

An Introduction to Popular Education

What is popular education?

Popular education is a philosophy and methodology of teaching and community organizing. It has many sources. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian, is the person best known for his contribution to popular education.

What are the goals of popular education?

- The creation of a truly democratic society where we all have equal access to the world's resources
- Human liberation, both personal and collective

How does popular education propose to achieve its goals?ⁱ

- Step 1: Help each person come to believe that s/he is capable of changing her/his world.
- Step 2: Connect people's personal problems to national and global realities (develop critical consciousness)
- Step 3: Motivate people to organize collectively and take action to resolve their common problems.

What are the principles of popular education?ⁱⁱ

- The current distribution of the world's resources is unjust and change is possible.
- We learn with our heads, our hearts, and our bodies.
- It is important to create an atmosphere of trust so that people can share their ideas and experiences.
- We all know a lot. As educators and organizers, we should always start with what people already know and/or do.
- The knowledge we gain through life experience is as important as the knowledge we gain through formal education.
- People should be active participants in their own learning process. They should not be passive recipients.
- Knowledge is constructed in the interaction between people.

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- Popular education is an inclusive movement that combines influences from many sources.
- In each situation in which we try to teach or organize, the conditions should reflect the conditions of the society we are trying to construct. This means equality between “teacher” and “student,” and democratic decision-making.
- It is important that educators and organizers share the life experience of those they want to teach and/or organize.
- The arts (music, drama, visual arts, etc.) are important tools for teaching and organizing.
- The purpose of developing a critical consciousness is to be able to take action to change the world. (Critical thinking alone is not enough.)
- The goal of popular education is organized action to change the world.

What are some of the values of popular education?ⁱⁱⁱ

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| • Love for the cause of the people | • Dedication |
| • Honesty | • Solidarity |
| • Compassion | • Humility |
| • Responsibility | • Comradeship/ <i>Compañerismo</i> |

ⁱ Serrano-García, Irma (1984). The illusion of empowerment: Community development within a colonial context. In J. Rappaport, C. Swift & R. Hess (Eds.) *Studies in empowerment: Steps toward understanding and action* (pp. 173-200). New York: The Haworth Press.

ⁱⁱ Many of these principles, although not all, are drawn from: Horton, M. (2003). *The Miles Horton reader: Education for social change*, ed. Dale Jacobs. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Harnecker, Marta (2002). *Sin tierra: Construyendo movimiento social*. (Landless: Constructing a social movement.) Madrid, Spain: Siglo XXI de España Editores.