

About Training for Change

Since 1992 Training for Change has been committed to increasing capacity around the world for activist training. When we say activist training, we mean training that helps groups stand up more effectively for justice, peace and the environment. We deliver skills directly that people working for social change can use in their daily work. Training for Change has trained over a thousand trainers in its unique, empowerment approach and over ten thousand activists around the world.

*We call our particular approach the **direct education** approach.*

WHAT IS DIRECT EDUCATION?

Direct action means actions that directly confront and challenge the current system of injustice; *direct education* means education that directly confronts and challenges the current system of injustice -- which includes how people are taught.

Rather than traditional education, which gives all the expertise to textbooks and teachers, *direct education* invites the expertise of the people themselves. Direct education is about liberation and empowerment -- going to the *direct* source of wisdom: the group itself!

Direct education is rooted in experiential or popular education, started by Brazilian educator Paulo Friere -- and then adds to it. We've learned lessons from dozens of different teaching modalities and approaches; we take the useful elements and make those skills accessible in our training of trainer workshops. (Sometimes we call ourselves the "Robin Hood" of training -- stealing from modalities/technologies that activists would normally not have access to and delivering them to activists).

WHAT MAKES THE DIRECT EDUCATION APPROACH DIFFERENT THAN OTHER EXPERIENTIAL APPROACHES?

We're glad that participatory training has become more widespread -- and we still find our approach unique. For example, many training approaches are still curriculum-centered. So the activist trainer when designing a workshop reviews her/his knowledge base to determine what they think is the most important information, then delivers that info with the help of participatory exercises -- have the group do an exercise, then tell participants what the answers are.

We believe in a group-centered approach, where the trainer sees themselves as empowering people to discover their own expertise and that of each other. The trainers challenge is to design and lead a workshop that helps the group access their own wisdom.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ELEMENTS OF TFC'S DIRECT EDUCATION APPROACH?

EMERGENT DESIGN

In our approach, facilitators learn how to plan the beginning of the workshop and include diagnostic tools within it, and then create the rest of the workshop in light of the emerging needs and dynamics in the group, staying loyal to the learning goals. In that way, the facilitator stays open to what issues, challenges, and growth edges the group presents. (Of course pre-designed workshops can sometimes be highly effective, but emergent design can make the most of the "teachable moments" which arise.)

WORKSHOP AS LABORATORY

Experiential education is a four-step model: experience, reflect, generalize, apply. Without application in the workshop, the information is often not internalized, and there is little difference back home. One way to design for this challenge is to create the workshop as a lab in which participants try new behaviors.

DIFFERENCE/ DIVERSITY AS NOT ONLY A CONTENT AREA, BUT A THEME RUNNING THROUGH THE WORKSHOP

We believe a cross-cultural and anti-oppression commitment shows up at every level of facilitation (design, exercises used, etc). Therefore, we are constantly paying attention to the group's dynamics of its mainstream and margin, and stay ready to support the group to go deeper.

Teachable moments on diversity often arise from unwitting expression of stereotypes or sexist or other behaviors. Because we are open to the group and use emergent design, we use the teachable moments to the max. At a recent Super-T the group worked for hours "peeling the onion" after the facilitator observed that a growth edge for the group was racism.

DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

Traditional education stresses reading, writing, and lectures as the major modes of learning. We recognize people learn in all sorts of different ways: visual, auditory, through the body (kinesthetic), through heart connection, and more. We therefore design for a diversity of learning styles -- for example using group challenge exercises and other kinesthetic tools, instead of relying only on auditory and visual learning channels.

LEARNING AS RISK TAKING

TFC trainers operate on the principle that deep learning is change, and change requires risk, and the facilitator's job is to invite risk and make it safe to risk. This not only has design and facilitation implications (such as intentional container-building), but also implies that the facilitators themselves need to take risks, including the risk of transparency to the participants.

There are many more characteristics of TFC's unique direct education approach, especially when we move into the arena of cross-cultural workshops, and how to teach diversity, nonviolent action and strategy in nonjudgemental ways, but this gives a taste for our work.

For more information, contact us:

Training for Change • www.TrainingForChange.org