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From Consciousness Raising to Popular Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

THOMAS J. LA BELLE

Latin America and the Caribbean have a long tradition of innovative approaches to nonformal education for economically and politically subjugated adults.¹ Consciousness raising and, more recently, popular education are examples of such a tradition. This article documents the ways in which popular education has emerged and what is known about its efficacy in the region during the last decade. It begins with a brief discussion of consciousness raising that is based primarily on Paolo Freire's influence. That section ends by providing several reasons why consciousness raising has been criticized and ultimately combined with other interventions (primarily the economic and political organization of the poor) and why it now exists as an important component of what is termed "popular education." Following a discussion of the characteristics and origin of popular education, I describe participatory-investigation activities as the typical first step beyond consciousness raising, linking the latter to popular-education strategies. I then offer an assessment of what is known about popular education's accomplishments relative to its goals and aspirations.

Consciousness Raising: Concept and Practice

Most observers see consciousness raising as a pedagogy for the oppressed.² It is a group pedagogy, usually initiated by a facilitator, that seeks to promote horizontal and reciprocal relationships for participants. These relationships are fostered through discussion of concrete historical experiences in a dialogue intended to lead to mutual learning about the participant's social reality.³ By confronting family, education, labor, and social problems and by generating their own formulations of reality and community activity, the participants are expected to achieve transformed,

¹ This article is based in part on T. J. La Belle, *Nonformal Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Stability, Reform or Revolution?* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

² A Puiggrós, "Discusiones y tendencias en la educación popular Latino-Americana," *Nueva antropología* 6 (1983): 15-39.

³ A. M. Escobar Guerrero, "Capacitación y liberación: Hacia una educación revolucionaria," *Educación no formal para adultos: Algunos temas* 4 (1981): 1-48; F. Vio Grossi, "Investigación participativa: Precisiones de Ayacucho," in *Investigación participativa y praxis rural, nuevos conceptos en educación y desarrollo comunal*, ed. F. Vio Grossi, V. Gianotten, and T. de Wit (Lima: Editores Mosca Azul, 1981).

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or heightened, consciousness.⁴ Consciousness raising, although sometimes linked to literacy programs and skill-transmission programs, typically does not represent a fixed curriculum, nor does it aim to integrate the individual into the present society. Instead it represents a normative process that is geared to democratic participation and that juxtaposes a utopian future against the contradictions of the present.⁵ It assumes that the oppressed have their own set of ideas that are born out of their daily struggle for survival.⁶

While there have been several practice-oriented variants of consciousness raising, including rural animation and communication pedagogy, Paolo Freire is the individual most often associated with consciousness raising in Latin America. He has drawn on Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism as well as on other social science and philosophical tracts as a basis for formulating his now-famous method that was launched in northeast Brazil in 1961. By 1964 the national literacy program in Brazil, with Freire as director, had prepared a large number of program coordinators, and plans were made to initiate 20,000 "culture circles" for 2 million illiterates. A military coup occurred in Brazil in 1964, however, and under the new government Freire was arrested, jailed for 70 days, labeled a subversive, and eventually driven into exile in Chile. There he began to write about the methods and to work in the Chilean National Department of Adult Education with Christian Democrats.⁷ During the 1970s the method was widely copied, altered, and applied in much of the world, and Freire wrote, consulted, and taught in association with the diffusion of his ideas before returning to Brazil in the early 1980s.

Freire is most often cited for his rejection of mass education, which he feels imposes silence and passivity, stifles criticism, and makes participants objects rather than subjects of reality. He contends that education cannot be neutral; it should be participatory and must involve self-reflection and critical thought about the individual and society; personal development depends on the individual's mutually influencing relationships with other beings and objects; education must be linked to societal questions, especially to political and economic struggles between social classes; learning cannot occur unless it is accompanied by praxis or a testing out of the new

⁴ P. Cariola, S. J., "Educación y participación en América Latina," *Socialismo y participación* 14 (1980): 129–58.

⁵ E. Céspedes Ruiz, A. Opezo B., and M. Pérez V., *Investigación y evaluación de experiencias innovadoras en educación de adultos en México, Centroamérica y el Caribe* (Costa Rica: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1982).

⁶ J. Barreiro, *Educación popular y proceso de conscientización* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1974).

⁷ Asociación de Publicaciones Educativas, *Paulo Freire, conscientización: Teoría y práctica de la liberación* (Bogotá: Asociación de Publicaciones Educativas, 1974); E. DeKadt, *Catholic Radicals in Brazil* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

knowledge; and the world that people live in is for the most part created by themselves.⁸

While many programs that function using the term "consciousness raising" (especially those sponsored by government agencies) use only Freire's terminology and bias toward greater participation for learners in the teaching and learning process,⁹ he has nevertheless provoked many to consider education from the learner's point of view and to utilize various instructional materials and methods to foster reflection of self and reality. These include games, literature, theater, and electronic media and are often associated with literacy and numeracy programs.¹⁰

Sometimes consciousness raising has also been joined with skills transmission. In Chile, for example, Pinochet's repressive, authoritarian military regime has made difficult and dangerous the organization of viable community groups who would wish to alter political and economic structures. Skills transmission in the 1980s, however, is less likely to be viewed as a threat in Chile even though many of these efforts are infused with considerable consciousness-raising activity that centers on political themes.¹¹ Looking outside of Chile to Mexico, another example of consciousness raising that is combined with skills transmission appears to respond to repression at the local, as opposed to the national, level. Operated under the auspices of an agency known as Education and Development of Western Mexico (EDOC),¹² it has applied a Freirean approach to rural problem formulation and solution. One case apparently involved a group of 80 sugarcane cutters who were contracted to a group of cane growers in the southern part of the state of Jalisco. Traditionally, the cane cutters worked through a middleman who would arrange the contract and take a portion of the cane-cutter salaries as his fee. The EDOC effort was designed to raise the consciousness of the cane cutters about their dependency on this middleman and enable at least some of them to develop enough literacy and numeracy skills to break the relationship. Within 6 weeks, as

⁸ N. F. McGinn, "The Psycho-social Method of Paulo Freire: Some Lessons from Experience," *World Education* (1973): 9–13; P. Freire, "Adult Literacy Process as Cultural Action for Freedom," *Harvard Educational Review* 40 (May 1970): 205–25, and "Cultural Action and Conscientization," *Harvard Educational Review* 40 (August 1970): 452–77.

⁹ See, e.g., C. Sánchez de Sahagún and G. Flores de López, *Aplicación del método de Freire en un programa de desarrollo rural* (Chapingo, México: Escuela Nacional de Agricultura, 1977).

¹⁰ See, e.g., D. R. Evans, "An Approach to Nonschool Rural Education in Ecuador," in *Educational Alternatives in Latin America: Social Change and Social Stratification*, ed. T. J. La Belle (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1975); and H. Ford-Smith, "The Case of Iris Armstrong: A Forum for Women in Sugar," *Third World Popular Theater Newsletter* 3 (January 1983): 22–25.

¹¹ Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación (CIDE), *Programa de contabilidad y administración predial para campesinos (PROCAP)* (Santiago, Chile: CIDE, 1984); M. Gajardo, "Educación popular y experiencias concientizadoras en América Latina," in *La educación en América Latina*, ed. P. Cariola et al., (Santiago, Chile: Ed. Limusa, 1981).

¹² Educación y Desarrollo de Occidente (EDOC), *Integración de las ASR al proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje* (Guadalajara, Mexico: EDOC, n.d.).

the story was related to me, a few representatives of the cane cutters had learned enough literacy and numeracy to formulate their own contracts with the growers and thereby eliminate the middleman.

In contrast to the case above, most consciousness-raising programs, alone or in combination with skills-transmission components, have not achieved such social change objectives, and it seems that this has led to a growing disenchantment with such efforts. Gajardo argues, for example, that after looking at programs in Latin America over the last 10 years it has become evident to her that the objective of much consciousness raising does not extend to needed structural transformation.¹³ Luft, in his study of 20 popular-education programs in Bolivia, also found evidence of a positive impact of consciousness-raising efforts on the ability of peasants to articulate opinions on repression, corruption, dependency, and the like but not on structural changes in the economy or polity.¹⁴ Cervantes argues that consciousness raising has difficulty influencing reality in the absence of social organization and political action.¹⁵ Likewise, Rebeil criticizes the psychosocial method for neglecting the integration of actions that would allow the participants to transform effectively and critically their material conditions in a capitalist system.¹⁶ Similarly, Tovar Gómez points out that consciousness-raising efforts are viable in the short run in their concentration on the formation of the individual but do not appear to have brought about concrete results in improved living conditions because of restrictive structural conditions.¹⁷

Some would argue that consciousness raising should not be judged for its economic and political effects, especially in the short term. Instead it is sometimes stated that consciousness raising should be viewed as a means for understanding the mechanisms of oppression and for exploring alternatives to make society more just. Even then, however, there is an open-ended ambiguity associated with such efforts as they are intended to help the poor achieve a greater awareness of their reality and of the social structure that keeps them oppressed. The question emerges, however, whether the dialogue is as likely to leave them frustrated as it is to facilitate some specified action.¹⁸

¹³ Gajardo, "Educación popular y experiencias concientizadoras en América Latina."

¹⁴ M. Luft, *Popular Adult Education: The Bolivian Experience* (Toronto: M. Luft, 1984).

¹⁵ E. Cervantes, *Educación popular y sociedad capitalista*. Colección Teoría de la Educación Popular (Netzahualcoytl, México: Servicios Educativos Populares, A. C., Taller de Impresiones Populares, 1977).

¹⁶ M. A. Rebeil, "Educación no formal en áreas rurales Mexicanas," in *La educación y desarrollo dependiente en América Latina*, ed. D. Morales-Gómez (Mexico City: Ediciones Gernika, 1979).

¹⁷ J. Tovar Gómez, "Educación de adultos y desarrollo integral," *Educación no formal para adultos: Algunos temas* 3 (1980): 1-13.

¹⁸ T. J. La Belle, *Nonformal Education and Social Change in Latin America* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin America Center, 1976).

McFadden offers a plausible explanation for the lack of economic and political effects of consciousness raising.¹⁹ He argues that Freire has contributed to the practical issues of how to research themes, make codifications, pose problems about the themes to small groups, and reflect on themes through dialogue but that he has not contributed to methods of changing the oppressive situation that has been identified through such processes. McFadden traces this lack of attention on social action to the confusion in the way that Freire uses the term “praxis”—intellectual praxis, the praxis of everyday life, and revolutionary praxis. He says that Freire has enabled the first two forms of praxis to be built into the culture circle, but there is nothing in Freire’s theory or method that links up the knowledge that something is wrong with an action that would do something about it. It is this absence of a link with social action, which many feel is a major weakness in consciousness raising, that has led to its combination with the organization of community groups for the achievement of economic and political ends.²⁰ As an example, some might cite the combination of consciousness raising with group organization in advance of the Nicaraguan revolution, where the work of grass-roots organizations coincided with the anti-Somoza movement and helped to pave the way for radical change. Pushing consciousness raising in this direction also comes from the more dogmatic Left as individuals like Paiva criticize consciousness raising for its moral and utopian thrust and for its lack of articulation with the revolutionary vanguard.²¹

Popular Education as a Concept

As individuals searched in the 1970s for more pragmatic efforts to accomplish economic and political goals, a conceptual split between consciousness raising on the one hand and popular education for structural change on the other became apparent. This split can be seen in the literature. Garcia Huidobro, for example, separates liberation education, which he associates with the consciousness-raising programs of Freire, from popular education, which he says is more political and social class oriented and is intended to lead to a more egalitarian and classless society.²² Cariola refers to popular education as participatory education, which he divides into integrative (that is intended to increase participation within the existing social order) and liberative (that is intended to lead to trans-

¹⁹ J. P. McFadden, *Consciousness and Social Change: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire* (Sacramento: California State University, School of Education, 1975).

²⁰ Barreiro (n. 6 above).

²¹ V. P. Paiva, “Antoções para un estudio sobre populismo e educação no Brasil,” *Cuadernos de educación* (1982).

²² J. E. Garcia Huidobro, “Educación popular y nueva hegemonía,” *Revista Latinoamericana de educación* 1 (June 1981): 52–81.

forming institutions and structures critically).²³ Likewise, Wanderley refers to two types of popular education, one for national populism and another for liberation.²⁴

In each instance, the latter alternative falls into what is here called popular education, a term that is associated with the New Left and that is not associated with either capitalist industrial development or socialism but that instead seeks to create a third alternative. Because the ideology and philosophy of popular education is pulled by the New Left toward Socialist states like Nicaragua, such a bias provides the model with a democratic and participatory framework in which the balance of power is intended to shift toward justice for the majority.

Contrasted with a human capital approach, the goals of popular-education efforts are quite distinct. The traditional human capital approach places emphasis on small-scale agrarian or industrial production (involving a combination of private property and social cooperation) and uses technical, financial, and commercial assistance from above. Such enterprises typically remain appendages to large agribusinesses and mass-production industries as providers of essential services, labor, and markets for capital-intensive production. In effect they complement the existing social and economic system. The economic and political results of such an approach have often produced inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income, a polarization of rural and urban workers, and a perpetuation of a cycle of low food costs, cheap labor, a highly skewed income distribution, and upper-class luxury consumption.

The popular-education rhetoric claims to provide an alternative to the human capital approach by espousing small-scale producers who, rather than being satellites organized by large-scale manufacturing and agribusiness, organize an economy that is based on pooled capital, labor, technology, and marketing opportunities in various collaborative and competitive ways. The intent is to utilize self-help, political agitation, rotating capital, and community cooperation to execute flexibly projects that emphasize equality but that still compete effectively in the marketplace. Popular-education programs also attempt to transform rather than to complement basic institutions in society by developing alternative forms of economic and political ventures that affect particular locales or sectors.

While some might suggest that popular education is a recent phenomenon that originated with the work of Freire as a reaction to paternalistic adult education programs, others associate the concept with the historical struggle of the oppressed and the disenfranchised. Puiggrós, for one, traces popular education through the intermittent and disconnected popular

²³ Cariola (n. 4 above).

²⁴ L. E. Wanderley, "Apontamentos sobre a educação popular," *Cultura de Povo* (1979).

struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean, most of which are microscale experiences involving Indians, workers, peasants, women, youth, and intellectuals.²⁵ She also traces the concept to well-known Latin American pedagogues (e.g., Rodriguez, Mariategui, and Freire) as well as to major regional or world political upheavals and changes.

In identifying other major streams of influence that have shaped popular education during the last 20 years, it is important to mention the Catholic church and Marxism. The religious influence was most striking in the Second Vatican Council proclamation in the 1960s that favored liberation theology or the process of reflection about faith as a liberating praxis.²⁶ There emerged from the Second Vatican Council a new theological focus on contemporary reality with an increased awareness of underdevelopment and structural dependency.²⁷ In 1968 at the Episcopal Conference in Medellin, Colombia, liberation-theology concepts were strengthened by an even more direct focus on liberation from oppression and injustice. As Scannone reports, such attention has been concerned primarily with the relation between human and social science in connection with a desire to act politically.²⁸ Liberation theology has been associated with considerable controversy within the church, much of it centering on the avowed connection to Marxist analysis, especially class struggle.

The writings of the Italian Antonio Gramsci are probably the most frequently mentioned Marxist contributions to popular education in the region. In the 1920s Gramsci advocated the need for workers to establish their own cultural values in such a way as to bring together the oppressed and the intellectuals.²⁹ He considered cross-class coalitions (e.g., interests of political allies) as the basis for a movement of the masses. Gramsci argued that workers must be organized into councils at each work site and that such councils would become the matrix for a new proletarian culture. Such a position in the 1920s put him in opposition to both the Communist Left and its emphasis on centralized decision-making bodies (which he referred to as a dictatorship of the Communist party) and to the Communist Right (dominated by the Socialist party) upholding the notion of a representative democracy with a Socialist majority. Instead Gramsci imagined a society in which every process of life was subject to control by the whole mass of producers. He argued that such an outcome

²⁵ Puiggrós (n. 2 above).

²⁶ See, e.g., J. L. Elias, *Conscientization and Deschooling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

²⁷ See, e.g., M. Azevedo, "Opção pelos pobres e cultural secular," *Síntese* 9, no. 26 (1982): 11–26; J. L. Caravías, *Religiosidad campesina y liberación*, vol. 21. Colección de experiencias (Bogotá: Indo American Press, 1978); J. M. Sosa, *Nueva civilización, nueva revolución*, vol. 4. Colección clásicos de la política (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1980).

²⁸ J. C. Scannone, "La teología de la liberación," *Stromata* 38 (1982): 3–40.

²⁹ A. Broccoli, *Antonio Gramsci y la educación como hegemonía* (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1977).

would occur only if workers achieved cultural hegemony in advance of political power.³⁰

The organization of the masses is at the center of Gramsci's conception of change and is the key element in moving beyond Freire's praxis of everyday life and intellectual praxis. Popular educators such as Garcia Huidobro, for example, believe that such organization is necessary to neutralize the political development of the state and its support for the interests of the dominant classes.³¹ But such organizations cannot take the form of mass uprisings that are spontaneous, says Garcia Huidobro, as these groups are characterized by weak organizations and unclear objectives. Instead he says that the organizations must struggle to create, consolidate, and diffuse their conception of the world and society, thereby achieving within the society as a whole a consensus among classes that is accepted as second nature or as common sense. He says that such a struggle must go beyond the economic, political, and legal spheres and include a cultural and ideological consciousness of how the dominant classes use institutions to impose their direction and values on others. Some have referred to such a consciousness as popular culture, or a political attitude underlying social action.³²

While a common approach of popular-education programs organizes the exploited working classes into cooperatives, community enterprises, unions, and so on to make tactical and strategic alliances with other groups and institutions to acquire power and influence, there are many options that may be followed.³³ In the economic arena action can take the form of strikes, hunger marches, and changing the pattern and rhythm of work. In the ideological arena the use of print media, radio and television, and electoral campaigns are a means of socializing and mobilizing mass support. And in the political arena participation in elections and demands for equal treatment and access as well as the public denunciations of the arbitrariness of authority structures can be means to both gain access to power and develop a tradition of social action.³⁴ Popular education therefore attempts to prepare the oppressed to take advantage of opportunities so that they can become more capable of acting for their interests and exercising power in an organized and systematic manner.³⁵ The emphasis is on

³⁰ L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³¹ Garcia Huidobro (n. 22 above), and *La relación educativa en proyectos de educación popular: Análisis de quince casos* (Santiago: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación, 1982).

³² C. Estevam, "A questão da cultura popular," in *Cultura popular educação popular*, ed. O. Favero (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1983).

³³ I. P. Nunez, *Educación popular y movimiento obrero: Un estudio histórico* (Santiago: Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigación en Educación, 1982).

³⁴ M. Harnecker, *Los Conceptos elementales del materialismo histórica* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1982).

³⁵ R. Aguilar Valenzuela, "Educación popular y cambio de estructura," *Educación no formal para adultos: Algúnos temas 3* (1980): 25-35.

tactics that will alter the balance of power in capitalist societies but that typically fall outside violent armed struggle.³⁶

Popular Education in Practice

The practice of popular education often begins with a process of community research, analysis, and action known as participatory investigation. Some see such a process coming from consciousness raising and the attention that Freire places on the language, culture, and problems of the oppressed. Others argue that it is a derivative of the dependency thesis that links control over knowledge to economic and political structures.

Seen as an outgrowth of Freire's approach to literacy instruction, participatory investigation emphasizes the need to identify a minimal core vocabulary that is indicative of the lifeways of the population as part of an overall study of the context in which the population lives. This vocabulary and contextual research, usually conducted by non-community members, forms the basis for consciousness raising, interest group discussions, and the literacy process. In popular education this bias toward community involvement is enhanced as many programs emphasize the importance of engaging the community itself in data collection and in an analysis of its own reality.

Taking the dependency thesis as the basis for participatory investigation challenges traditional conceptions of science and scientific inquiry. Fals Borda, for example, says that scientific inquiry typically reflects the dominant-group interest at any given point in history.³⁷ It is, he suggests, a cultural product of the human intellect, and as such its value is relative to the objective interests of the social classes most involved in the formation and accumulation of information. He calls for an expanded and alternative view of science, a science that reflects the knowledge and behavior of the oppressed who have been victimized by unequal progress brought about by a science controlled from above. Brandão takes a similar tack in arguing the importance of participatory investigation and control from below over the scientific apparatus.³⁸ He defends the value of traditional, community-based knowledge even though from the outside it may not appear to be useful, to be compatible with other perceptions, or to have internal logic and order. He connects this outsider's view of lower-class lifeways with human capital-oriented social service agencies, which he says preserve the political and economic status quo.

³⁶ O. Marques, "Do associativismo à consciencia de classe; educação rural de adultos," *No educação a sociedade* 7 (1980): 111–22.

³⁷ O. Fals Borda, "La ciencia y el pueblo," in Vio Grossi et al., eds. (n. 3 above).

³⁸ C. R. Brandão, "Estructuras sociales de reproducción del saber popular," in *Teoría y práctica de la educación popular*, ed. M. Gajardo (Toronto: International Development Research Center, 1983), and *O ardil da ordem: Caminhos e armadilhas da educação popular* (Rio de Janeiro: Papirus Livraria e Editora, 1983).

Most other authors writing on participatory investigation follow the same line of thinking as that of Fals Borda and Brandão. Yopo Paiva, for example, argues that traditional scientific inquiry is nothing more than a theoretical tradition transformed into a technical practice that is intended to justify and reinforce modern dependency.³⁹ Vio Grossi sees the lower classes in need of the acquisition and development of their own knowledge to determine their own transformation and fate.⁴⁰ And Gajardo believes that participatory investigation must enable participants to influence the design and application of social and educational policies and to promote popular-sector interests, often through representative organizations.⁴¹

The link between participatory-investigation rhetoric and popular education is also made explicit by these authors. Vio Grossi⁴² and Safa,⁴³ for example, outline a series of steps for community-oriented social action that begins with analyses of local and extralocal obstacles and turns to assessments of the causes for their existence and a determination of both objectives and strategies to overcome them. Alternatively, Fals Borda views the need to build participatory investigation into a scheme of observation, reflection, practice, and observation as a cyclical rhythm of social action.⁴⁴ And Gajardo sees participatory investigation as a way to clarify political and labor options for marginal groups in the population, to identify and analyze contradictions in the structural determinants of social reality, to incorporate the masses into a consciousness-raising educational process so that they share in its planning and implementation, and to ensure the existence of research activities so that proposals for social action emerge along with theoretical constructs for social change.⁴⁵

While such action-research goals may not be completely attained through participatory investigation, there is case-study evidence indicating that attempts are being made.⁴⁶ As suggested in these cases, participatory

³⁹ B. Yopo Paiva, *Metodología de la investigación participativa* (Pátzcuaro, México: Centro Regional de Educación de Adultos y Alfabetización Funcional para América Latina, 1981).

⁴⁰ F. Vio Grossi, "La educación de adultos y el desarrollo rural: Algunos comentarios sobre convergencias y divergencias en el caso de Latinoamérica," *Educación de Adultos y Desarrollo* 20 (1983): 87–98.

⁴¹ M. Gajardo, "Investigación participativa: Propuestas y proyectos," *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Educativos* 13 (1983): 49–85.

⁴² Vio Grossi (n. 3 above).

⁴³ C. Safa, "Investigación participativa sobre educación no formal para adultos," *Educación, revista del consejo nacional técnico de la educación* 7 (1981): 93–98.

⁴⁴ Fals Borda (n. 37 above).

⁴⁵ Gajardo, "Investigación participativa" (n. 41 above).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; M. García Olvera, "La educación no formal para adultos a partir de una experiencia de investigación participativa," *Educación no formal para adultos: Algunos Temas* 1 (1981): 17–28; S. García Angulo, "Educación y desarrollo autogestionados—una experiencia en el Valle de Metzquitlan," in *La organización de los campesinos y los problemas de la investigación participativa*, ed. J. Fuentes Moruna (Morelia, México).

investigation is not simply a technique to engage the community members in diagnosis and problem solving. Its significance lies with challenging traditional approaches to explaining social reality and acting on it. Thus it is founded on the idea that traditional scientific inquiry has perpetuated the dominant group's control over which questions and issues are researched, how they are researched, and which resolutions to those issues are outlined. An example of the importance of this power and control over knowledge and its use in social-action efforts can be seen in the health delivery field, where participatory investigation and popular education are increasingly combined to redefine issues and to act on them in new and different ways.⁴⁷

This alternative perspective on health status can be seen in a program of health delivery in Guatemala among the Cakchiquel Indians.⁴⁸ Behrhorst, who coordinated the program, reports having changed health-status priorities from curative medicine to social action designed to correct social and economic injustices that were the causes of poor nutrition, sanitation, child-birth practices, and so on. Behrhorst argues that health programs must be engaged in questions of land ownership, local leadership, meeting financial needs of community members, and organizing individuals into local health committees. This model of health delivery varies considerably from the human capital model of training medical professionals, building clinics and dispensing services on a fee-for-profit basis, extension programs through the media, and so on. Instead the Behrhorst approach is tied to community control of knowledge and to the use of that knowledge for social action.

Popular-Education Strategies

As can be detected in the health care example above, knowledge generation at the local level through participatory investigation is only the first step in popular-education programs. Also involved is the mobilization of the community as individuals are expected to proceed from analysis to identification of avenues of action to improve their socioeconomic and political power. For this reason, most popular-education programs go beyond single-problem areas such as health delivery and are aimed at penetrating economic and political structures. For most of the Latin American and Caribbean regions the basic structures are those associated with capitalism. Therefore, popular education must be both adaptive to survive within this context and change oriented to achieve its objectives.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., L. M. A. Atucha and C. D. Crone, "A Participatory Methodology for Integrating Literacy and Health Education in Honduras," *Convergence* 15 (1982): 70–81.

⁴⁸ C. Behrhorst, "The Chimaltenango Development Project in Guatemala," in *Health by the People*, ed. K. W. Newell (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1975).

Popular Education: Problems and Prospects

It is possible to divide examples of popular-education programs into two types. The first is oriented to initiating and servicing either a large number of communities or the organizations within those communities drawn from across a geographic region or an entire nation.⁴⁹ The other is oriented to a single community, with facilitators typically living and working in conjunction with community members in designing and carrying out a program for action.⁵⁰ The first type of program acts as a broker, facilitator, and service agent for communities and organizations engaged in popular-education activity. It might provide organizational advice, training, technical assistance, and so on and usually does so in an effort to provide some common ideology and practice and thereby to federate or link organizations across a region.⁵¹

For an appraisal of the service-oriented and single-community efforts of popular education, there exists a considerable descriptive literature to draw on, including some comparative studies of programs within and across countries.⁵² But such an appraisal depends also on evidence of effects, about which still relatively little is known. One way to organize the findings that do exist is to begin with popular-education aspirations. Three goals seem to be mentioned most often. First, popular education is expected to assist in the promotion of a coherent organization in which decision-making mechanisms are participatory. Second, in accord with the ideas of Gramsci and others, popular education is to forge linkages

⁴⁹ See, e.g., J. Bosco Pinto, "Liberation through Education: Theoretical Premises"; S. Schmelkes, "Educación popular y campesinado" (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Educativos, 1981); J. Werthein, "Sistema integrado de educação rural: Sier a experiência de Pernambuco," in *Educação rural no terceiro mundo*, ed. J. Werthein and J. D. Bordenave (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1981), and *Educación de adultos en los procesos de desarrollo rural* (Santiago: Oficina Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe, 1983).

⁵⁰ See, e.g., S. Schmelkes, "Educación no formal en la organización económica campesina," *Educación: Revista del consejo nacional técnico de la educación* 7 (1981): 103-6; G. Tapia Soko, *Unidad de capacitación campesina (UCCA): Una experiencia de educación popular con una confederación sindical* (Santiago: CETRA/CEAL, 1983); G. Hernández Franco, "El Proyecto educativo de los grupos étnicos de México: La educación indígena bilingüe bicultural," in *Alternativas de educación para grupos culturalmente diferenciados: Estudios de casos* (Pátzcuaro, México: Centro Regional de Educación de Adultos y Alfabetización Funcional para América Latina, 1982).

⁵¹ See, e.g., A. Janssens, *El alcance y desarrollo de la acción popular a partir de la educación no formal* (Caracas: Centro al Servicio de la Acción Popular, 1984); and Luft (n. 14 above).

⁵² See, e.g., Céspedes Ruiz et al. (n. 5 above); Luft (n. 14 above); García (n. 31 above); J. Ochoa and J. E. García Huidobro, "Tendencias de la investigación sobre educación de adultos y educación no formal en América Latina," in *Ensayos sobre la educación no formal en América Latina*, ed. C. A. Torres (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Educativos, 1982); M. D. Sánchez, E. Almeida, S. Blas, and F. Luis, "Investigación participativa en el proyecto de San Miguel Tzinacapan," in *La organización de los campesinos y los problemas de la investigación participativa*, ed. J. Fuentes (Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Social y Acción Comunal, 1982); and R. Maguire, *Bottom-up Development in Haiti*, 2d ed. (Roslyn, Va.: Inter-American Foundation, 1981).

across and within social classes to gain greater economic and political power for the poor.⁵³ Finally, popular education is intended to assist in designing strategies that shift concentrations of power to the poor. To what extent is popular education achieving these aims?

Regarding the first aspiration, or the creation of participatory organizations, there are two aspects that are often repeated in the literature. One is the dependence on outside leadership, and the other concerns the importance of participatory community structures. As to the dependency of programs, some authors indicate the indispensable nature of outside intervention in explaining the success of programs,⁵⁴ while others advocate the advantages of utilizing local leadership and indigenous institutions.⁵⁵ Many argue against the intrusion of outside agents as local participants are said to lose confidence in their own knowledge,⁵⁶ are dominated rather than treated as equals,⁵⁷ and fail to gain a clear understanding of the change process or the objectives of their own efforts.⁵⁸

Overall, in much the same way that many human capital programs are concerned with not establishing dependent relationships with communities, activists in popular education view such external control as antithetical to its goals. Brandão, for example, reports that, even though popular education often operates under critical and engaging concepts, many programs suffer from what he terms a "colonizer bias."⁵⁹ In other words, agencies administering programs too often fail to move from traditional top-down organizational structures to participatory structures. Such a position is reinforced by Garcia Huidobro, who characterizes such relationships as manipulation, domination, and "improvement by subjugation."⁶⁰ Some suggest that agencies such as the Catholic church are

⁵³ S. Gómez-Tagle, "Educación popular y clase obrera," *Nueva antropología* 6 (1983): 63–82; Escobar Guerrero (n. 3 above).

⁵⁴ See, e.g., M. M. Alves, *A força do povo: Democracia participativa em Lages* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense); J. Moulton, "Development through Training: Animation Rurale," in *Nonformal Education and National Development*, ed. J. Bock and G. Papagiannis (New York: Praeger, 1983); and Centro de Arte y Acción Popular, "Comunidad andina: Alternativas políticas de desarrollo," *Cuadernos de discusión popular* 4 (1981).

⁵⁵ See, e.g., M. P. Bazdresch, "Una historia relacionada con las cooperativas promovidas por IMDEC-SECOOPIM contada per algunoas notables cooperativistas" (Guadalajara, Mexico: IMDEC-SECOOPIM 1983); "Sistema integrado de educação rural" (n. 49 above).

⁵⁶ N. Matayoshi, "Identidad étnica y recuperación cultural," *CHASQUI: Revista Latinoamericana de comunicación* 5 (1983): 43–47; L. Rojas Aspiazú, "Ayni Ruway," in *Alternativas de educación para grupos culturalmente diferenciados: Estudios de casos* (Pátzcuaro, México: Centro Regional de Educación de Adultos y Alfabetización Funcional para América Latina, 1983).

⁵⁷ H. P. Gerhardt, "Angicos Rio Grade de Norte 1962/1963: A primeira experiencia como 'Sistema Paulo Freire,'" *Educação e sociedade* 5 (1983): 5–34.

⁵⁸ Gajardo, "Educación popular y experiencias concientizadoras en América Latina" (n. 11 above).

⁵⁹ Brandão, *O ardil da ordem* (n. 38 above).

⁶⁰ Garcia Huidobro, *La relación educativa en proyectos de educación popular* (n. 31 above).

not above using popular education to widen control over, rather than to liberate, local communities.⁶¹

As for the participatory nature of community structures, the evidence must be viewed in relation to the frequent external dependence. Thus, while communities may be making strides toward organizing their own institutions and assuming responsibility for them,⁶² the majority of programs might be better viewed as in a stage where community members and external agents are in a negotiation posture regarding who will make decisions and how those decisions will be made.⁶³ What does seem to be apparent is that the community must have considerable practice at being participatory. In this regard, those programs that have advocated participatory investigation may be in a relatively stronger position for ongoing negotiations with external change agents.

But even if strides have been made in the organization and participation of community members in their own determination of issues and their resolution, this is not a new accomplishment for community-based change programs. Advocates of the human capital model, for example, can claim considerable accomplishment during the last 30 years through community development and integrated development frameworks for the organization of community groups. In fact, the differences between community development and popular education in this regard appear to depend more on the type of society envisioned and who is facilitating or leading the community to action rather than on a major difference in strategy or tactics. Hence, with regard to organization and participation, both community development and popular education are often similar in practice. What often distinguishes them is the rhetoric and ideology that form their foundations and establish their goals.

A risk in both models is that community organization and participation will become an end in itself with local communities going through the steps to create a viable decision-making structure, only to learn that the structure is used mainly by outsiders to serve outside interests.⁶⁴ Thus self-help organizations and their participation can become a means to serve the opportunistic middlemen and brokers.⁶⁵ These outsiders control political and economic structures and take advantage of such organizations to channel information and influence, thereby manipulating the community

⁶¹ M. N. Damasceno, "A prática educativa popular de igreja e as dificuldades desta em liderar com a diferenciação econômica de camesinato," *Educação e sociedade* 6 (1984): 14–25.

⁶² See, e.g., Céspedes Ruiz et al. (n. 5 above).

⁶³ A. Delpiano, A. Magendzo, R. Aguirre, and H. Contardo, *El problema de la participación en la educación popular: Análisis crítico de una experiencia*, Documentos de Trabajo no. 3 (Santiago: Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigación Educativa, 1984).

⁶⁴ Rebeil (n. 16 above).

⁶⁵ Cervantes (n. 15 above).

for their own gains. Such has been the legacy of much community social action, and there is little reason to believe that popular education, if it only sought to organize local groups, would not go the same way. Of course it seeks much more, which leads me to the second aspiration.

A second aspiration of popular education is to forge linkages across and within social classes to gain greater economic and political power. Here the evidence suggests that popular education has made strides to link communities within social classes but has failed to do so across social classes. Although middle-class professionals are occasionally at work with lower classes at the community level, it is apparent that the chosen vehicle for change in popular education is the lower class rather than a coalition of classes. This is not to deny the existence of election movements in the early 1980s in several countries in South America (especially Brazil) or the antirepression efforts in countries such as Chile that involved individuals from various social classes. The question is whether the poor and the disenfranchised have been the focus for such efforts and whether the mobilization activities can be referred to as popular-education programs. To the contrary, the implementation evidence suggests that popular education often involves the poor as a battering ram against those in power. While this strategy may prove viable—as it has been in some areas where unions or other forms of worker federations have become strong advocates for workers' rights—it is contradictory to the notion of the unification of members from various strata in accord with popular-education rhetoric. Instead through popular education it is not common to find the organization of political, commercial, or other powerful interest groups in the community on behalf of the poor or on behalf of the goals of a given popular-education program.

The importance of this issue is highlighted by Huizer, who studied peasant organizations to learn something about the conditions that must be favorable to their rise.⁶⁶ He notes that important movements, including those associated with Freire in northeastern Brazil in the 1950s and early 1960s, usually did not begin in the poorest, most marginal areas. Instead most sites of such movements had easy access to major cities and were led by individuals who did not come from peasant backgrounds. It is such urban/rural and multiclass efforts that popular education espouses, but there is little evidence that reality reflects much programmatic action.

The third aspiration associated with popular education is the transfer of power from dominant groups to the poor and the disenfranchised. Although the rhetoric is heavy with the need for such structural trans-

⁶⁶ G. Huizer, "The Strategy of Peasant Mobilization: Some Cases from Latin America and Southeast Asia," in *Popular Participation in Social Change: Cooperatives, Collectives and Nationalized Industry*, ed. J. Nash, J. Dandler, and N. S. Hopkins (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

formations,⁶⁷ the evidence suggests that relatively little shift has occurred. Here is where popular education is especially constrained in its existence in capitalist countries, where the industrial growth model is dominant.⁶⁸ While such education may be viewed as preparation for an ultimate assault on, or rebellion against, capitalism, some contend that it is unlikely on its own to bring about a radical change in the social order in the absence of major shifts in the balance of political power or the distribution of economic rewards.⁶⁹ Marques, for example, points to the false aspirations raised by capitalism and the difficulty of raising class consciousness to confront them critically.⁷⁰ In effect, such education may be little more than an ideological palliative that sustains capitalism by envisioning improvement that is not possible.⁷¹

The reasons that popular education may be more stabilizing than change oriented include a lack of political tradition at the local level that fosters popular struggles or political movements.⁷² When there is such political action, it is often narrow and controlled by the dominant sectors. Additionally, popular education fails to bring about structural change because of the limited social and political space available within which to initiate such change. Again the dominant groups often dictate the space within which such change is permitted, and the popular educator has little experience moving across such boundaries. A third reason that such programs fail to achieve their structural change objective is that they lack the strategic frameworks to guide their implementation in the face of adversity and opposition.

But none of these reasons appear to discourage those who believe that popular education must be pursued if the poor in the region are going to enhance their status and power. Instead, at least in some countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, there is evidence of continued growth in popular-education activity. Perhaps the driving force behind such efforts has relatively little to do with being able to measure, in some scientific or pseudoscientific way, concrete material progress or even changes in knowledge, values, and attitudes. Instead popular education's attrac-

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Estevam (n. 32 above); Céspedes Ruiz et al. (n. 5 above); J. T. Guzmán, "Proyecto Buenavista, Macupana Tabasco," *Revista Latinoamericana de estudios educativos* 11 (1981): 133–40; M. Del Rio Grimm, M. Fernández, and P. Latapi, "La sistematización de proyectos de educación no formal en América Latina," *Revista Latinoamericana de estudios educativos* 3 (1982): 85–96; and Gómez-Tagle (n. 53 above).

⁶⁸ A. Glidden, *Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

⁶⁹ Cervantes (n. 15 above); Gajardo, "Educación popular y experiencias concientizadoras en América Latina" (n. 11 above).

⁷⁰ Marques (n. 36 above).

⁷¹ S. Bowles, "Education, Class Conflict and Uneven Development," in *The Education Dilemma*, ed. J. Simmons (New York: Pergamon, 1980).

⁷² Rebeil (n. 16 above); Tovar Gómez (n. 17 above); Aguilar Valenzuela (n. 35 above).

tiveness may be related to the dismal record of human capital programs and the avoidance of more radical clandestine efforts, both of which often leave little room for those who have been repressed to participate effectively in their own development. In other words there is a feeling that avoidance of what has not worked and placing confidence in what might work in some distant future may be the best hope given the alternatives.