8 how to inspire change through learning

The Trapese Collective

How things are taught is as important as what is taught in inspiring people to take action in their own lives. In these days of compassion overload we can't assume that any shocking statistic or distressing story will have any impact. Instead we need creative ways to think and learn about the problems we face.

In the year 2004–5 shortly after we formed our popular education collective Trapese, we carried out over 100 workshops, talks and quiz shows round the UK and Ireland exploring issues of the G8, climate change, debt and resistance. Since then we have continued our work exploring popular education methods as a way to support a range of campaigns. This chapter brings together practical advice which is based on our own experience of a four month long educational roadshow and from other groups who also use popular education as a tool for change.

Many of the activities and games mentioned in this chapter have been adapted from tried and tested methods of others doing similar work who made their resources available. What links the activities together is that they aim to create a collective understanding of problems, root causes and encourage people to take action, tapping into a desire for change. This is just a starter, there are many websites and books that expand all these ideas (see the resources section at the end of this chapter), but we believe that there is no better way to learn than by doing.

getting organised

Here are some of the stages in organising an event.

(a) Knowing the subject
- Choosing the theme should be the easy part, remember to have a clear focus for the workshop. Local issues can quickly be scaled up and connected with bigger questions.

- Find out as much as possible about the participants – how often they meet, what their interests are, what level of awareness they may have about the topics you want to talk about.
- While you don't need to be an expert, it's important to have some concrete facts as they will help give you credibility and confidence. Use books, films and websites, newspaper clippings and quotes from the radio, TV and films.
- Research any existing campaigns and try to understand the arguments of all sides.

(b) Designing the workshop

- Running a workshop with more than one person can really help practically – it also gives more variety.
- Bear in mind that people normally retain more if they have an opportunity to discuss, question and digest. Less is more.
- Remember that there are neither correct answers nor easy conclusions. The aim of the activities is to plant the seeds of questioning and encourage people to find out more for themselves.
- Use a variety of different types of information – films, games, debates and allow free time for questions and informal discussion.
- Include plans for action and possible future steps early on. Things often take longer than you imagine and it's depressing to hear all about a problem and then be left with no time to discuss what to do about it.
- Allow time for breaks – in our experience, any more than one and a half hours and people will start to switch off.
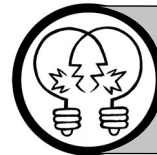
(c) The practicalities

- Getting people along can be the main challenge, look out for existing groups, unions, community groups/centres and spaces which have similar events.
- Advertise as early and as widely as possible using posters, websites, email lists, etc. but also think about personal invitations, which can be most effective.
- Set up all the equipment you need well in advance to avoid last minute stress.
- If space permits, arrange the chairs in a circle as people can see each other and there is no one at the front lecturing.

Figure 8.1   Poster advertising our workshops

- Think of a method for people to give feedback and to exchange contact details.
- Provide snacks and drinks.
- Offer people the possibility of further sources of information, either through handouts or websites.

(d) Facilitating

- Keep to an agreed time frame and explain the aims and structure of the workshop.
- If you are friendly and respectful, then other people are more likely to follow your example.
- Make a brief group agreement at the start – this can include things like everyone will turn off mobile phones, agree to listen to other people speaking, wait their turn, etc.
- Ask people who haven't spoken if they would like to contribute.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer. You can offer to find out or suggest that you find the answer together.
- People learn best when they come to their own conclusions. The facilitator's role is to lead people through information, rather than presenting completed solutions. Ask questions and encourage participants to ask questions. For example, 'the way it works is ...' can be replaced by 'why do you think it works that way?' This may take a bit longer but it is more likely to be absorbed.
- Use bright, colourful props and a range of media to draw people's attention. Dress appropriately to the group.

exercises for social change

Think of a really boring teacher at school. What made them boring? Were they monotonous, arrogant, bossy or stern? Think of some piece of information that really impacted on you. Why do you remember it? What struck you about it? How was it presented? Thinking about being a participant yourself will help you to plan a workshop. At the same time, remember people learn in different ways – through listening, writing, drawing, speaking and acting – so try and use a variety of senses. Many of these activities can be easily adapted to work on other topics.

1. Warm ups

Warm ups set the context of workshops and allow everyone to get to know each other. They can be more animated or calming depending on what you feel is appropriate for the group. Games can be a good way to create a participatory environment where everyone feels they can contribute. Some physical contact (being aware of different abilities and cultural sensitivities) can be a good way to relax people and break down personal boundaries. Go round the room and ask people to say their names, and if there is enough time ask them to add what they hope to get out of the workshop. This can help the facilitator pitch things accordingly.

Play a game   Before you do anything, try playing a short physical game – we all know many from our childhood, such as musical chairs, keeping a ball or balloon up in the air, or stuck in the mud.

Finding Common Ground

*Aim: A*n icebreaker and a way to see how many similarities exist in the group's opinions.

Method: Everyone stands in a circle. Explain that when a statement is read out, if they AGREE they should take a small step forward. If they DON'T AGREE, stay put. No steps to be taken backwards. Statements should try and reflect the interests of the group and controversial or topical issues. for example:

- 'I think corporations are taking over our political processes'.
- 'This makes me angry'.
- 'I drink fair trade coffee/tea'.
- 'I don't think that's enough'.
- 'If more world leaders were women, the world would be a better place' etc.

Depending on the size of the group, with ten or so statements everyone should be in the centre of the room. At this stage you can all sit back down again. Alternatively, ask each member of the group to close their eyes and put out their hands into the middle of the (now very small) circle. Ask each person to take two other hands. When they open their eyes the task is to untangle the knot of hands.

Outcomes and tips: The tangle is also good for working together out of an apparently impossible mess. Be prepared to abandon it if it takes ages!

2. Collective learning

Before beginning an explanation about collective learning, ask people what they already know about it. One way of doing this is to ideastorm around an issue. Ask people to shout out what they know about something and write it up visibly so that everyone can see the ideas. Don't correct people at the time if they say something incorrectly but make a mental note to come back to the point later.

Acronym game/Articulate

Aim: To jargon bust, build group understanding of terms and to gauge the existing knowledge of a group. The game introduces lots of background information and gets people working in teams.

Method: Write out some relevant acronyms or words on small cards. Divide the group into teams and divide the cards so they have roughly one per person. Ask groups to discuss the cards and work out what they are/mean/ do. Help if necessary. Each group then presents the acronym to the other groups without saying any of the words in the name. For example, if you have WTO you can't say the words 'World', 'Trade' or 'Organisation' in your description but something like, 'It's a global institution that makes rules about and removes barriers to trade'. Or an emotional response, 'It's the most damaging institution in the world and should be abolished'. The team which correctly guesses what the acronym stands for receives the card. Ask the group if they can explain the idea in more detail.

Some acronyms we have used include:

- PFIs (Private Finance Initiatives). Corporations investing in public services, such as hospitals and schools.
- IMF (International Monetary Fund). Lends money to developing countries; generally comes with conditions on market based reforms.
- WB (World Bank). Lends money to projects in developing countries, mainly focusing on large infrastructural projects like dams and roads.
- SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes). Conditions for IMF loans which involve liberalising the economy, deregulating and privatizing industries.

Outcomes and tips: Demystifying complicated acronyms and terms is important to developing a critical awareness about our world. This game can last a long time so be prepared to cut it short in order to stick to your workshop plan. Any words, names or ideas can be used for this game and it is a good lead in to the Spidergram game (see below).

Spidergram (Mapping Climate Change)

Aim: To explore a topic visually, make connections between ideas and unpack cause and effect.

Method: In small groups, draw a box in the middle of a big piece of paper and write the big theme which you want to explore, e.g. 'climate change'. Ask people to think of things which directly cause this like 'flights', 'cars' and connect these to the centre with a line. Then think of problems or issues relating to these issues like 'pollution', 'asthma', 'traffic jams', etc. If linking to the acronym game, mentioned above, choose a couple of cards and ask people to draw connecters to other cards and arrange them.

Outcomes and tips: You'll soon build up a picture of connections like a spider's web. Ask the group which words have the most links. Make sure you go round and help groups.

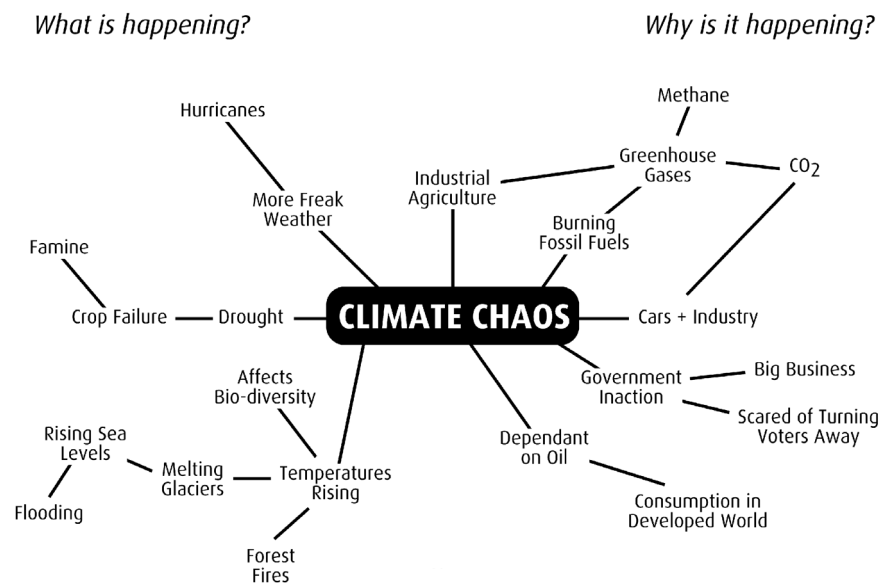*What is happening?*   *Why is it happening?*

Figure 8.2   Spidergram

Source: Trapese Collective

3. Using visual activities

It is often more striking to see something simply but visually than to listen to a long list of statistics. Physical and visual activities change the pace and dynamic of a

workshop, which helps participants retain concentration. Look for possibilities of involving practical tasks, training or experiments in the workshop.

Chair game

Aim: A simple way to show the imbalance between the G8 countries and the rest of the world. This game can be modified to represent other imbalances or statistical information, e.g. debt, trade or carbon emissions.

Method: Ask ten volunteers to form a line with their chairs and to sit on them. You are going to ask a series of questions and in each question, one chair equates to 10 per cent of the total. During the game, people will move along the chairs according to their allocated amount. Always try to get the answers from the participants.

Figure 8.3   Chair game

Source: Alberta Council for Global Co-operation.

Explain that the ten people represent the world's population, which is roughly 6 billion – so each person represents 10 per cent or 600 million people.

Question: What percentage of the world's population is in G8 countries?

Answer: 12 per cent.

Nominate one person (ideally at one end of the line) to represent the G8. The remaining 88 per cent are the majority world.

Question: What percentage of the world's total Gross Economic Output is produced by the G8 countries?

Answer: 48 per cent (roughly 50 per cent).

Ask the nominated G8 person to occupy five chairs while the remaining nine squeeze on to the other five chairs.

Question: What percentage of the world's total annual carbon emissions are produced by the G8 countries?

Answer: 62 per cent.

Ask the nominated G8 person to occupy six chairs while the remaining nine squeeze on to the other four chairs.

Question: Of the top 100 multinationals how many have their headquarters in G8 countries?

Answer: 98 per cent.

That would leave the majority without any chairs but if the G8 generously gave a bit of aid that would leave them with one chair. Ask the nominated G8 person to occupy nine chairs while the remaining nine squeeze on to only one chair. This is obviously quite difficult.

Outcomes and tips: Ask the G8 how he/she is feeling – then ask the majority world what they would do to change the situation. Some people might try to persuade the G8 to give them their chairs back; others just go and take them.

4. Debate it!

Often participants really value an opportunity to talk freely, but as a facilitator free debate can be very difficult to structure and dominant personalities or viewpoints can easily take over. The following activities help to structure things.

The YES/NO game (or Issue Lines)

*Aim: To s*ee opinions in relation to other points of view and for participants to try and defend or persuade others of their perspective.

Method: All stand up and explain that you are all standing on a long line with YES at one end and NO at the other and NOT SURE somewhere in the middle. (It can help to make signs.) Read a statement and ask people to position themselves in the room depending on their point of view. When people have moved, ask someone standing in

the YES or NO sections to try and explain why they are standing where they are, then ask the opposite side for an opinion. Allow the debate to continue awhile and then ask participants to reposition themselves depending on what they have heard.

Questions that we have used include:

- Is nuclear power a viable, alternative to fossil fuels?
- Is it desirable that levels of consumption in the developing world equal that of those in the 'developed' world?

Outcomes and tips: These debates are often lively. Be careful not to allow any one person, including the facilitator, to dominate and make sure the question has a possible yes-no range of answers. Try working in smaller groups to allow everyone to speak and then give time for groups to feed back their main points.

Role plays

Aim: To present different opinions and encourage people to think from varied perspectives. Role plays enable participants to develop characters and take on their opinions, providing an excellent opportunity to express common misconceptions and controversial opinions without the participants speaking personally.

Method: Prepare a 'pro' 'anti' and/or 'neutral' camp with prompt cards for each. This should include context, details on how to act and speak, and ideas on how to respond to questioning. Explain that people should keep in this role at all times, even if they don't agree with the views expressed. Give people time to discuss and expand on the prompt cards. A good way to structure discussion is to chair a hearing between the different parties, where a mediator asks each side to present their case in turn. Allow time for open questions, followed by a summing up.

Example: Building a local road.

- Chief Executive of Gotham City: Your city is booming and the key to its success is road transport. Business and tourists are being attracted from the whole country. Argue that: if the new ring road doesn't go ahead then the economic viability of the area will suffer. Less growth means fewer taxes, which means less money for public services.
- Concerned citizens near the proposed road: There has been so much development in this city that there doesn't seem a case for any more. Roads are jammed already and just building more roads doesn't solve the problem, but only encourages more car use. Argue that: more cars equals more pollution, accidents and unhealthy lifestyles.

Outcomes and tips: Role plays need to be well prepared and work best when people are confident speaking in front of each other. With a longer session, ask participants to research and develop roles for small groups to enact.

5. Connecting histories and lives

Sharing our collective pasts is a key way to begin to understand our present and to imagine our futures. There are many ways to do this, through oral histories, participatory video documentaries, etc. It can also be useful to plot events on to a visual representation of history.

The rise of global capitalism and resistance timeline

Aim: To chart the rise of the current economic system and global resistance to it, to show international organisations in context. It can be used, for example, to show how US foreign policy has worked and evolved, or how resistance movements in the global North and South have progressed and connected.

Method: Draw a timeline on a big piece of paper or cloth, write key moments of the development of the economy and resistance events on to cards and give one or two to each pair. Give them time to discuss it and ask any questions about it and then ask them to put the events on the timeline where they think it occurred. Also give participants blank cards and ask them to fill in things they would like to add – maybe from their local area or that they have been inspired by. Go through the events, asking others to explain and give their opinions and help people identify connections.

Outcomes and tips: This activity helps people see connections between seemingly separate events. Make sure you have reliable information on dates, etc.

6. Get out of the classroom – creative educational events

Plays, film screenings, music, talent shows, bike rides, mural painting, nature trails, and cooking are all ways to get together and can be adapted to a theme. A walking tour can be a great way to bring a theme to life and to learn about our built environment or local history.

Walking tours of immigration controls and the 'chain of deportation'

Aim: To draw to people's attention institutions, companies and government departments involved in the chain of deportation of asylum seekers. A tour exposes the process and joins the dots in the picture of detention and deportation and helps understand the system.
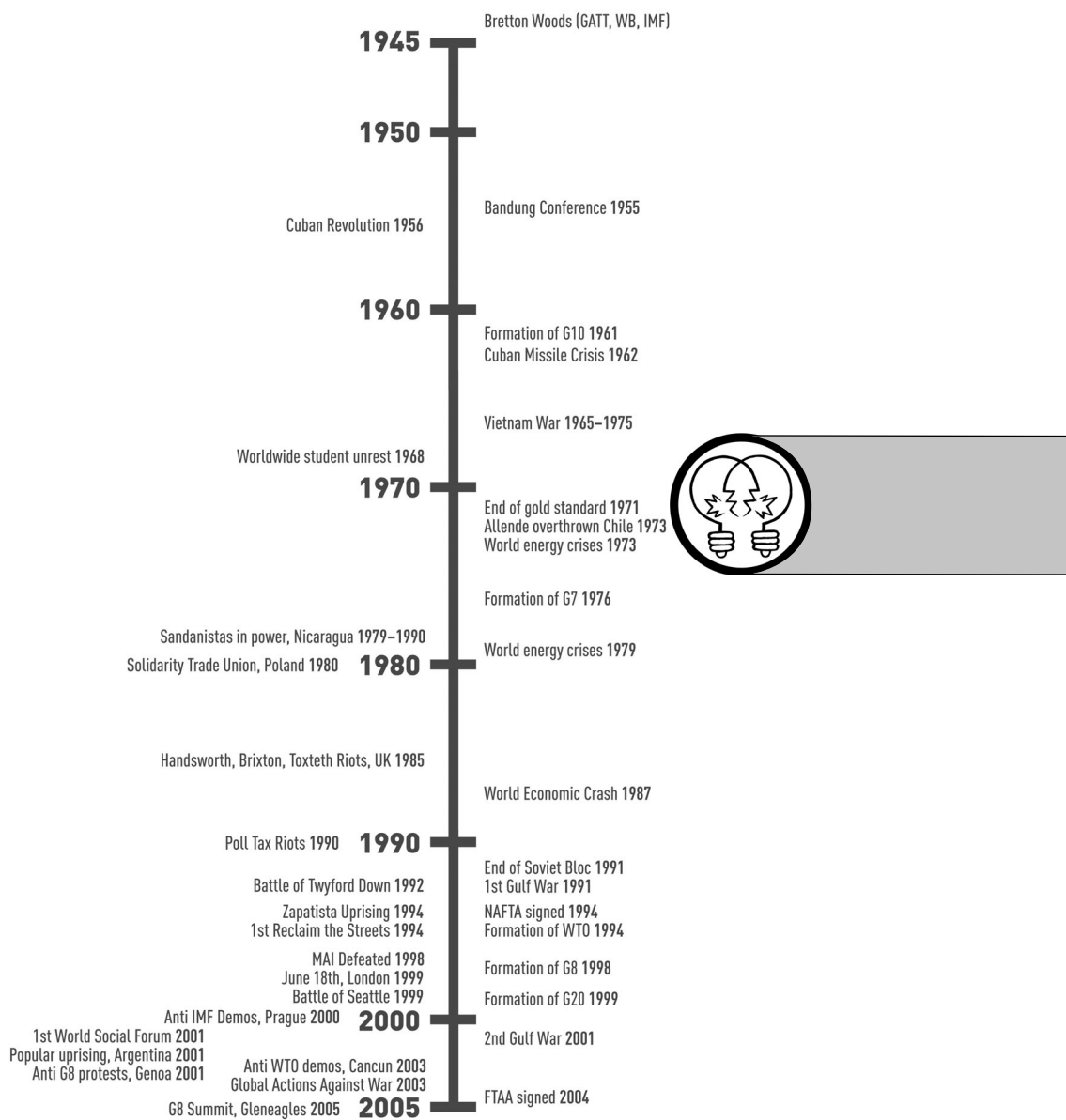
1945 — Bretton Woods (GATT, WB, IMF)

1950 —

Cuban Revolution **1956** — Bandung Conference **1955**

1960 — Formation of G10 **1961**
Cuban Missile Crisis **1962**

Vietnam War **1965–1975**

Worldwide student unrest **1968**
1970 — End of gold standard **1971**
Allende overthrown Chile **1973**
World energy crises **1973**

Formation of G7 **1976**

Sandanistas in power, Nicaragua **1979–1990**
Solidarity Trade Union, Poland **1980** **1980** — World energy crises **1979**

Handsworth, Brixton, Toxteth Riots, UK **1985**

World Economic Crash **1987**

Poll Tax Riots **1990** **1990** —
End of Soviet Bloc **1991**
Battle of Twyford Down **1992** 1st Gulf War **1991**
Zapatista Uprising **1994** NAFTA signed **1994**
1st Reclaim the Streets **1994** Formation of WTO **1994**
MAI Defeated **1998** Formation of G8 **1998**
June 18th, London **1999**
Battle of Seattle **1999** Formation of G20 **1999**
Anti IMF Demos, Prague **2000** **2000** —
1st World Social Forum **2001** 2nd Gulf War **2001**
Popular uprising, Argentina **2001**
Anti G8 protests, Genoa **2001** Anti WTO demos, Cancun **2003**
Global Actions Against War **2003**
G8 Summit, Gleneagles **2005** **2005** — FTAA signed **2004**

Figure 8.4   Timeline of world history and resistance used in a workshop

Source: Trapese Collective.

Method: Research the government sponsored institutions and private companies that earn money carrying out these racist policies, and organise a tour to visit some of the places in your area that are involved in locking up and deporting asylum seekers. Go as a walking tour in groups, assemble in a public place and have easily identified guides with maps, information, loud speakers, music, etc.
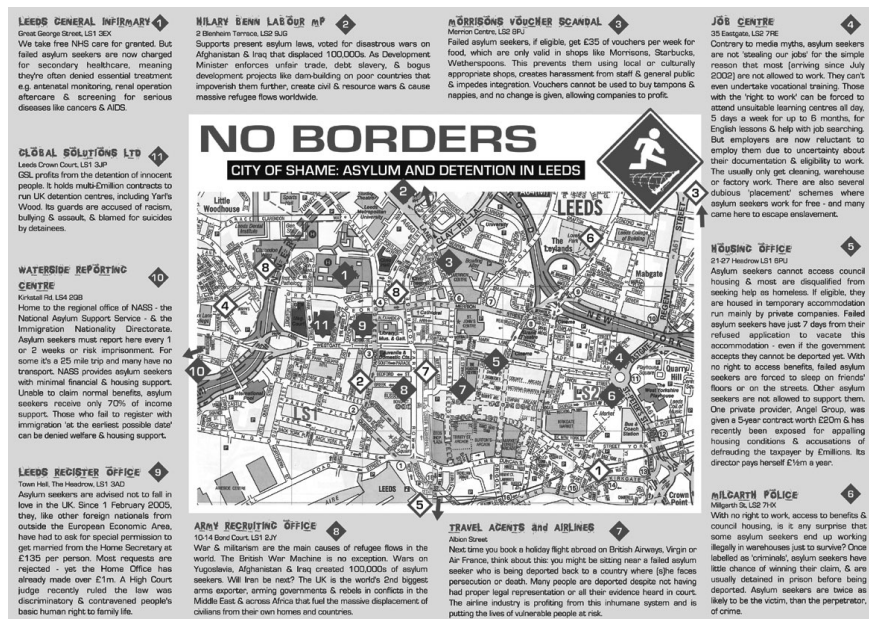

Figure 8.5   No Borders Tour of Asylum Shame, Leeds

Source: Leeds No Borders.

Social change pub quiz
Aim: A social event where the content matter is related to important issues. Can be a good way to outreach to different audiences.

Method: Find a venue to host you – community centre, student union bar or a local pub – and advertise the event. Make up several themed rounds of questions, get answer sheets, pens and prizes and maybe a microphone. Keep it varied by using multiple choice, picture or music rounds, bingo or maybe even some subverted karaoke.

Example: The Food Round.

1. How many million battery chickens are produced for consumption each year in the UK?
    (Answer: 750 million)
2. How many billion did Wal-Mart's global sales amount to in 2002; was it (a) $128 billion, (b) $244.5 billion, or (c) $49 billion?
    (Answer: b)
3   What is the legal UK limit for the number of pus cells per litre of milk that may be legally sold for human consumption?
    (Answer: Up to 400 million)

Sources:
1. and 2. Corporate Watch (2001)
3. Butler (2006).

7. Planning for Action

The aim of the game is that people leave with concrete ideas about what they are going to actually do – a next date, an ambition or a vision. This stage is also a chance for people to share ideas about the things they are already doing and plug any events or projects.

Action mapping

Aim: To show a variety of actions and inter-connections.

Method: Ask groups to think of two ways to tackle the issue that the workshop is dealing with at different levels: the individual, local and national/international for example.

Outcomes and tips: Get groups to think about time scales for their actions and how they practically might do them. A variation is to think about two things to do this week, this month, this year, etc.

Picture sequences

Aim: To look at how things are and how we would like them to be, and to work out how to get there.

Method: Draw a simple picture that represents, 'the present', with all the problems illustrated. Then, as a group, put together a second drawing to represent 'the future', which shows the same situation once the problems have been overcome or the improvements made. Make sure you incorporate everyone's ideas of what you hope

Table 8.1   *Example*: The problem: climate change

What can you do individually?	What can you do locally?	What can you do nationally/ internationally?
Energy efficiency; insulation, turn heating down etc., switch to green energy sources.	Develop community owned renewables, energy sources and food production.	Take part in actions, protests, camps and gatherings.
Stop flying unless unavoidable and cut car use.	Set up neighbourhood composting schemes.	Support/publicise struggles against fossil fuel extraction, e.g. new pipelines.

to achieve. Once you have the drawings, put them where everyone can see them with a space in between them, then ask yourselves how you can get from the first to the second. What needs to happen to get there? How could it be achieved? Use the answers to make your own middle, between the present and the future. Now you have your vision and have gone some way to working out your action plan.
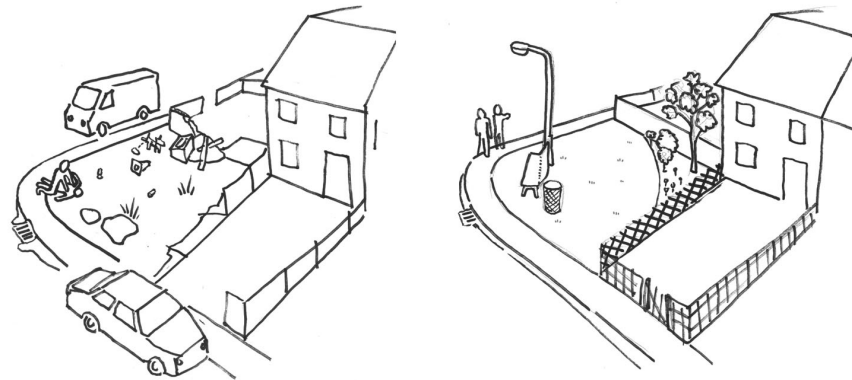

Figure 8.6   Designing your own life: before and after

Source: Groundswell.

Presents

Aim: To end the workshop on a high note and to get participants to 'think the impossible'.

Method: Identify the main problem that people want to focus on. Give out cards with an imaginary present written on to each participant. Ask them to describe how they would use their present to solve the problem.

Examples:

- the ability to look like anyone you want
- £1 million
- a minute of prime time TV
- a key that unlocks any lock
- an invisibility cloak
- a guarantee you'll never get caught.

Calendars of resistance   It's important to share information on other things that you know are going on in the area. Draw up a calendar with contact details for people to get more information.

Skills for good communication

- Challenge dominance. Both from vocal participants and as facilitators. Be open from the start about why activities are being undertaken and do not manipulate participants to certain ideological ends.
- Don't judge. Be supportive in your approach and recognise the validity of a diversity of actions and viewpoints. It's not about persuading people to think or act as you want them to!
- Listening is crucial. Learn the importance of active listening to allow necessary discussion. Letting people talk, reducing dependency and empowering people to think for themselves are at the heart of radical education.
- Overcome powerlessness. If everything is connected you can't change anything without changing everything. But you can't change everything, so that means you can't change anything!' (A student after a lesson on globalisation from the book *Rethinking Globalisation*) (Bigelow and Peterson 2003).

While it's not true that we cannot change anything, this student's comment demonstrates how depression and a feeling of powerlessness is a logical reaction when solutions seem very small in the face of such large forces. Here are some tips for giving positive workshops about negative subjects:

- Don't cram in too much information. Go step by step and give things time and space to develop.
- Mention the empowering side. Look for the positive things we can do and emphasise our creativity, our adaptability. Sharing personal experiences and failures can be very useful. Start with concrete achievable aims and develop from there.

- It is important that people are not left feeling isolated and that there is follow up.
- Try making a presentation about initiatives or protests that have inspired you with images or photos and use this is a springboard for talking about the viability of these ideas.

making the leap to action

There are lots of issues which people are angry and passionate about and areas where they want to take action. Getting together to discuss and understand problems is a good way to reduce feelings of isolation and to launch campaigns and projects. It is really important to pick our starting points carefully, to build up trust and meet people in their daily realities, whilst not being scared of expressing radical views. Having worked with different groups we have been continually inspired by people's views, opinions and desires to instigate change. These experiences have helped us to break down the false distinction between activists and everyone else and we have learned as much as we have taught. Popular education is about building from the beginning and finding innovative ways to learn together, realising the capacity that we have to take control of our lives and facilitating collective action, and for us, this lies at the heart of building movements for change.

The Trapese Popular Education Collective is based in the UK and since 2004 has been working with groups of adults and young people to understand and take action on issues including climate change, globalisation and migration. They also produce educational resources and promote participatory, interactive learning through training and skill-shares (see www. trapese.org). Additional material sourced gratefully from Rising Tide, Groundswell, the Alberta Council for Global Co-operation and Rethinking Schools.

resources

Books

General

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Websites

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Education Otherwise www.education-otherwise.org/

Highlander School www.highlandercenter.org/r-b-popular-ed.asp

Home Education www.home-education.org.uk

Institute for Social Ecology www.social-ecology.org/

Interactive Tool Kit www.openconcept.ca/mike/

Intro to Paulo Freire www.infed.org/thinkers/et-freir.htm

Intro to Pop Ed www.infed.org/biblio/b-poped.htm

Laboratory of Collective Ideas (Spanish) www.labid.org/

PoEd News www.popednews.org/

Popular Education European Network List http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/poped

Popular Education for Human Rights www.hrea.org/pubs/

Project South www.projectsouth.org/

Trapese Collective www.trapese.org

Film resources

Beyond TV www.beyondtv.org/

Big Noise Films www.bignoisefilms.com/

Carbon Trade Watch www.tni.org/ctw/

Eyes on IFIs www.ifiwatchnet.org/eyes/index.shtml

Global Exchange http://store.gxonlinestore.org/films.html

Undercurrents www.undercurrents.org/