



**MINISTERIAL SPECIAL  
PROJECT ON THE FUTURE  
OF THE HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

## Traditions of Popular Education

In South Africa we witness a process of re-mobilisation of community and workplace struggles. In a recent national workshop of popular educators participants recognized that and said: "This process is directly related to popular education."

*Re-Membering Traditions of Popular Education (PE): towards comprehending and informing community education policy and provision* is a project that investigates past and current popular education in South Africa. It began in March 2013 and runs until November, 2014.

In end-January, the project is going 'live' on the internet: [www.populareducation.co.za](http://www.populareducation.co.za)  
Please check it out!



## Background

In South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, there were many community and workers' organisations and civil society movements. Most of them identified strongly with anti-apartheid struggles, alternative development paradigms and social justice agendas. Many engaged also in education. They often worked in direct opposition to the formal education system because they saw it as a reflection of authoritarian, racist and capitalist relations.

Popular education sought to recognise and validate people's experiences, knowledge and skills.

These days, many younger people are no longer clear about popular education. They are forgetting African and other philosophers and writers and they don't know about learning and working together. There are new initiatives of popular education that build on old traditions and some embrace new forms of technology and mobilisation.

## A national project investigating traditions of popular education

*Re-Membering Traditions of Popular Education* is one of the 'catalytic' projects of the new *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences* initiated and supported by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

It is led by Prof. Shirley Walters of the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) at University of Western Cape (UWC) and includes many other universities and community-based organisations and trade unions.



## What this project is about

This project seeks to inspire alternative forms of education provision that benefit working class and poor people. It aims to achieve three things:

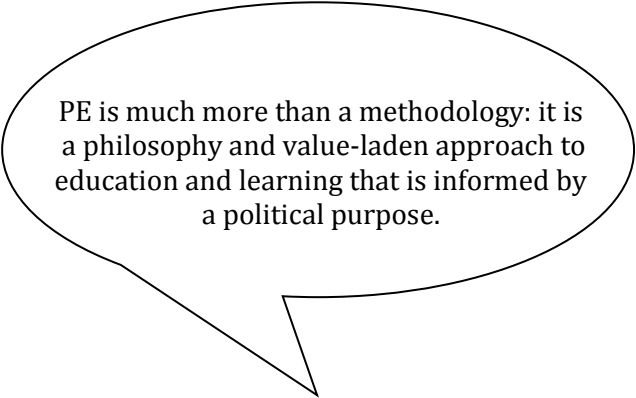
- \* Begin a lively and productive dialogue on popular education traditions both inside South Africa, and beyond. A network of researchers and practitioners is committed to the praxis (critical reflection and action) of popular education.
- \* Begin to un-cover and re-cover forgotten traditions of popular learning and education amongst different groups of women and men, urban and rural, old and young. To this end, the project undertakes a 'mapping' of existing collections of records and materials, and organisations and people who were/are instrumental to traditions of popular education.
- \* Identify useful models and practices, both past and present that can feed into the design of a comprehensive education provision accessible to all people and in particular, working class and poor people.

## What is popular education (PE)?

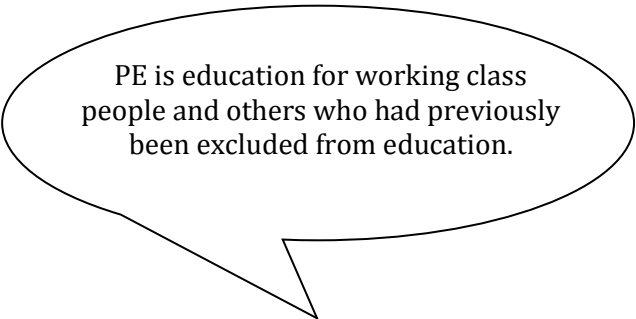
Popular education is a contested term and practice – there are many competing understandings of what constitutes popular education.

Most people agree that popular education is underpinned by the value of social justice both in process and in proposed outcomes. It is committed to changing systems that are unjust and oppressive.

It is impossible to talk about popular education outside of the context of struggle.



PE is much more than a methodology: it is a philosophy and value-laden approach to education and learning that is informed by a political purpose.



PE is education for working class people and others who had previously been excluded from education.

## Why is popular education important?

We have many current examples of popular education in South Africa. For example *The Workers College* in Durban develops worker and community leaders through providing educational opportunities for students selected from participating trade unions and community organisations. The College also promotes debates on working class perspectives on a range of issues (RPL, Race, Class, Gender, Economic etc.);

The *Treatment Action Campaign* (TAC) employed PE to inform people about living with HIV / AIDS, the use of and access to anti-retroviral drugs, and mobilized mass support for their actions;

*Durban South Basin environmental groups* taught people how to measure air quality and use the data for their struggle against polluting industries;

*Feminist popular education* continues to deepen understanding of gender justice and how the struggle for women is fundamental to building a democratic, just society;

*The Popular Education Programme* is a grassroots-based programme that offers popular education 'schools' in / around Cape Town and the Western Cape as a way to strengthen local organisations' and communities' capacity to organise and act on specific problems affecting them.

Popular Education is often the only site where people can acquire and develop critical consciousness in dialogue with others and plan actions that both end domination and strengthen coherence and solidarity. Unlike other education, popular education is a deliberate tool for movements and initiatives in the service of social justice.

## How can you contribute?

- ✓ Check out the website [www.populareducation.co.za](http://www.populareducation.co.za) when it goes live in end-January!
- ✓ Contribute news, information of interest, documents and stories from past and present; add links to other useful related websites and upload popular education materials
- ✓ Adapt and use the materials that are freely down-loadable for your own popular education classes
- ✓ Find out who offers popular education workshops and classes so you can participate and learn more about the practice
- ✓ Draw on and be inspired by stories and reports of struggles that used popular education to conscientise and activate people for change
- ✓ Give us feed-back: what else would you like to see here?
- ✓ Look out for news about the traveling exhibition and compilation of stories with model practices planned for late 2014; these will serve as catalysts for dialogue and inspire action
- ✓ For more information and/or to be put on our database, please send an e-mail to [info@populareducation.co.za](mailto:info@populareducation.co.za)

