Popular education and social creativity

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We are living in turbulent times. For some years now we have been witness to the most significant and vicious cuts to the welfare state which are affecting 90% of the inhabitants in Europe. Vicious because they are focusing on the weakest sections of society: older people, people with disability, the new poor who are losing their homes, their work, the life they once lived. Whilst we have austerity for the poor and vulnerable, money is available for the banks and big companies that are behind the current global financial crisis. On the other hand individuals are abandoned to their own fate.

But these dark times have also been times for hope, for creativity, for social and popular organization: residents resisting evictions, individuals embracing public health care and defending hospitals for all, citizens fighting for good public education. In short, at present time we are watching how common people are building new forms of resistance. And this resistance demonstrates creativity and solidarity.

People are creating new forms of compassion based on an understanding of the lives of others, people are learning about the problems and hopes of their neighbours and fellow citizens. In this scenario of crisis something is arising from people's hopes, aspirations and desires: the dream that other forms of popular organization at different levels of society are possible. In this issue of *Freirean Rhizome* we try to reflect on the role of popular education which has the responsibility to create both hope and innovative forms of resistance.

Jim Crowther presents the role and activities of the International Popular Education Network as an exceptional network joining university teachers, community activists, members of social movements and other individuals interested in building new ways to examine and stimulate the role of education in helping to realise the dreams and desires of ordinary people; a true education which seeks to inform and learn from action to change the daily life of the oppressed and exploited. Freire called it *concientização*. As Freire stated, it emerges from a liberating praxis – a creative dynamic between ideas and action – where teaching, learning,

transformative actions and an irrepressible hope are present and developed.

Brid Connolly links popular education with community and insists on the role of creativity in social change as exemplified in methodologies as the *Theatre of the Oppressed*. It is important that people learn skills to express their creativity and share it with others. Theatre is a powerful experience for achieving that.

Deborah Durnan and her colleagues present educational practices which show how popular education can be a really useful resource for people on the margins of society. It can help people to edify self-esteem, a belief in their own resources and a different approach to resolve conflicts.

Finally, Vernon Galloway focuses on the training of popular educators. It is very important to engage people to work together with others in democratic and participatory ways. But Vernon also suggests we need a new task: to create spaces for a liberating education in institutions – such as the universities – which do not have a proclivity for this task. We must promote creativity and popular education inside the walls of the educational establishments as well as outside of them. That is why popular education is both political and educational as well as being both necessary and urgent in the post-welfare times we are now living in.