

## **Lessons in Pedagogy from the *National Union of the Homeless, KWRU, and PPEHRC* experiences**

To out-fight the forces arrayed against us, we must out-smart them. Nowhere in world history can anyone find where a dumb force rose up and defeated a smart force.

In the war to end poverty today we cannot allow our enemies to create and provide "leaders" for us. Daily the growing struggles against poverty, for survival are producing new soldiers with the potential for leadership. We need a pedagogy or educational approach that is about the development of these soldiers into generals. To accomplish this, our approach includes not only popular education but also intermediate and advanced education. An effective and efficient leader or general not only put forth solutions to problems but also organizes the carrying out of those solutions. Generals must be educated and trained to build a mighty army organized to wipe out poverty and homelessness forever.

Building a house like everything else has to be done in stages and builders must have a blueprint or in other words, a strategic plan that take into account the stages of development. No stage can be skipped. Nor can we stop at any stage. We must start at the beginning stage, that is, with the stage of building the foundation of the house not with the roof. Then the pillars and walls are built and finally the stage of building the roof is reached. Today with our remote control mentality we impatiently want to fast forward to start with building the roof, to begin at the ending. Presently, we are at the initial stage, the foundation stage of building a massive movement to end poverty led by the poor as a united and organized force. That is the stage of building a large and expanding core of leaders who are connected, clear, competent, and committed. History teaches that every successful social movement has to begin with the development of such a core as its cadre base or foundation. The basic strategic content of this leadership is the recognition of the necessity of poverty being solved by the building of a massive movement led by the poor as a force united and organized across color lines. All of our various activities, tactical as well as educational, must be coordinated as means toward accomplishing this task of the current initial stage of the construction of a movement to end poverty.

The Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) was founded by six welfare mothers in 1991. It wasn't just any six welfare mothers otherwise there would be KWRUs springing up spontaneously all over the place. In this group of leaders there already existed through prior education and training a certain clarity of the necessity for and commitment to a broad social purpose. Organizing to unite the poor as the base of a broader movement to abolish poverty is necessarily founded on "***commitment not compensation.***" Commitment to build such a movement is the primary quality of leadership. This must be a commitment

strengthened by clarity, competence, and connection to the emerging struggles of the poor and dispossessed. The other indispensable qualities of leadership are the abilities to learn *and* teach as well as to organize. This includes, most importantly for especially this initial stage, the indispensable quality of a leader, i.e., the development of other leaders. **"The more you know the more you owe"** sums up this quality. Therefore the cornerstone of our general education plan must be **"educating the educators, training the trainers."** Promoting and putting into play the following lessons are important in this regard.

1. Our Basic Principle of Education and Training: **"Each One, Teach One"** has proven to be powerful in *"surfacing"* and challenging old and obsolete assumptions and basic beliefs. Leadership development as well as general membership necessarily involves first, *"plowing the fields,"* then, *"planting the seeds,"* and thirdly, *"nurturing the plant."* Of these three the first is most often forgotten. People don't come with a thinking process that is like a blank tablet. Old values and deeply held misconceptions, stereotypes, and misplaced symbols and images dominate the "mental terrain." Understanding this is particularly important because education is also necessarily a process of "reeducation," a process of *"plowing the field"* so as to plant the seeds of new ideas, a process of exposing and opposing inaccurate, outdated, and erroneous thoughts and beliefs.

- key to this principle is collective study(classes, retreats, conferences, schools, and seminars, etc) strengthened by research and ongoing *self-study* with the use of a general and individual library system(including books, videos, tapes, posters/pictures, etc) and most importantly today, **the use of the internet**
- leaders must be trained to take advantage of every opportunity to teach in especially **one-on-one conversational situations** where barriers of distrust and insecurity are more likely to be taken down so that the real questions and concerns can be grappled with.
- the importance of **Personal Maps or Poverty Life Narratives(modern-day slave narratives)** in bringing to the forefront of our hearts and minds those life experiences that tend to reinforce poverty-ending human values, self-confidence, and commitment to reestablishing the human dignity of all
- use of biographies of important leaders(videos and books)
- use of **"Buddy System"**
- less monologue, more dialogue--use of Socratic method (**teaching by questioning**) to invoke and involve the thinking of people and challenging their basic assumptions and beliefs. "Inquiry" and not only "advocacy" is needed in an effective educational process.
- use of **civil disobedience actions** and schooling in the jail cells have proven to be effective means for especially values formation or commitment development.

2. **Reading people's personalities** in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes is important for effective approaches to teaching and education overall.

3. **Responsibility educates** and trains: clearly delineated areas of responsibility for all those involved (clear divisions of labor in the flexible **Committee System**) and preparations for **speaking engagements** have proven to be effective sources of motivation for learning. It must be emphasized that a prospective leader's division of labor should be determined on the basis of both the tasks before us as an organization and as much as possible on the strengths of the person to be assigned and not on her/his weaknesses. A genuine educational process requires a directed and effective motivational system at its base and clearly delineated areas of responsibility is an indispensable element of this base.

4. The **3 Es** of learning: **1) Examples** (learning the qualities of leadership through followship), **2) Experiences** (learning through "on the job training"), and **3) Explanations** (learning through evaluations of examples and experiences). For effective leadership and membership development we must constantly ensure that no one of the 3 Es is left out

5. Carrying out plans for **utilizing activities and protests as schools** is the best way to use fresh experiences to leave indelible and transformative impressions and lessons. **"Teaching as we fight, learning as we lead, talking as we are walking"** is the key principle here. For examples, the Homeless Union's nationwide housing takeovers served as effective schools for developing leadership and membership. Other examples include, the New Freedom Bus Tour and March of the Americas, which were traveling schools.

- **survival AND symbolism:** The struggle of the poor and dispossessed for their daily economic survival including staging protests for immediate needs must be combined with the battle of images and symbols. Symbols as conditioned images are powerful influences both for and against the development of a new consciousness. Education plans must involve a process of "flipping symbols" by associating new meaning to popular symbols particularly religious symbols.

6. **Reality Tours**-participating in them and guiding them--draw on at once multiple sense perceptions and reflective-conceptions capacities of people to think and feel. They have proven to be effective forms of teaching and getting over difficult concepts generally.

7. Use must be made of those **arts and cultural forms most accessible to the poor for education purposes**. Such forms as movies (TV and Videos), street theater, music, pictures and posters are among the most prominent fixtures in the lives of impoverished communities. **Combining entertainment with education**

has proven to be a most effective way of engaging and elevating the thinking of the people we're dealing with challenging their basic false beliefs.

8. It is critical that our organization constantly engages and closely monitors the life and struggles of the impoverished masses so that we can identify and discern those **emerging forms of life and struggles most useful in making our educational approaches most effective**. We must respect and therefore learn from the multi-billion dollar advertising industry in terms of the forms of persuasion they've used to inundate and condition the thinking of particularly **the poor, that basic and leading force of our movement**.

9. Popular education forms have been very useful especially for new members' orientation and introductory education. However, our experience is that they must be applied with the view of advancing especially the prospective leaders to intermediate and more advanced educational forms. Paulo Freire exposed himself to higher levels of education, which he then uses to creatively formulate and apply popular education approaches. The sophisticated leadership development of our enemy's cadre requires in our leadership development process more than simply popular education level graduates. It requires nothing less than **the training of many more Paulo Freires, which require higher levels of education development methods**.

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