waiting for solutions. This is why popular education is such an empowering process for individuals and groups to go through. This form of education will be met with resistance because it is so powerful in preparing people to live for the movement that it will be hard for authority to back down from responding. When people recognize the strength that each human being can bring, then people become a part of a process of people doing things for themselves and the group and this is the beginning steps of transforming communities, societies and governments.

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<sup>44</sup> "The Declaration of Independence." *Ushistory.org*. Web. 19 Apr. 2011.

<<http://www.ushistory.org/DECLARATION/document/index.htm>>.

Popular education is a form of education that has been used throughout the world to bring power to the oppressed. Organizations such as the Pacific Institute and the Catalyst Centre use popular education due to their history of working with marginalized people in order to build the capacity for people to take responsibility and action for their lives is a great way of rebuilding relationships among people so that individuals and groups who participate within the program can think beyond the constructed ideologies of classism, racism, sexism, in order to rebuild a world where all individuals and groups are represented and have the right to live their lives with fully equality without living in fear of subjugation, violence and oppression. America is still divided along racial, ethnic and economic lines. Popular education would be able to provide the space for people to come together to critically analyze the history of oppression and privilege in America in order to understand what needs to be done to transcend issues of racial and economic exploitation in America.

The strengthening of relationships beyond borders in America will challenge the ideals of capitalism because once people understand power in numbers they will understand that life is more forgiving when people come together. Individualism in America leaves people in isolation, where they see their successes and failures based on individual work ethic not on the barriers established within society – where one's race, economic background and even gender can signify a different set of obstacles to overcome. Capitalism allows the government to escape blame for inequalities since most people will first place blame on themselves rather than on society. Therefore individualism is one of our greatest weaknesses and is what keeps most of us drowning in our oppression. Paulo Freire explains that “when men avoid encounters they become inflexible and treat others as mere objects; instead of nurturing life, they kill life; instead of searching for life, they flee

from it. And these are oppressor characteristics.” Through isolation we do not realize our oppressive state of existence, we continue to move along placing blame on ourselves and others instead of placing blame on the authoritative figures within society who perpetuate systems of oppression. As humans we are communicative creatures, we are not meant to live in silence. Through renewing our voice, and sense of purpose within popular education programs through becoming aware of the patterns of oppression that exist, in simply unmasking the ideas behind our personal experiences, then people will become aware to begin to solve their own problems and act to become more in charge of their future, as well as their community’s future. Already, the masters of the system are acting in unshakable solidarity to withhold a system of human subjugation. It is about time that people act in solidarity to shake up this world, through learning how to live and transform the idea of shared power between everyone in the human race.

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