

GLOSSARY OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNIQUES

Popular education and economic literacy take advantage of a cornucopia of participatory pedagogical techniques to bring learning alive, to address different styles of learning, and to reach people at multiple levels in order to serve as empowering, transformative experiences. The pedagogical tools briefly described here are but a short selection of what is possible. This list only covers those techniques actually suggested for use in one or more modules.

BRAINSTORM The purpose of a “brainstorm” is to generate ideas, to encourage creativity or stimulate thinking. It is not meant to be a time where ideas are evaluated, debated or elaborated upon. It works best when many people contribute ideas, not just a few. If there is a large group, it may be helpful to have more than one person recording the ideas on newsprint in order to keep up with the pace of the brainstorm. The facilitator invites participants to call out ideas briefly – in a word or two – at most in a phrase or short sentence. There need be no “logical” connection between one person’s thought and another person’s. Generally, brainstorms are kept to a relatively short time frame – with the facilitator judging when to call and end to it by noticing when people’s energy and ideas are dwindling.

COLLAGE: Some people process ideas and think visually. Making a collage can help people synthesize, elaborate, and apply ideas or knowledge. It enables people to work also at a symbolic or emotional level, which can be helpful in surfacing how people FEEL about economic issues – an essential aspect of any training that aims to mobilize people to take action. All visual forms of learning and processing information are very useful in working with people who have low or no formal literacy skills, or among people who have different native languages. Making collages can be one way to help equalize the power dynamic within a group of people with mixed educational backgrounds. The technique also helps ensure everyone can participate and keep up with the discussion regardless of their primary language.

Collages are pictures/murals of any size that are made by gluing things to a backing – generally a piece of paper or cardboard. They can be made from photos, pages from publications, fabric, wrapping paper, found objects, scraps of wood, metal or plastic -- just about anything that can be glued. Sometimes, people also draw, paint or otherwise write or mark on a collage as well. Anything is possible! When working with larger paper or in larger groups, it may be easier to have rather thin glue in bowls and invite people to use paint brushes to apply it.

DEBATE: There is nothing like having to defend a position to force people to learn facts, synthesize information, and critically assess it. There are several ways to maximize the learning in a debate format. One strategy is to form teams and have teams work together to prepare points for argumentation, even if ultimately there will only be one person from each side debating. Another way is to

have a panel with several people representing each side. If participants are likely to freeze or feel uncomfortable because a formal debate feels too confrontational, the stress level can be reduced by turning this into a TV talk show format whereby the facilitator interviews people representing different points of view. It is generally helpful to de-brief the debate with everyone to clarify points, fill in gaps, assess what was learned.

DISCUSSION:

Large group

This is perhaps the most widely used and comfortable technique in facilitators' repertoires. However, large group discussion tends to be over-used because many people have a limited pedagogical toolkit and haven't stopped to think about what conditions are most ideal for a large group discussion. Save this technique for information you absolutely want everyone to hear first hand and keep the time to the bare minimum. Large group discussions may be the most efficient way to process information but not the most effective. For example, there is no guarantee everyone is paying attention or that everyone is understanding what is being discussed. Large group discussions work for people who are oral learners but not necessarily for other types of learners. If the group is sizeable, heavily relying on this technique keeps the processing at a mental level and doesn't touch other levels. Consequently, personal empowerment, transformation, and inspiration for advocacy are unlikely outcomes of the session.

DISCUSSION:

Small group

Use this to enable more people to talk, to share ideas and experiences, and to provide opportunities for people to process the material more profoundly. The facilitator must factor in time to give instructions, for people to move and reassemble themselves in small groups and return to the large group. Decide whether reporting back to the large group is necessary. If so, decide whether the group should select one or more people to serve as the reporter, or whether there will be other ways of facilitating a more open, less structured report back. It may be helpful for facilitator(s) or resource people to circulate among the groups to make sure the groups understand their instructions, and to listen to the nature of the conversation in order to plan how best to facilitate the next portion of the session.

LIVE ILLUSTRATION:

Live illustrations take an object or an activity to metaphorically illustrate an abstract concept or help people grasp quantities (percentages, distributions, large amounts). They differ from a role play in that they do not necessarily realistically show processes, procedures, individuals or institutions as a way of to help people understand how things work or the power or behavioral dynamics underlying a particular situation. Instead, live illustrations work at a more symbolic level. Two examples may make their usefulness clearer:

- a) Making a quantitative point: Using chairs, pouring amounts of water into clear glasses, distributing slices of bread – to show distribution of income. In this case, the facilitator might first ask the group what would it look like if

people and bread (bread as metaphor for income) were distributed equally; and then have the volunteers illustrate what the actual distribution of income in your country looks like.

- b) Illustrating an abstract concept: A discussion of a country's capacity to absorb foreign assistance and the IMF's concern with too much aid flowing to a country might be illustrated using a sponge, 2 bowls, a pitcher of water, and rubber bands. Participants would be asked to pour some water into one bowl. Put a dry sponge into the bowl of water. Let the sponge absorb all the water. (Water as metaphor for aid. Sponge as metaphor for the economy. Rubber bands as metaphor for IMF conditions.) Squeeze all the water in the sponge into the empty bowl. Then, put a rubber band around the sponge as tightly as you can. Put that sponge into the bowl you just filled. How much water can the sponge now reabsorb?

Mini LECTURE Most people have extensive experience with formal and informal learning situations done in very conventional "bank account" style. This involves a "teacher" talking at the "student", assuming that the student's mind is empty and needs filling up with the information the teacher will provide. Certainly, there are times when certain facts, information, and analyses will need to be presented by the facilitator in a lecture format. However, this technique is vastly overused and over-rated. As many academic studies have shown, people are least likely to retain information they have heard orally. Moreover, there is no guarantee that they will believe it, be able to repeat what they've learned, know how to apply it after the fact, etc. Lectures are needed less if participants can read material in advance of the session. The sets of instructions in this library try to keep lectures to a minimum, and when suggested, facilitators are encouraged to keep oral interventions short and accompany them with visual or other forms of learning devices.

MURAL DRAWING/ VISUAL MAPPING

Some people process ideas and think visually. Making a picture or a map can help people synthesize, elaborate, apply ideas or knowledge and strategize. All visual forms of learning and processing information are very useful in working with people who have low or no formal literacy skills, or among people who have different native languages, if words are not used or kept to a minimum on the mural or map. Utilizing this technique can be one way to help equalize the power dynamic within a group of people with mixed educational backgrounds. The technique also helps ensure everyone can participate and keep up with the discussion regardless of their primary language. If a conversation or analysis is happening over several sessions, the mural or map can be used to refresh and recap past discussions and then be added to in subsequent sessions. It is an excellent tool to provide continuity.

ROLE PLAY This technique can explain processes, procedures, and motivations involving individuals or institutions. Sometimes it is referred to as a simulation. It is an excellent way to help people understand how things work or the

power or behavioral dynamics underlying a particular situation. It also can be used to set up a situation to allow actors and/or the audience to problem-solve and develop strategies, solutions, or alternatives to an existing situation. Participants can be assigned or volunteer for roles. Coaching is optional, depending on how familiar the person is with the situation/role. When problem solving, sometimes scenes are repeated, allowing for one or more new people to step into the existing role(s) or create a new role and attempt to change the situation.

SCULPTING

This is a symbolic technique that assists people in expressing themselves, in processing information, and thinking and expressing their feelings kinetically and visually. It is valuable for forcing people to distill complex concepts or trends or issues and produce an image that is often very powerful and telling. It is also very valuable in providing a way for participants to contribute to the discussion who are hesitant to talk. It can be done quickly and used to improve the energy and attention of the group or shift the tone/mood. If there are any cultural concerns related to people touching each other, then this is probably not be a good tool to use. However, there are ways to adapt the instructions to meet some concerns. (See below.)

One person is invited to be the sculptor. She or he can use any number of participants and anything in the room as a prop. The facilitator defines the task for the sculptor. For example, the sculptor is asked to depict an abstract concept (e.g. justice, the economy, environmental sustainability, poverty). Sculpting can be used to illustrate a process. In this case, the sculpture could actually have moving parts, if desired. Sculpting can be done in two stages to problem solve. One sculptor is asked to depict the problem. A second person is asked to re-shape the sculpture to illustrate the “solution”.

The sculptor bends people into the position she/he wants, or tells them to assume a certain pose. The sculptor **does not** explain why she is doing something, or what gestures are supposed to mean to either the people being posed or the audience. Ideally the sculptor works silently. Once finished, the people in the audience can be asked what they see. The people in the sculpture can be asked how they feel, and if relevant, what they see from their vantage point in the tableau. Only at the end, should the facilitator ask the sculptor what she/he feels and was trying to do. It spoils the intention and process if the discussion stimulates debate or a lengthy or intense analysis.

Strategies to address cultural concerns about touching:

- a) If there is a prohibition against male/female touching: invite a group of female participants to do it and/or a group of male participants to do so.
- b) If there is a prohibition against anyone touching anyone: invite someone to pose her or himself. This is most fun when the exercise forms a “sculpture garden” – with half the participants being the sculptures and half the participants being able to walk around and study the different sculptures.)

SKIT Some people use the word skit and role play interchangeably. However, a skit may tell a story, either dramatically or through comedy. If it tells a story, it often has a point of view, whereas a role play may not. A skit may spend more time developing details about character, plot, situation, or outcome and speak to people at a more emotional or aspirational level, rather than the more analytical possibilities of a role play. Some of the most powerful forms of skits are “codes” – also known as mimes – where no words are spoken and the audience is left to interpret the symbolism and action. These silent dramas are used to open up a discussion, often of difficult topics.

STORY TELLING There are very few people in this world who do not like talking about themselves or hearing stories. This is a wonderful method for arousing interest in a subject, helping people identify intellectually and emotionally with the material, establishing the relevance and import of the subject at hand, or tapping and reaffirming the wisdom and experience of participants. Story telling also can be used to help build awareness of different points of view and different experiences. It is also another technique to help bridge differences in formal education among participants.

TIME LINE This is an excellent way to develop an historical analysis of an institution, issue, or movement. It is also a very effective tool in advocacy planning. Time lines can vary in their complexity, depending on the intended goal of the exercise. They can be used to track the evolution of multiple factors, or multiple locations. An example of the former: One layer can track what happened politically at a certain period of time; another, what happened socially, a third layer, what happened economically. Alternatively, different layers could track what was happening locally, nationally, regionally, globally. When working on multiple layers, it can be more effective to use different colors to more easily distinguish the layers. Sometimes facilitators also invite participants to locate themselves on the time line in various ways– and use it to help people to get a sense of where they fit into broader social and political movements.

VIDEOS There is nothing like compelling visuals with stories to make theories, policies, and issues come alive. Showing videos can powerfully drive home points. If time is limited, showing a segment may be quite sufficient to achieve your learning goal(s). The internet, libraries, local non-governmental organizations, and sometimes labor, environment and religious institutions can be sources for appropriate videos.