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Reflections on Popular Education in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean

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CEAAL was founded by Pablo Freire and is currently a Popular Education movement, which as a Network, acts and accompanies processes of educational, social, political, cultural and economic transformation of Latin American and Caribbean societies, in local, national and regional dialogue with the world. It was founded in 1982, and currently has a presence in 21 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with around 200 organizations and affiliated groups. Affiliates develop educational actions in multiple fields of social development and with multiple social subjects, which includes a series of experiences, capacities and potentials that express an active wealth in each country.

Historically, Latin America and the Caribbean have been victims of European and North American imperialism, militarization, colonization, patriarchy, racism, slavery, and genocide. To this day, we continue to be victim to the interests of a small world elite. These situations have generated, and continue to generate, much inequality which, in turn, generates all kinds of tensions. Thus, to provoke social transformations,

multiple interventions and fronts have been needed, in which Popular Education has been a transcendent means of action and transformation.

Throughout our history it has been necessary to carry out demonstrations, confrontations and peaceful and armed rebellions aimed directly at dominant sources of power. We have also had, in some cases, to take power, occupy political power and use the Political Parties and the State to emancipate the peoples. Occupying such spaces of power and influence has allowed us to work to transform oppressive structures from within, with proposals aimed at equity, solidarity, sustainability and cooperation. But that has not been enough. We have also had to fight other more daily sources of biopower, internalized power and micro-power, in which the goal is for people to be able to disempower the other, break the limitations imposed by and from the other, transgress and create our own rules of coexistence.

Achieving a radical and lasting change in social relations requires that people first achieve autonomy and self-determination. There is important and necessary political work to be done to enable people to regain their personal power, their ability to do, create and develop ideas, activities, projects, plans and dreams. It is necessary to continue opening and creating spaces of security, equity, creativity, fun, hope and joy, in which existing social relations are problematized and questioned, while opening or creating new possibilities of being, living and feeling. These spaces can be called cracks, between spaces, which challenge, transgress, fragment and weaken the external and oppressive forces. That is why the approach to Popular Education has been and continues to be relevant and valid in Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to provoke and sustain a true social transformation.

Popular Education works consciously ... to understand structural injustice – how we are dominated and oppressed, but by the conditions that allow some to act with impunity to serve their own, minority interests. This education is deeply political and partisan: it is based on an analysis of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression, and informed by clear political purposes. Popular education aims to support the struggle for a more just and egalitarian social order, and for a living planet based on a

sustainable future. Through its rootedness in the real interests and struggles of people, its critique of the status quo and its commitment to progressive social and political change, popular education ... [works]to strengthen the struggles of exploited and oppressed people in the interests of the majority (PEN, 2018).

Therefore, it is necessary that we politicize the discussions on all the phenomena that affect us; that we look critically at our reality, and reflect on our practices; that the participation and democracy of all sectors of society be strengthened in matters by which they are affected, without forgetting that reality can only be understood through a continuous, dynamic, and systematic process over time; that it is important to believe in our own potential for understanding, growth, action and transformation; that it is important to trust and accompany others in their efforts; that for us to think, question, insert ourselves into processes of self-transformation and social transformation it is essential to create and protect safe spaces where that may happen.

Some tools that contribute greatly to Popular Education processes are the pedagogy of questioning, participatory-action research, and the incorporation of the arts, technology and social networks. These tools not only facilitate the process of expression, questioning and awareness of groups, but also contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions in which to be able to think, imagine, dream and propose different and revolutionary ways of being and living. However, these processes of individual and collective formation and transformation must also be systematized, documented and disseminated through all possible means, with an emphasis on alternative means of social or popular communication, so that they serve as inspiration to other groups and communities of the world. It is ever more necessary to communicate with neighboring countries and with the world, establish alliances and work in networks in a way that allows us, as popular educators, to exchange our knowledge, support, and protection, and to accompany each other as we grow together. And, as Freire taught us 'radicalisation, nourished by a critical spirit is always creative'.