

Some considerations about our popular education model:

Our "methodological model" is based on some general principles and values that guide our action, we believe that they can be adapted to different circumstances. **These principles are a synthesis of values, attitudes, knowledge and skills based upon concrete experiences.** We don't want to pretend that we are "inventing" how to boil an egg or discovering the wheel. From our experience of doing something in concrete places and times, we are extracting some ideas confirmed and learned down the road; with the hope that they can be helpful to those who are walking similar paths. Method means Road, not Recipe, as usual a poet got it right:

"Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.

Al andar se hace camino, y al volver la vista atrás

Se ve la senda que nunca se ha de volver a pisar

Caminante, no hay camino, sino estelas en la mar."

Antonio Machado

This are some of our methodological principles:

- **To do a workshop is to open a space for dialogue**, it has been called the creation of a "safe space" for learning, and therefore the initial effort is to open the space. But a safe space exists around behaviors, attitudes and values, it doesn't exist just because the trainer says that the space is safe, or because the people with more privileges feels safe.
- The ways in which we define what is a "safe space" depends on our circumstances: our background, our race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, immigration status, disabilities, and many other variables that imply inclusion or exclusion, privilege and oppression. As facilitators of a workshop we can not solve these differences, but we must acknowledge them if we want to open a space for dialogue and not for simulation. Therefore instead of defining a workshop as a "safe space" it is better to think that **a workshop is a place for trust and participation.**
- **The main tool for facilitation in a training process is the facilitator him/herself**, if he/she doesn't attends with an attitude of dialogue and openness then she/he can't really facilitate the participation of others. (Notice: The facilitator is the tool, the group as a whole is the builder of the dialogue)
- Education is always Reproduction and Resistance of values, ideologies, skills, and attitudes; the more we can be explicit about what we are reproducing and resisting, the better we can keep the direction of our process. **Being explicit and specific about our values, (the political-ethical center of our educational-organizing effort) helps to create a center of gravity for the process.**

- From a conventional point of view, education implies transmission, conservation, and creation of knowledge. (knowledge includes: information, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors in an specific context; **information without context is not knowledge, and doesn't necessarily means empowerment**)
- **In the tradition of Popular Education: Any educational project should be an ethical and political process that looks for the liberation of the oppressed**, the inclusion of the excluded, the empowerment of the individuals and group, the transformation of the structures of power and the building of a more just society. It has several "dimensions": Person, Family, Community, Popular Organization and Society and it is a long term process.
- **Popular Education processes are based upon *Concientización*: Experience in Context. Knowledge that leads to Action** The personal story (experiences) of Oppression/Resistance/Liberation shared in dialogue and related to the stories of others and then to the structures of power from an historical perspective. It is learning and unlearning, redefining my personal reality in relation with the experiences of those around me.
- **The synthesis of Action/Reflection or Theory/Practice has been called Praxis:** Learning through action how to transform my reality in the everyday struggle for survival, resistance and affirmation of rights. Action without reflection is *activism*, is just doing a lot of isolated actions but without long term goals and strategies that help to build new popular organizations. In the context of organizing reflection without action is a privilege, an "intellectualism" that can only afford those who aren't struggling for survival. The production of analytical tools to better denounce and understand the structures of oppression is an important task. The documentation of the struggle for resistance is an essential tool for learning and also a source of hope.
- **Popular Education implies Participatory Methods, but it is not reduced to that.**
- **There are several ways of doing organizing. From a Popular Education perspective, it has to be a long term participatory and democratic process. Leadership will be service and a process of becoming unnecessary. Or in the Zapatista's words: Leadership is "Mandar obedeciendo" (To command by obeying)**
- **Becoming Unnecessary is a long term goal and it is a lot easier if we are developing new organizers**, so they can do what we are doing, so that we can go do something else or go somewhere else to do the same. Developing new leaders or organizers has also been called "Forming Promoters"; and in the experience of the movement *De Campesino a Campesino* in Central America it was done under this principles: Little by little, from the practice, starting in small scale, with demonstratives experiences, building a model that can be applied elsewhere. Becoming unnecessary doesn't means becoming irrelevant!
- **Any educational process implies planning and evaluating, from the popular education perspective these two activities have to be participatory in order to be**

coherent with the ethical and political vision. There are several methodologies for planning and evaluating here we offer a guide with some principles to have in mind when choosing or designing one.

PICOSO

BRAINSTORMING ON THE DIFERENT ELEMENTS OF A PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY

P articipation	Process perspective and Ownership of the process: Dependence/Independence/Interdependence.
I ntegration	Landing the process on Every Day life: Reproduction/Resistance of Poverty, Racism, Sexism, etc.
C ritical Creativity	Information in Context.... Structural Critic / Self Criticism
O rganizing	What happens if we disappear? Creating new social actors Creating Community and Power Becoming unnecessary,
S ymbolism	Other kind of power/ Culture, Celebrations, Faith
O peration	Being effective, responding to needs, transforming reality. Evaluating, improving

SOME "PREGUNTAS GENERADORAS" TO REFLECT ON OUR WORK:

1. **Participation:** How are people **Participating** in the decision making process? Are we being Democratic? How do we define our agenda and establish our goals? Who controls the money? How are people participating during the workshops: In the planning? Recruiting? Logistics? Attending? Does everybody gets to speak in the session or just the "trainers" and the group has to listen?
2. **Integration:** Are we Integrating the experiences, knowledge and skills of the group in the process and the sessions? How are we trying to **Integrate** the long and short term needs of the group? Are we connecting the different sessions/modules among themselves along the process? How are we trying to **Include** those who are not included now? Who is missing in the group, the process? What can we do to bring them in?

3. **Critical Creativity** Do we make space for **Creativity and Criticism** within our team and process? What are the mechanisms we have for feedback? How do we react to feedback (personally and as a team), Are we being critical in our analysis of our reality? Are we addressing the causes of the problems or only the visible symptoms?
4. **Organizing**: Are we creating/strengthening local organizations and groups (social actors) or are we carrying out events and campaigns and reducing organizing to mobilizing? What happens when the campaign ends? What happens if we disappear... if things end when we leave, then we are mobilizing, not **Organizing**.
5. **Symbolic Power**: What kind of power are we using and creating? Are we clear about who we are and what are our values? Are we playing with the rules and language of the oppressor or are we drinking from our own wells: How are we using our Culture and Faith? How are we using, creating and recreating our **Symbols**? Are we incorporating art and culture as part of our organizing strategies?
6. **Operational capacity**: Are we solving some concrete problems? Responding to some concrete needs? Transforming reality? Achieving some concrete victories? Are our **Operations** Efficient? How do we measure this? How do we define victory? What are we doing right? How can we improve?

