

Adult and Popular Education in Timor Leste

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This paper introduces the adult and popular education stream at the 2011 Timor-Leste Studies conference. This is the second conference of the Timor-Leste Studies Association held in Dili, following on from the one held in July 2009, and the second time that a group of popular educators from Australia, Timor-Leste and other parts of the world are using the opportunity presented by the Conference to analyse and reflect on the role of adult and popular education in Timor-Leste. In 2009, we reflected on and systematised the experiences of people who had been working on popular education projects in Timor-Leste, including members of the Dai Popular network, Timor-Leste's own popular education network; two OPMT women who were veterans of the first popular education campaign in Timor-Leste, the 1975 literacy campaign led by the student union UNETIM; the Cuban educators who were working with the Ministry of Education on the current national literacy campaign; and several Australian adult educators who were part of the international Popular Education Network. To assist us in systematising our work at that Conference, we invited an Argentinian popular educator, Daniel Schugurensky, who at that time was Director of the Transformative Learning Centre at the University of Toronto in Canada.

In 2011, we are asking how adult education builds community leadership, and enables people to become active participants in the democratic process. My aim in this paper is to introduce the stream. I begin with a brief discussion of what is meant by adult education in general, and popular education in particular, with reference to some of the history of popular education which is relevant to Timor-Leste today. I then outline what we did at the last Conference, before providing a brief overview of the papers to be presented in the stream this year. I finish by explaining the concept of systematisation, drawing on Daniel Schugurensky's 2009 paper, which is included in the Proceedings of this stream of the Conference.

What is Popular Education?

Popular education refers to a particular type of education work with adults, which dates back to the 19th Century movements for democracy and national independence in Europe and other parts of the world. In the histories written in English about popular education, its origins are usually linked to the Chartist movement, which campaigned for democratic rights among the new industrial working class in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s (Johnson 1988). In the second half of the nineteenth century, popular education became associated with the international socialist movement which began to spread through Europe and into the Americas, Asia and Africa. In Latin America, it was also associated with the national independence struggles in Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and elsewhere. Among the ideas that these movements promoted were that education was for all the people, not just for elites, and that, in the words of the Chartists, "a peoples education is safe only in the peoples hands." The Chartists were also known for promoting the idea of "really useful knowledge", which they spoke of as "the knowledge we need to get ourselves out of our present troubles." Paulo Freire defined it in terms of creating 'popular power', or 'peoples' power, as we might say today: Popular education postulates, then, the effort of mobilizing and organizing the popular classes with the goal of creating a popular power (cited Torres 1992, 55). Popular education can be summarised simply as mass education initiated by and in support of movements for social and political change (Boughton 1997; Kane 2001; Crowther et al 2005).

As the tide of revolutionary change ebbed in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, popular education in the west became domesticated into more conventional forms of adult education provided by the modern capitalist state. Adult education, as it now was called, was largely run by universities and Ministries of Education, and slowly lost most of its connection with radical social movements. By the 1950s, it had become a highly-professionalised field of practice, a sub-discipline within education.

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However, as this was happening in Europe, popular education was re-emerging in the colonial countries on the periphery of world capitalism, in activities such as the mass literacy campaigns of the Chinese nationalist and communist forces (Boshier and Yan 2010), and in independence movements throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America (Arnové and Graff 1987). In the 1960s, the works of Paulo Freire in Brazil were translated from Portuguese into English, giving new life to the idea of popular education in the west. However, Freire was only one among many leading popular educators in this period, and he himself was the first to acknowledge how much of his inspiration and ideas reflected what was being done all over the world in anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements (Schugurensky 2011). Cuba's mass literacy campaign in 1961 was one such source of inspiration, and the Cubans also played a role in helping to export this tradition of mass education to the revolutionary anti-colonial movements in the Portuguese colonies of Africa, in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau (Prez Cruz 2007). Three key features of twentieth century popular education were mass literacy campaigns, politically-focused education which aimed to mobilise people to join the struggle for independence and freedom, and the promotion of alternative and indigenous forms of education, especially through drama, song, poetry and popular culture.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the western countries which had largely domesticated popular education into adult education were also exporting their newly-professionalised models into countries of the Global South, increasingly calling it 'non-formal' education, to distinguish it from school and university education, which was said to be the 'formal' education system. This work was supported and sponsored by UNESCO and funded by the international aid agencies of the western governments. Sometimes these western-sponsored adult education programs made common cause with the more revolutionary and transformative practice associated with the national liberation movements; but more often, while they emphasised human rights and education for all, and highlighted the need to overcome the problem of adult illiteracy, donor-led non-formal adult education lacked the sharp political and ideological critique of imperialism and colonialism which characterised the popular education work of the national liberation movements.

Popular education in Timor-Leste

At the last Timor-Leste Studies Conference, several papers discussed the introduction of popular education into Timor-Leste, which occurred with the rise of the national independence movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The best-known example is the 1974-1975 mass literacy campaign launched by FRETILIN and the student union UNETIM, which is further analysed in several papers presented to this session. As detailed in research by Da Silva, Cabral, myself and others, Timor-Leste's first popular educators included the students of the *Casa dos Timores* who had learned about popular education when studying in Portugal at the time of the Carnation Revolution. Their main sources were the works of the African independence leaders like Amílcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau, and the Maoist tendency in the Portuguese revolutionary student movement. Through these sources, they also knew about Paulo Freire and his revolutionary approach to mass illiteracy. The literacy manual they produced, *Ra Timor Ra Ita Nian*, reflects these influences, combining basic literacy instruction with political education, cultural traditions such as *tebe tebe* and popular song (Cabral 2002; Da Silva 2011).

Popular education continued in the mountains after the Indonesian invasion, and this is documented in Antero Da Silva's doctoral thesis, soon to be completed. After the fall of Matebian in 1978, it continued through the underground networks of the resistance, surfacing in a more public way among the students studying in Dili and Indonesia in the 1990s. Several organisations formed in the last period of the Indonesian occupation to promote the independence struggle practiced and promoted popular education, including the Sahe Study Club, the Student Solidarity Council and the young women's organisation GFFTL (Durnan 2005). The mobilisation of the population to vote for independence in the 1999 referendum was a dramatic and heroic example of Timor-Leste's strong tradition of popular education, handed down from those first leaders in 1974-75, almost all of whom had lost their lives in the struggle (Da Silva 2011).

Since independence, many different groups have maintained their commitment to popular education, but this tradition has tended to be marginalised in debates around the content and purpose of education in the new Timor-Leste. Increasingly, these debates are dominated by powerful international organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, who prefer 'non-formal' adult

education to the more politicised and radical view of education associated with the popular education tradition. It should not escape our attention that this is like the attempt to domesticate popular education which occurred in the west in the last century, as I described above. Nevertheless, popular education survives in the work of many local NGOs, and is also being revived, as we will hear at this Conference, in the political education work of at least one political party, namely FRETILIN. The national literacy campaign initiated in 2006 by the FRETILIN government at that time, and supported by the adviser mission from Cuba, can also be seen as an example of the popular education tradition, even though it lacks the political education content associated with the earlier mass campaign (Boughton 2010).

Introducing the Papers in this Stream

We are fortunate to have a total of twelve papers and presentations being offered in this stream, in both Tetum and English. A selection of these papers is reproduced in the Conference Proceedings.

Following this introductory paper, Antero Da Silva will present in Tetum, on a post-literacy model. His paper is entitled *Dezenvolve modelu edukasaun Pos-alfabetizasaun*. This is followed by Zelia Fernandes, who will also present in Tetum, summarizing the outcomes from a Popular Education Conference held in November at the national university in Dili, UNTL. Two papers will be given in English in the second session, Deborah Durnan and Jack Beetson's paper on *The pedagogy of solidarity: Timor-Leste and Aboriginal Australia*; and Paddy Tobias, on *Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Timor Leste*. In the third session, a team of researchers from Timor-Leste, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are presenting on four papers from a major project in which they are involved. The introductory paper *Becoming a Nation of Readers in Timor-Leste*, written by Benjamim de Araújo e Corte-Real and Sjaak Kroon, will be presented by Benjamin who is the ex-Rektor of UNTL. The second paper, written by Estêvão Cabral and Marilyn Martin-Jones, and presented by Estêvão, is entitled *Discourses about adult literacy and about liberation interwoven: recollections of the adult literacy campaign of 1974/5*. Danielle Boon is presenting the third paper, written by Danielle and her colleague Jeanne Kurvers, entitled *Adult literacy in multilingual Timor-Leste: First results of a survey*. The final paper in the session is by Edegar da Conceição Savio, Jeanne Kurvers, Aone van Engelenhoven, and Sjaak Kroon and will be presented by Edegar, entitled *Fataluku language and literacy uses and attitudes in Timor-Leste*. All papers from this session are reproduced in the Conference Proceedings. In the fourth and final session, there are three presentations. Talik Reis will speak in English on *The place of past experience in the process of the future leadership formation*, a paper based on the experiences of redeveloping cadre training in FRETILIN. Raimundo Oqui and his colleagues will speak in Tetum in a paper entitled *Espiritu Estudantes UNETIM: Luta ba Mudansa Sistema Edukasaun no Ukun Rasik An*. I will present the final paper in the stream, on *Adult literacy, political participation and democracy*. At the conclusion of the presentations, we hope to spend time systematising the learnings from the stream, across all the sessions.

Systematisation

What is systematisation and why do we do it? In his excellent book on popular education in Latin America, Liam Kane describes the practice of systematisation in this way:

Popular educators confront situations which are fluid, unstable, changing and uncertain; everything seems messy and confused, a collection of interacting problems... 'Systematisation' ... is an attempt to bring order to, reflect on, interpret, and make sense of a practice which intervenes in this constantly changing reality. (There are) a diversity of motives behind the desire to systematise. One is to enable communications between organizations and educators so that each may learn from the other's experiences, successes, problems and failures; another is to help a group of educators analyse and evaluate their own work; a third is a deliberate attempt to use systematisation as part of the educative process, where writing down and interpreting developments is part of helping a group reach new levels of understanding (Kane 2001,20).

So, we use systematisation in popular education as a form of 'systematic reflection', to take all our different experiences and understandings, gained from our practice in different places in different times, and try to draw out what is common and what is different, so we can raise our understanding to a new

level. This is what Daniel Schugersky did for us, at the conclusion of our stream in 2009, in the paper which follows this one in the printed proceedings. In order to continue the process during this stream, we need to ask ourselves the following focus questions, at the conclusion of each paper and each session:

- What did we each learn from this presentation and discussion?
- How can we use our different understandings to develop a more complete analysis?
- How can we act collectively as popular educators on what we have learned?

However, we do not have to begin completely anew, since the twelve questions which Daniel identified in his systematisation of the papers presented in 2009 are still relevant to our discussions in this Conference. They were:

1. What is the history of popular education in Timor Leste? And its 'cousins' e.g. community development, peacebuilding, environmental education, human rights education?
2. What role does adult popular education play in Timor-Leste's national development?
3. What are the connections between literacy and the adult education system?
4. Can popular education play a role in democracy, or is it only for resistance to colonialism/dictatorships?
5. What is the balance between *popular* and *education* in popular education?
6. How can popular education navigate trends towards NGO-ization?
7. What languages should adult education programs use in multilingual communities?
8. What is the role of the social economy in a popular education strategy?
9. Are the teaching-learning processes the most appropriate ones?
10. How will Timor-Leste benefit from international research on education?
11. Are there enough community spaces for democratic deliberation and decision-making?
12. Are there enough spaces for popular educators to gather, network, and learn from each other? (Schugersky 2009)

Conclusion

Hopefully, we can return to some of these themes in the discussion which follows each presentation. Our aim, as always with popular education, is not simply academic, but to discover, through our research and analysis, what we need to know to support the continued struggle of the people of Timor-Leste for independence and freedom. *A luta continua.*

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