Learning together for critical consciousness

a rad ed zine from Brisbane

popular.education.bris@gmail.com
before we start we would like to acknowledge the owners of the land here in and around Brisbane
and pay respect to the traditional and ongoing

domestic relations and the knowledge embedded
within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

tempts us to listen to the sounds of the earth, to

we acknowledge and pay respect also to the
many inspiring Indigenous scholars, activists and
artists that have influenced us over time, such as

Morton Robinson, Prunella Balls and

1970 March in Brisbane against
Australia's Involvement in Vietnam War

1970 Commonwealth Games Protest (Brisbane)

by C.R and A.M.
2. FEELING QUESTIONS are concerned with body sensations, emotions and health. "What sensations do you have in your body when you think or talk about this situation?" "How do you feel about the situation?" "How has the situation affected your own physical or emotional health?" KEYWORDS: feel, suffer, tired, angry, sad, frustrated, needs, etc.

3. VISIONING QUESTIONS are concerned with identifying one's ideals, dreams, and values. "How could the situation be changed to be just as you would like it?" "What about this situation do you care so much about?" "What is the meaning of this situation in your life?" "How would you like it to be?" KEYWORDS: hope, wish, like, love, better, justice, etc.

4. CHANGE QUESTIONS are concerned with how to get from the present situation towards a more ideal situation. "What will it take to bring the current situation towards the ideal?" "What exactly needs to change here?" "Who can make a difference?" "What are changes you have seen or read about?" "How did those changes come about?" (Here you are trying to find the individual changes that will greatly impact the strategies for change she will believe in.) "What will it take?" "How could it.

5. CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES! Try to imagine more than two alternatives (contrary to our cultural training, the world of resistance is not dualistic). Be alert for other alternatives to pop up in other areas of questioning. Do not rule out any alternative. "What are the consequences of each alternative you see?" "How might those changes come about?" "Name as many ways as possible." KEYWORDS: alternative ways, imagine, and all the ways imaginable.

6. PERSONAL INVENTORY AND SUPPORT QUESTIONS are concerned with identifying one's interests, potential contribution, and the support necessary to act. "What would it take for you to participate in the change?" "What do you like to do that might be useful in bringing about these changes?" "Tell me what is special about you." "What aspects of the situation interest you the most?" "What support would you need to work for this change?" "What will it take, part of the change, your part, everyone has a role, etc.

7. PERSONAL ACTION QUESTIONS are those which get down to the specifics of what to do, how and when to do it. The actual plan begins to emerge. "Who do you need to talk to?" "How will you get an introduction to them that will establish your credibility?" "How can you get others together at a meeting to work on this?" Usually in working on the streets using strategic questioning, one does not get to the lower level of questions like obstacles and resistance. The earlier questions of feeling and thinking (analysis) are important and the visioning and alternative ways of achieving the social goals are very important in street polling.

I encourage you to ask yourself, "What would it take for me to practice strategic questioning?"

If you have comments or suggestions to make this booklet better I would greatly appreciate hearing from you. Send to fpeasey@ig.org or by snail mail: 3181 Mission Street #30, San Francisco, CA 94110. If you want to know about social change work and Crabgrass (the organization I choose to work with) see our web page: www.crivergrass.org
Throughout my career as a democratic educator I have known many brilliant students who seek education, who dream of service in the cause of freedom, who despair or become fundamentally dismayed because colleges and universities are structured in ways that dehumanize, that lead them away from the spirit of community in which they long to live their lives. More often than not, these students especially gifted students of color from diverse class backgrounds, give up hope. They do poorly in their studies. They take on the mantle of victimhood. They fail. They drop out. Most of them have had no guides to teach them how to find their way in educational systems that, though structured to maintain domination, are not closed systems and therefore have within them subcultures of resistance where education as the practice of freedom still happens. Way too many gifted students never find these subcultures, never encounter the democratic educators who could help them find their way. They lose heart. For more than thirty years I have witnessed students who do not want to be educated to oppressors come close to graduation - and then sabotage themselves. They are the students who turn away from school with just one semester or one course to finish before they graduate. Sometimes they are brilliant graduate students who just never write their dissertations. Afraid that they will not be able to keep the faith, to become democratic educators, afraid that they will enter the system and become it, they turn away. Competitive education rarely works for students who have been socialized to value working for the good of the community. It renders them, tearing them apart. They experience levels of disconnection and fragmentation that destroy the pleasure of learning."

- bell hooks, 2003, Teaching Community: a pedagogy of hope

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Skills of strategic questioning

The most important skill in strategic questioning is that of looking for action in static communication. Being able to recognize movement and the intention for movement is key. Then feeding that perception back to the person involved is important. In social change, the key skill in addition to the above is the ability to plan a campaign based upon what the questioners have heard in the field. The necessary skills are creating literature that uses the logic of the people, finding tactics that people are waiting for, providing leadership, and developing activities that use the change strategy already residing in the people.

A strategic question has seven dimensions:

- It creates motion
- It creates options (there are many ways to go: something, not just one, not even just two, and what's on offer may be the lesser of two evils)
- It avoids "why" (tends to demand a defence or justification; can be very powerful as a focus on value and meaning)
- It avoids "yes or no" answer (open questions over closed questions)
- It is empowering, the opposite of manipulation (express confidence that the person being questioned can change their circumstances)
- It asks the unaskable taboo question
- It is a simple sentence (should not need a lot of analysis as answers can be easily formed)

Question Families

I imagine questions as falling into 'families.' The question families increase in fluidity, dynamic and strategic power as you go down from family to family. The first group of questions are NOT strategic questions but are necessary in order to have enough information in order to create the strategic questions. In any questioning campaign or session one would start near the top of the family order and work down to the more powerful strategic questions. Let me explain each 'question family' and give some key words for that family:

Questions to support strategic questions

0. FOCUS QUESTIONS identify the situation and the key facts necessary to an understanding of the situation. "What are you most concerned about in your community?"

1. OBSERVATION QUESTIONS are concerned with what one sees and the information one has heard regarding the situation. Notice: I do not refer to the situation as a "problem" for that would set a field which may work against creative thinking. "What do you see?" "What do you hear?"

2. What have you heard and read about this situation? "Which sources do you trust and why?"

3. What effects of this situation have you noticed in people, in the earth? "What do you know for sure and what are you not certain about?" KEYWORDS: see, hear, know, find, etc.
The real reason for the unwillingness of most scholars to use the term "institutions of stradd," as a "Democratic" will fail to see, is that they do not want to be labeled as "democratic." This is an interesting fact, and it is one that we accept as a "show of hands." Why? If we accept this idea, then why is there such an incredible sophistication on the part of the people who support a proposal that stands on the "classical democratic" position? It is true that the people who support it have a tendency to believe that they are the majority. But their views have been taken seriously. A long time ago, I would have thought it was strange to do so, but now I do not think so. The conclusion is that the majority is not always right. In some cases, the majority can be wrong. This is what I meant by saying that the majority is not always right.
Beware the tyranny of structurelessness
By Josh Bolotisky
In Sum:
Sometimes the least structured group can be the most tyrannical. Counter by promoting accountability within the group.

Have you ever sat through an interminable meeting where everyone is theoretically on equal footing, yet only one or two people are doing eighty percent of the talking? Where there's no facilitator, for fear of introducing hierarchy, and so the discussion goes in endless circles, never quite sure when it's finished? Where new members lose patience because their suggestions are ignored and their ideas left to float in the ether?

Welcome to the tyranny of structurelessness.

Jo Freeman's seminal 1970 essay “The Tyranny of Structurelessness” put a name to the persistent problem that plagues decision makers in non-hierarchical groupings, organizations or collectives. Freeman argued that by claiming to eschew hierarchy, or even leadership, activists are really unilaterally disarming themselves when it comes to identifying and correcting impediments to effective collective action. As she points out, "there is no such thing as a structureless group."

This means that to strive for a structureless group is as useful, and as deceptive, as to aim at an “objective” news story, “value-free” social science, or a “free” economy. A "laissez-faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez-faire" society; the idea becomes a smoke screen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others... Thus structurelessness becomes a way of masking power.

Facilitator's Toolkit
Icebreaker – any activity aimed at getting people to know each other better so that they can work together more effectively in the meeting. It doesn't have to be a game, paired listening activity (see below) can work as well.

Go-round – each person has their say in turn. No interruptions. It can be round a circle, or a ‘popcorn’ go-round where people speak when ready, regardless of position in the circle, but each person only speaks once. Good for equalising participation and checking where everyone stands in relation to an issue or proposal.

Idea storm – a quickfire creative thinking tool often used at the start of an agenda item to gather ideas and encourage creative thinking. It's important that people don't critique each other's ideas during the idea storm. It's uncensored thinking - anything goes! People can storm ideas onto post-it notes and then share them or call out ideas in the full group to be written on flipchart paper.

Group agreement – a list of behaviours agreed by the group to help the meeting stay respectful and focused. For example “no interrupting”, “be conscious of time”, or “no mobile phones on”.

Paired listening – a time-limited sharing of ideas and experiences in a pair. Sometimes done as a conversation, sometimes with the pair speaking in turn for an equal time. Often followed by feedback to the full group. A good tool for ensuring that even those people who don’t like to speak in a large group can make a contribution.

Parking space – a large sheet of paper on the wall used to collect ideas for future discussion as they emerge in a meeting. It helps the meeting stay focused on one topic. Other topics are listed on the parking space as they arise and can be dealt with later at an appropriate time.

Small groups – splitting a meeting into smaller groups which either all do the same work in parallel, or each take on a different task. Good for changing the dynamic of the meeting, involving more people in discussion, and getting a lot done in a short time.

Spectrum line – an active discussion tool in which the group physically place themselves on an imagined line depending on their response to questions or scenarios posed by the facilitator. A discussion follows to allow people to say why they are standing in the position that they’ve chosen. A nice change to being talked to.

Throwing it back to the group – bouncing questions and decisions back to the group rather than answering them or making them yourself! “What’s a good question… does anyone want to suggest an answer?”

Evaluation – evaluation is crucial if we’re going to improve the quality of our meetings. It could be an evaluation form or a quick go-round of “what worked well?” and “what worked less well?”.

Summarising – regular summaries allow the discussion to develop and to stay focused. They also ensure everyone shares the same understanding of the situation.

Minutes of the meeting – a written record of the meeting, including decisions and agreed action points. Some groups like to flesh minutes out with a description of the different points and opinions raised. Minutes are a vital tool to ensure that ideas are not forgotten, and that they are implemented after the meeting.
Rhizome guide to

Facilitation Tools

Almost everything that you do as a facilitator to make your meetings more effective and participatory could be called a facilitation tool. A facilitation tool is simply any technique that you use when you’re facilitating—everything from making eye contact and actively listening to the group, through to more obvious and formal tools such as small groups and go-rounds (see glossary for a glossary of all the tools mentioned here).

Informal facilitation tools

Of all the facilitation tools available you’ll use the informal tools the most often. And yet they’re commonly ignored or underused. For example, creating a good, safe space for your group to work in is one of the biggest tasks we take on as facilitators. Much of that space is created by our use of our bodies, eyes and voices. If our eye contact is inviting and reassuring, our body language is comfortable and approachable and our voices calm yet energetic we’re a long way to our goal. That makes something as simple as breathing a core facilitation tool – taking a few breaths can ground us, and this helps us to ground the meeting. So it can be useful to become more aware of what informal tools we’re using, how we use them, and how we could do so to greater effect. It’s also important to think about any informal tools that are missing from our toolkit, so we can consciously add them in future.

Ensuring facilitation tools work!

Here’s a checklist you can use to remind you what to tell the group in order to ensure that a tool works smoothly. Many of these are common to most tools:

- Task – what are you asking the group to do?
- Aim – why are you asking them to do it? What’s the purpose?
- Context – where does this tool fit within the wider meeting process? What happens after this step?
- Time – how long have they got to complete the task?
- Roles – should they appoint someone to take notes, or do feedback, for example?
- Materials – what materials do they need, if any?
- Space – which rooms/tables/spaces are available during the activity?

Informal tools include:

- breathing, eye contact, a smile, tone of voice, body language, asking appropriate questions, actively listening, humour, opening a window, turning the heating up or down, throwing issues back to the group for decision, taking an unscheduled break, refreshments, offering a summary of the discussion—and so on.

Formal facilitation tools

There are of course some formal tools that would also help create that same safe space. For example: a group agreement, introductory icebreakers and so on. Many formal tools are planned in advance. Others you will use responsive to help you deal with situations that arise during a meeting. With experience it becomes easier to predict many of the group’s needs and plan appropriate tools, reducing the need for using responsive tools. But you will never be able to predict everything.

Formal tools include:

- evaluation form, go-round, group agreement, icebreaker, ideastorm, minutes of the meeting, paired listening, ‘parking’ space, small groups, spectrum line... and more

[1] Structurelessness is often mistakenly conflated with absence of hierarchy, when in fact, effective non-hierarchical forms of organizing actually require a great deal of structure. Anyone who has participated in an effectively facilitated general assembly or spokescouncil meeting will well understand this distinction.
Kahn (2009) talks about understanding different approaches to action as different expressions of rage. Prometheus rage (forethought rage) is direct action, protest, civil disobedience. It is proactive and reactive. Epiphemic rage (afterthought rage) is more about cultivating interconnections within community grounded in a passion for nurturance, sustainability, and reciprocity... It is still a type of rage, and the things it enacts “can topple power-driven, top-heavy, hierarchical bureaucracies that ultimately produce widespread oppression” (Kurt Love, Annual Meeting of the New England Philosophy of Education Society, October 2011).

*Our Bodies are Not Terra Nullius* by Erin Konsmo of erinkonsmo.com & shamelessmag.com

Image from Rion Sabean’s *Men-Ups* project
AND NOW...

Tools for strategy, tools for problem solving, tools for decision making, tools for reaching consensus, tools for exploring options, tools for monitoring progress, tools for helping groups contribute, tools for reaching shared understanding, tools for preparing for difficult situations.

We have noticed, in our own ways, that open-mindedness is intertwined with open-heartedness, with an opening of bodies. We invite a queering of anarchist pedagogy by emphasizing the role of love in teaching, learning, and living. We invite ourselves, and our readers, to notice the perhaps familiar discomfort in reiterating the role of the dry scholar and to gently stretch into the living edge between the ease of the known and the discomfort of overstretching. What does it feel like to play with that edge, to sit with it, to notice how it moves, to feel its vitality? Can we learn to love our anger enough to set it free, rather than holding tight to that moralizing powerlessness of resentment (Nietzsche 1969)? And the same for our shame, so that we need not hold ourselves tightly in the normative reiterations of “pathological shame” (Scheff 1990)? Learning to be free means learning to love ourselves and the emotions that pass through us; not gripping on to identities or ideologies.

Our question, then, is not how we get other people to become anarchists. It is, rather, how do we make space for vitality for love?

For pedagogy to be revolutionary, there must be a loving connection. It is this “radical love” that Freire advocated and practiced, inspiring so many of his students. As Kincheloe (2008) remarks:

> Love is the basis of an education that seeks justice, equality and genius. If critical pedagogy is not injected with a healthy dose of what Freire calls “radical love,” then it will operate only as a shadow of what it could be. Such a love is compassionate, erotic, creative, sensual and informed. Critical pedagogy uses it to increase our capacity to love, to bring the power of love to our everyday lives and social institutions, to rethink reason in a humane and interconnected manner. . . . A critical knowledge seeks to connect with the corporeal and the emotional in a way that understands at multiple levels and seeks to assuage human suffering.

From:

What does it mean to really hear the 'other'? We may be listening, but we may misrecognise what someone is saying.

The coloniser's demand for narrative or "access for dominant groups to the thought, cultures and lives of others" can underpin the imperative to include 'multiple voices'.

-Homi K. Bhabha

Wanting to learn from the Other is meant to "signal an 'openness', a lack of prejudice, a pure 'desire to know'.[6]" positions the guiltless speaker as 'helpless', 'guilty', in need of sympathy, compassion and understanding, even love. "I am not powerful", says the speaker, "not threatening, only ignorant! Care for me!"

-Allison Jones

http://peaceeducationalgroup.ning.com

Emphasis on "voice" is not an emphasis on speaking, but on the need for members of powerful groups to listen.

Dehumanization is being treated as an object.

There is your truth, my truth and the truth - Chinese proverb.

"Either way, change will come. It could be bloody, or it could be beautiful. It depends on us."

-Arundhati Roy
Mainstream and margin: two roles in conflict

Mainstream and margins are two roles that often appear in group conflicts. The mainstream is part of the group that has its interest's recognized; the margin, however, is not part of this universalised interest. Margins are any sub-group (or sub-groups) whose voice is not recognized by the group. In every group, there are mainstreams and margins.

For example, in a group that communicates by talking loud, people who tend to be quiet may go left unheard. The people who tend to talk loud, in this case, are playing the "mainstream" role while the quiet people are the "margins." Both roles are important. The mainstream offers commonality (such as an accepted way of communicating) to the group; the margins offer growth for new behaviours, insights and understandings.

At any time, we might be one role or another (or playing several roles at once) - what is important is for us to recognize which role we are at any time. Each role can make moves to a resolution of conflict - integrating the margin into the mainstream through expanding what defines the mainstream.

Mainstream
- Has interests universalised
- Unaware to the margin and their experiences
- Identity taken as assumption
- Unconscious to its privileges and rank

Negative approaches to conflict
- Staying unengaged (does not need to deal with issue)
- Will personify (hearing the individual, not their structural responsibility)
- Will require safety/comfort before entering into dialogue
- Will evade structures (i.e. "I don't see race, I just see human beings"")

Positive approaches to conflict
- Listen, listen, listen!
- Stay engaged
- Try to understand the margin's experience and what it can teach

Margin
- Naturally conscious (at least subconsciously) of power differences
- Has experiences and insights not recognized by the mainstream
- Growth for a group always occurs at the margins

Negative approaches to conflict
- Avoidance (especially due to fear of sanctions)
- Isolation ("I'm the only one")
- Accept internalised oppression
- Get stuck into an identity of oppression

Positive approaches to conflict
- Remember their desiringness
- Don't trust the isolation: there is never a margin of one!
- Grow in compassion for the mainsteam's lack of power because of its cluelessness

Source: Daniel Hunter, Training For Change with appreciation to Arnold Mindell's Sitting in the Fire.
ALL THE CONTROL BELONG TO THEM.

Can I help you?

Ooof, a little too close.

Do you think they're going to let us out of here?

Can you play cruel games?

Can you help me?

Sure, I can help you with anything. What do you need?
1. Exploration: “Do it”
Perform or do an activity with little to no help from the facilitator/teacher. Examples might include: making products or models; role-playing; giving a presentation; problem-solving; playing a game.

Features of experiences include:
(i) May be an individual or group experience, but involves doing.
(ii) Most likely will be unfamiliar to the learners - a first-time activity.
(iii) Push the learner beyond previous performance levels.
(iv) May be “uncomfortable” to the

2. Sharing: “What happened”
Publicly share the results, reactions and observations. Get the participants to talk about their experience. Share reactions and observations. Discuss feelings generated by the experience.

Let the group (or individual) talk freely and acknowledge the ideas they generate.

Examples of sharing questions:
1) What did you do?
2) What happened?
3) What did you see, feel, hear? the experience, Discuss how
4) What was the most difficult? Bestest?

3. Processing: “What’s important?”
Discussing, analyzing, reflecting on the experience. Discuss how themes, problems, and issues were brought out by the experience.
Discuss how specific problems or issues were addressed. Discuss personal experiences of members. Encourage the group to look for recurring themes.

Examples of processing questions:
1) What problems or issues seemed to occur over and over?
2) What similar experience(s) have you had?

4. Generalising: “So what?”
Connect the experience with real world examples. Find general trends or common truths in the experience. Identify “real life” principles that surfaced. List key terms that capture the learning.

Examples of generalising questions:
1) What did you learn about yourself through this activity?
2) Why is (life skill) important in your daily life?
3) How does what you learned relate to other parts of your life?

5. Application: “Now what?”
Apply what was learned to a similar or different situation. Learn from past experiences, practice. Discuss how new learning can be applied to other situations. Discuss how issues raised can be useful in the future. Discuss how more effective behaviours can develop from the new learnings.

Help each individual feel a sense of ownership for what was learned.

Example questions about applying the experience:
1) How can you apply what you learned to a new situation?
2) How will you act differently in the future?
3) How could you apply life skills learned through this experience?
Some ideas collated by Clare Towler, from Larry Olds' "Notes on my philosophy of education":

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional education</th>
<th>Free schools or humanistic education</th>
<th>Education for liberation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept of Learning</strong></td>
<td>banking concept; deposits</td>
<td>learning through activities; learning is experience; organic growth</td>
<td>praxis; development of critical consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>nature revealed; facts information; that which is repetitive, objective, owned by authority</td>
<td>inner experience of self awareness; subjective; personally valued and relative, owned by self</td>
<td>products of peoples interactions with their environments; as considerations, contextually objective, that appear as problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>to control and manipulate</td>
<td>to clarify</td>
<td>for liberation; to transcend current material circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of People</strong></td>
<td>individual beings, often inherently bad some better</td>
<td>individual beings, inherently good, everyone valued</td>
<td>individual and collective beings in dialectic relation with the world, capable of creating and recreating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Teachers</strong></td>
<td>depositor of knowledge actor, evaluator, judge claiming ethical neutrality</td>
<td>facilitator, helper; ethically neutral</td>
<td>engaged with students; owner of a point of view; interpreter of experiences/ words/event with others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning of Freedom</strong></td>
<td>absence of restraint; references the individual earned through responsibility, given by others</td>
<td>Absence of restraint; do your own thing located in the individual; a natural quality of people</td>
<td>located in concrete circumstances; in terms of action; maximizes both individual and collective action; has little power to explain separate from concepts like oppression, choice, domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning of Choice</strong></td>
<td>not problematic, not developmental; equated with selection from alternatives; an individual phenomena; made by teachers</td>
<td>choice and whim equated; made by students; not problematic or developmental; more dimensions of choice allowed, selection by individuals</td>
<td>choosing thought to be problematic; collective choice with oppressed; connected to purposes and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interests Served</strong></td>
<td>Owning class; status quo; domination</td>
<td>owning class; pacification; status quo; in a material sense those of the middle (managerial) class</td>
<td>liberation for working and oppressed classes; authentic interests of all people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program / Content of Education</strong></td>
<td>cultural traditions; determined by teachers; known in advance; knowledge, facts, concepts; priority on substance</td>
<td>whatever anyone wants or whims; intrinsic in people; development of self; process is all that is important; emphasis on procedure and form</td>
<td>a product of interaction; drawn from the environment that is active within students together with teachers; purpose is participation in making of the world; integration of concern for form and substance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Critical Reflection</strong></td>
<td>Not present; eliminated by planning model and conceptual models</td>
<td>not present; acceptance of everything</td>
<td>shared by all; central to the theory and practice of education</td>
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</table>