

# POPULAR Education





*Popular Education*  
*Bilingual Edition*

## *Popular Education*

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Department of Education and Leadership  
January 2009

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ISBN 9780976789338

LCCN 2010921646

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# Introduction

This book is inspired by the words of Portuguese writer José Saramago who said: “For there to be a new world, we must put our imagination, fantasy, hope, and sense of utopia to work.” One small part of working for the new world that Saramago is talking about is increasing the influence of popular education<sup>1</sup>. This is an effort that has been, and will continue to be, a hopeful one for people who have traditionally been victimized by a domineering and patronizing “banking<sup>2</sup>” approach to education.

Popular education is alive and well and will continue to grow in wealthy countries that serve now as gathering places for migrant communities who have been expelled by their home countries in this globalized world. The people in these communities are the day laborers and domestic workers who are flowing by the thousands into large cities in search of a more dignified and just life. Many bring with them from their home countries a cultural inheritance of subjugation and manipulation. Popular education is being developed now in this context of the “new country” in order to raise critical awareness. It is helping migrant people to understand and create new forms of action, to change certain practices in order to improve their lives, and to act based on the marginalization they are experiencing.

This booklet is being published in the context of a serious global economic crisis and the arrival of new leadership in the United States under the slogan of “Yes We Can!!” For immigrants, it also comes in the midst of an atmosphere of persecution and terror. They are experiencing an onslaught of raids, anti-immigrant laws and ordinances, and an uncertain situation in which there is no clear way forward towards comprehensive immigration reform. Popular education is the only way to build a movement of solidarity that can transform this discouraging situation.

We have developed this booklet for organizers; social workers; union members; health advocates; renters and leaders in neighborhood associations or boards; teachers and students in English classes; day laborers in employment centers; activists who lobby government officials; legal rights advocates; staff of non-profit organizations; and many other people who use it as a fundamental tool in their work of creating participatory and liberating education. It is this kind of education that was envisioned by Paulo Freire, Bernice Robinson, Myles Horton, Septima Clark, and other educators and popular educators who have gone before us on this journey.

Let’s make sure we don’t lose anyone along the way, for as Freire said: “Being outside of the people’s struggle is a way of being against that struggle.”

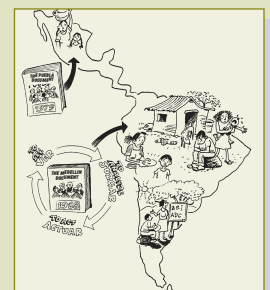
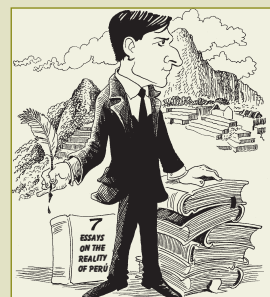
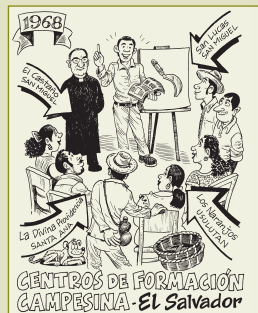
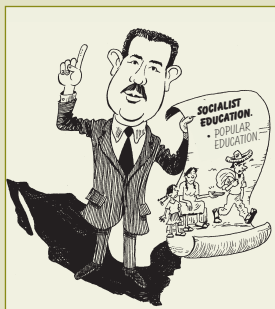
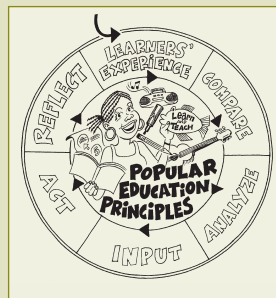
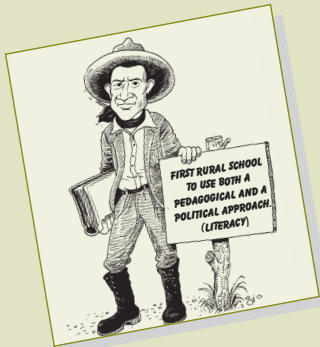
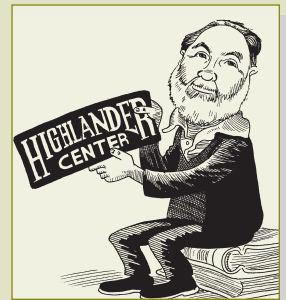
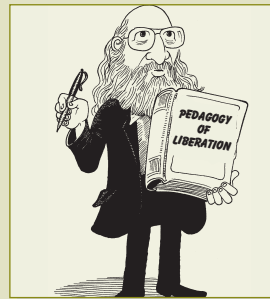
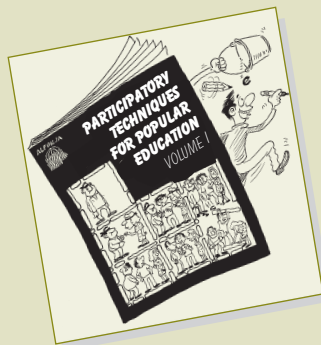
<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: *Popular education* is a term that is translated literally from the original Spanish. It will be explained in greater detail throughout this booklet, but it refers to an entire pedagogy and spirit of education that emphasizes the participation of the poor and other traditionally excluded groups. In popular education, students draw on their own life experience to collectively determine what they will learn, how they will learn it, and how they will use it to transform society.

<sup>2</sup> Trans. note: a “banking” approach to education is a critical term used to describe many traditional modes of education where the students, especially the poor, are treated as ignorant objects who are expected to show up to the classroom – “the bank” – and passively receive “deposits” of information. This kind of approach is top-down and preserves the status quo.

# The beginnings of popular education

## Introduction to popular education

Popular education didn't come falling out of the sky, nor is it the product of a single brilliant mind. It is like a spring that grows until it becomes a swift flowing river. Popular education has been growing and walking alongside mass movements for social change. Many people and social forces have served as diverse channels of thought, but they always converge on the same idea: the need to accompany people as they fight for their rights. This is not a full history of popular education, but we would like to highlight some of the individuals and groups that have contributed to it and influenced its development.





# César Augusto Sandino

(1895-1934)

Nicaraguan César Augusto Sandino was a liberator who fought in the 1920s against the interference of the United States in his country. Sandino always emphasized the importance of adult literacy and the educational aspects connected to the military struggle.

Carlos Tünnermann, the Nicaraguan Minister of Education from 1979 to 1984, saw the educational legacy of Sandino in the following way: "The first rural school to use both a pedagogical and a political approach was opened in the mountains of Las Segovias in 1928... It was truly a school of liberation, where classes were held on riverbanks and

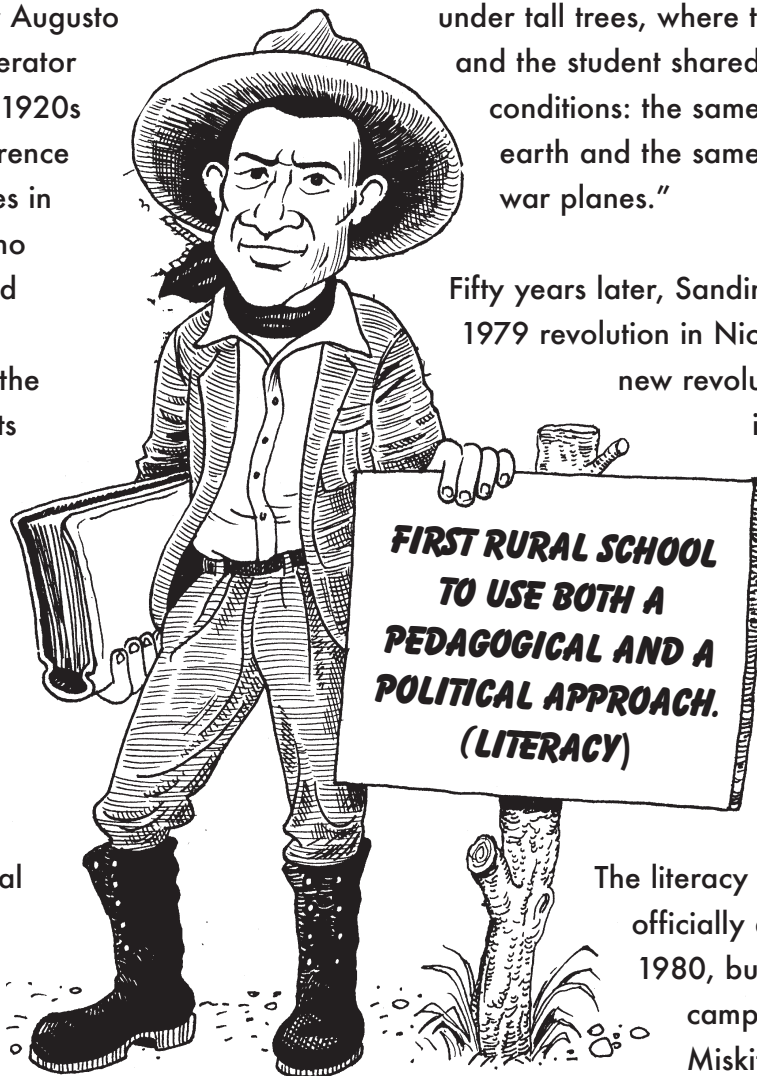
under tall trees, where the literacy instructor and the student shared the same harsh conditions: the same bomb-pocked earth and the same sky clouded by war planes."

Fifty years later, Sandino inspired the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua, and the new revolutionary government implemented a

"National Literacy Crusade" that reduced the illiteracy rate from 50.35% to 12.96% and taught 406,056 Nicaraguans to read and write.

The literacy campaign in Spanish officially ended on August 23, 1980, but a new literacy campaign in English, Miskito, and Sumo languages began

on September 30th of the same year with the goal of achieving literacy for 16,500 citizens of the Atlantic coast region of Nicaragua.



# José Carlos Mariátegui

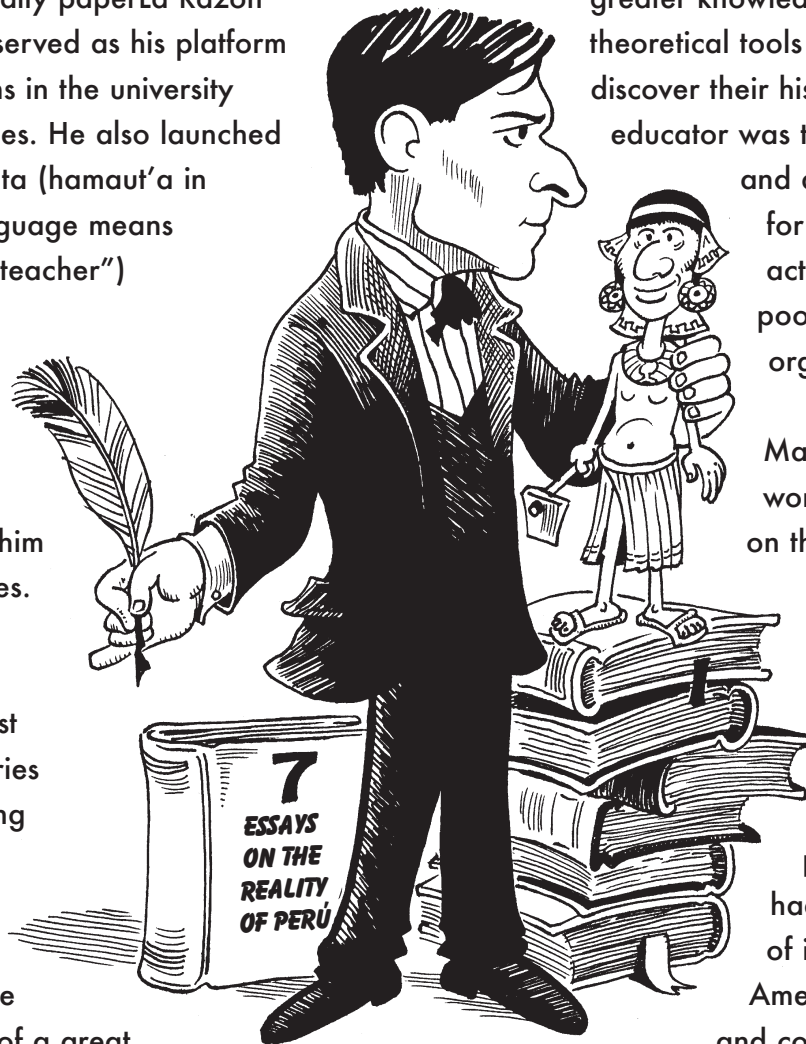
(1894-1930)

José Carlos Mariátegui, born in Perú, was one of the most original thinkers of 20th century Latin America. In 1919 he founded the daily paper *La Razón* [Reason], which served as his platform to support reforms in the university and labor struggles. He also launched the journal *Amauta* (hamaut'a in the Quechua language means "wise elder" or "teacher") and founded the Socialist Party and the proletarian journal, *Labor*. His work landed him in jail several times.

Mariátegui developed the first educational theories focused on training and organizing indigenous populations. He was one of the founding fathers of a great philosophical current that joined with others to form what we now know as popular education.

Mariátegui articulated a vision of the role to be played by the intellectual, teacher, or educator. Intellectuals were to use their greater knowledge of history and theoretical tools to help Peruvians discover their historic calling. The educator was to be a resource and a point of support for transformative action led by the poor and their organizations.

Mariátegui's principal work, *Seven Essays on the Reality of Peru*, was a Marxist analysis of the Peruvian situation of the early 20th century. His philosophy has had a great deal of influence on Latin American struggles and continues to have influence today.





# General Lázaro Cárdenas

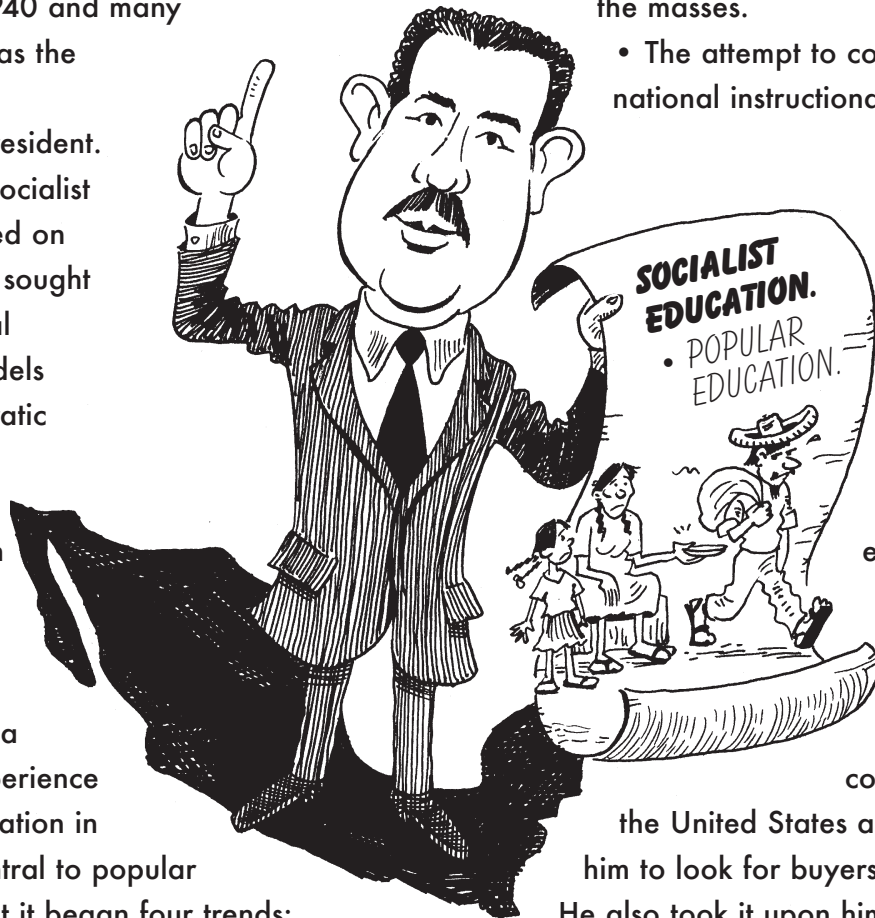
(1895 -1970)

Cárdenas was president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940 and many would say he was the country's last revolutionary president. He promoted "socialist education" based on science, and he sought to turn all formal educational models towards democratic methodologies that would elicit the participation of the poor.

According to historian Adriana Puigros, the experience of socialist education in Mexico was central to popular education in that it began four trends:

- The association of popular education with revolutionary views and with Cardenas's emphasis on secular education.
- A rationalist and scientific underpinning for education that attempts to connect with the historic reality of the Mexican people.

- The idea of free education for the masses.
- The attempt to construct a national instructional method.



Under the slogan "Mexico for Mexicans," Cardenas carried out a policy of nationalizations that were especially far-reaching when it came to oil. This put him into direct conflict with

the United States and forced him to look for buyers in Germany. He also took it upon himself to enact protections for the indigenous population, launch an agrarian reform, break up large landholdings, nationalize the railroads, and establish secular, free, and mandatory public education.

# Paulo Freire

(1921 -1997)

Brazilian Paulo Freire is the biggest name in popular education.

In 1960, he created a method of literacy education known today as the “generative word” method. The method was used to teach 40 million people in Brazil to read and write. Three hundred rural workers were the first to try this method in 1963, and they learned to read and write in 45 days.

Freire coined terms like “banking education,” “literacy for critical awareness,” and “liberating education;” these terms have become common vocabulary for many educators.

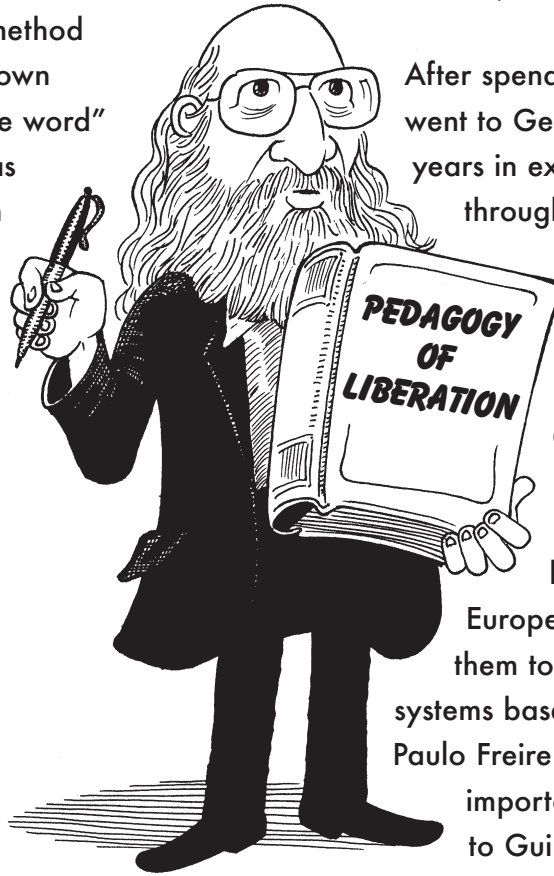
In 1968, he was accused of writing a “subversive” book—none other than *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was published in 1970 and has had a tremendous influence worldwide.

In 1969 Freire received an invitation to teach at Harvard University in the United States. He was keenly interested

in experiencing American culture and learning about the Third World (ghettos and slums) within the First World.

After spending a year at Harvard, he went to Geneva where he spent 16 long years in exile. From there, he traveled throughout Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas (though, sadly, not Brazil) as a “mobile consultant” for the World Council of Churches’ Office of Education. During this time, he advised African countries that had recently been liberated from their European colonizers and helped them to implement education systems based on self determination. Paulo Freire wrote one of his most important works, *The Letters to Guinea Bissau*, based on this experience.

He returned to the United States again with this new stock of African experience and had a dialogue with Myles Horton about the presence of the Third World within the First World. This led to writing a passionate and hopeful book of wisdom titled *We make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, by Freire and Horton.





# Myles Horton

(1905-1990)

Myles Horton, born in the state of Tennessee in the United States, was a socialist educator and the co-founder of the Highlander Folk School.<sup>3</sup> The Highlander School became famous because of its role in the Civil Rights Movement, and Horton taught and powerfully influenced most of the movement's leaders.

Two of his most well-known students are

Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks.

Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, studied with Horton briefly and then went on to make the historic decision to keep her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, when segregation was still legal.

Horton traveled to Denmark where he studied in the "folk schools" and in centers for adult education and community empowerment. He organized the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee according to this model that he encountered in Denmark.

The founding principle of the Danish

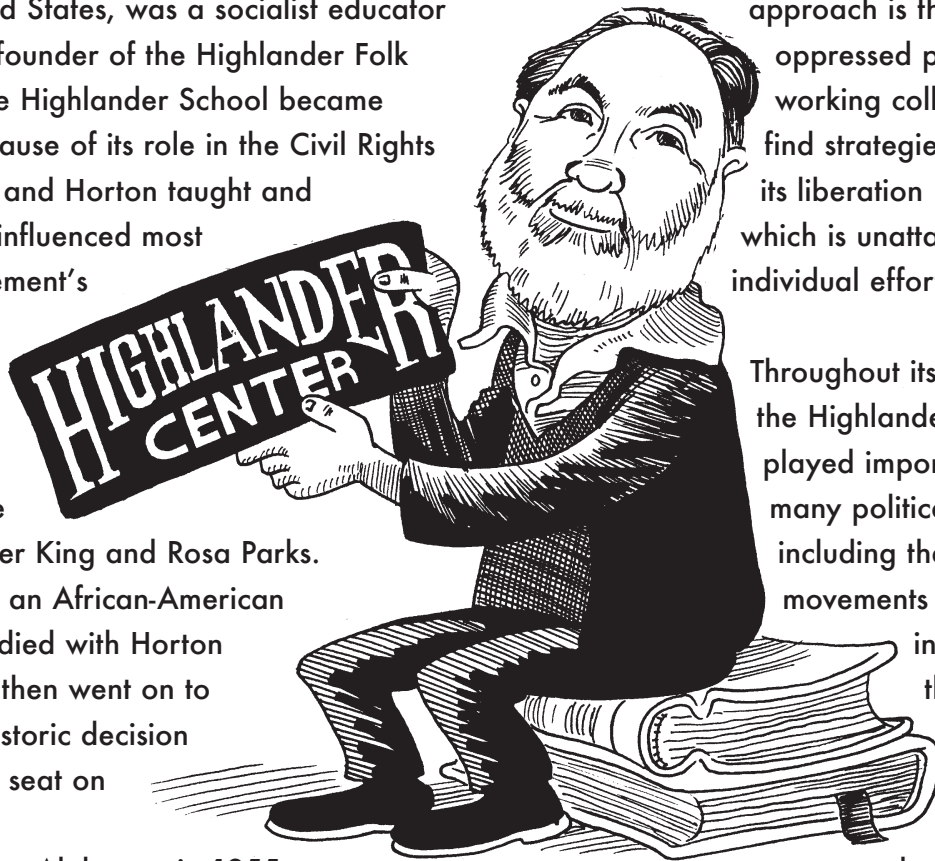
approach is this: "an oppressed people working collectively can find strategies to achieve its liberation - a liberation which is unattainable through individual efforts."

Throughout its history, the Highlander Center has played important roles in many political movements, including the labor movements of the South

in the 1930s, the Civil Rights Movement in the 1940s-1960s, and the Appalachian

peoples' movements during the 1970s and 1980s.

Now part of Horton's legacy, the Highlander center is residential center for population education and research located on a 106-acre farm outside of New Market, Tennessee, 25 miles east of Knoxville in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains.



<sup>3</sup> It was later renamed the Highlander Research and Education Center.

# Septima Clark

(1898 -1987)

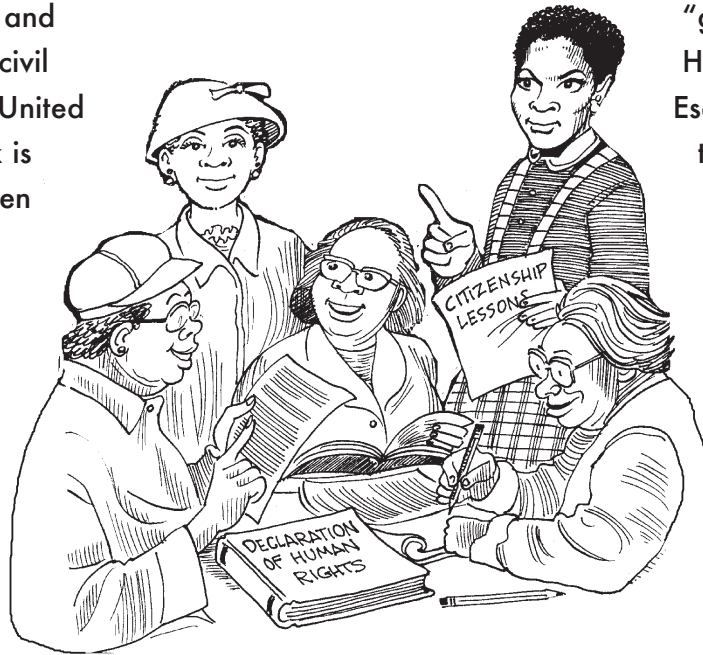
Septima Clark was a US-American educator and civil rights activist.

Many leaders fought and sacrificed during the civil rights struggle in the United States. Septima Clark is often called "the queen mother of the civil rights movement," and she surely was. When she died at age 89, Governor Carroll Campbell praised her as, "a leading civil rights activist... a legendary educator, and humanitarian..." and declared that "...we have lost a part of our collective conscience which calls out against inequality and injustice..."

During the 1950s, Clark became the Director for Trainings and Workshops at the Highlander Center in Tennessee. There, she came up with a curriculum focused on promoting voter registration and empowering people to resolve their problems through social activism.

The workshops focused on areas like voter education, civil rights, and union organizing.

Some of the people who "graduated" from the Highlander Center, like Esau Jenkins, went back to their birth places in the Sea Islands and elsewhere to open "citizenship schools." They taught many poor people who didn't know how to read and write and who therefore were not allowed to vote.



Within three years after the first citizenship school opened, 600 African-Americans who attended the schools were registered to vote. The following year, Septima Clark, with the assistance of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, developed a program for training teachers to work all over the South. As a result, two million African-Americans were registered to vote by 1970.



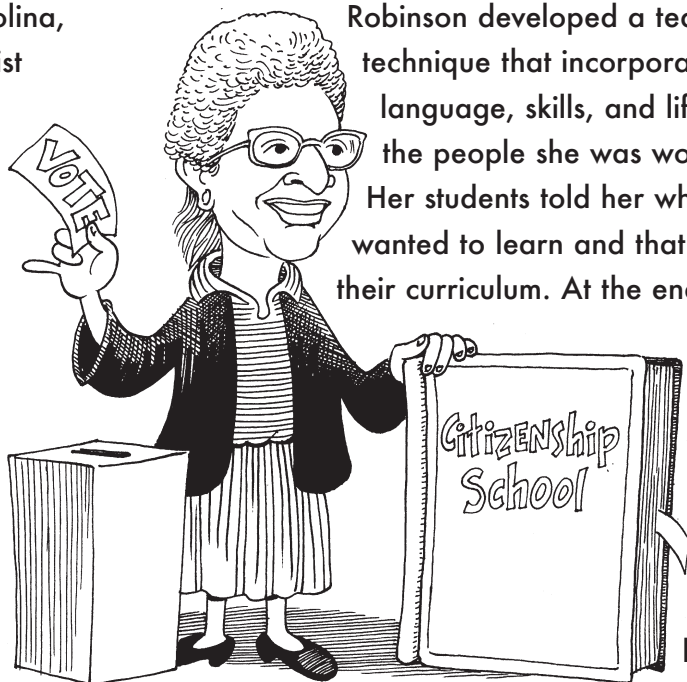
# Bernice Robinson

(1914 -1994)

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Bernice Robinson was an activist through and through. She was an adult educator in the citizenship schools and was on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1955, Bernice attended a Highlander workshop on the United Nations along with Septima Clark and Rosa Parks. There, she met Esau Jenkins who used the workshop to appeal for the creation of a school to teach people how to read and write and to register voters.

After many months of work, and with the constant support of the Highlander Center, a school was ready to open. Esau approached Bernice to ask her to be a teacher. Bernice continued working at her beauty parlor and caring for her sick mother, but she still showed up to the first class ready for the challenge: She said, "I'm not going to be the teacher. We're going to learn together. You're going to teach me some things, and maybe there are a few things I might be able to teach you, but I don't consider myself a teacher. I just feel that I'm here to learn with you. We'll learn things together."



Robinson developed a teaching technique that incorporated the language, skills, and lifestyles of the people she was working with. Her students told her what they wanted to learn and that became their curriculum. At the end of five

months, the fourteen students that had started with her had registered to vote, knew how to read and write, and could do basic arithmetic. After this, the program continued to grow beyond what anyone had first expected.

Bernice Robinson was the first teacher of the Citizenship School. She was hired by the Highlander Center and by the Citizenship Education Program (CEP) to register voters and conduct workshops in communities all over the South where there was a lot of racial tension.

Bernice Robinson carried out the largest and most successful literacy campaign ever seen in the United States. Then, she worked with farm workers and with migrants until 1977.

# La Conferencia de Medellín

(1968)

The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops was held in the city of Medellín, Colombia. That was the meeting where the Catholic Church decided on an “option for the poor” and made the decision to create vibrant and active Christian Base Communities. These were to be groups that would work actively for change in their countries, based on the kinds of things they learned in the Bible.

The bishops who participated in that conference said that the formal education system was very abstract and that it didn’t take into account the hardships that people were facing. They also criticized the teaching methods that educators were using to transmit information and argued that the formal education system supported and maintained the unjust social and economic structures that existed in Latin America at the time.

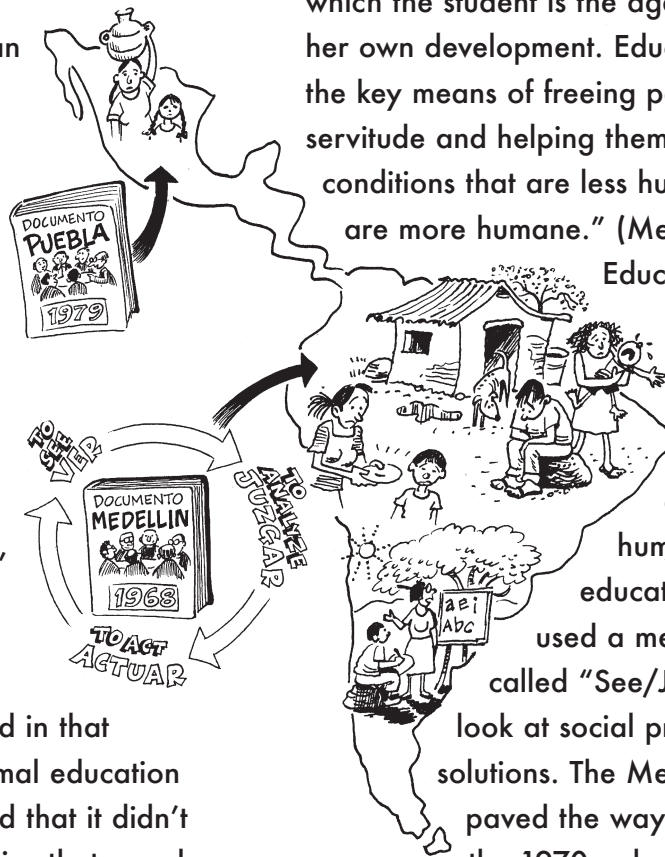
“Our reflection on this situation leads us to propose a vision of education that is more in line with the comprehensive development we are calling for on our continent; we would call it a ‘liberating education’—an education in

which the student is the agent of his or her own development. Education is, in fact, the key means of freeing people from servitude and helping them move from conditions that are less humane to ones that are more humane.” (Medellin Document, Education, 8)

The Bishops advocated for a greater emphasis on the human values of education and they

used a methodology called “See/Judge/Act” to look at social problems and find solutions. The Medellín conference paved the way for a new era in the 1970s when rural communities used certain teaching methods to raise church members’ awareness about the problems they faced in their communities.

The Medellín documents and the documents from the bishops’ meeting in Puebla (Mexico 1979) are still points of reference for Christian communities in Latin America that are trying to train new leaders and reflect on reality and on the problems that make life hard for the poorest communities.





# Leónidas Proaño

(1910-1988)

Leónidas Proaño was the Catholic bishop of Chimborazo province in Ecuador. He dedicated his life to the defense of the indigenous people, and they used to call him "Tait Leónidas." He used to say that he learned everything he knew from the poor and from the indigenous people. "What I have learned and experienced in this life has not been extracted from university classrooms in my country or any others, but from the quarry of the people," he said. "My university has been the people, and my best teachers have been the poor, in general, and the indigenous people of Ecuador and Latin America, in particular." That's why they also called Proaño the "Disciple of the People."

His goal was to build a church that was unconditionally committed to the liberation of indigenous and oppressed peoples. Unfortunately, he was closely watched and controlled by the Vatican and persecuted by those with political power. In 1976 he was arrested along with seventeen other bishops who were meeting in his house.

The Riobamba Diocese became a kind of school for many people who went there to share their work experiences. Soon it became a focal point for discussing the experience of working with indigenous communities.

Proaño was a fervent defender of teamwork. In fact, he organized several work teams in



his diocese. His most important written work came precisely from these working group sessions. It was called: *Concientización, evangelización, y política* ["Awareness raising, evangelization, and politics"].

He used liberating education methods to try to promote a critical consciousness in people so they would recognize injustices and denounce them. He also tried to raise awareness about the importance of participating in politics in order to transform reality according to the values of the Gospel: truth, solidarity, the common good, etc.

Leónidas Proaño, along with Manuel Larrain, the Bishop of Talca in Chile, founded the Latin American Pastoral Institute (IPLA) where they trained several generations of religious leaders. One of their students was Rutilio Grande of El Salvador who went home and began a successful process of organizing and awareness-raising among peasant farmers in a place called Aguilares. Rutilio Grande was eventually murdered because of his work.

Leónidas Proaño and Sergio Méndez Arceo from Mexico; Helder Câmara and Pedro Casaldaliga from Brazil; and Oscar Arnulfo Romero from El Salvador are the bishops that have had the most influence in putting liberating education and grassroots organization into practice after the Medellín conference.

# Augusto Boal and the Theater of the Oppressed

(1931–2009)

Augusto Boal was a Brazilian playwright, actor, director, and professor of theater. In the 1960s, he created the Theater of the Oppressed, which has been defined as “theater for the oppressed classes, and of all oppressed people, including those who are oppressed within their own social class.” This kind of theater has specific techniques that were influenced by Bertolt Brecht’s “epic theater.” They include a series of games for actors and non-actors and techniques like “journalistic theater,” “the Rainbow of Desire,” “legislative theater,” “invisible theater,” “image theater,” and “forum theater” (the most well-known). The goal of these techniques is to turn the spectator into an active participant in dramatic action and “through this transformation, to help the spectator to plan real actions that will lead to his or her own liberation.” (Augusto Boal)

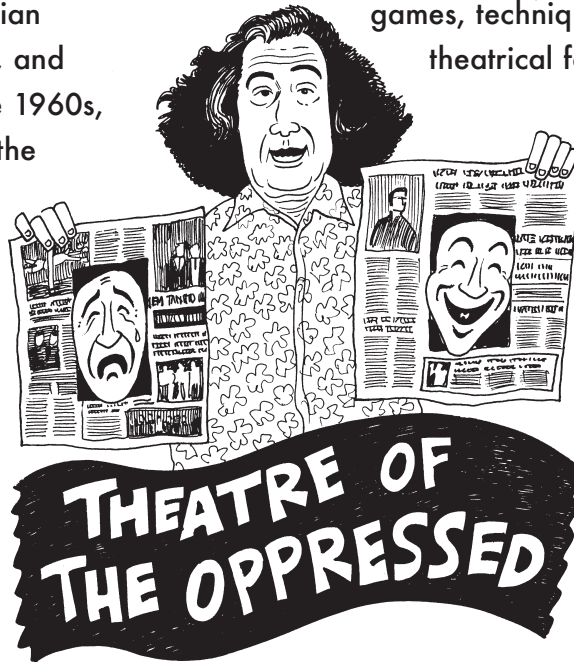
Boal starts with the principle that theater is like language and that anyone can use it if they take over the means of production. The “Theater of the Oppressed” tries to teach people to do this. It uses a series of exercises,

games, techniques (image theater), and theatrical forms (of which forum theater is the one most often used) to help people try to understand reality in order to transform it—similar to Paulo Freire’s ideas in the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed.”

Boal wrote down his theories in his books, which include *The Theater of the Oppressed*, *200 Exercises and Games for*

*Actors and Non-Actors Who Want to Say Something Through Theater*, *Categories of Popular Theater*, and *Latin American Popular Theater Techniques*.

The Theater of the Oppressed introduces pedagogical aspects as well as social, cultural, political, and therapeutic aspects. The joker (or the *comodín* in Spanish) is the theatrical animator who leads the activities and has both a pedagogical and a theatrical function. Theater of the Oppressed methodology can be used in educational settings because it allows for the exchange of information and experiences and can be an instrument for facilitating discussion on social problems and socio-cultural intervention.

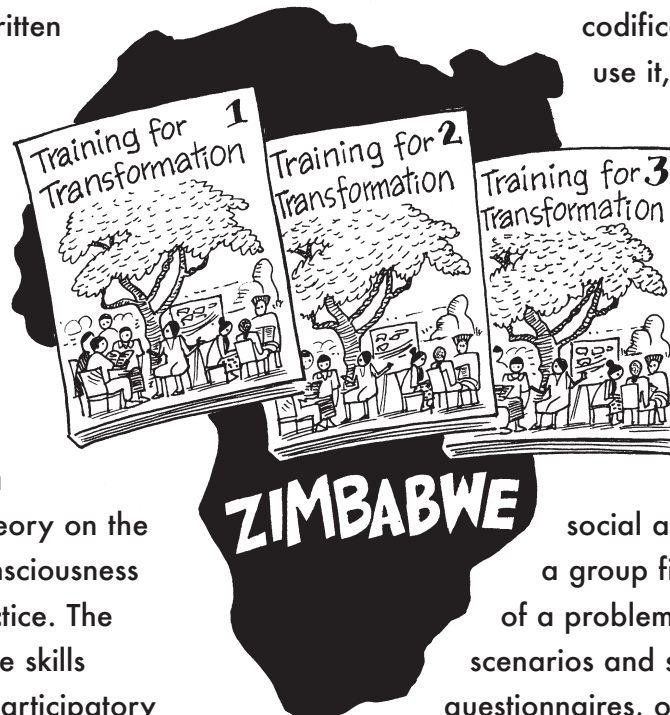


# Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers

(1984- Africa)

Training for Transformation is a 3-volume set of books written by Ann Hope and Sally Timmel and illustrated by Chris Hodzi (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984) based on experiences in education being developed in southern Africa.

The first volume is mostly a review of Paulo Freire's theory on the development of critical consciousness and how to put it into practice. The second book focuses on the skills necessary for working in participatory education. And the third book includes the social analysis needed to develop critical consciousness. The three volumes are used together as manuals to train for transformation. Adult educators, social workers, church leaders, community development workers, and union members from all over the world are using these books as basic texts. The books were originally written in English and have been translated into Spanish and French.



The books show how to develop a codification and how to use it, and they contain many useful ideas about how to develop a democratic group debate. They also offer aspects of organizational development and

social analysis that can help a group find the root causes of a problem. They contain scenarios and scripts, questionnaires, open-ended lesson plans, quotes, profiles, and guides to the analysis of social and cultural oppression, and drawings and diagrams that can be used with young people as well as with adults.

Educators who want to use Paulo Freire's ideas in a practical way see these books as a very valuable tool for popular education. In 1999, the authors published a book discussing the themes of the environment, gender, development, racism and culture.



# Los Centros de Promoción Campesina de El Salvador

(1968-1980)

Training Centers for Peasant Farmers in El Salvador (1968-1980)

One intensive experience of awareness-raising and training for leaders from rural areas took place in the country of El Salvador. Several training centers were created including the El Castaño and San Lucas centers in San Miguel (1968 and 1971); the Divina Providencia center in Santa Ana (1970); and Los Naranjos in Usulután (1972).

An estimated 15,000 men and women were trained at these centers.

Many of these peasant farmer leaders went on to create their own organizations, like FECCAS (Christian Peasants Federation) and UTC (Farm workers' Union) and they became

involved in an intense struggle to defend their rights, especially the right to better treatment and better pay at harvest times for coffee, sugar cane, and cotton.

These organizations were repressed by the Salvadoran government and army, which then led to a long civil war in the country. It was in this context that Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, emerged as a clear voice in defense of the peasant farmers'



right to organize. He also supported their just demands and denounced the repression unleashed against their organizations.

Monsignor Romero was murdered on March 24, 1980 but has continued to be a light and an example for many people and groups in Latin America and throughout the world.

# ALFORJA

(1981)

ALFORJA is a coordinating group for popular education made up of seven organizations: IMDEC from Mexico; SERJUS from Guatemala; FUNPROCOOP from El Salvador; CENCOPH from Honduras; CANTERA from Nicaragua; CEASPA from Panama; and CEP-Alforja from Costa Rica where the regional offices are located.

ALFORJA was created in 1981 when most of its member organizations were working in Sandinista Nicaragua. That was during the first years of the revolution, and it was a time of many challenges and a time when a lot of work was being done in popular education.

Educators who went through the experience in Nicaragua got together and compared ideas on popular education, theories of knowledge, methodologies, and techniques for achieving a multiplier effect among the people they were educating.

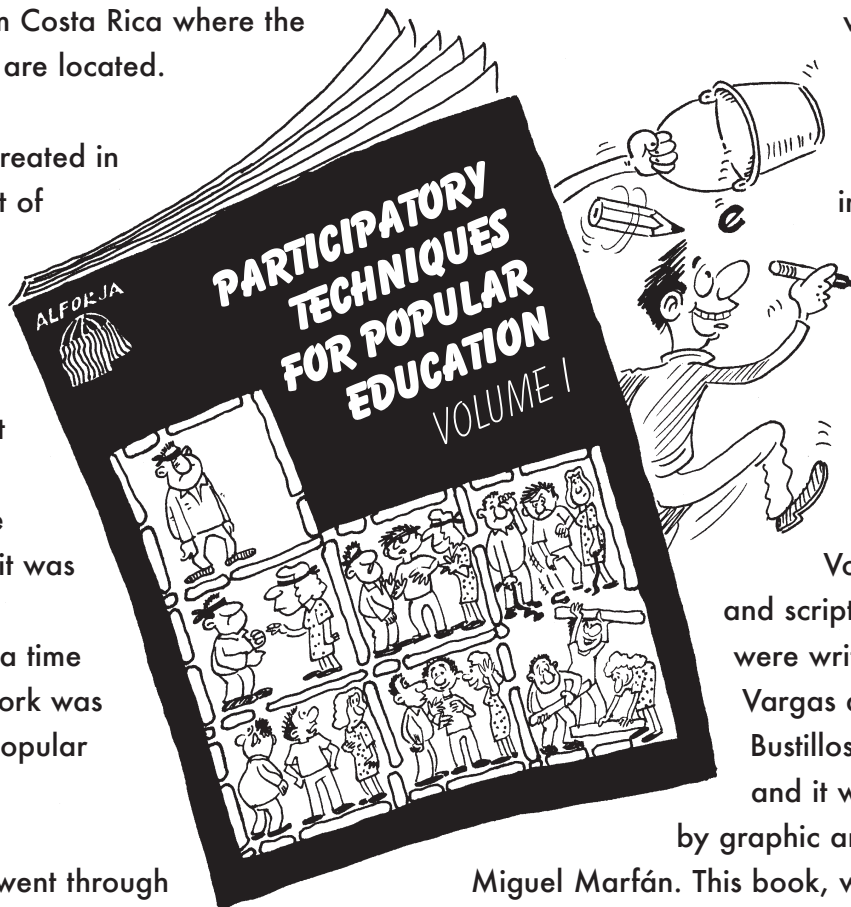
As a result of these experiences, a number of regional workshops were held with the participation of men and women educators who then went back to their countries with new information and practices that they could adapt to the realities and contexts of their

work. One of the publications developed at the time that had an impact on popular education work was the book called Participatory Techniques for Popular Education:

Volume I. The text and script of this book were written by Laura Vargas and Graciela Bustillos de Nuñez and it was illustrated

by graphic artist and facilitator

Miguel Marfán. This book, which has been a veritable "best-seller" for popular educators, was published in 1984 by CEP-Alforja in San José, Costa Rica. Some of the best known educators who have been leaders in the Alforja network include Carlos Nuñez, Oscar Jara, and Raúl Leis.



# Participatory *Development of ESL Curriculum*

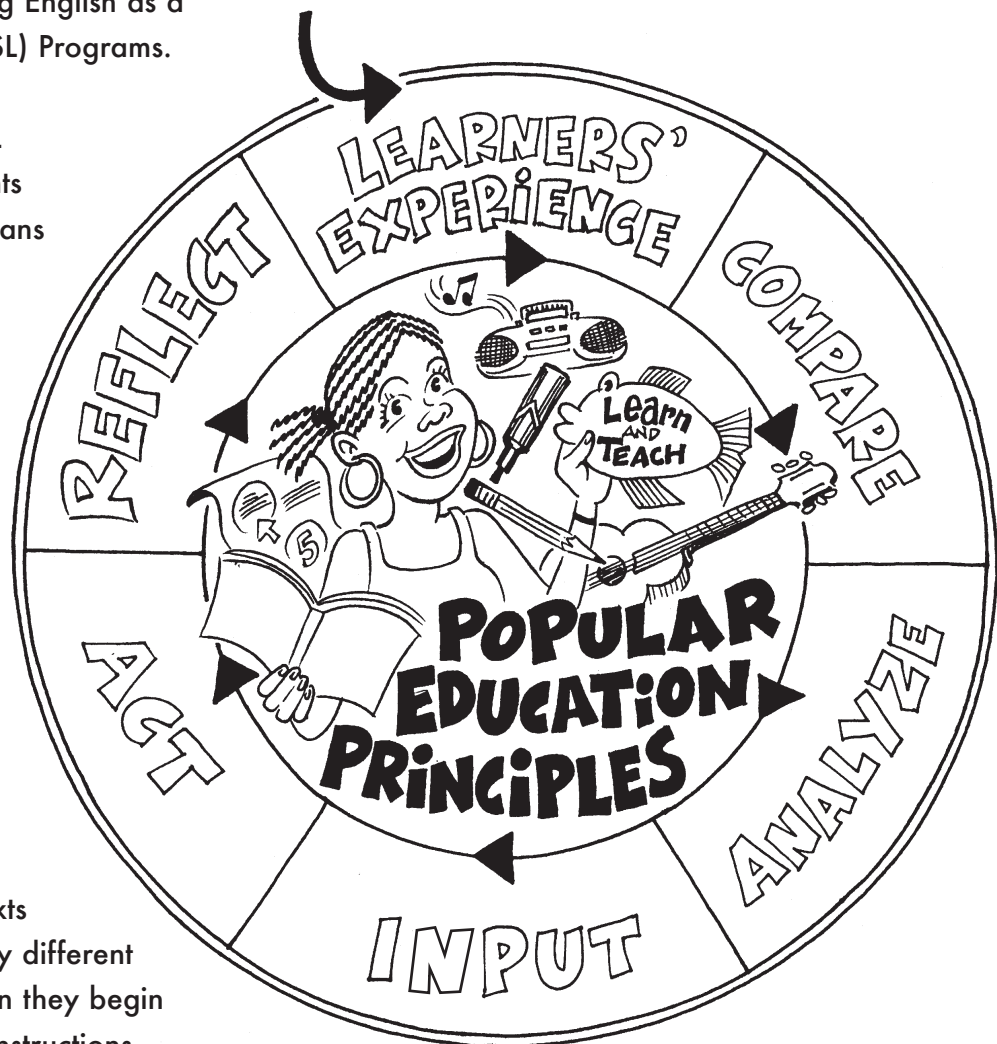
*(English as a Second Language)*

(1993)

This circle, designed by Caroline Kerfoot of South Africa, illustrates a participatory method for developing English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs.

In a participatory ESL curriculum, the students draw up the lesson plans for each stage of the process.

The curriculum is generated lesson by lesson based on the questions the students ask, the reactions of the group, and the learning and homework that arise from this process. Students in different communities or contexts will come up with very different study plans even when they begin with the same set of instructions.

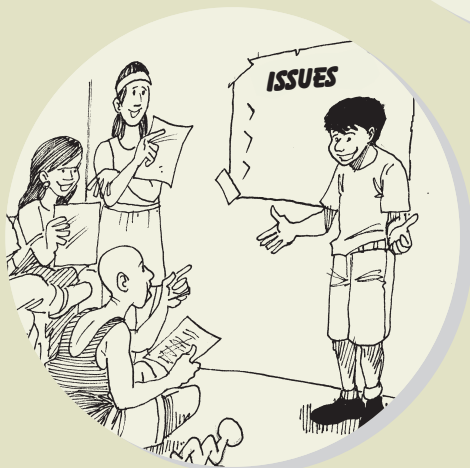






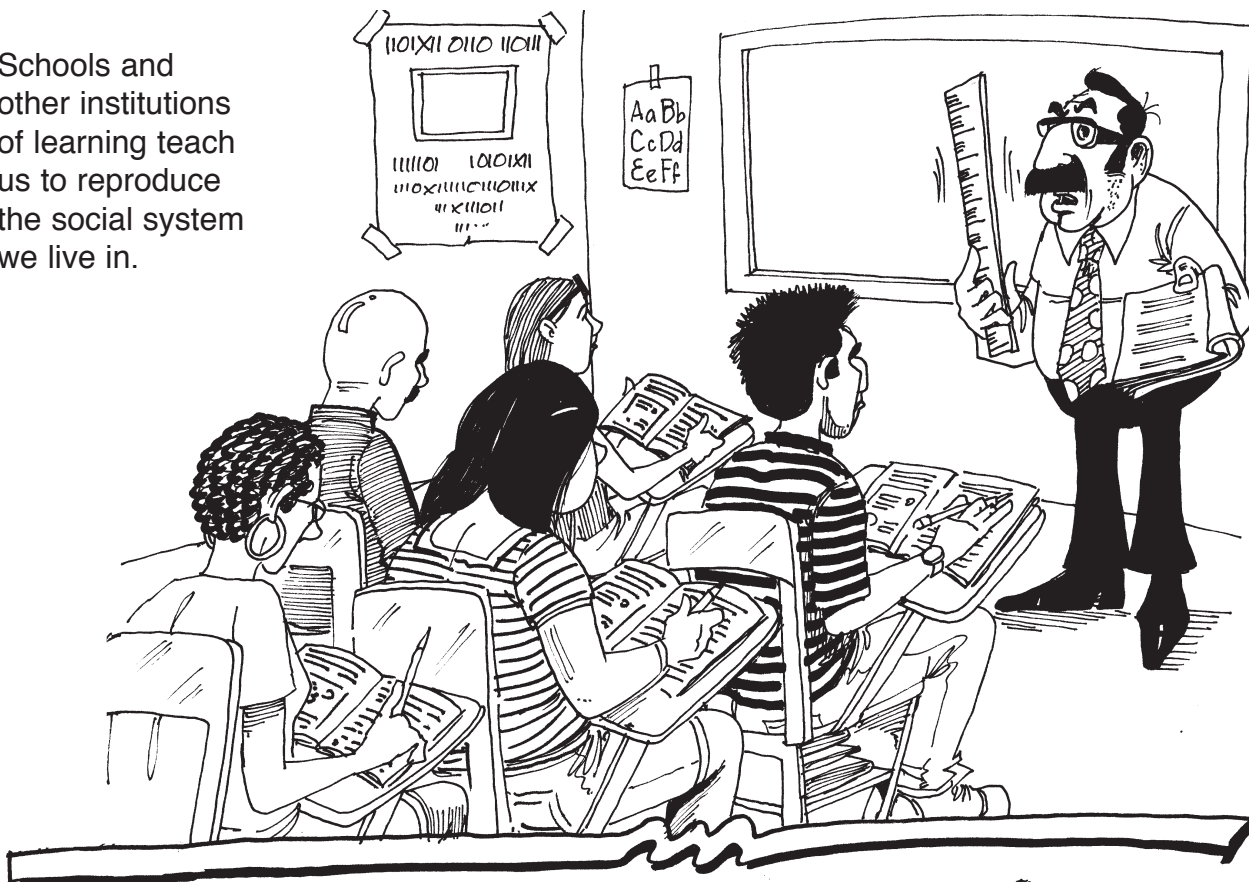
# **POPULAR EDUCATION**

# Popular Education



# What Popular Education is

Schools and other institutions of learning teach us to reproduce the social system we live in.

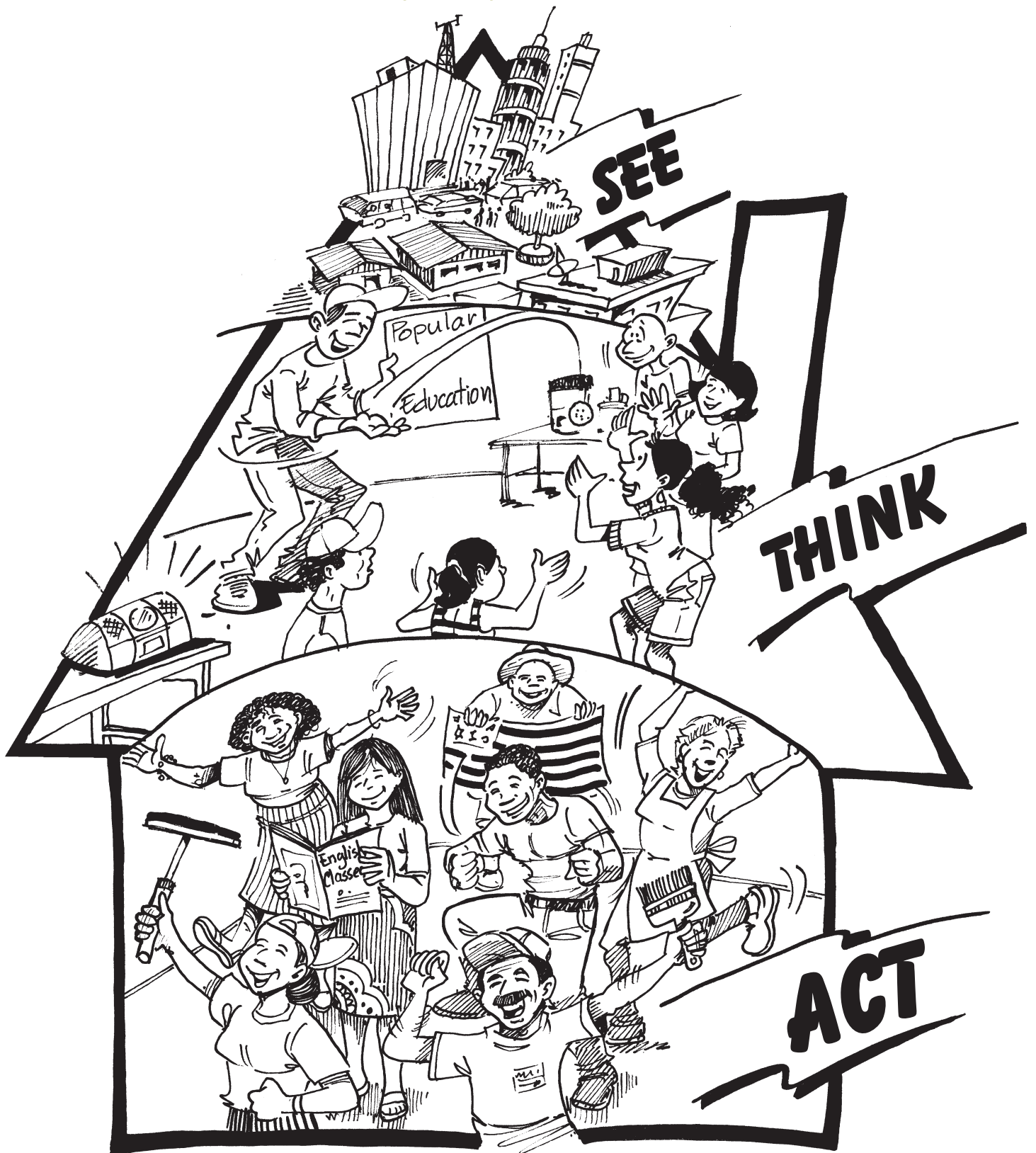


In Popular Education we learn together to analyze our situation critically and transform it in favor of life, justice, and dignity.





It could be said that the motto of traditional, domesticating education is “see, hear, and be quiet.” But the motto of Popular Education is “see, think, and act.”

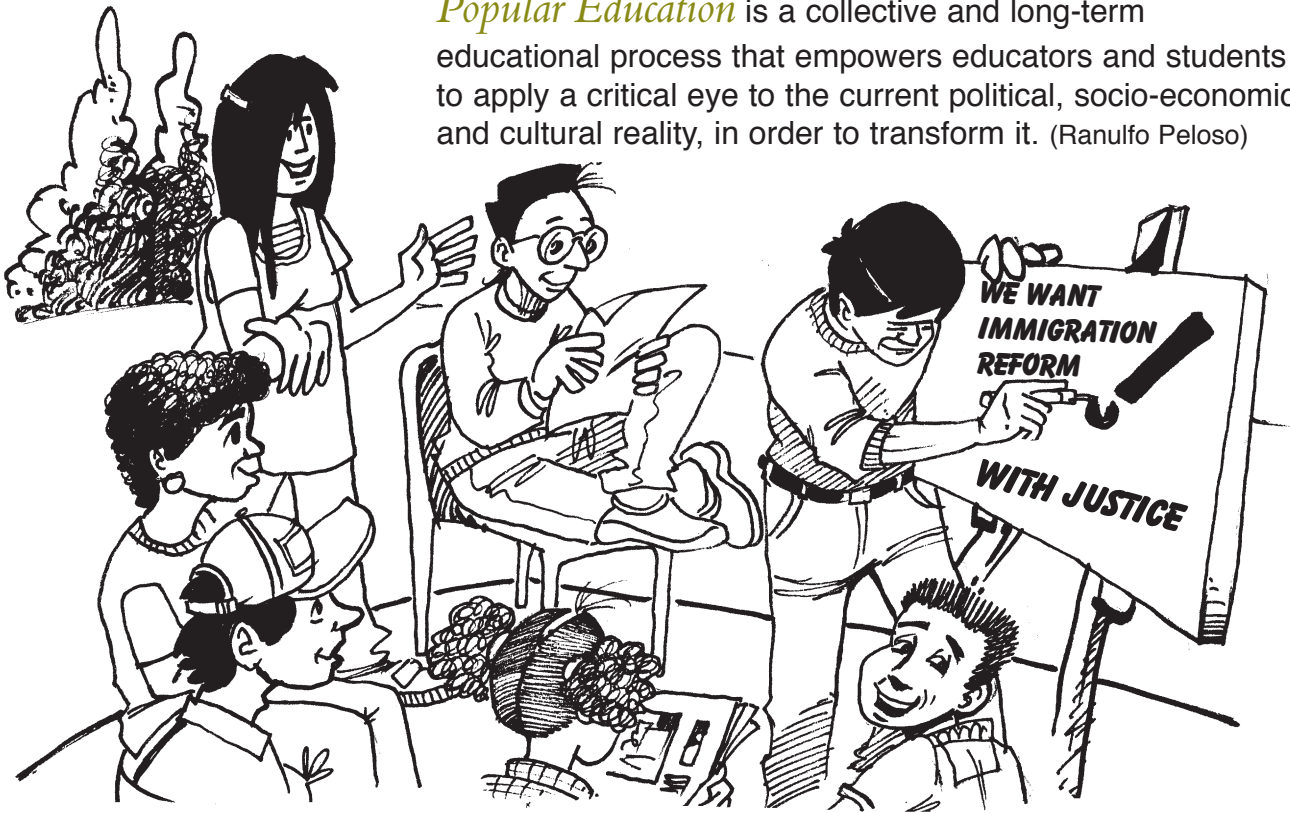


It is easier to be quiet and passive than to take responsibility. Being responsible means speaking out, acting, and working hard to change a society that is based on exploitation, exclusion, and inequality. Getting entangled in the problems of our community is not an easy thing; it can often be difficult and draining. That's why a lot of people prefer to just shut up and be obedient consumers.



These two definitions seem to sum up the main elements of Popular Education:

*Popular Education* is a collective and long-term educational process that empowers educators and students to apply a critical eye to the current political, socio-economic, and cultural reality, in order to transform it. (Ranulfo Peloso)



*Popular Education* differs radically from mere training or the simple transmission of information. It allows people to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to understand, make commitments, come up with ideas, transform, and be transformed. (Ranulfo Peloso)

# Popular Education has Three Key verbs:

## Understand

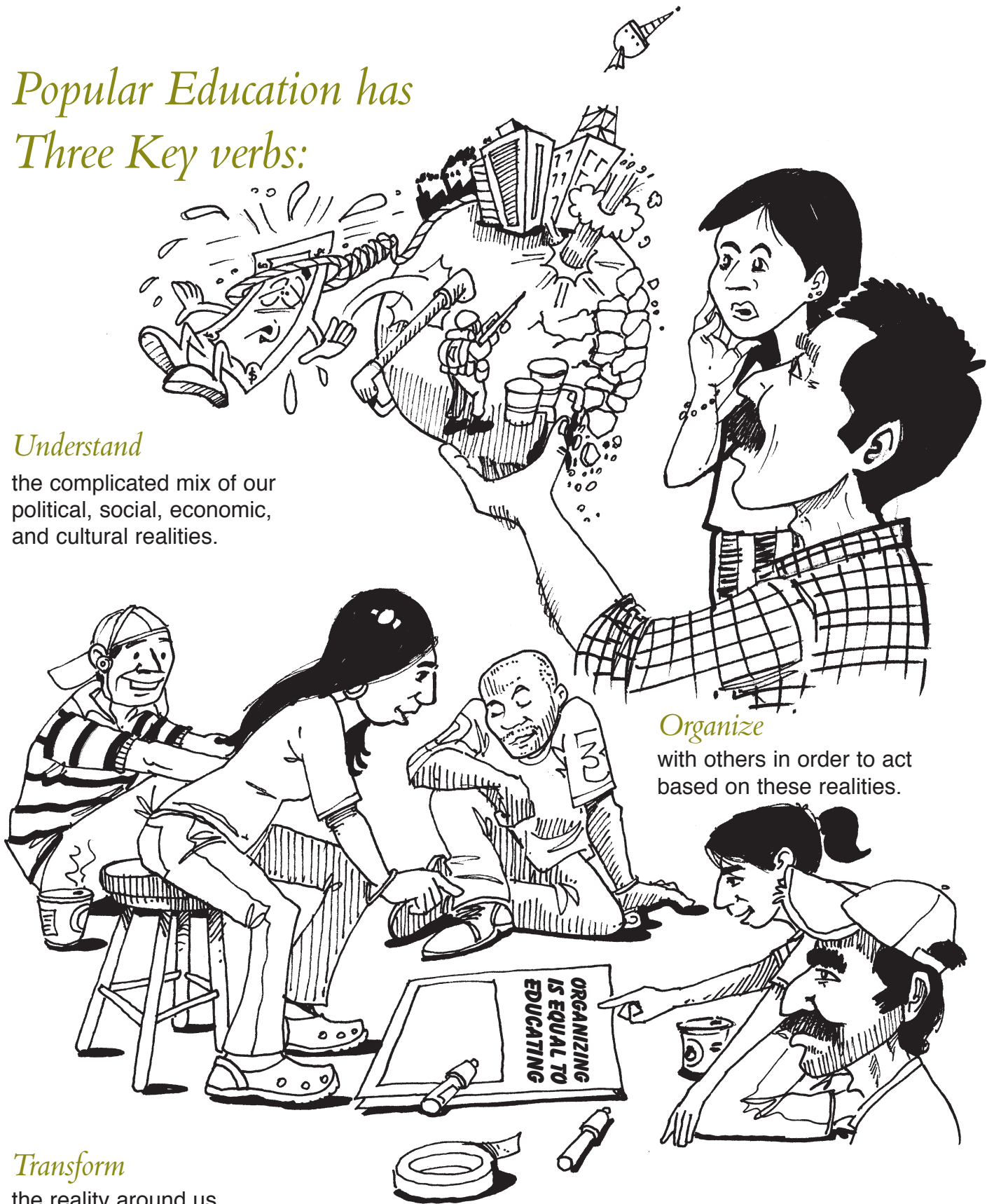
the complicated mix of our political, social, economic, and cultural realities.

## Organize

with others in order to act based on these realities.

## Transform

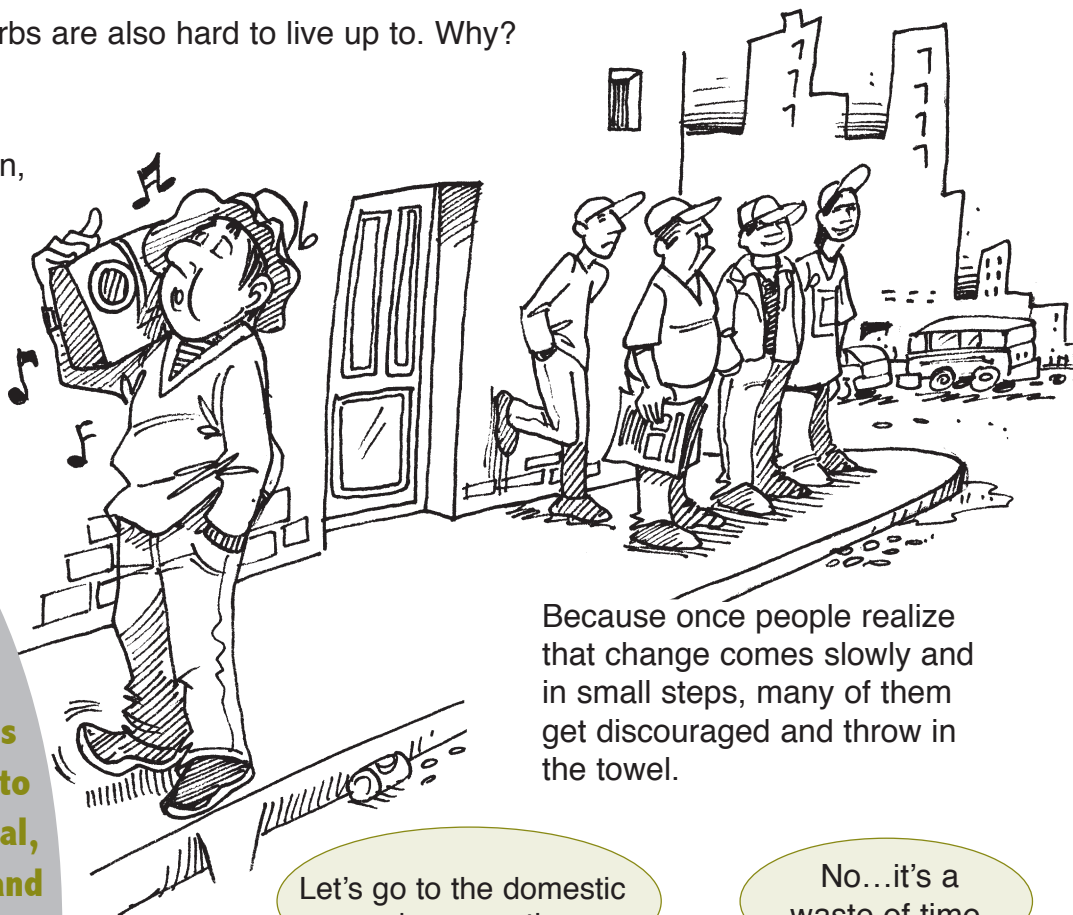
the reality around us.





But, these three verbs are also hard to live up to. Why?

Because a lot of people want to learn, but they don't like to organize.



Because once people realize that change comes slowly and in small steps, many of them get discouraged and throw in the towel.

**Popular Education is a collective and long-term educational process that empowers educators and students to apply a critical eye to the current political, socio-economic, and cultural reality, in order to transform it.**

(Ranulfo Penoso)



**Victima Secret**

Let's go to the domestic workers meeting

No...it's a waste of time.

I'd rather just go to the mall and forget about that stuff.



Because lots of people like to organize, but they don't want to think a lot or analyze the world around them.

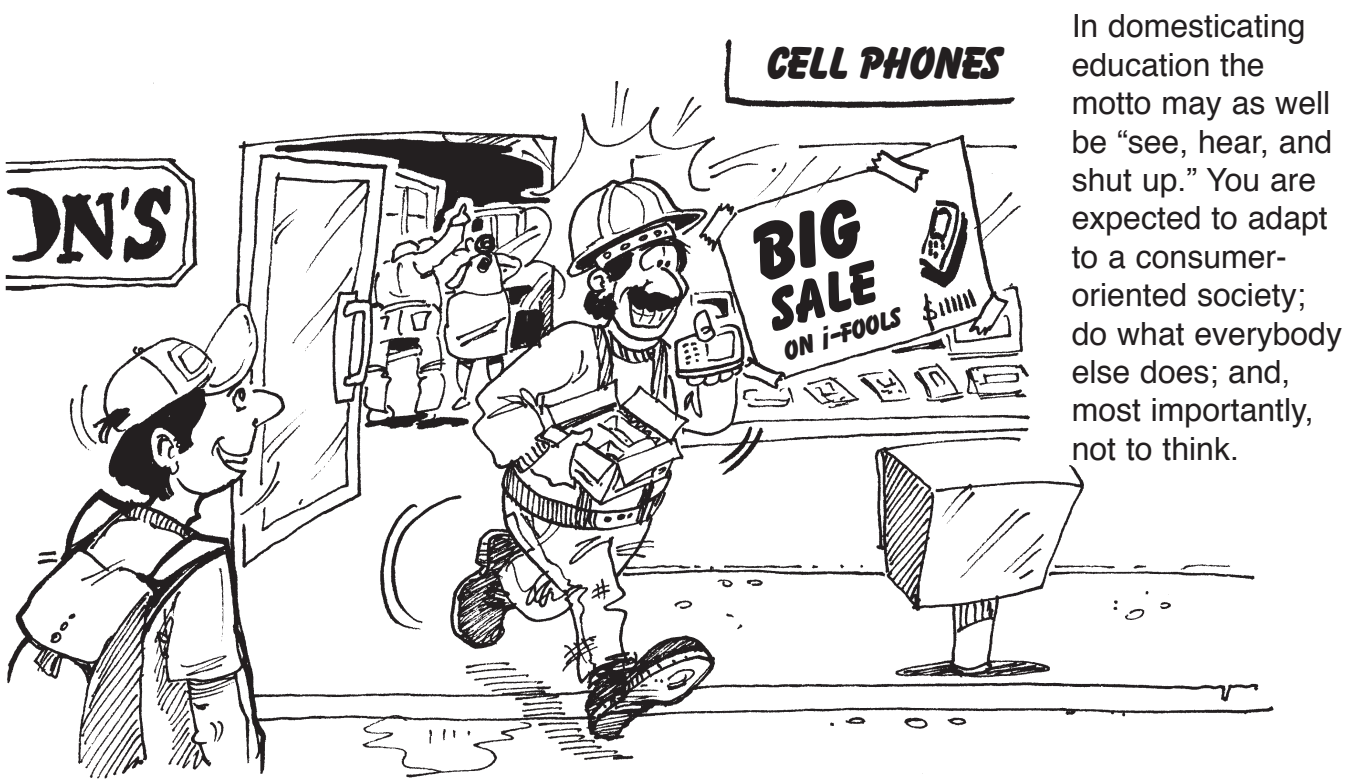
# What Popular Education is Not

*Popular Education is not an academic lecture* about a method; it's not a magic recipe; and it's not just a bunch of skits, games, and participatory techniques. Sure, group exercises are necessary to spark participation, inclusion, and creativity, but they by themselves do not define popular education. Popular Education is not a simple recipe for boiling down complicated concepts and social dynamics.

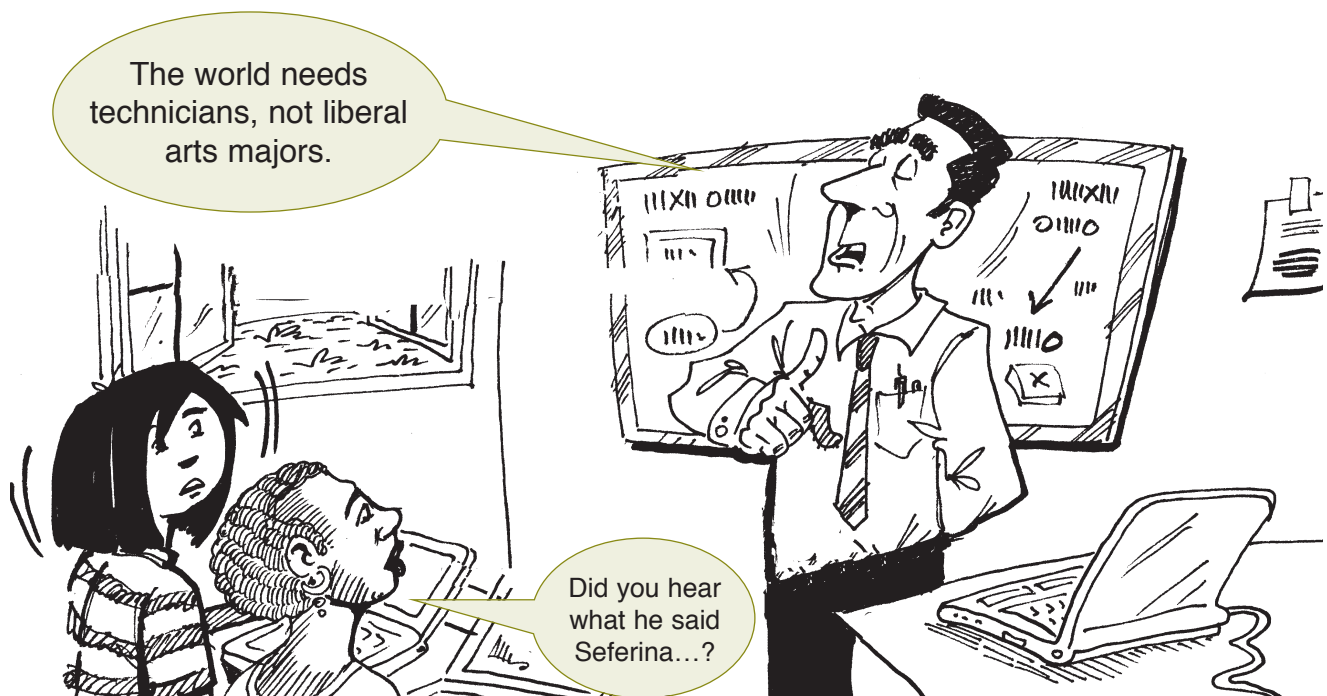


According to Paulo Freire, many people think about education as if it were a bank. “Those who know” are supposed to deposit their knowledge into the brains of “those who don’t know,” as if the students’ brains were bank accounts. Education that only involves transferring information without asking questions is what Freire calls a “banking education.”

*Paulo Freire* also said that education often tends to be a kind of “domestication,” because it treats people like animals that only learn to do what the owner wants them to do.



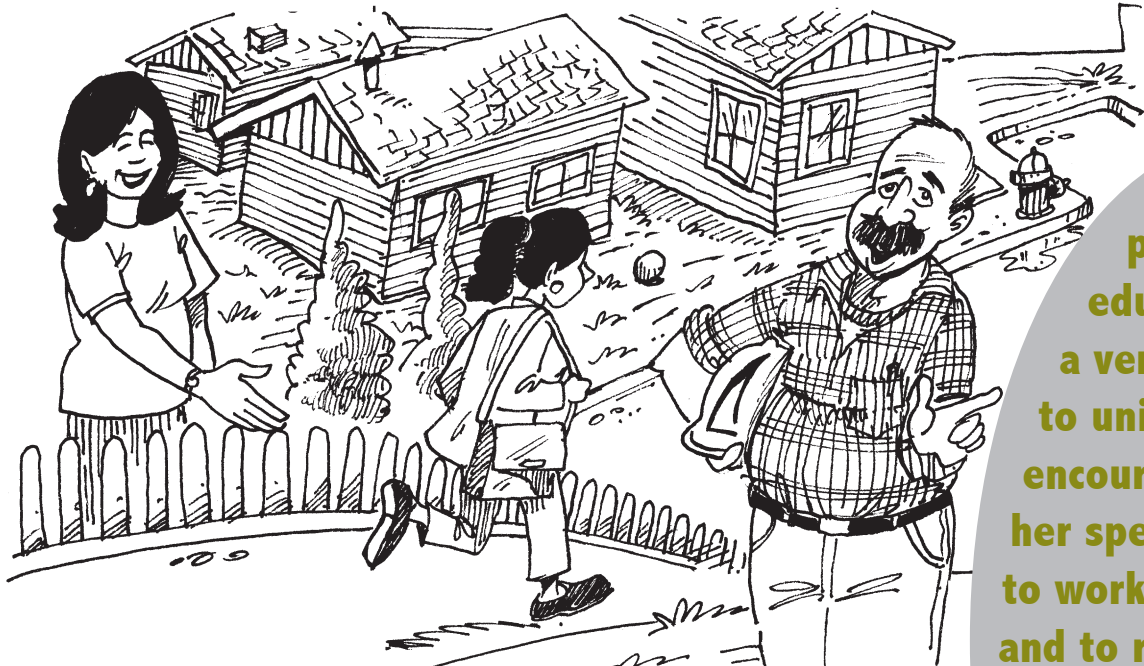
*Traditional Education* sees students as cogs in a social machine. It tries to get everyone to find a place in that machine and to do what they need to do to keep the machine (society) functioning without any problems.





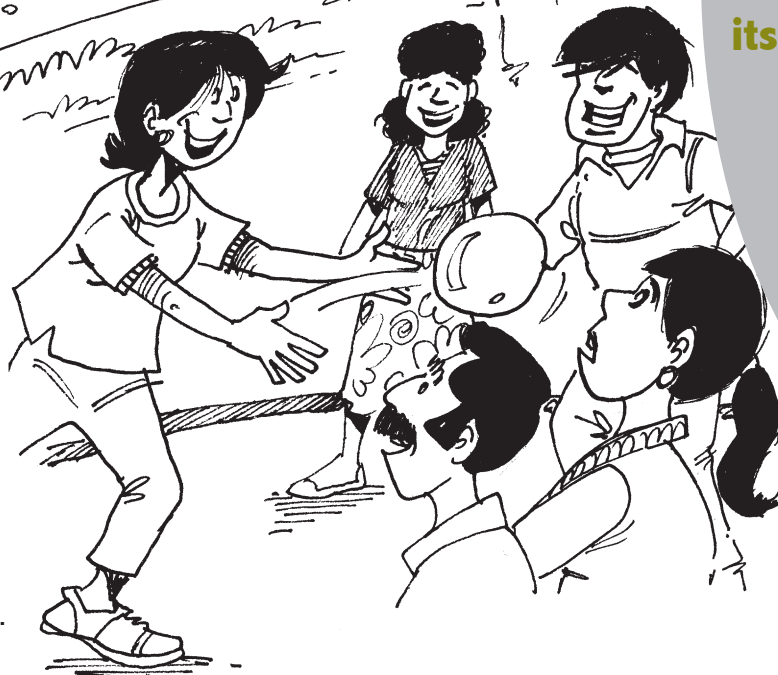
# Who Makes a Good Popular Educator?

*You don't have to* have a college degree or a teaching certificate to be a popular educator. If you identify with the people you serve, and truly want to be helpful, you can be a popular educator—whether you are an immigrant, a seamstress, a metal worker, or a young student.



**The popular educator has a very clear role: to unite and to encourage his or her specific group to work together and to reach its goal.**

Sometimes popular educators go by other names: community workers, social workers, group coordinators or facilitators, or leaders. The name doesn't really matter. What matters is a person's attitude, personality, and skills.





First of all, we have to throw out any image we might have of an educator who is a know-it-all or a messiah. A popular educator should be an average ordinary person who plays a very specific role: that of uniting and energizing his or her particular group to achieve an objective that everyone has mapped out together. Frans Geilfus said that if you are going to find the right person for the job, you have to be very clear about what kind of leader you are looking for.

A popular educator should be someone who can:

1. *Believe in and embrace* the objectives that unite the group
2. *Have faith in the participants,* their abilities, and their ways of working.
3. *Create an atmosphere* of trust

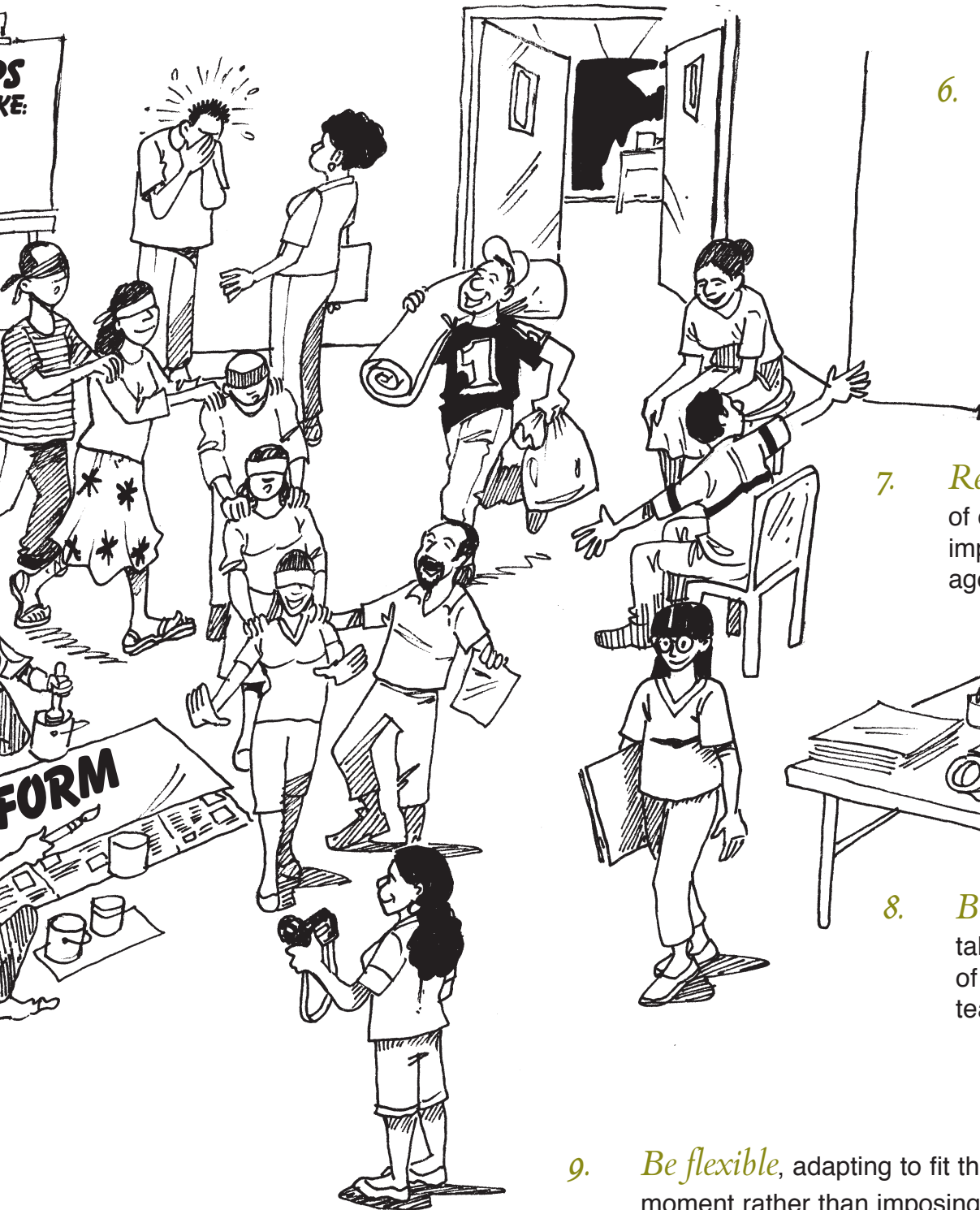


11. *Be skilled* in analysis and synthesis

10. *Be sensitive* to the mood and sensibilities of the members of the group

4. *Listen* to others

5. *Always be open*  
to learning new things



6. *Be confident*  
without being  
arrogant

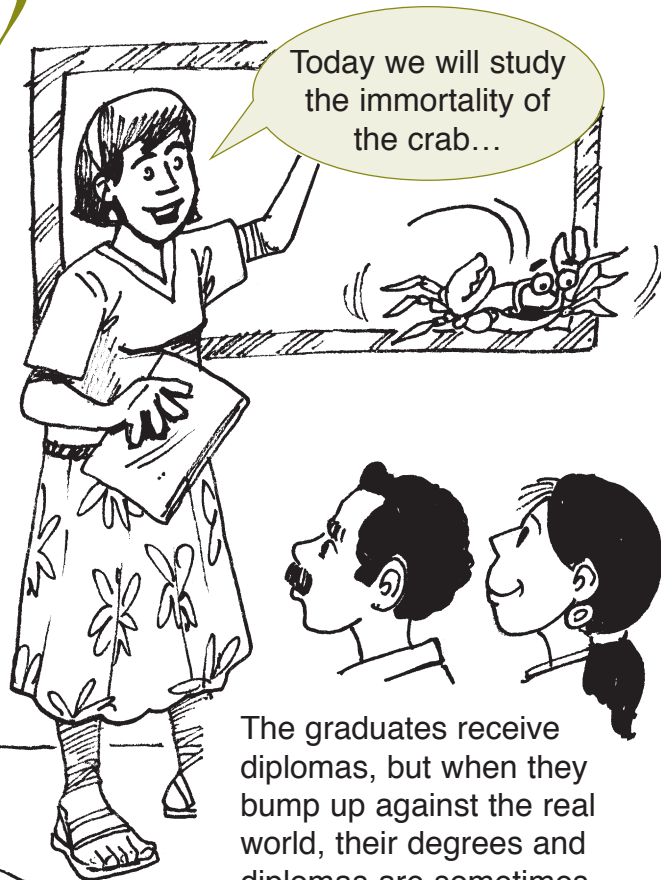
7. *Respect the opinions*  
of others and not  
impose his or her own  
agenda

8. *Be creative* and  
take advantage  
of unplanned  
teaching moments

9. *Be flexible*, adapting to fit the  
moment rather than imposing  
a rigid program

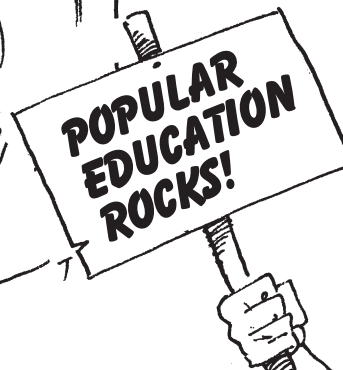
# Popular Education Methodology

Schools, institutes, and universities are often accused—and with good reason—of being too abstract in their approach to education. Teaching is often based on the lectures of instructors who take their material right out of a book. When it comes time to take a test, the students have to regurgitate what they have heard from their teachers or read in their books (even if they don't really understand the material).



The graduates receive diplomas, but when they bump up against the real world, their degrees and diplomas are sometimes irrelevant. Of course, employers require diplomas and degrees; but, they also demand something else—experience—and experience is gained by working. That's an important point.

**In popular education the process of teaching and learning revolves around concrete and practical experience.**

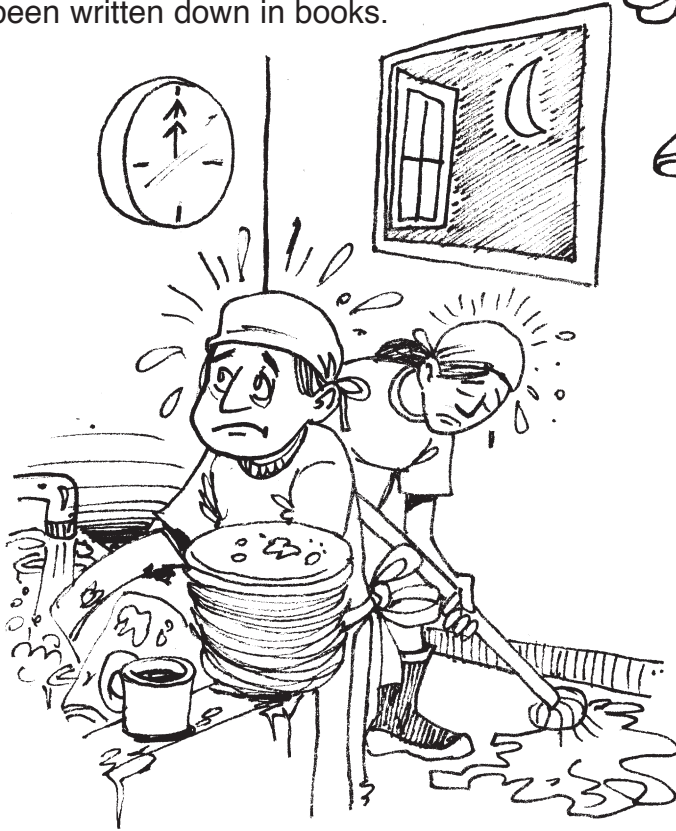


In popular education, the teaching team and the books serve as important resources; but, the teaching and learning process doesn't revolve around them. Everything is built around concrete and practical experience.





Traditional education tends to involve a “discursive” approach in the sense that it is based on lectures and theories, and the need to absorb a lot of ideas written down in books. Many of these ideas are valid—that can’t be denied—and books are a useful way for people to accumulate knowledge. Throughout history, huge amounts of information and facts have been written down in books.



But popular education uses a “dialectical” approach—or, as Paulo Freire says, a “dialogical” approach. Both of these terms mean “dialogue-centered.” Dialogue between who? Between practice and theory. Liberating education begins with the students’ experience rather than theory, and the popular education process is built on the foundation of people’s actual day-to-day lives. Naturally, books and the experience of others are also taken into account, but that happens in the second step which has to do with thinking and theorizing. .

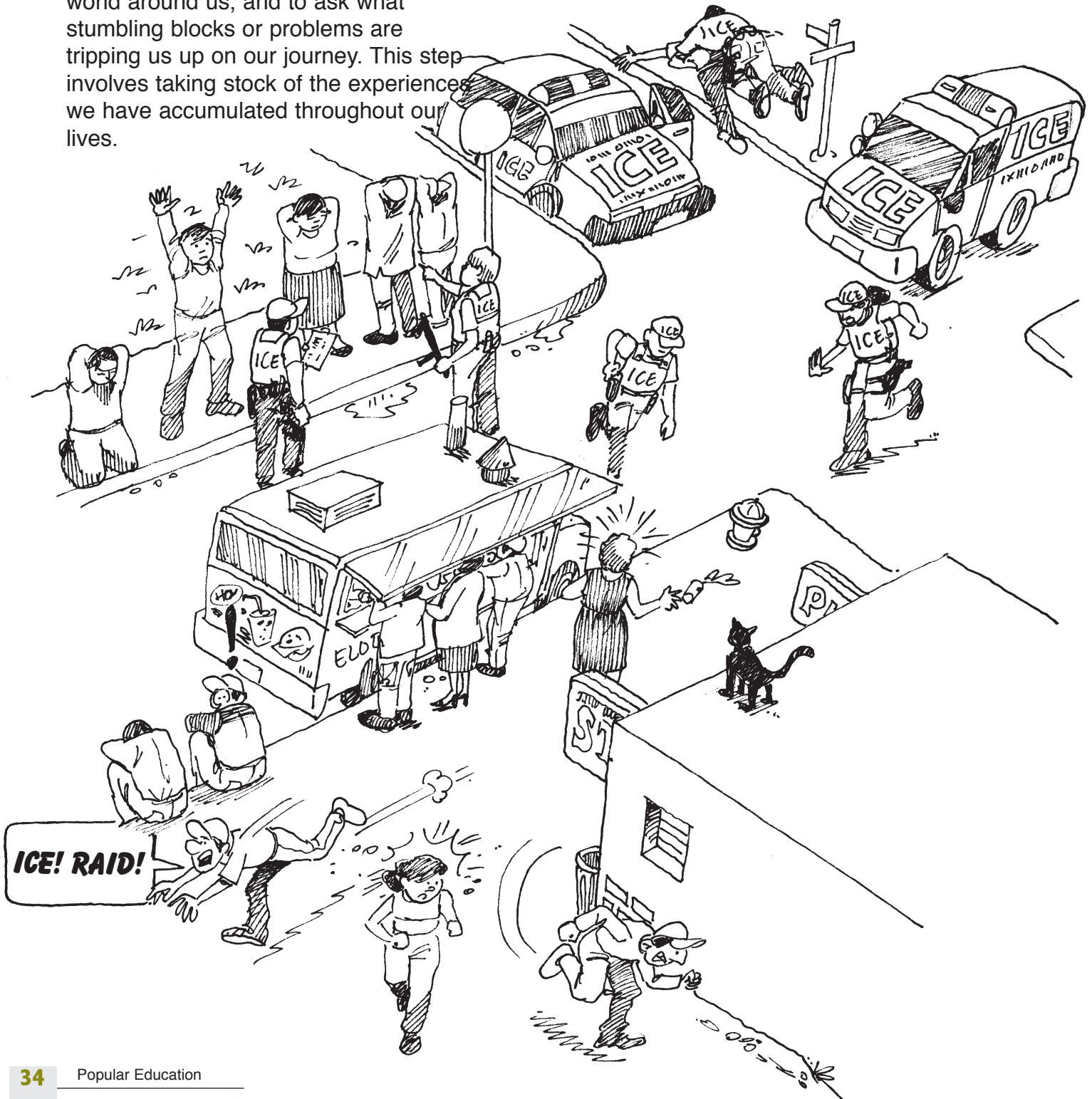




*Step One: Start with the Real World and Real Life Experience*

The first very important step is to recognize what people already know about a particular topic or question, to become aware of the realities of the world around us, and to ask what stumbling blocks or problems are tripping us up on our journey. This step involves taking stock of the experiences we have accumulated throughout our lives.

Some people call Step One, SEEING. Others say CALLING IT LIKE IT IS, and others simply name it REAL EXPERIENCE.

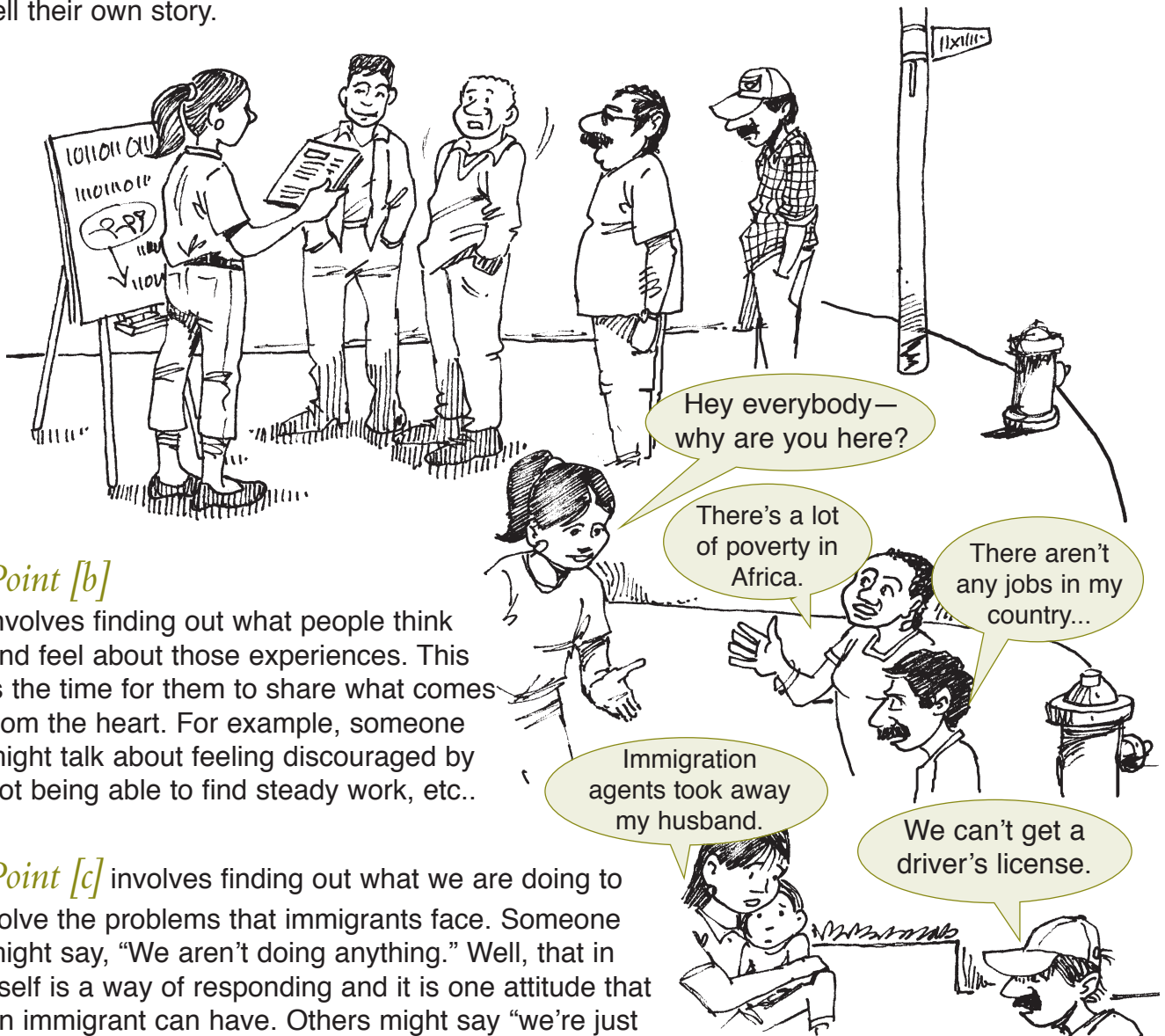


## Step One has Three Dimensions:

[a] Reality itself; [b] What people think about that reality; and [c] what people do about that reality.

Let's give an example to illustrate this better. Suppose we are with a group of immigrants:

*Point [a]* is talking about the reality of life as an immigrant. Each person talks about his or her experience as an immigrant. In other words, this is the time for people to tell their own story.



### *Point [b]*

involves finding out what people think and feel about those experiences. This is the time for them to share what comes from the heart. For example, someone might talk about feeling discouraged by not being able to find steady work, etc..

*Point [c]* involves finding out what we are doing to solve the problems that immigrants face. Someone might say, "We aren't doing anything." Well, that in itself is a way of responding and it is one attitude that an immigrant can have. Others might say "we're just trying to get by," or that they are trying to solve their problems by themselves.

Can you see how this popular education stuff works? Clearly, the process doesn't begin with a lecture by an expert. It doesn't even start with what statistics on immigration tell us. The point of departure is always the real experience and behavior patterns of the participants.

## Step Two: *Dig Deeper*

This second step is the time to delve more deeply into the subject. For example, we might start by asking questions like: Why do people leave their countries? Why are immigrants treated so badly? This phase builds on the previous step, but now people are giving their opinions and interpretations and digging deeper to find more information.



## *Here, we are building knowledge.*

This is the THEORETICAL part. Some people call it the THINKING part. Others call it INVESTIGATION.

We described and defined the problem in an earlier step; now, we are looking for the problem's causes and consequences, its implications and dimensions. We are also trying to get a handle on the size of the problem. In other words, we turn the problem inside-out in order to get to know it really well.

## Step Three: *Go Back to the Real World and to Action*

Step Three finally takes us into a phase of problem solving where we try to transform the reality we are experiencing—even if it is only in some small way. This is the time to share ideas, to make a plan, to get organized—to do something. The third step is very important. Some people call it GOING BACK TO REALITY. Others call it TAKING ACTION, and still others call it PRACTICE. It's a crucial step, because if we don't do something to change our situation—if we don't try to solve the problem we have studied—people will be right when they say we are just arm-chair critics.



We have to apply what we've learned in this process and put it into practice. It's quite possible that the change we produce will be a small one, but we'll get there step by step. Like they say: "crabs can go a long way—even if they run sideways."



**When you dig deeper, you build up information and knowledge about a problem. You look for the causes and consequences, the size of the problem, and its implications.**



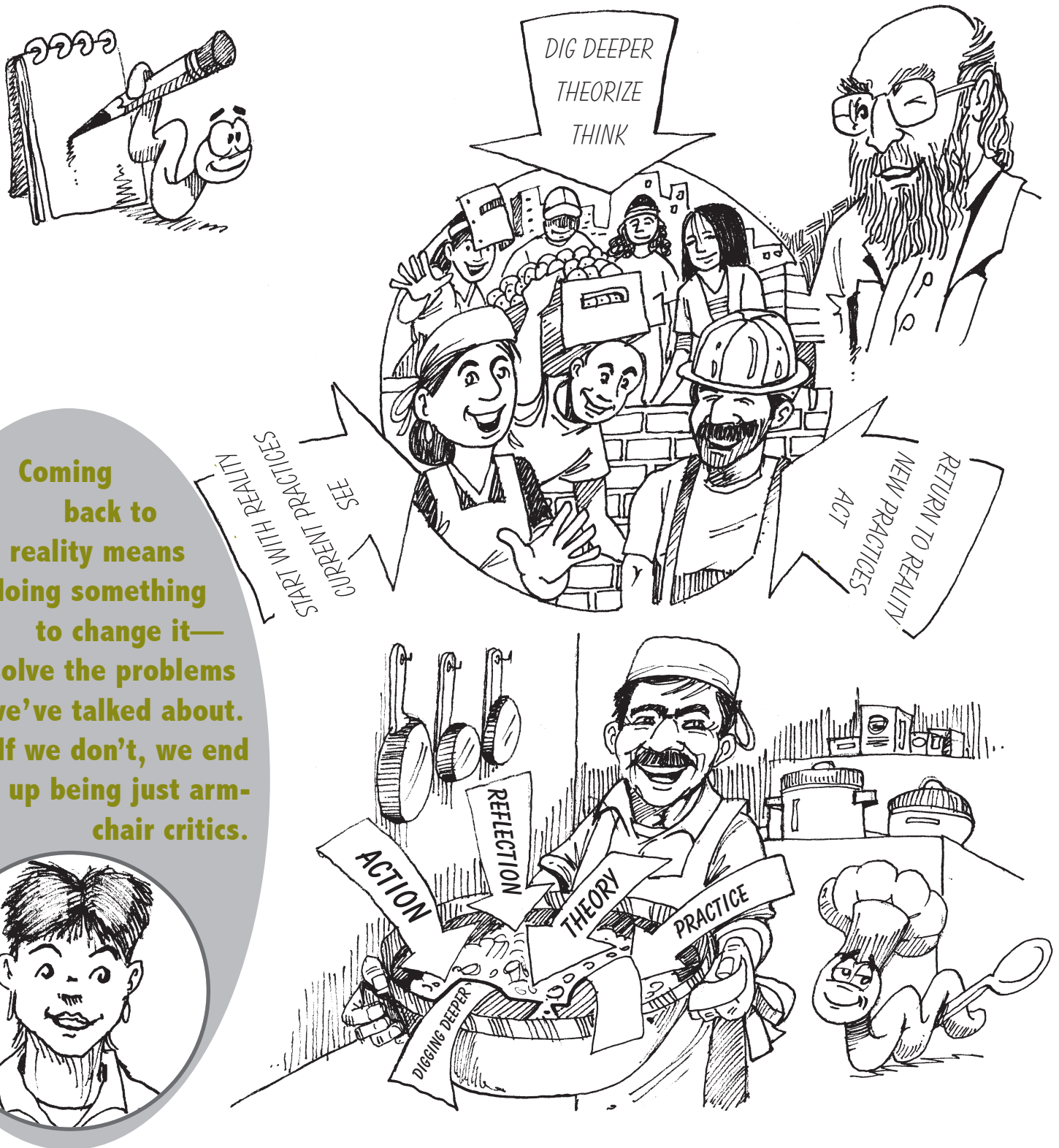
*The world is always changing*, whether we like it or not. It's like the song says: "The Times They are a Changin'."

The important thing is for us to be part of bringing about that change. We want to see changes that are the result of our own actions and practices, and we want changes that will benefit everyone.





Popular education methodology never loses its connection with the real world. It doesn't just float around in the world of theories. It's like a wheel:



**Coming back to reality means doing something to change it—to solve the problems we've talked about. If we don't, we end up being just arm-chair critics.**



This method isn't perfect, and it's not a recipe that has to be followed precisely. But it is a path that can take us where we want to go. A method is a path.

*Planning in*

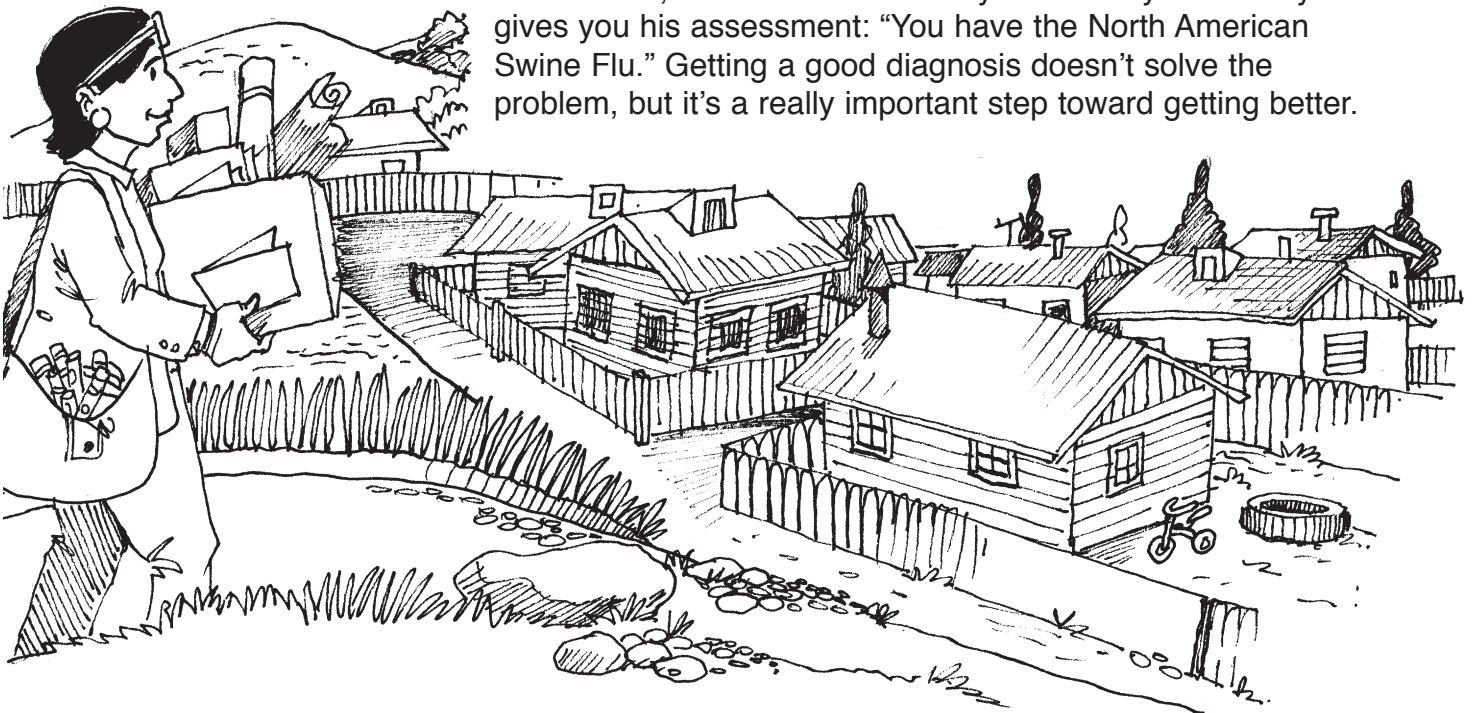
# *Popular Education*

Let's go a little deeper into the process we just studied. Nothing is improvised in popular education. Everything is planned ahead of time. The planning process in popular education uses the same SEE, THINK, ACT method we just looked at. It involves at least three steps:



## 1. Assessment

This is equivalent to the SEEING step where you START WITH REALITY. If you feel lousy, you might go to the doctor. You have the symptoms of an illness, but as a patient you want to be sure. So, the doctor examines you carefully and finally gives you his assessment: "You have the North American Swine Flu." Getting a good diagnosis doesn't solve the problem, but it's a really important step toward getting better.



Continuing with that same example, if we don't have a diagnosis—or if we have one but it's wrong—then the medicines prescribed by the doctor won't work, and instead of getting better our problem is going to get worse. The cure can be worse than the disease—and all because a good assessment was not made to begin with.



In the educational process, a good assessment of the situation should be a complete one. This means we should find out:

- What the problem is (We need to define it and separate it from other problems so that we can see it clearly);
- How much do people know about the problem; and
- What people are doing about it.

These three steps are called a “triple assessment.”

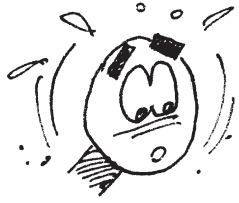
**The triple assessment:**  
**What is the problem?**  
**What do people think about it?**  
**What are people doing about it?**



Simple assessments can be done in a single session, or we can do a more complex and complete assessment over a longer period of time. The key is to always begin by looking at what is happening in the real world that we are living in.

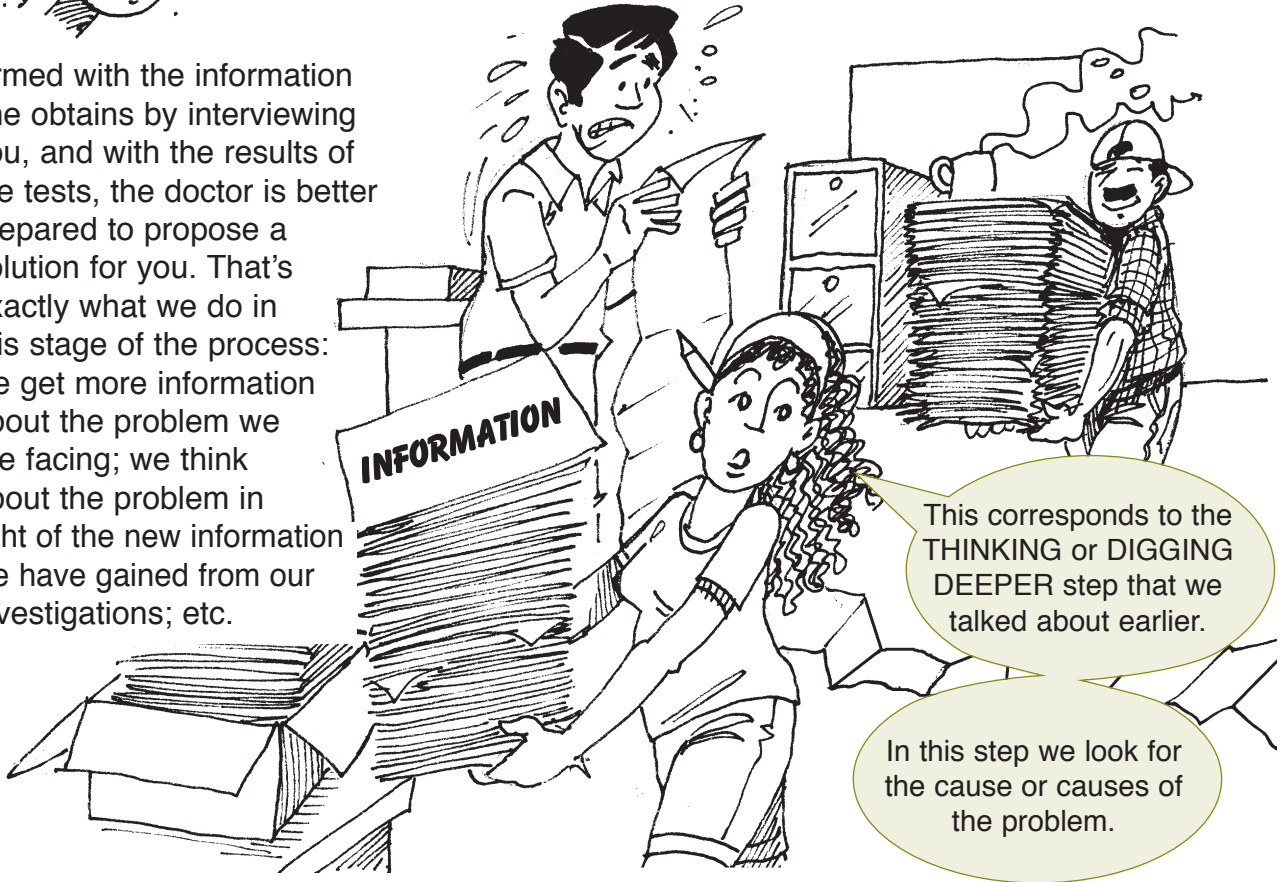


## 2. Analysis



Once the assessment is done, we move on to analyzing the problem that we want to address. Going back to the example of the doctor, let's say that her initial diagnosis, or assessment, is that you have the "North American Swine Flu." But now she needs to find out a little more about why you came down with it or how serious it is. So she talks to you, or maybe she sends you off to get a urine test or a blood test.

Armed with the information she obtains by interviewing you, and with the results of the tests, the doctor is better prepared to propose a solution for you. That's exactly what we do in this stage of the process: we get more information about the problem we are facing; we think about the problem in light of the new information we have gained from our investigations; etc.



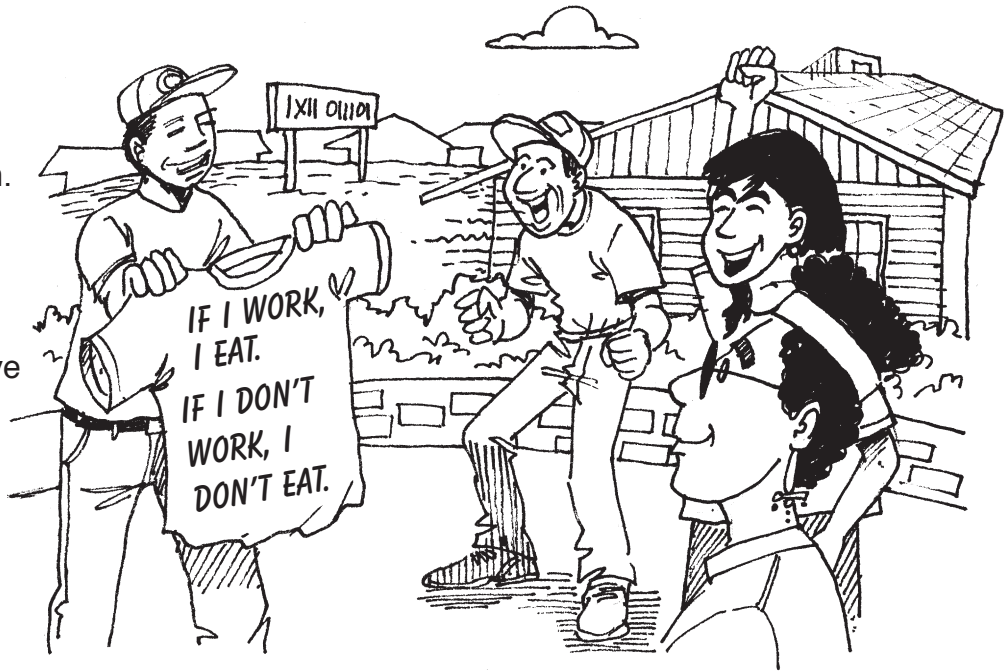
## 3. Action Plan

Once we have information from our assessment, and it is enriched by the process of reflection and research, we make a decisive move: we draw up an action plan to solve the problem—or at least to solve what is within our reach. This step corresponds to the ACTION phase, or the phase where you RETURN TO REALITY.





When we take action, we don't want to just act spontaneously or fly by the seat of our pants. We need to follow a plan. In the example we have been using, when the doctor gives us a recovery plan, she gives us a list of things we have to do to get better: take medication, follow a special diet, etc.



A popular education action plan should include at least the following components:

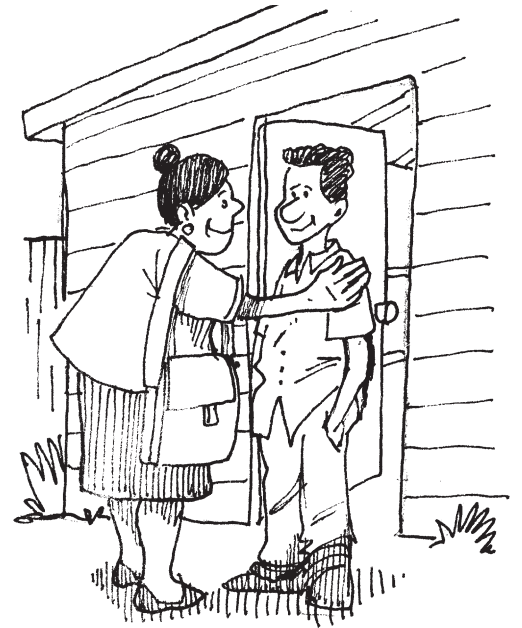
*An Objective:* We spell out what we want to achieve. The objective should be written as if it has already been accomplished. It needs to be measurable and it needs to include a timeframe. So we won't write: "Help immigrants to become familiar with their rights." Instead, we'll say, "After 2 years, 70% of the immigrants associated with this program know all of their legal rights." The first example is too general. The second one is more concrete, and it will be very useful when it comes time to evaluate our progress. A clear objective is an essential part of an action plan.

**The objective is like a beacon that shows us the way. If we lose sight of that light, we may end up shipwrecked.**



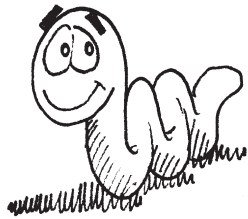
### Activities:

In order to reach our goal, we have to come up with a series of activities to get us there. For example, an activity might be a visit to an ally, a motivational session, or a day-long workshop on immigrant rights. We are talking, of course, about activities aimed at achieving our objective and activities that are doable.



### Resources:

Here we make a list of all of the human and material resources we need in order to carry out the activities. And we don't just make the list, we actually look for the resources. Everything hinges on this. We may have a clear goal and some great activities lined up, but if we don't have the resources to pull them off, all that is just wet ink on the page.



**Who is Responsible:** Someone has to be responsible for each item. The plan doesn't implement itself, and no one person can do it all alone. Popular education is always a team effort; many people cooperate to do it. That's why responsibilities need to get spread out. Decide who will do what.

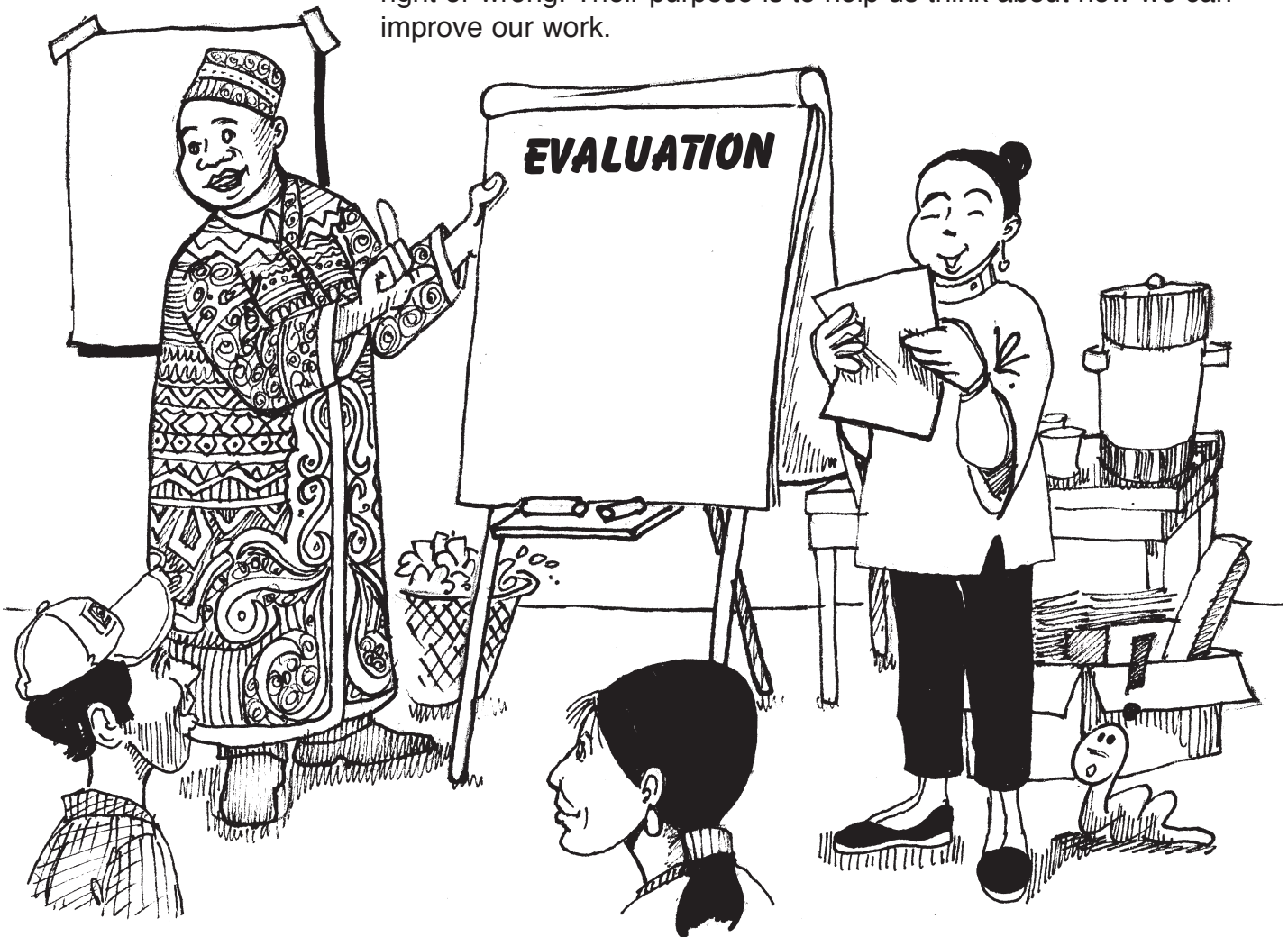
### Timeline:

The last thing we do is to make a timeline for each activity. This timeline will remind us when to begin and end each action that takes us closer to our goal.



## 4. Evaluation

At some point, we need to evaluate whether, and to what extent, we have achieved the objective we set for ourselves. If we weren't able to do something we set out to do, this is the time to analyze why not. Evaluations aren't done just for the sake of doing them. They help us correct and adjust our plans so that we can begin again with a revised version of our action plan. This stage is the equivalent of the step where we GO BACK TO REALITY. The basic questions for all evaluations are: What have we achieved? How did we do it? What haven't we achieved? Why not? Evaluations are not about pointing fingers or proving who was right or wrong. Their purpose is to help us think about how we can improve our work.



Every step we have mentioned is carried out by the whole group—not just by a couple of people. An action plan that one person comes up with won't work, no matter how good it is. It has to be put together by all the people who are committed to the educational process. Teamwork and dialogue are key.

*If you don't have the active participation of all the people involved and they aren't talking to each other, then you don't have popular education. Participation is the cornerstone on which popular education is built.*

# The Teaching-Learning Process

## in Popular Education

So, we were just saying that popular education is based on participation and dialogue, right? But how do we actually do this? It's not easy. When you invite a group of people to a popular education session about a particular topic, the people come, they sit down, and they expect to hear a talk. If you ask them something, they sometimes get uncomfortable and they don't come back. They say, "I didn't come to talk. I came to learn what you have to teach me."



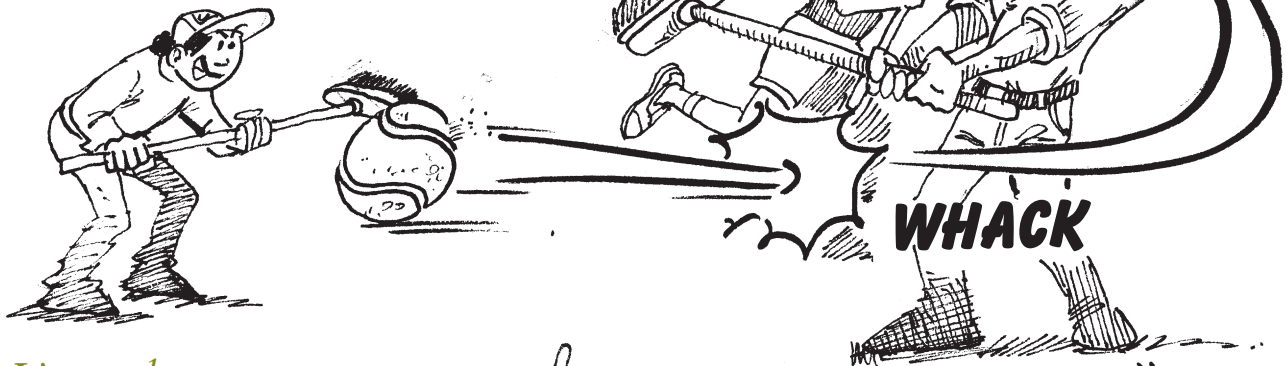
**Participatory Techniques are tools for establishing the kind of environment you want where everyone is participating and learning together. People learn by participating.**



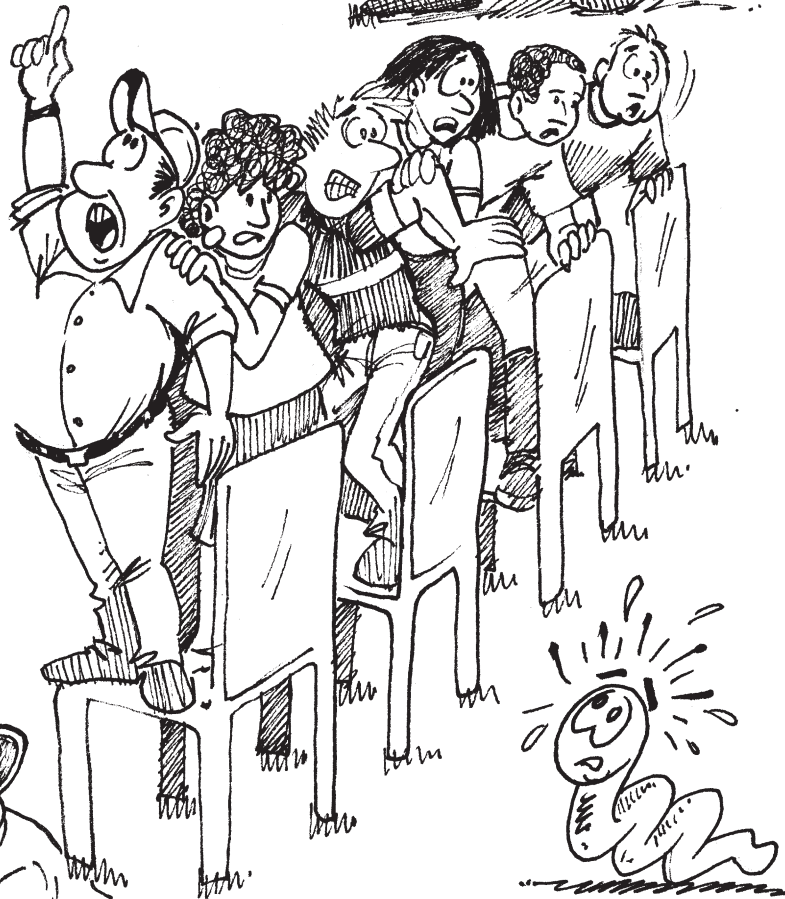
In order to get people to participate, you first have to make them feel comfortable and at ease and make sure they don't feel pressured... If you manage to do that, people will be talking and participating when you least expect it. To help this process along, we propose some techniques for participation.



Let's be clear about what a technique for participation is. It's not just a game for having fun or to clear your mind a little after a 'heavy' talk.



*It's a tool* for getting people to participate as much as possible in the educational session. Of course, games do have an important function in popular education. They help us create a positive environment and they make people feel good and feel willing to continue. But the point isn't just to play a game.

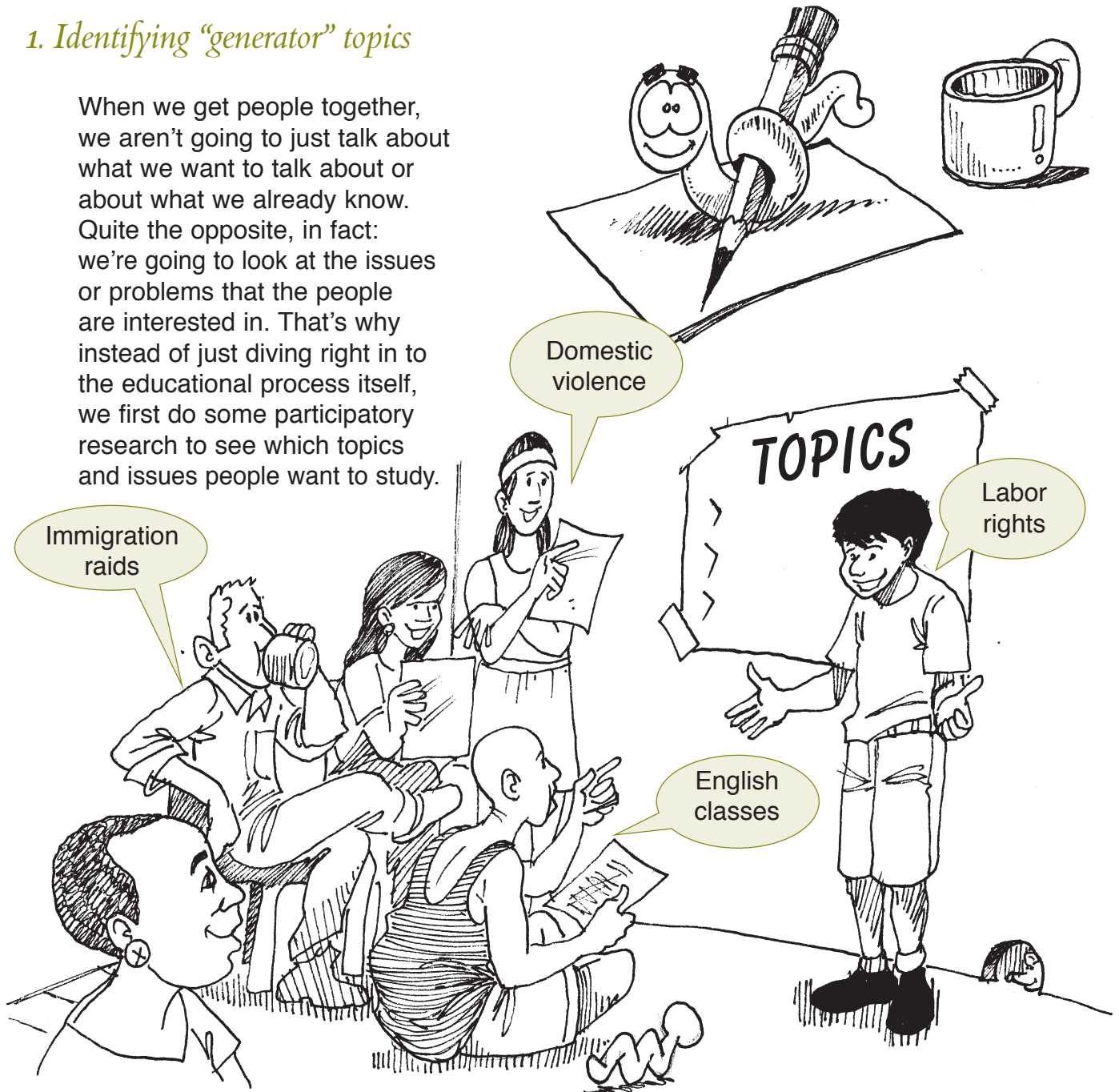


Participatory techniques are often games, but they have a very specific goal: to get people to participate. In popular education, nobody teaches anybody; everyone learns together. We learn by being in dialogue with each other, we learn by doing, we learn by playing... In short, we learn by participating.

Participatory techniques are used as part of a methodological process that gets its inspiration from Paulo Freire’s literacy training method. There are four steps involved:

### 1. Identifying “generator” topics

When we get people together, we aren’t going to just talk about what we want to talk about or about what we already know. Quite the opposite, in fact: we’re going to look at the issues or problems that the people are interested in. That’s why instead of just diving right in to the educational process itself, we first do some participatory research to see which topics and issues people want to study.



In this participatory research, we make a list of the issues that people propose and the problems they mention. It’s alright to add a few items to the list that people haven’t mentioned if everyone thinks it’s important to include them. Then as a group you prioritize the topics and put them in order to make a final list. You might come up with a list of eight topics that you want to cover in eight sessions. Or you might have just one major topic divided into subtopics. For instance, the “generator” topic might be immigration and the subtopics might be the history of migration, causes of migration, problems that immigrants face, alternative solutions for immigrants etc.

## 2. Codification

Let's clarify what a code is in popular education. We're not talking about the Da Vinci Code or the criminal code. What we mean here by code is a partial representation of the reality that we are going to study. It's like a symbol that will help us to focus on an issue and stimulate some dialogue among the people who are participating. These codes are also called group exercises or participatory techniques. There are two ways to categorize the codes or the exercises: by their form and by their function.



By their form, the codes or exercises might be:

### *Visual:*



a. Graphics: pictures, photographs...

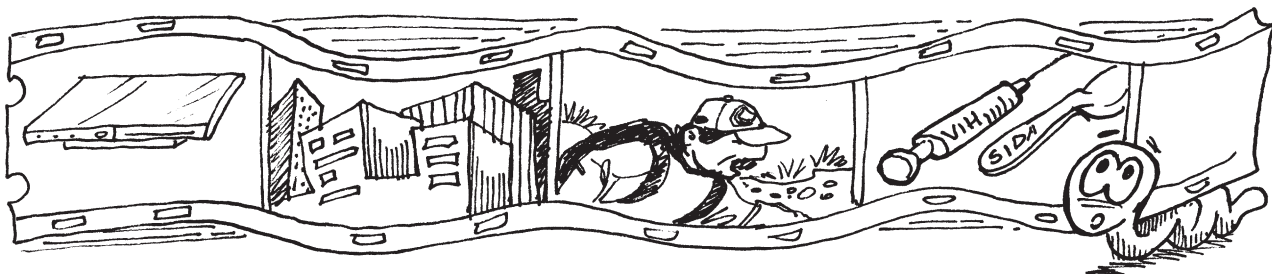


b. Written things: texts, poems, posters...

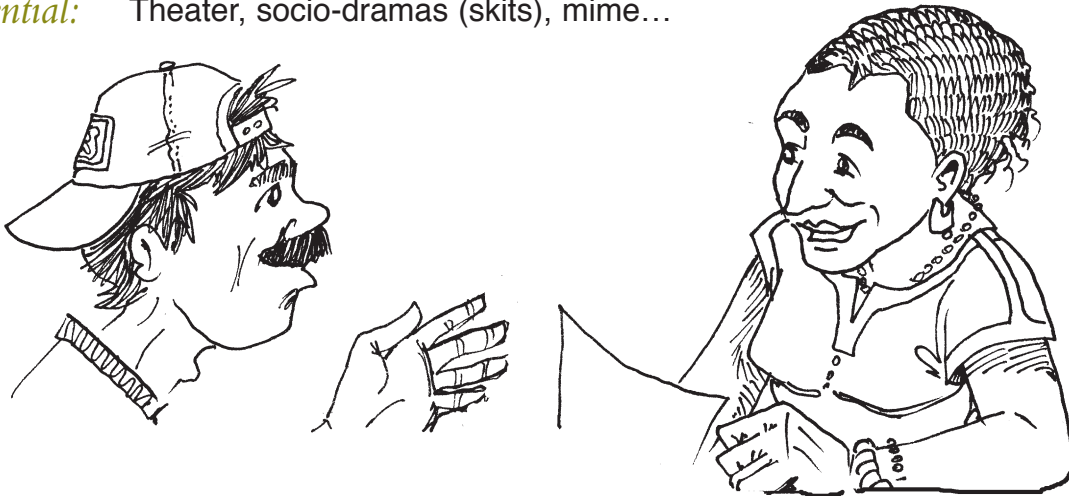
### *Auditory:* Songs, stories, radio programs...



### *Audio-visual:* Movies, videos...



*Experiential:* Theater, socio-dramas (skits), mime...



Codes and exercises can also be classified by their function:

|                            |                         |                          |                        |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| <p><i>Introduction</i></p> | <p><i>Animation</i></p> | <p><i>Group Work</i></p> | <p><i>Analysis</i></p> |
| <p><i>Organization</i></p> | <p><i>Planning</i></p>  | <p><i>Evaluation</i></p> |                        |

You can find collections and explanations of these kinds of participatory techniques in several books that have already been produced. One of them is ALFORJA's book *Técnicas participativas para la educación popular* [Si existe en inglés, mejor se pone el nombre en inglés. (Participatory Techniques for Popular Education)] Equipo Maíz in El Salvador has also produced a series of books called *Vamos a jugar*. ["Let's Play!"] Another well-known work used all over Africa is *Training for Transformation* by Hope, Timmel, and Hodzi.



### 3. Decoding

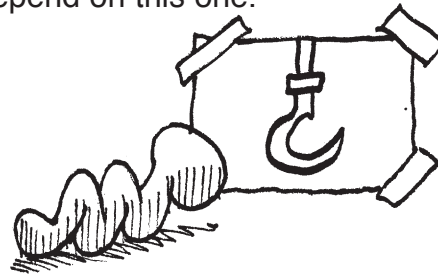
Now we are in the very center of the educational process. It is the most important moment. Decoding is thinking based on the code. There are four steps involved in decoding.



#### a. Introducing the code

For example, if it's a poster, it is placed somewhere where everyone can see it. The participants are asked to focus their attention on the poster. If we have chosen a socio-drama, or skit, as a code, then this is the moment when the skit is acted out. Or if we have decided to do a jigsaw puzzle, now is the time when the pieces are put together. It's very important to have enough time to do this part of the session calmly, because the next steps will depend on this one.

What do you see in the poster?



#### b. Reconstructing the code

Once the code has been presented or acted out, you begin a conversation so the participants can recall, recognize, or reconstruct what you have just seen or done. For example, if you're standing in front of a poster, you ask: "What do you see in the poster?" You are only looking for a description of what people are seeing, not an interpretation (that comes later). What you want to do here is to describe the content of the poster in as much detail as you can.



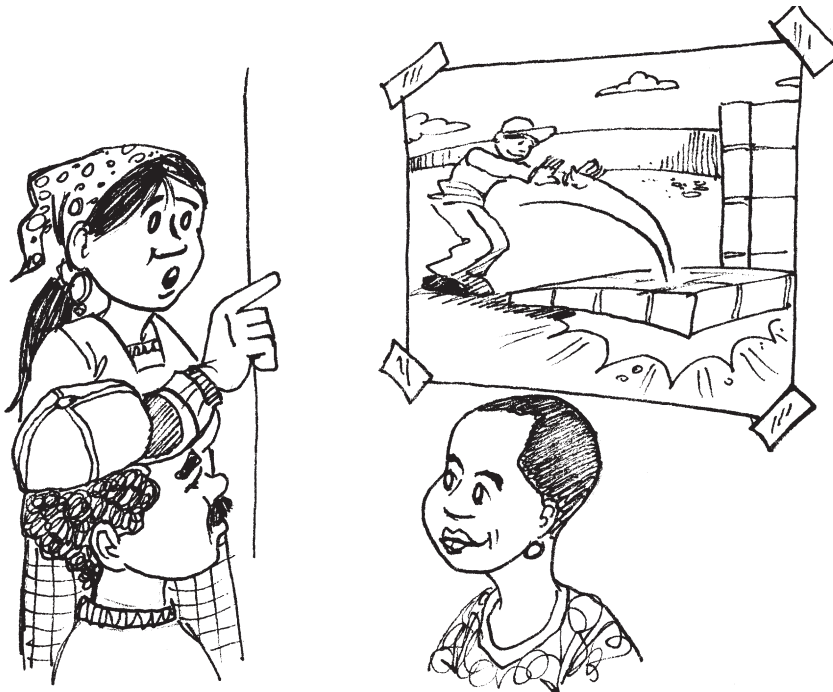
If the code is a socio-drama or skit, you would ask: “What did you see in the skit?” Then all of the participants remember and reconstruct what they have seen. It’s like when someone goes to the movies and then tells their friend about the story.



If the code is experiential, like a jigsaw puzzle, you would want to ask the participants something like: “How did you feel when you were putting the puzzle together?” “Why?” And if there were spectators, you might ask: “What did you see happen as the jigsaw puzzle was being put together?”

### *c. Analysis of the code*

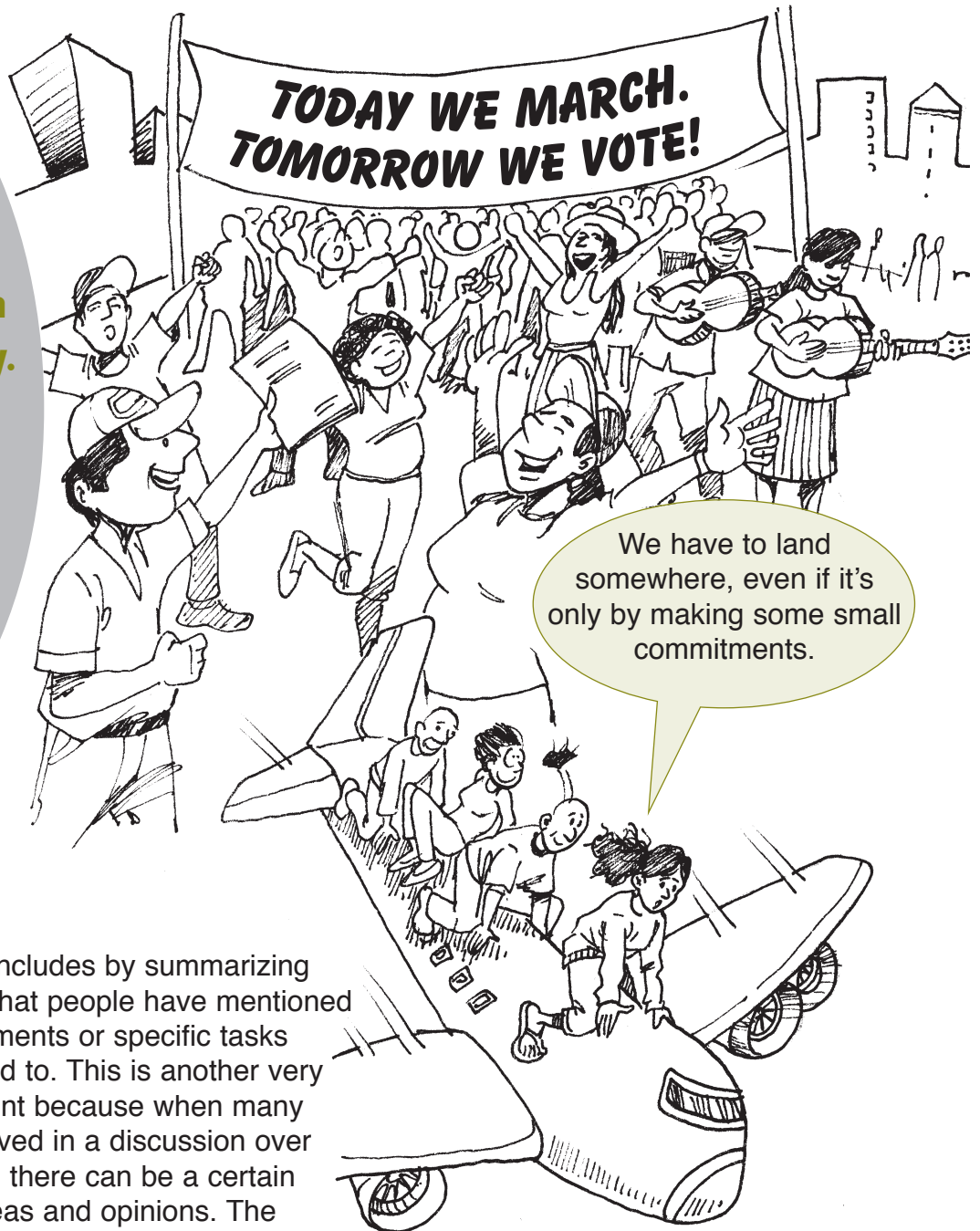
Now it’s time to move from the code to the reality of the experience of our group of participants. For example, if it was a poster with a picture of an immigrant crossing a border illegally, several questions can be asked to analyze this reality. They could be something like: “Are you an immigrant?” “Can you tell us your story?” “Why are there immigrants?” “What advantages and disadvantages do you see in immigration?”



No matter what the code is, the important thing is that everyone participates in discovering its message. Then we move from there to reality (what is really happening in our community and our world) to analyze the topic and how it plays out concretely in our daily lives.

This way, little by little, we become aware of our problems and we look for alternatives and solutions collectively. That's why at this stage we want to make sure we include a question aimed at making commitments: What can we do to transform this reality that we've been reflecting on? If the process doesn't end with concrete commitments, we've only done part of the work.

**If popular education is to be transforming, it must lead to very specific tasks that can help to change reality.**



#### *d. Conclusion*

This process concludes by summarizing the main ideas that people have mentioned and the commitments or specific tasks they have agreed to. This is another very important moment because when many people are involved in a discussion over a period of time, there can be a certain dispersion of ideas and opinions. The leader should close the session by giving a summary of the most important points. This does not mean giving a “spiel” about a topic. It means summarizing. And summaries need to be brief, concise, and clear.



# Popular Education and the Social Movement



When we talk about the “social movement,” we are talking about a whole array of organizations that the people themselves have formed. These organizations may emerge in work situations or be formed as a result of local problems. We’re talking about labor unions, cooperatives, day laborer organizations, farm workers, community organizations, indigenous groups, feminist organizations, human rights defense committees, healthcare defense committees, networks or coalitions made up of these organizations, the whole range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) etc.

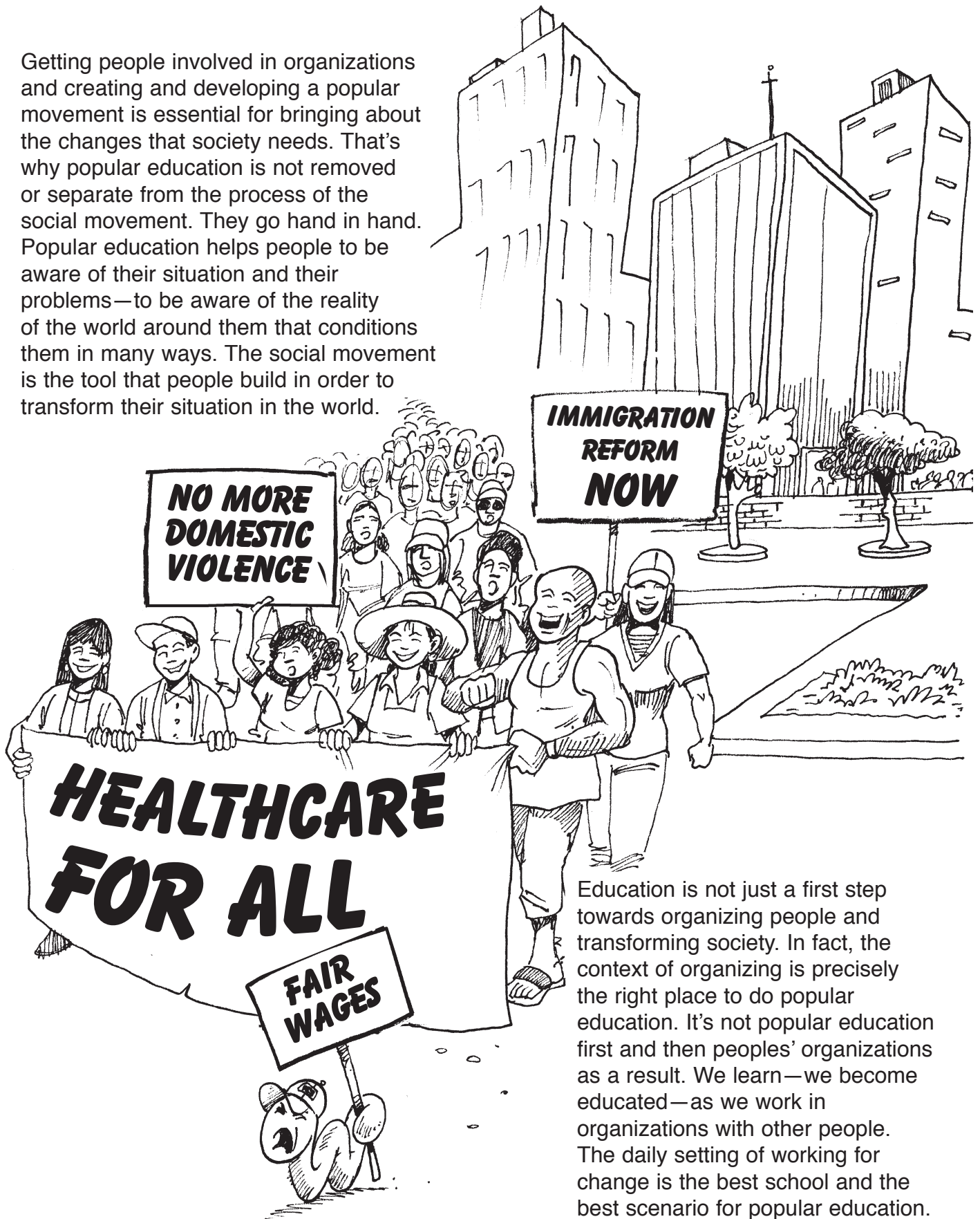
**The best school and best scenario for popular education is the practice of being involved in a struggle for change.**



**Only the People can Liberate the People** People who are aware, on the march, and active in organizations are people who have stopped being an easy-to-manipulate mass of people and have decided to take a leading role in their own lives, to be agents of change. The dominant class does everything it can to keep people disperse, separate, and uneducated, because they can keep them under control more easily that way.



Getting people involved in organizations and creating and developing a popular movement is essential for bringing about the changes that society needs. That's why popular education is not removed or separate from the process of the social movement. They go hand in hand. Popular education helps people to be aware of their situation and their problems—to be aware of the reality of the world around them that conditions them in many ways. The social movement is the tool that people build in order to transform their situation in the world.



Education is not just a first step towards organizing people and transforming society. In fact, the context of organizing is precisely the right place to do popular education. It's not popular education first and then peoples' organizations as a result. We learn—we become educated—as we work in organizations with other people. The daily setting of working for change is the best school and the best scenario for popular education. Popular education and popular organization should always go hand in hand.

# Some Quotes about Popular Education

“Transformation is only valid if it is a process carried out with the people, not for the people.” (Paulo Freire).

“The choice is between an education that domesticates or an education that liberates.” (Paulo Freire).

“Being outside of the people’s struggle is a way of being against that struggle.” (Paulo Freire).

To believe in the people is the first indispensable condition for all change.

“Nobody teaches anybody. We all learn together.” (Paulo Freire).



Education that is used to domesticate people is simply a transfer of information.” (Paulo Freire).

“The dominant practice of educating aims to indoctrinate in the sense that it tries to get people used to a world of oppression.” (Paulo Freire).

“Nobody educates anybody, and nobody educates themselves either. People educate each other in community and the world is the mediator.” (Paulo Freire).

“Education should turn people into actors in history, not a passive and conformist mass.” (Óscar Romero).

“Creative education should anticipate and be at the forefront of the kind of new society we want in Latin America.” (Óscar Romero).

“Education is about creating a critical spirit, not just transferring information.” (Óscar Romero).



“Theory, practice, theory. It’s like a wheel that never stops turning.” (Equipo Maíz).

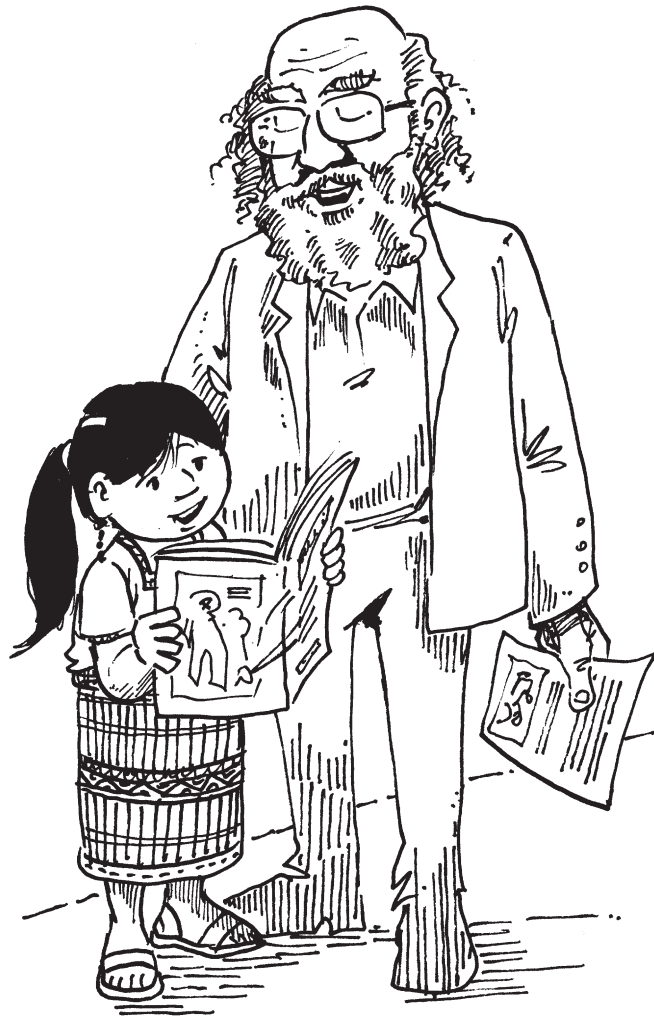


“In a ‘banking’ view of education, people are seen as adaptable, adjustable beings.”  
(Paulo Freire).

“We have to respect the levels of understanding that people have about their own reality. No one knows everything and no one is completely ignorant.” (Paulo Freire).

“Education for liberation is an act of learning and a method for the kind of transformative action that human beings should exercise over reality.” (Paulo Freire).

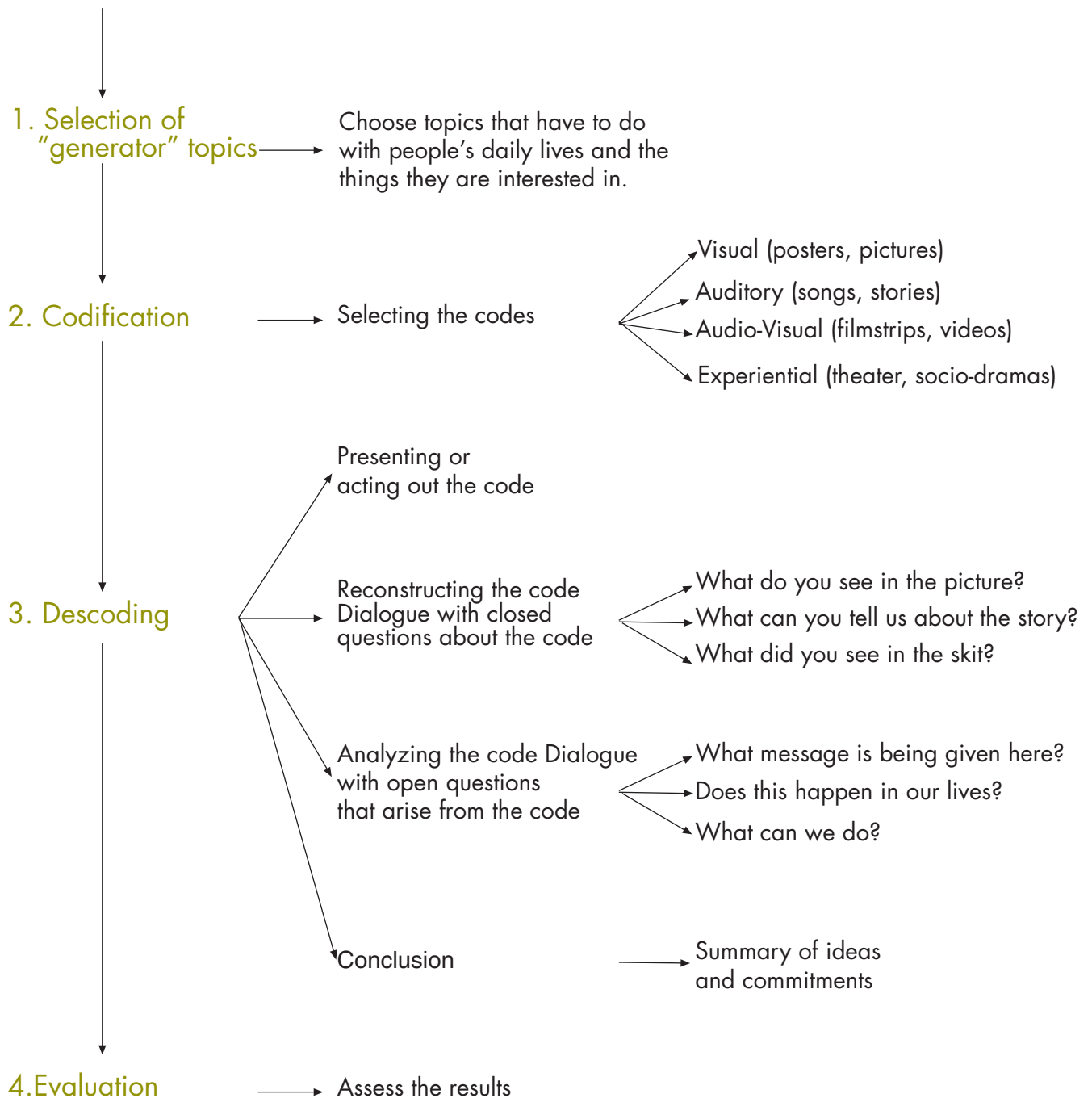
“Popular education does not exist outside of processes where people are fighting for change.”  
(Ranulfo Peloso).





# Annexes

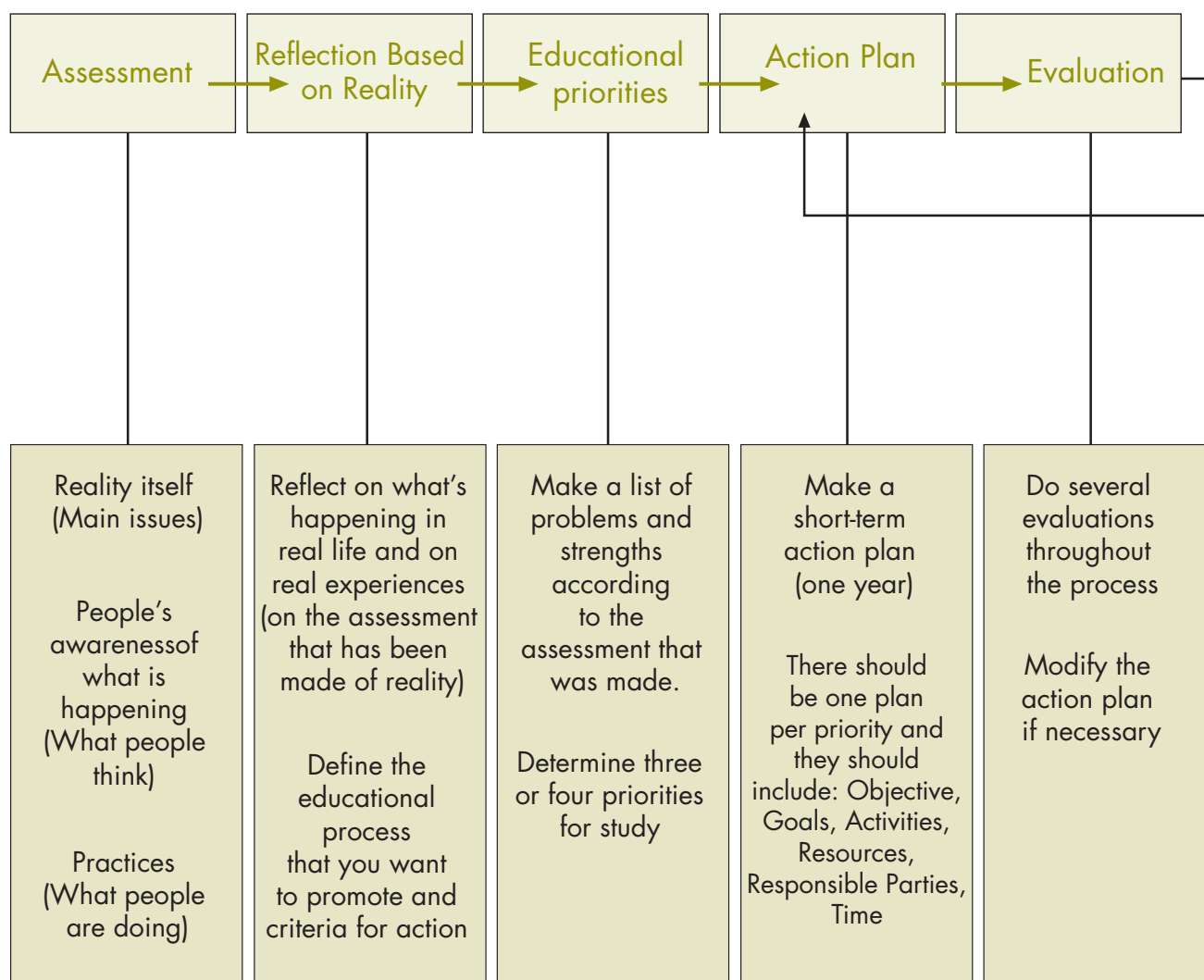
## Processes in Popular Education



**Suggested reading:**

*P. Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

# Planning in Popular Education



Participatory planning methods in education are carried out with the direct participation of the group of people interested and committed to processes in the community (the work team) and the indirect participation of the population.

The result does not have to be a nicely-written document. It just has to be the result of the thinking and action of many people who have felt ownership over the plan from the time it was drawn up.

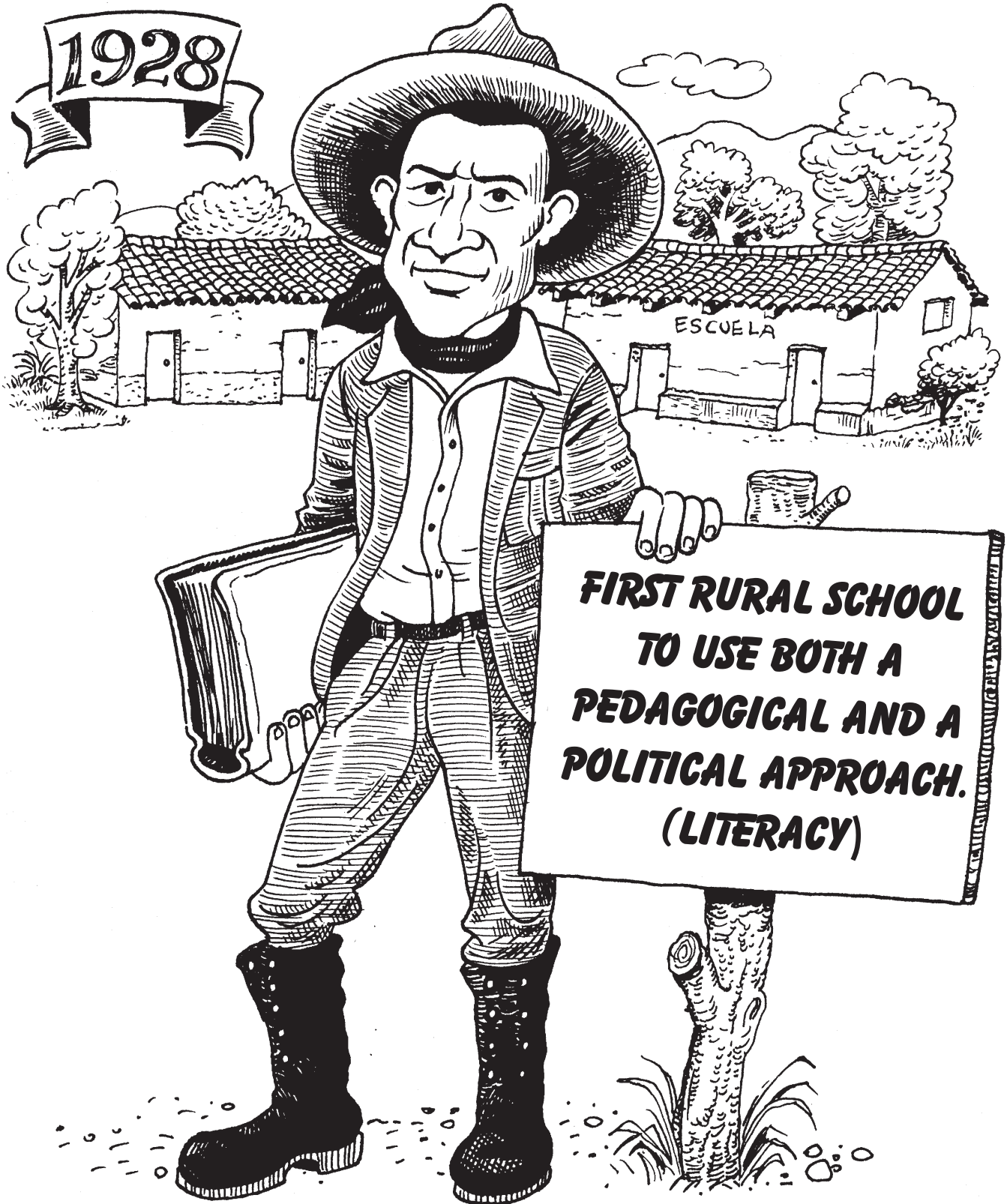
The participatory planning process is, in itself, an educational process. We learn alongside people to understand our reality (SEE), to reflect on it (THINK), and to make strategies to transform reality (ACT).

**Suggested reading:**

*J. Marins, Realidad y praxis de la pastoral latinoamericana, bogotá, 1976.*



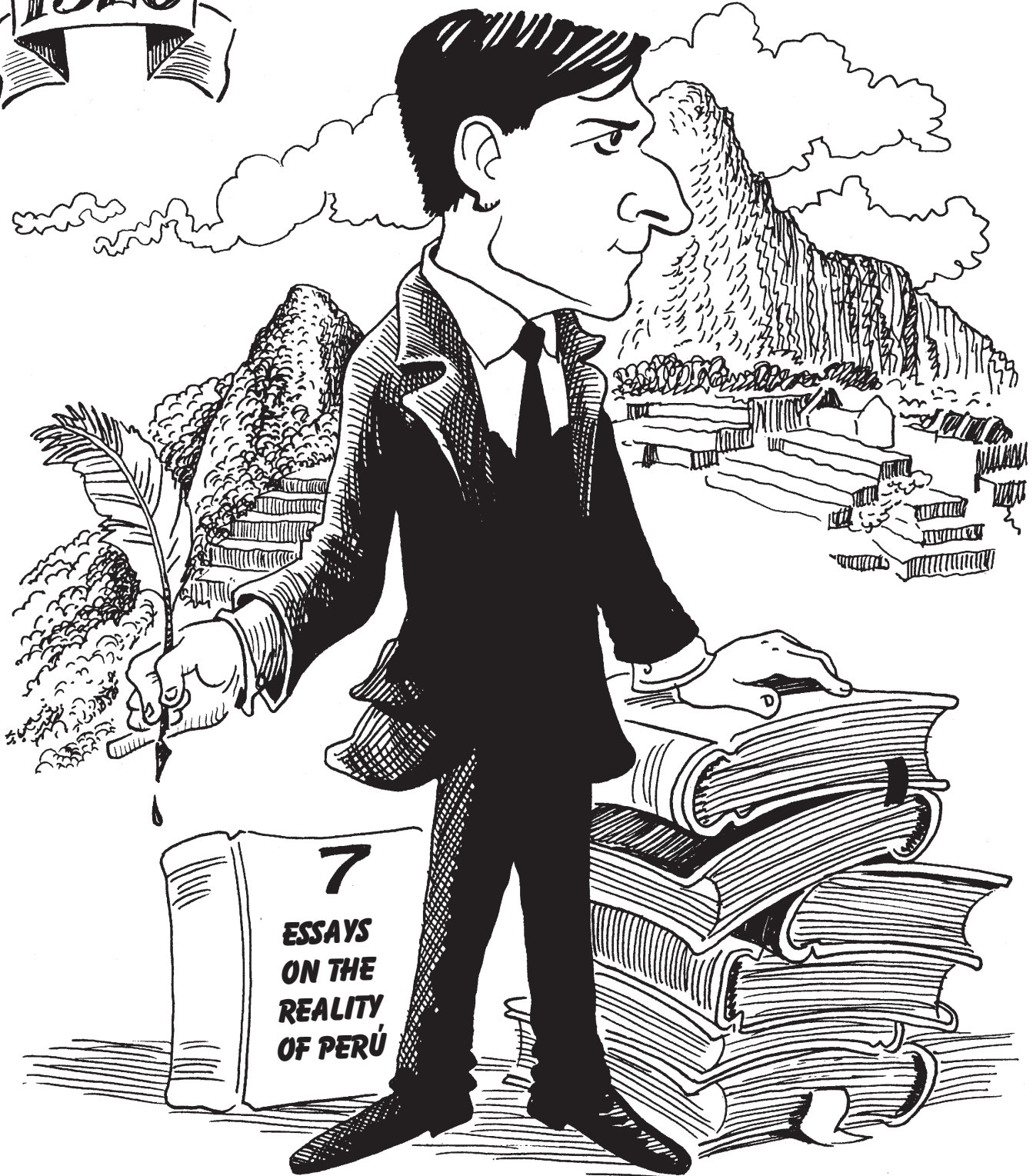
1928



CÉSAR AUGUSTO SANDINO



1920

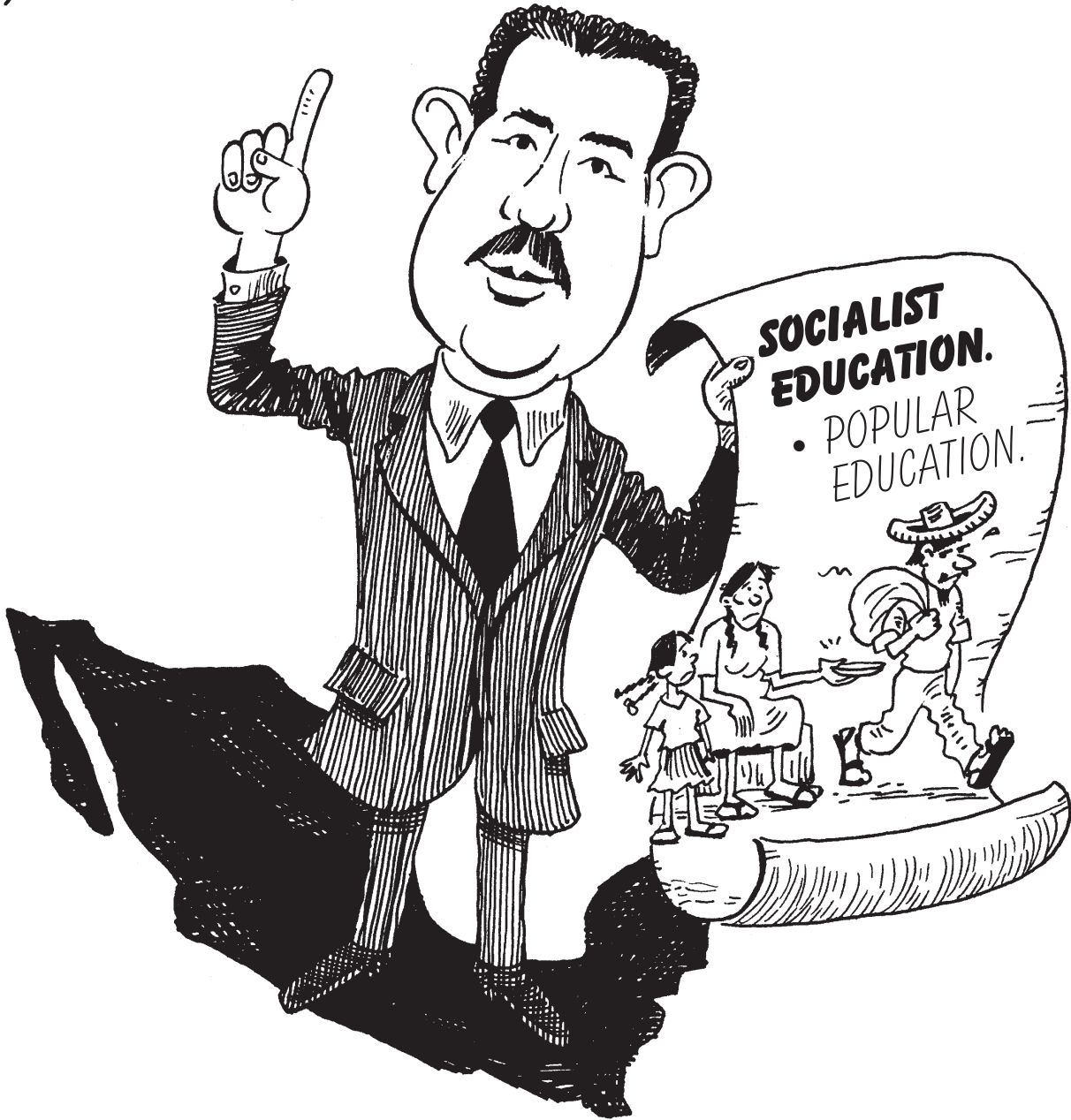


JOSÉ CARLOS MARIÁTEGUI





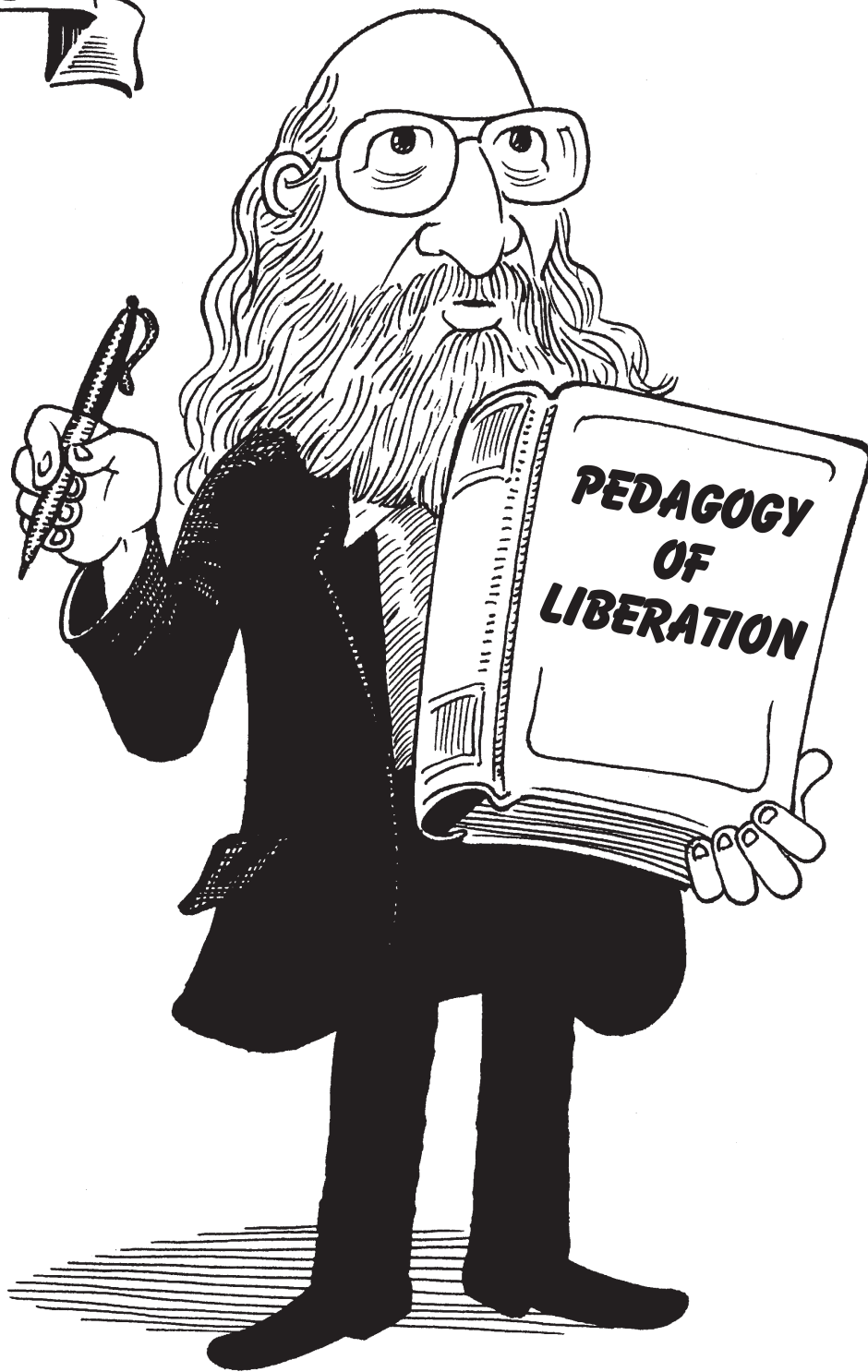
1934-1940



# General LÁZARO CÁRDENAS



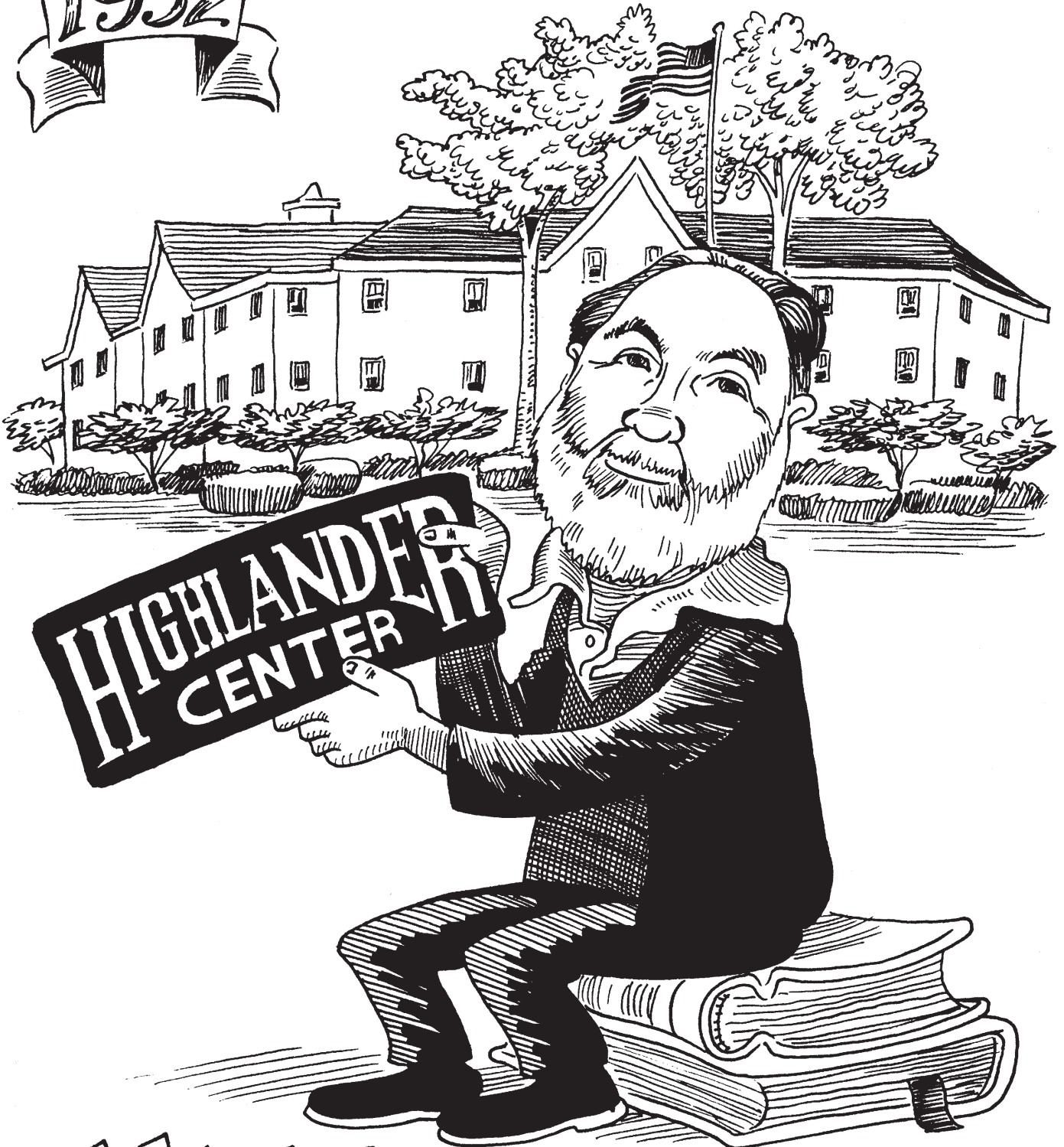
1960



PAULO FREIRE



1932



# MYLES HORTON

Founder of the Highlander Research and Education Center.



1957



SEPTIMA CLARK





1957

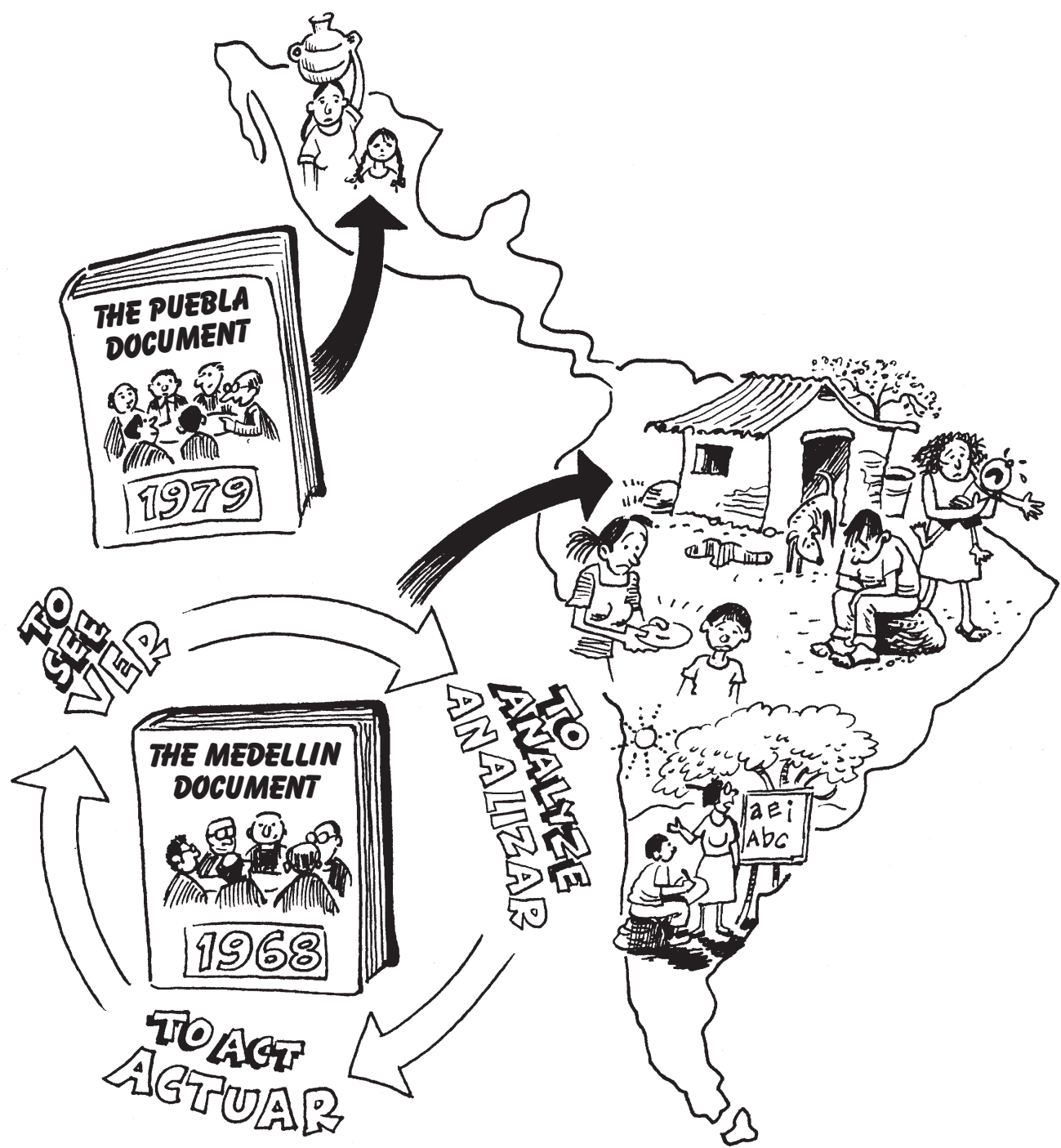
" I'm not going to be the teacher. We're going to learn together. You're going to teach me some things, and maybe there are a few things I might be able to teach you, but I don't consider myself a teacher. I just feel that I'm here to learn with you. We'll learn things together."



BERNICE ROBINSON



1968





70's



# THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

AUGUSTO BOAL



1976

Taita  
Leónidas



LEÓNIDAS PROAÑO



1968

El Castaño  
SAN MIGUEL

SAN LUCAS  
SAN MIGUEL

La Divina Providencia  
SANTA ANA

Los Naranjos  
USulután

# CENTROS DE FORMACIÓN CAMPESESINA - El Salvador

1984

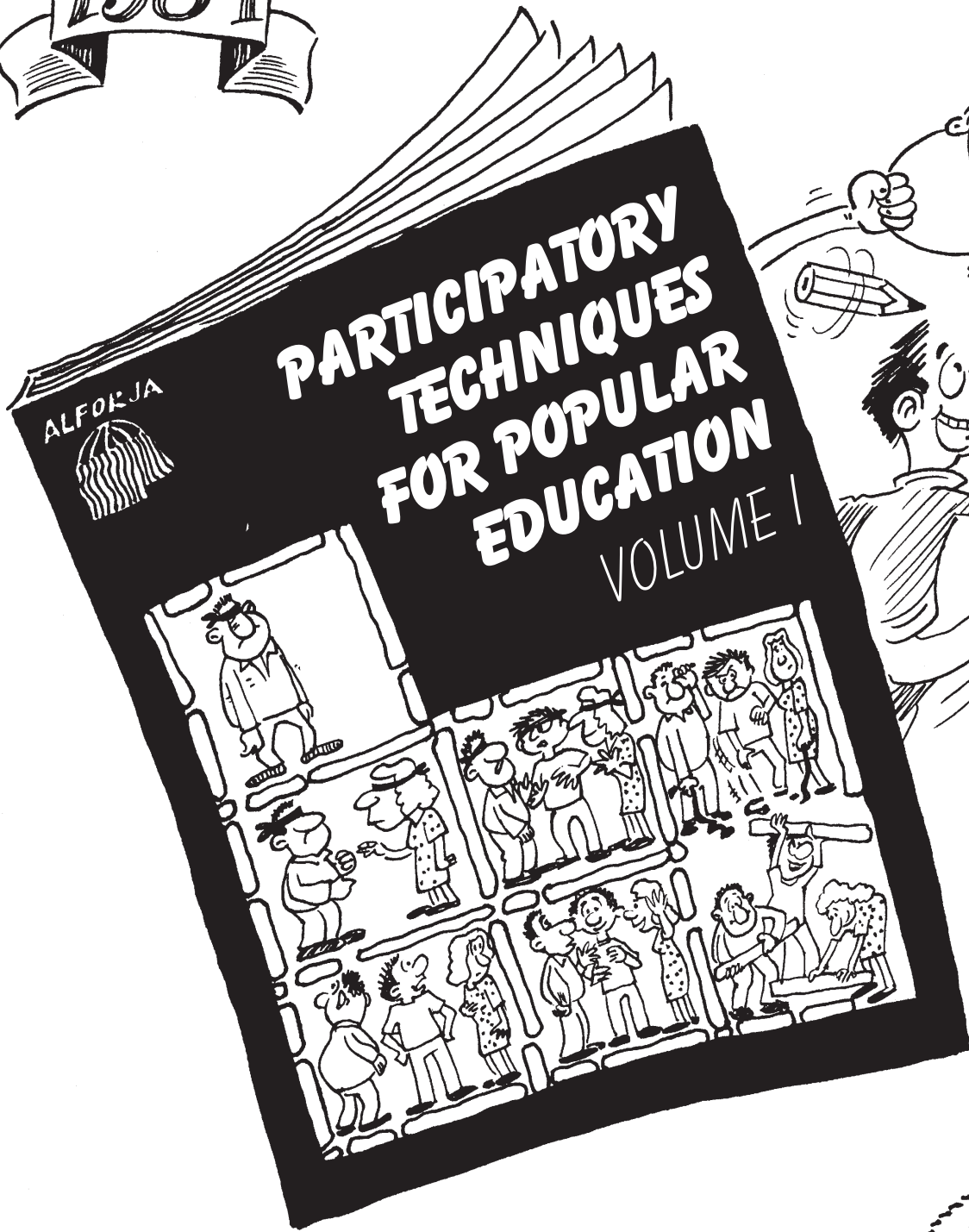


# A HANDBOOK FOR COMMUNITY WORKERS

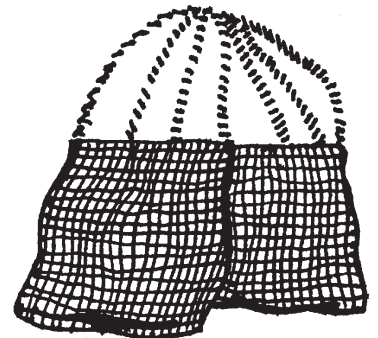
Anne Hope - Sally Timmel



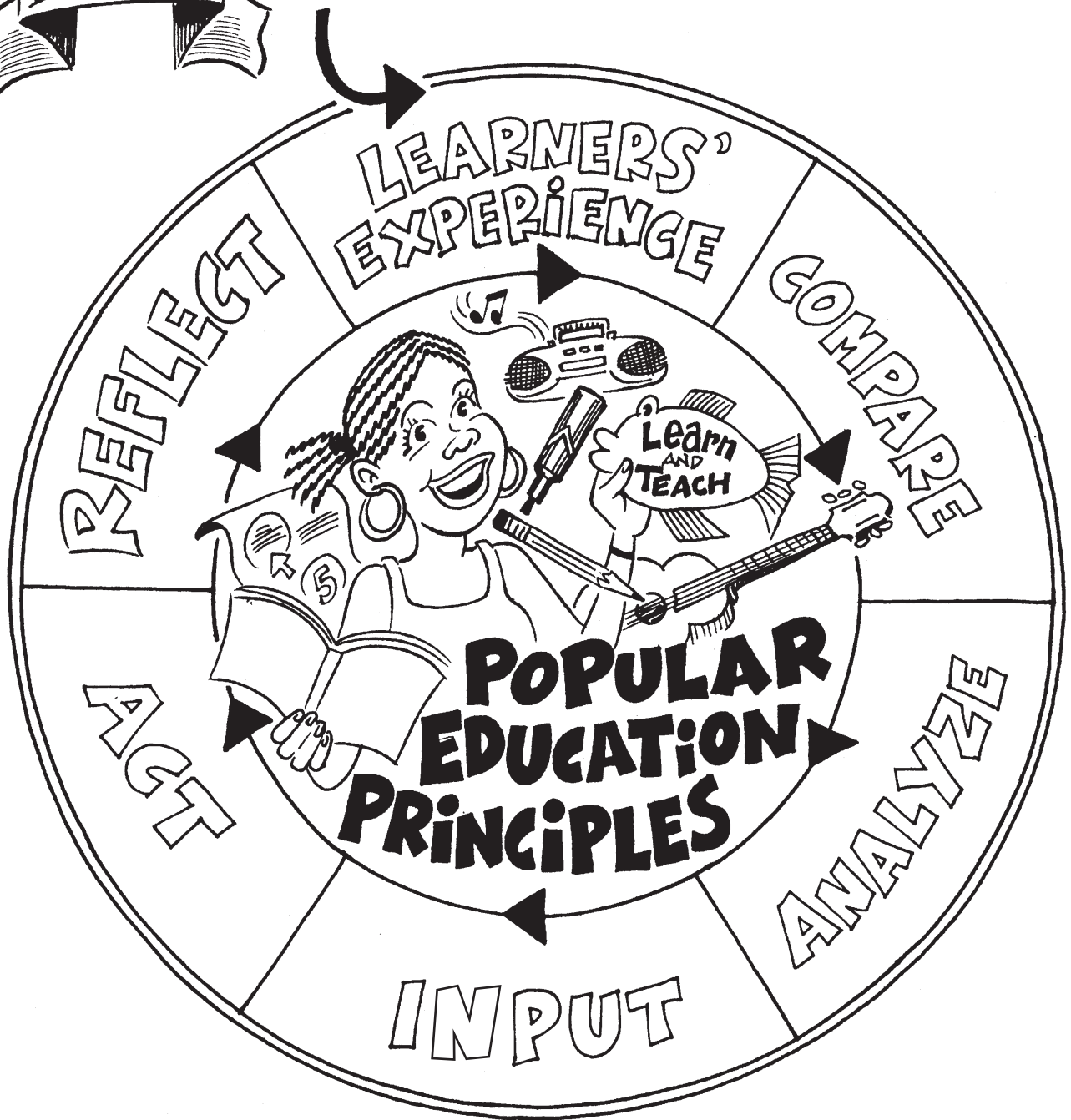
1984



ALFORJA



1993



A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR  
PARTICIPATORY **ESL** EDUCATION  
CAROLINE KERFOOT ~ South African



# EL EDUCADOR POPULAR (ALGUNAS CARACTERÍSTICAS)

## THE POPULAR EDUCATOR (SOME CHARACTERISTICS)



OÍDO RECEPTIVO  
RECEPTIVE LISTENING.

HERRAMIENTAS  
TÉCNICAS.  
TECHNICAL TOOLS.

MENTE CLARA  
QUE CONTENGA  
SENSIBILIDAD,  
IMAGINACIÓN Y  
CREATIVIDAD.

CLEAR MIND  
FOR SENSIBILITY,  
IMAGINATION AND  
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ARMAS  
METODOLÓGICAS.  
BAG O' TRICKS.

CINTURA AGIL:  
EVITA LA RIGIDEZ Y  
PERMITE UBICARSE  
BIEN EN SITUACIONES  
NUEVAS.

A LOOSE BELT TO  
AVOID RIGIDITY AND  
TO ADAPT TO NEW  
SITUATIONS.

PAPELÓGRAFO  
A LA MANO  
PAPER IN  
HAND.

FRENO PARA  
NO IMPONER  
SU CRITERIO.

BRAKE, DON'T  
IMPOSE YOUR  
AGENDA.

DISPOSICIÓN  
PARA IR DONDE  
SEA NECESARIO.

A DISPOSITION  
TO GO  
WHEREVER  
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