



KEY PRINCIPLES OF FREIRE

**Adapted from Training for Transformation: A Handbook for
Community Workers by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel**

1. The aim of education is radical transformation

We are all called upon to transform:

- our own personal lives
- our community
- our environment
- the whole society.

For the poor of the world, "the way things are" is not satisfactory, and it is not the only way they can be. Transformative education is based on the hope that it is possible to change life for the better. It must be based on the vision of a new, more just society. 'Radical' means going to the roots. The cause of much of the unnecessary suffering in the modern world lies deep in the values which influence modern western industrial "civilization." This "civilization" now influences most of the rest of the world. These dominant "values" include greed and control for material possessions and power over people and things. The process of transformation includes both action and reflection. "Popular education" is not just an individualistic academic exercise like much traditional western education in which people try to obtain high qualifications for themselves. "Popular education" recognises the energy and potential within each person and each community, and tries to empower them to make their full contribution to the process of building a new society in which it is possible for all people to meet their fundamental human needs.

2. Relevant - generative themes - empowerment

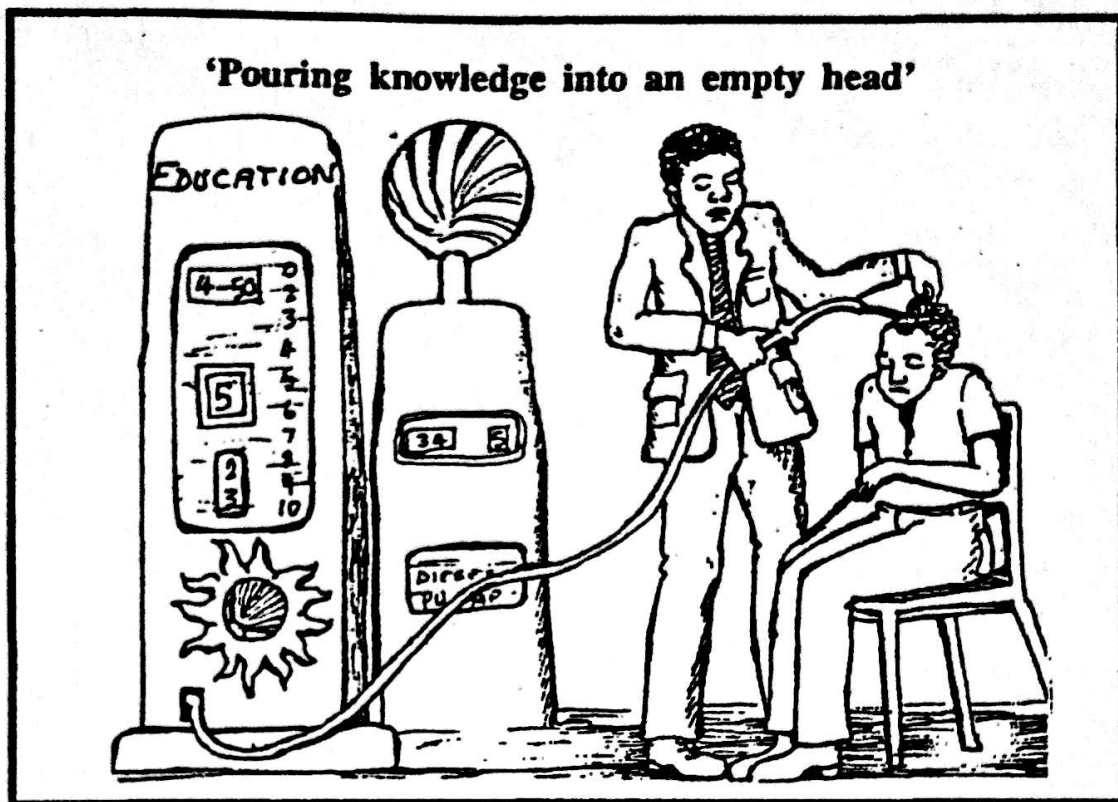
Everybody thinks the education they provide is relevant, but who decides what is relevant to a particular community? Many have stressed that the community themselves must choose the issues which are central in their education and development programs. Paulo Freire has taken this concept much deeper, by pointing out the link between emotion and motivation to act. Much education has tried to ignore human feelings and concentrated only on reason and actions. But Freire recognises that emotions play a crucial role in transformation. Feelings are facts. Only by starting with the issues on which the community have strong feelings - hope, fear, worry, anger, joy, sorrow - and bringing these to the surface, will we break through the deadening sense of apathy and powerlessness which paralyses the poor in many places. Apathy is not a natural condition for human beings. It is natural for all people to strive to meet their human needs. Only when their efforts to do so have been blocked again and again, do they sink into apathy. The role of the facilitator is to help people find new hope as they tap into their natural energy and break through this apathy together. Paulo Freire calls the issues that generate this natural energy and hope "generative themes".

The role of the educator is to present to the people in challenging form the issues they themselves have raised in a confused form. -Mao Zedong

3. Dialogue

Dialogue is crucial in every aspect of participatory learning, and in the whole process of transformation. The challenge to build a just society, based on equality, is very complex. We have learnt to believe that there are experts who have all the knowledge we need to know. For years traditional education has been seen as a process of passing on information, from one "person who knows" (the teacher) to others "who do not know" (the pupils). Paulo Freire refers to this process as "banking" education, as the teacher makes regular deposits in the empty mind of the pupil. It has also been described as pouring water from a full jug into an empty glass, or compared to filling an empty car tank with gas. Research has shown that people learn, remember and apply far more of the things that they learn in dialogue with their peers, than the things they hear in lectures from experts. Dialogue requires patience, humility and a real belief that there is something that

one can learn from the other person. It requires an openness to new information, a willingness to be challenged and a deep hope that change is possible. The role of the facilitator is to create a climate in which true dialogue can take place.



4. Problem-posing and the search for solutions

Once we have found the generative issues of a community, we need to find a concrete way of presenting a familiar experience of the core problem back to the group. This makes them realize immediately that they do have something to say on the issue. Posters, plays, photographs, slides, songs, and simulation games can all be used to help focus the attention of everybody present on the same problem. They often link feelings to facts, and highlight contrasts. The facilitator then uses a series of questions to help the group describe and analyze the problem. They need to relate it to real situations in their lives, as this generates the energy to act. The facilitator helps the group go as deeply as possible into the root causes of the problem, and then challenges them to find solutions, sometimes offering alternatives used in other groups. This reflection on the problem lays the groundwork for effective action planning. The role of the facilitator throughout the

process is not to give the answers, but to set up a process through which the group can search for the answers themselves in a systematic way.

Banking approach

Teacher seen as possessing all essential information

Pupils seen as "empty vessels" needing to be filled with knowledge

Teacher talks

Pupils absorb passively

Knowledge seen as a ready-made package of reliable information that must be passed from one person to another

Problem-posing approach

Facilitator provides a framework for thinking, creative, active participants to consider a common problem and find solutions

Animator (facilitator) raises questions: why, how, who?

Participants are active, describing, analysing, suggesting, deciding, planning.

People are actively involved in the social construction of knowledge.

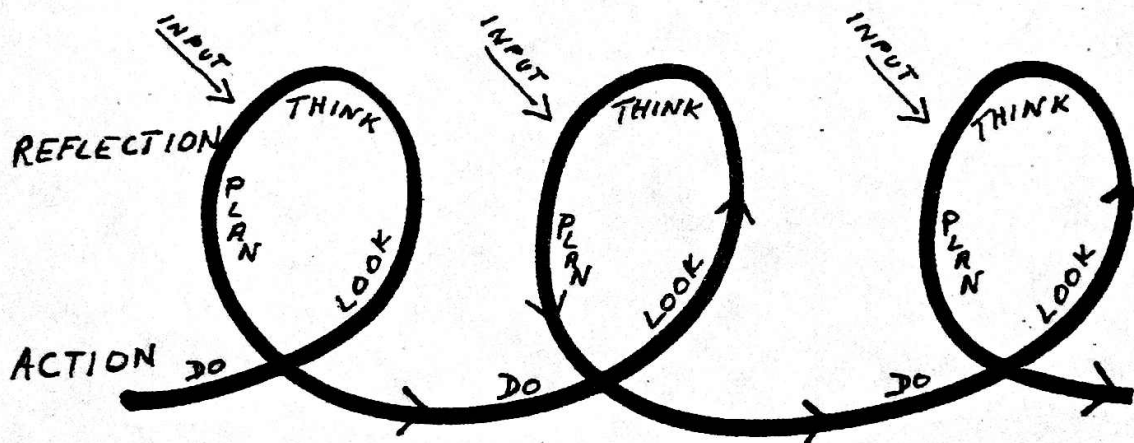
5. Reflection and action

The cycle of reflection and action is central to the whole process of community transformation. Radical change begins when a community experience dissatisfaction with some aspect of their lives and are willing to take time to look at their dissatisfaction. The facilitator needs to arrange a context in which dialogue on the issue can take place. Regular meetings of organizations are often so full, that special workshops, where there will be enough time for some depth of discussion, need to be arranged. Often the first plan of action will solve some aspects of the problem. but not deal deeply enough with the root causes of the problem. By setting a regular cycle of reflection and action in which a group are constantly celebrating their successes and analyzing critically the causes of mistakes and failures, they can become more and more capable of effectively transforming their daily life. This process of action and reflection is called "praxis".

The inputs are important in this cycle. Every group does not need to invent the wheel from scratch. They can learn from the experience of people outside the group. The inputs can take the form of:

- short lectures giving the information they have recognized as relevant
- models of analysis which provide a framework and put the problem in a wider perspective
- slide shows or videos which show how other groups in similar situations have found alternative ways of meeting these needs
- guidelines for action planning

The inputs should themselves be offered as starting points for further dialogue, and not as the formal "truth" or the definitive answers. Once a community experiences the joy of achieving some of their goals, they become more and more ambitious and their lives are filled with new energy and purpose. The facilitator sees the flowering of people and communities before his/her eyes. This is what makes it such an exciting method to work with.



6. No education is neutral

No teacher is ever fully objective. We are all conditioned by our life experiences and it is important that we look critically at how these have affected our values and our judgments. We need to check to what extent we use our role and our power in the group to try and shape others in our own image. We also need to look to what extent we

encourage participants to develop along their own unique paths. We need to check to what extent our education is "domesticating" them to fit obediently into the roles required of them by the dominant culture, and to what extent it is liberating them to be critical, creative, free, active and responsible members of society - as well as in this learning group. But there also are real facts that we all need to know in order to understand the world. But facts, by themselves, have little meaning unless they are seen in relation to the whole.