

Tips for Popular Education

1) Backwards Planning.

Start with three objectives or goals that you hope to accomplish in your lesson, and plan from there.

2) Popular Education is creative, dynamic, and engaging.

In theory and practice, it is the opposite of the “banking” style of education, in which teachers “deposit” ideas in the minds of students.

In contrast, popular education is both hands-on and minds-on!

Through experience, learners gain insights and grow intellectually to see the big ideas and the relationships between different issues.

3) Ask questions.

Questions should be open-ended and lead to the investigation of issues we are trying to transform.

They should be thought-provoking, engaging, and spark discussion or debate.

It should call for higher-order thinking, including analysis, inference, evaluation.

The best questions raise additional question and spark further inquiry.

4) Active listening.

Teaching is primarily an exercise in listening. Demonstrate understanding through eye contact and body language.

5) Affirmations.

Affirm the feelings and ideas of participants to build an atmosphere of trust and risk-taking.

Encourage everyone to share, particularly people who are often silenced in our society, including women, people of color, people with disabilities, etc.

6) Paraphrase, summarize, and kick-back.

Briefly rephrase participants' comments or feelings and summarize the theme (or multiple themes) running through a conversation. This can clarify points, affirm ideas, and encourage elaboration. Follow up with another question (kick-back).

7) Oftentimes, it is best to kick-back participants' question to the rest of the group.

For example, Student: "Is capitalism inherently unequal?" Teacher: "What does everyone think?"

8) Put closure on discussions.

Try not to leave dialogue unresolved, even if the resolution is the say we don't have the answers and we will have to return to this later. It may be necessary to approach individuals after the workshop for additional closure. Also, if you don't have the answer to a question, welcome participants to do some research.

9) Break into small groups or pairs.

This gets all people to participate and breaks up the monotony of large group workshops. One powerful model is think-pair-share. Start with giving people some time to reflect and freewrite, have them share their freewrite in pairs or threes, then have each pair or three share with the larger group.

10) Other ideas for activities.

- Skits
- Freewriting
- Fishbowl
- Problem Tree
- Dot-mocracy