

Section 3: Popular Education

What is Popular Education?

<http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/book/export/html/2337>

Popular education is an educational approach that collectively and critically examines everyday experiences and raises consciousness for organizing and movement building, acting on injustices with a political vision in the interests of the most marginalized.

~ Paulo Freire

Popular education comes from Latin America where popular means “of the people.” Popular education refers to a method of education that encourages people to teach and learn from each other about issues that matter most in their lives, issues that will allow them to organize together for social change.

Popular education requires the “learners” to define what they need in order to learn. Lessons are not dictated by a teacher or leader based on what they know or what they think is important. Popular education is non-hierarchical. The boundaries between learners and teachers are intentionally blurred, with each teaching the other according to their personal skills, knowledge, and lived realities. Popular education may be defined as a technique designed to raise the consciousness of its participants and to allow them to become more aware of how personal experiences are connected to larger societal problems. It has the potential to **empower** people to collectively organize to change issues affecting their lives.¹

This approach has been used around the world as a method to analyse how things work and to organize for change. For example in Brazil, peasants who were displaced from their land rallied together, learned about the issues, analysed the key players in the situation, and mobilized broad support. This action led the landless peasants back to their rightful land.

Popular education has also been a key component in other mobilization efforts and ongoing battles of land reclamation. In the United States Myles Horton and the Highlander Centre put popular education on the map in the 1930s when they organized meetings with people in the Southern U.S. to better their life circumstances. In naming issues of concern, people mentioned that they wished they could vote in order to have an effect on the political processes. The result was a popular education approach that mobilized a massive voter drive. This process focused on local people, collectively learning about political issues while also learning to read.

In Canada, popular education has been used to mobilize communities to protest free trade and to organize **social justice** campaigns with union workers. Popular education is not just learning for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, but learning so that you can make a difference in the world. Popular education can be applied in any setting where you are looking for action that will affect social change. It is not a set process or defined method with steps that must be followed, rather it is about reflecting with others and figuring out ways to take action to change our lives and in our world.

The key components to popular education are:

- Understanding that learning starts with what is important in the lives of the participants
- Understanding that learning is a process that names and addresses **power** imbalances in the world, as well as in the collective group

- Understanding that the main goal of popular education is to create positive social change
- ⁱ Wikipedia, *Popular Education*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_education [consulted September 4, 2008].

Popular Education for Girl-Centred Programming

The learning spiral of the popular education method was employed in every session in order to identify shared experiences, to engage in critical analysis, and to collectively discuss and develop solutions and alternative actions.

Each session was designed with the goal of involving the intellect, the emotions, and the promotion of action-based solutions for a holistic approach to program delivery.

~ Nabila El-Ahmed,

St. Joseph Immigrant Women's Centre, Hamilton

Popular education is a great way to do girls' programming that starts with girls' experiences, and helps them to put into perspective what is going on in their lives, and helps them to be active participants in making changes in their lives, communities, and beyond.

The key to popular education is that the programming should centre on the girls; they should take the lead in naming what activities they want to do, and in raising issues that are important to them. The focus is on what *they* are experiencing and wondering about and what they find cool. Let them lead with the content and you create the container – the space, the **resources**, the support and the process! Take their interests and concerns as your inspiration to create workshops. Girls can also be encouraged to plan and lead workshops by themselves that demonstrated their special skills or hobbies while you provide support as the facilitator.

You can use these aspects of popular education in your own girls' program. Here are some examples of how:

- Start with the experience and knowledge of the participants through `get to know you` activities and through activities that encourage girls to tell stories about what is important in their lives (for example, sharing troubles girls face).
- Identify patterns by noticing what themes are repeated in girls' experiences as they share their stories. Explore these topics (for example, noting that

everyone in the group is mentioning being effected by some form of bullying and girl cliques).

- Do your homework! Bring in information or guest speakers based on the questions and needs of the group. In order to get girls thinking, ask questions about how situations related to these topics have come to exist. (For example, why are girls in competition with each other, and why do girls think they are each other's enemies?). If girls have questions work together as a group to find the answer. The main idea is for new information is introduced because of the girls' curiosity and needs, not because you wanted to teach them something you thought they should learn.
- Based on what you have shared and learned you have probably noticed some things that are not working the way you would like, or some things that are great and you would like to see more of it in girls lives - this is the point! Seize the opportunity to do something! Strategize and plan for action. Think of the options that you and the group have for making the situation better; brainstorm and think through different ideas. (For example, can think of different ways you can effectively intervene when there are cliques forming or bullying is happening?)
- Apply what has been learned and take action. Let the girls come up with strategies for change themselves; although you can suggest actions if they are stuck; such as a letter writing campaign, organizing a workshop, making a 'zine or talking to friends. (For example, decide not to be mean to other girls and tell your friends about it; create a 'zine about why girls should support each other!)

The key to a popular education approach is to be flexible and adaptable – it is not a step-by-step method! You will jump back and forth between different parts of the spiral model. For example, when adding new information to an activity you may uncover a new aspect of your participants' experiences and want to explore that; you may even want to switch gears and do a full session on another topic that is raised. Be flexible and work according to the needs of your group.

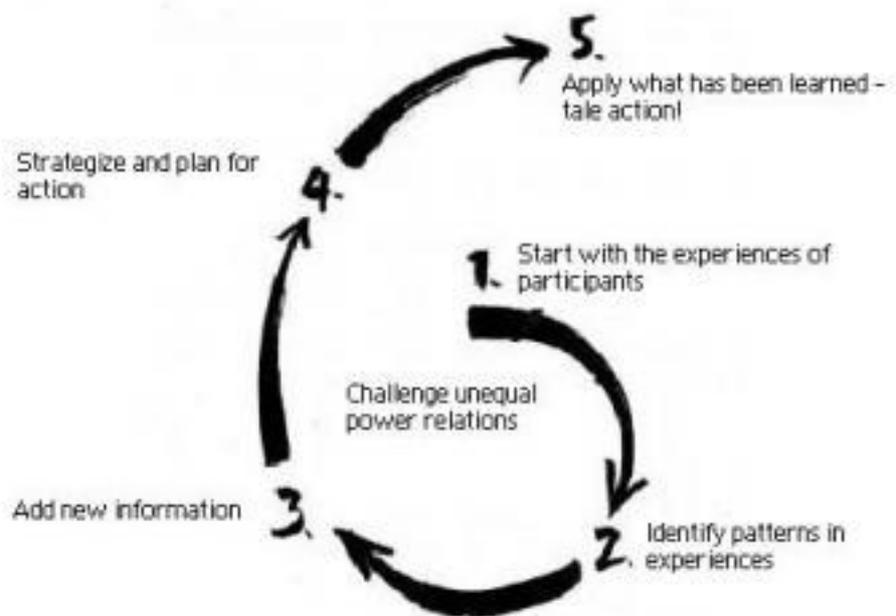
For additional information on Popular Education, visit our Online Resource Centre

The Popular Education Spiral

The Popular Education Spiral

Popular education can provide a model to help you think about how to plan a session with girls, as well as how to plan an entire program. It is not a template, but a way of thinking about education for social change.

The spiral model of popular education looks like this:



In this spiral model of popular education, there are a number of aspects, or guiding principles, to incorporate. These aspects include:

- Starting with the experiences of the participants
- Identifying patterns
- Adding new information
- Strategizing and planning for action
- Taking action

They do not need to be followed in that order, but each should be taken into account in your programming.

For example, a popular education inspired girls' program using the spiral model would focus on working with girls to figure out, and then work with, what is important in their lives. The root purpose is to help girls improve their lives; so naturally, the starting point *is the girls' lives*.

This can be accomplished by having girls name the issues they face, find common ground with other girls, learn new things to improve their analyses, and act together for change that affects their lives. By incorporating these aspects into your program, popular education offers valuable guiding principles for inspiring collective learning and action.

Start From Where We Are

The centre of the popular education spiral is called "Starting from Where We Are." This stage is about establishing where all the girls in the group "are at" in terms of who they are, where their interests lie, and what their knowledge and awareness of "girls issues" is. This is the beginning of a process that involves "getting to know you" activities, such as telling stories about what is important in our lives and sharing experiences common to girls. In this part of the spiral, the focus is on discovering each participant's starting point of knowledge and experience base, as well as creating the container for the group to create a safe(r) space and build co-operation allies instead of competition.

As in all aspects of the spiral, these are concepts that a group will return to again and again, not only in the formation stage but also in activities throughout the program. The spiral model of popular education is used to think about central concepts that need to be incorporated throughout the program, not as stages or steps that are passed through in a progression.

Activities

To see workshop activities that are based on a popular education approach, we have compiled a Workshop Guide that accompanies this Manual. The Workshop Guide is a compilation of a diverse selection of workshop activities gathered from girls' programmers from across the country. It contains descriptions of a vast collection of the most effective, or "best practice," activities and workshops for girls and young women. The activities found in the guide should be adapted for your specific context and your specific girls' group, and for this reason it would be helpful if you reviewed Section 2: Designing Workshops in this Manual at the same time.

The [Workshop Guide](#) is available both in hard copy and in this electronic version of the Manual!

The following are general suggestions and tips best suited to this initial stage of the spiral.

Introductions and Icebreakers

Introductions and icebreakers are best used in a progression that help group members learn each others names and gradually allow participants to learn more about each other and to build trust.

Trust Activities

These activities provide the group with an opportunity to build trust by sharing experiences, working together for a common cause and depending on one another. This type of activity can be used to create closeness at the beginning of a workshop and to maintain a sense of cohesion in the group, as well as to practice co-operation or to work on unspoken conflicts that may exist. Doing a trust activity and then

debriefing about how it went can be a great mirror for the group to reflect on how well they are (or aren't) working together.

Creating a Safer Space

In our experience, a “safer space” is one where girls are able to express themselves, make mistakes, take healthy risks, and constructively challenge one another. How can we create a sense of safety in the group? First of all, we have to recognize that creating a safe space in which everyone feels completely comfortable all the time may not be possible. Each girl will have different things that help her create and maintain a feeling of safety. However, it is also important that the girls challenge themselves outside of their comfort zone in order to learn and grow. Keep in mind that having the courage to grow also requires having a safe place to process and reflect on challenging experiences.

Incorporating processes such as Group Agreements into your workshops allow every girl to voice her needs and to be an active participant in the shaping of the girls' program. This will help to make it a safer space in which everyone can explore and experience himself or herself more fully!

See [Creating a Group Agreement in Appendix 3](#).

Energizers

Energizers add the spice to workshop! Having a range of energizer ideas in your back pocket is helpful for:

- When energy is low
- Breaking tension in the group
- Building cohesion in the group through sharing humour
- Releasing energy by giving the girls the chance to move their bodies
- Transitioning into an activity after a break, or transitioning between activities

Look for Patterns in Experience

It is an important role of the facilitator to listen to and acknowledge what individual participants share and also to listen for what the girls have in common. In our experience, noticing what themes are repeated in participants' experiences and exploring these topics is at the heart of girl-centred programming. To do this, you need to stay alert to, and curious about, the emerging trends of what girls are interested in and be motivated to act on these. Listening for what the girls have in common also means reading between the lines and listening for the implicit questions that are not explicitly asked.

When you are able to identify patterns in experience, you will be able to respond to themes that have emerged in the workshops you plan. For instance, if it seems like a lot of the girls are talking about their favourite celebrities, you may want to discuss what makes these individuals interesting and attractive and look at what it takes to become a celebrity. Perhaps you could organize some activities that analyse the popular media!

As a facilitator, looking for patterns in experience is about asking good questions that help you and others explore how issues relate. This is about making connections from the experiences of one girl to another. It also means figuring out how these experiences are impacted by messages and expectations from family and friends, by even larger social issues, as well as the influences of school, pop culture, and the media.

The following is a practice you can use to help you connect these dots.

Debriefing to Find Patterns In Experience

Debriefing is very important because it helps individual members of the group to deepen their learning and understanding. However, within a popular education approach, the focus is not only on individual learning, but also is on how the collective learns together for the purpose of shaping and informing collective action.

For this reason, when thinking about debriefing, it is more important to focus on what is being learned together as a collective. This is done by looking for patterns in experience or finding the commonalities in the lived experiences that individual members of the group share. Looking for patterns in experience will happen primarily at the “So What?” stage in the progression of debriefing questions.

The role of the facilitator at this stage is to encourage group members to draw links between their experiences. For example, group members may individually have experienced racism or homophobia. By sharing these experiences, group members may notice the shared experiences or see a relationship between their experiences. Participants may also need your help in making the links. By looking for patterns in experience it is possible to encourage group members to see that they are not alone in their experience and to strategize towards actions that can address the systemic nature of the oppressions group members have experienced. This is different to focusing on working through the individual actions each girl has experienced or witnessed.

For more information on approaches to debriefing experiences see [Debriefing to Deepen Learning in Section 2](#).

Add (New) Information: Knowledge Building

Positive body image was a key theme for Girls’ Club, addressed in multiple activities and through various media. For example: “The girls learned to create digital collages that represented positive body image ... not only did they learn a new skill using a different medium, they also demonstrated a new form of communication.”

‘Zine-making was also used as a means of self-expression that is outside the mainstream of regular media channels. Girls’ Club addressed body image issues through activities designed to have girls articulate social expectations of beauty and body image, and then critically reflect on these.

~ Girls Action Girls’ Club Evaluation

“Adding (New) Information,” is the portion of the popular education spiral where you seek out new information as a group and start to answer the questions that have arisen during programming. *The key is that this need for information originates from the girls.* Girls are not passive (and should not be treated as such) in the process. Whatever knowledge building you do together will therefore relate to where the girls are at and not from your desire to “teach” them something. In this way, popular education works from a positive perspective that trusts in the girls’ capacities, resourcefulness, and ability to ask good questions.

At this stage, girls are encouraged to develop their *own knowledge* as a political process leading to collective action in the community. We think it is important to take an asset-based approach: one that values what girls already know and the ways that they learn. This approach means recognizing that girls face certain structural barriers in learning, such as institutionalized racism, poverty, and

homophobia, among many others. In this way, we aim to bring critical perspectives of how these systems work into our learning.

In other words, the foundation of the new information we bring into the group needs to be grounded in anti-oppression frameworks. Modelling this kind of learning is an important way to understand issues holistically and to practise critical-thinking skills.

What counts as knowledge?

Another key aspect in this portion of the popular education spiral is to question and challenge what we have been taught to consider as credible sources of information. Often we are taught that only experts with specific credentials know anything and as such, to know something we must listen to them.

For example, psychologists may say certain things about what is important to girls or how girls develop. Girls need to trust what they are feeling and know that this also provides “expert knowledge.” In reality, knowledge exists in many places, especially in our lived experiences. There are many places to connect with information for knowledge building.

Recognizing knowledge or expertise within a group and/or **community** can be a very **empowering** and engaging process. Examples of group or community sources of information are:

- The group itself
- Mentors that the girls want to introduce to the group
- Volunteer workshop facilitators or speakers from other community agencies

For more information on how to work safely and effectively with volunteers, please see [Section 1: Volunteers and Guest Facilitators](#)

To help you seek out new information grounded in anti-oppression, we have compiled information sheets, on themes such as healthy sexuality, violence prevention, self-esteem and more in [Appendix 3](#). They provide just a few examples of thematic areas where the girls may need or want to explore new information.

We know that the information here will not meet every need you might have for knowledge-building; we could write a book about the issues girls and young women want to talk about and learn about – learning is a lifetime process for us all! We hope these information sheets will create the groundwork for what you need to know when questions arise and inspire further exploration with your group. We also hope that the activities suggested will help you promote meaningful discussions and inspire you to design your own activities.

Here is a quick preview of the information sheets we have prepared:

Anti-Oppression

Our mandate is to work towards equity and to create a just society. Our girls’ programs, publications, and **resources** aim to **empower** girls and an anti-oppression framework is at the heart of this work.

An anti-oppression approach is one that seeks to actively address and understand the varied causes and effects of power, privilege, and marginalization in girls’ communities. This approach means being actively reflective in our work and asking questions about how our practices reinforce or help overcome multiple forms of **oppression**.

In terms of programming, this kind of reflection can translate into a number of potentially productive discussions on how **power** and **privilege** play themselves out in group dynamics during workshops,

activities or in the kinds of knowledge we share. The addition of any kind of new information into your girls' group should take into consideration how all the multiple oppressions (all the "isms") affect us on an individual and community level. Anti-oppression is the basis of the framework for all of the information provided in this section and in this Manual as a whole. We have also provided the [Knowledge-Building Info-Sheet: What is Anti-Oppression? in Appendix 3](#) in order to help expand this concept.

Anti-oppression means recognizing historical inequities and working in a way that names power imbalances and works to transform them. The world as we know it divides people based on the notion that some are "better than" and some are "less than." We are taught to believe that some of us are deserving of privileges and opportunities, while others are less deserving. Who becomes "other" is determined by values that define social norms and organizes us into social hierarchies.

Interlocking oppression is a helpful way of understanding how oppressions are linked together and inseparable. Systems of oppression come into existence in and through one another; they are not separate and distinct. This means that **class** exploitation could not be accomplished without **gender** and **racial** hierarchies; imperialism would not be possible without **class** exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on.¹ In other words, oppression and privilege are two sides of the same coin; one cannot exist without the other. Having a grasp of anti-oppression theory and frameworks is critical to girls and women meeting across their differences and working together.

Self-Esteem

We recognize that self-esteem – feeling able to cope, feeling worthy, and feeling whole – is the starting point or foundation for girls to realize their potential.

The knowledge building information sheets and activities that we have provided try to reflect this idea, and are meant to provide resources that can be drawn on at any stage in your program. The suggested activities can also be used and adapted at any stage of programming when issues of self-esteem (or lack of self-esteem) arise with the girls in your program.

Sexual Health

An issue that comes up frequently in girls' programs is relationships, sexuality, and sex. Girls are naturally curious about these aspects of life and growing up and often the girls' group is the safest place they have to ask questions and learn about relationships and sex. As a facilitator, being comfortable and informed on these topics is important for modelling an **empowered** and centred approach to these issues. Modelling this kind of attitude can provide great incentive for girls to become more proactive about their own health and well-being.

Discussions and workshops on these issues can help counter **stereotypes** that discourage girls from taking a lead in their own health and encourage them to become an advocate for friends or family who face challenges such as accessing information or resources. We hope that the activities and information sheets provided will help girls become empowered in their sexual health.

Violence Prevention

Girls can experience violence in complex and intersecting ways. We call this the violence continuum, which ranges from personal violence (self-harm, substance abuse, and so on); relational violence (sexual abuse, emotional or verbal abuse, physical abuse, bullying, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on); and systemic violence (poverty, discrimination within institutions, policies or laws, sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on). Violence can occur on one, two, or all of these levels simultaneously and has proven to be detrimental for young women's health and emotional development.

Girls require preventative approaches that address these multiple forms of violence without perpetuating a climate of fear that can be intimidating and silencing. In all activities and conversations, it is key to intersperse time for processing these difficult issues with time for celebrating the ways we are strong!

ⁱS. Razack, and M.L. Fellows, “The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchical Relations Among Women,” *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 1, 2 (1998), p. 335.

Strategize, Plan, and Take Action

I ask youth what they want, what are some things that they see in their community, that they wish were different but don't know how to fix it, or don't know who to turn to. If they don't know, I give them suggestions to help them, and then develop programming that is of interest to them.

~ Bev Walker, Millbrook Family Healing Centre Truro, Nova Scotia

We attempted to get the girls involved in outside opportunities, build their confidence from feeling respected in a girl-centred space, and our eventual intention was to have them help co-facilitate after they had completed the program.

~ Joanne Cave, Ophelia's Voice, Sherwood Park Alberta

What Is Action?

Action means doing something (or avoiding doing something) in order to have a positive effect on the social, political, economic or cultural environment that you live in. Action is also closely tied to the idea of being an activist – someone who works to make change happen. Taking action with your girls' group can foster the development of leadership skills, self-esteem and community engagement. Girls learn about their world by changing it for the betterment of their lives, families and communities.

Why Take Action?

Action can be motivated by a wide range of political beliefs or orientations and take many different forms of expression. You might decide to take action based on situations, organizations, policies, laws or behaviours that you see in the world that you do not like. You may also take action in order to further a positive vision of the world that you want to see realized.

Here are just a few reasons why you might be motivated to take action:

- Make a change in your life, community, country or the world
- Raise awareness so that more people will take action
- Set a positive example for others
- Influence and effect public policy
- Create positive alternatives to problems or challenges you see in your community and in the world
- Encourage acting locally and thinking globally

Action and the Popular Education Spiral

Strategizing and planning for action follows the previous aspects of the spiral (starting from where participants are at, looking for patterns, and adding new information and theory), but this does not mean that you should only think about taking action at the end of the popular education spiral. Like all aspects of the spiral, the idea of social change and taking action should be infused in everything that you do.

At some stage in your session or program you will want to be very explicit about how to enact change. You can brainstorm and try out different ideas depending on the needs of the group. For example, if the issue of cliques comes up, think of how you can talk with girls about its negative effects and strategize together about what can be done.

The action phase of the process is very important. It offers hope, possibility, and engages girls in working together and building team skills as they enact change together. Taking action can also provide girls with an important opportunity to practise their self-expression and self-advocacy. This is an important part of confidence, self-assertiveness and advocacy building. Engaging in action with others is also important, since it can give girls the opportunity to share their learning and awareness with their peers and their community. Doing action with others also enables positive change on the broader community.

Here are some tips and suggestions that could help in the strategizing before you take action:

How to Strategize or Decide What Action to Take¹

There are many ways to take action. What kind of action you decide to do will depend on the situation, your analysis of the situation and what you think will produce the greatest results, as well as who else is interested in becoming involved in taking action with you.

For example, if you see a lot of garbage on the street you may determine the problem is the trash (which is dirty or looks bad) or people's behaviour (throwing trash on the street) or business practices (which create too much packaging). Each analysis calls for a different strategy or response: a neighbourhood cleanup, a public awareness campaign or writing letters to businesses that you feel over packaging. This is a very simple example, but hopefully shows how there are many ways to approach an issue.

Also, the same actions may not have the same impact or result each time you do it. A very important part of taking action is to think through the situations and analyse the possibilities ahead of time. Try not to just jump in and take action without being clear on what your purpose is.

To help you decide what actions are best suited to your vision, here are some questions to ask yourself about taking action:

- What are the objectives of your action? What do you want to see happen as a result of your action?
- What actions would suit meeting your objective best?
- How does your action fit into your longer-term vision of the change you would like to see?
- How will you communicate with your audience?
- What are the possible outcomes of your action (intended or unintended, good or bad)?
- How will you or your group make decisions about what to do next, before, during, and after the action?
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your action?
- Are there any possible negative consequences that might arise from your action? Are you prepared to deal with them?

- At what point will you decide to call it off?

How Can I Take Action?

Taking action can mean educating, awareness raising, creating positive alternatives or challenging injustices where you see them.

Here are a few examples of how you can take action with your girls group. Try brainstorming with the girls about what these actions involve and how they can use them for their own issues.

- Organize a workshop
- Arrange for an inspiring person to speak at your girls group and invite people to join, or you can decide to go big and fill a whole auditorium
- Encourage writing by making 'zines with the girls' stories and poetry; create pamphlets, websites or blogs
- Introduce art by creating a mural or collage, painting, dance, songs, theatre, photo exhibitions
- Talk to a friend
- Put on an event. Have the girls identify an issue that is important to them and their communities and organize an event to bring everyone together around this issue to raise awareness, share, and plan for the future
- Speak out and take responsibility for the aspects of your identity where you have privilege – most of us are both marginalized and privileged in some way
- Encourage political campaigning and support
- Fundraise
- Challenge oppression where you see it, openly and proudly express the aspects of your identity that are marginalized
- Conduct research to inform others and to inform policies
- Campaign and organize around an issue in order to raise awareness about it: write letters to those causing the problem or to those who can offer support and make your cause known in the general public by offering information (like tabling at an event or on the street)
- Try lobbying and influencing others in power (like legislators) who are in favour of a certain policy or practice by seeking interviews, writing letters or joining a letter-writing campaign and bringing external pressureⁱⁱ

- Promote civil disobedience characterized by the use of passive resistance or other nonviolent meansⁱⁱⁱ as a way of seeking law reforms
- Boycott by patronizing and encouraging others to patronize businesses whose practices you prefer (they are kind to the environment or treat their employees fairly)
- Take part in media activism by:

- *Culture Jamming*

A form of political communication in response to the saturation of advertising we face and commercial isolation of public life. Culture jamming makes a satire of media messages such as brand logos and political messages. By playing with and altering these messages, cultural jammers hope to make consumers aware of the assumptions that go into such messages.^{iv}

- *Internet Activism*

e-Activism or cyber-activism uses different electronic techniques to educate, spread awareness, and promote advocacy to bring about social change such as email, the Web, and other new media^v

- *Demonstrations or Rallies*

March through the streets^{vi} or hold a meeting in a public place (a rally) to hear public speakers.^{vii} Both are ways for a group to express their feeling for or against something.

Why is Action Important?

Never doubt that a small committed group can change the world.

Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.

~ Margaret Mead

As Margaret Mead points out, we have the power to affect the circumstances of our life if we act. Change can take a long time to come about, but every little bit of action that is taken helps to create change. By taking action you are becoming a part of making history, and moving forward towards the elimination of violence and discrimination in all its different forms. If you are unhappy about the state of the world, don't just complain: the best remedy is action. It has been shown that one of the best long-term antidotes to feelings of sadness or hopelessness about the state of the world is to work for social change.^{viii}

Action Profiles

At Girls Action we believe that taking action is an important way for girls to learn about the world: by changing it and making it better. Action can take on many forms. It can be personal, community-based or structural (government laws or organizational policies). Since we talk so much about action, we wanted to share some examples of the actions that girls and young women have taken within our network.

- Actions can be taken within girls' groups to build girls' capacity and raise awareness
- Actions can be taken outside the group to build community
- Girls and young women can self-organize as action
- Girls and young women can take action to influence structural change

Actions can take on one or more of these aspects. For example, girls can take action within the group and then present it to the wider community. This could then lead to collective action to change a law.

Capacity-Building Actions within Girls' Groups

Here are some concrete examples of what we mean by action:

'Zine making!

A favourite activity at Girls' Club is 'zine making. 'Zines address themes which matter to the girls. In the past we have done 'zines on themes such as self-esteem, friendships or healthy relationships. Girls then made copies and shared their creations with their peers.

Write poems, make collages, and create art!

Creative arts and creative writing on topics that affect girls is a great way to raise awareness, share talents, and be creative. It is easy to then share these art creations with the larger community.

Fundraise for a cause that affects us

The girls make bracelets to sell and donate the profits to the cause that is important to them.

Re-write song lyrics

Love the melody but hate the lyrics? Girls re-write song lyrics to deconstruct popular media, reclaim their own realities in music, and educate peers by sharing their songs.

Create your own song!

Girls write their own lyrics and use clapping, stomping, found objects or instruments to create their own song.

Community mural

The girls can paint an image that represents something they have learned or want to share from girls' group. For example, they could paint a "tree of peace" on the walls of the school. The mural is to educate their peers on the acceptance of others and non-violence.

Letter-writing campaigns

Girls write letters to organizations, corporations or government officials on issues they would like to see action on. For example, writing letters to your MP asking her/him to create legislation to ban the use of toxic chemicals in beauty products.

Blogging

Blogs are special websites designed to share information, opinions, and discussions. Girls can participate in existing blogs (see www.kickaction.ca) or they can create their own.

Intergenerational night

Create an event for multiple generations of women to get together about an issue in their community. For example "Leaping Feats Creative Dance Works" in Whitehorse held an informal gathering with prospective girls' club participants and local grandmothers to share stories about new beginnings. The event built bridges between different generations in order to work together towards violence prevention in their community. By networking with women in the community, they worked together to help make change that empowers young women to live without violence.

Ethical Fashion Show

In Victoria, B.C., Anti-DOTE organizes an annual “Unlabeled Fashion Show” where girls make their own brand of fashion through recycled materials and sew-it-yourself designs. This workshop aims to examine all aspects of fashion and explore its effects through a youth-engaged, feminist, and participatory lens. In addition, the workshop is designed for young girls and women to use fashion as a tool for exercising their political agency and resistance.

Body casting

The Green Goddesses girls’ group in Ottawa creates body casts. Using plaster and other materials the group creates body casts of the entire torso and arms, which are then “decorated” with messages about what their bodies mean to them, how they love and nurture them, and how they have been affected by media messages. These body casts are then displayed in an art gallery. The hope is that body casting supports girls in developing awareness and acceptance of body size and shape and offers an opportunity to show the world a different story about women and girls.

Food budgeting

Girlz Group from LEA Place plans a nutritious meal for a family of four while following Canada’s Food Guide and the families’ budget. The girls go to the grocery store armed with calculators and shopping lists. The groceries are then donated to the local food bank to be given to a family of four. This action helps the girls understand the impacts of poverty on families, meal planning, nutrition, budget living, and the cost associated with living in a rural area.

Community-Building Actions

Public film screening and discussion

Jodi Proctor from Whitehorse organizes an awareness raising event/fundraiser on the subject of women’s homelessness in the Yukon. Housing and having supportive programming for women is an important issue in Whitehorse, so Jodi invites different women to speak on the subject and female artists to perform. “I want to raise the profile of these issues in the community – get them more into the public eye. I have asked a women spokesperson, Charlotte Hrenchuk, to speak about certain stereotypes around homeless women, myth-busting if you will, and would love for people to leave with the knowledge that every women is vulnerable to this plight. It could happen to anyone.”

Celebration of cultures dinner

A girls' group in Vancouver invites people to a dinner to celebrate their cultures by bringing food, games, dress, and songs. There were activities of First Nation art making and flag making from the countries of each participant. The objective was to have participants take the time to be proud of who they are, to explore, and to leave the event with more knowledge about cultures different from their own.

Young Women Self-Organizing as Action

Back Off: Re-appropriating our bodies

Back Off is an event organized by a group of young women from Concordia University and the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM). They create a day to discuss various issues affecting women's bodies. Some themes addressed are: overmedication of contraception, the toxicity of menstrual products, and the homogenising of representations of sexuality and women. The event is a day to reflect, resist, and take control. It includes a community fair, bilingual workshops, and panel of guest speakers.

Rock Camp for Girls Montreal

Carina Foran and Jennifer Duffin from Montreal, Quebec create a week long music camp where girls can take up space, take risks, learn new skills, and create their own kind of cultural production through music. Rock Camp for Girls Montreal fosters girls' leadership and self-esteem building and offers a community of support to girls and young women interested in do-it-yourself music.

Teen Feminist Action Network

This network organizes conference calls, an email listserv, a message board and a blog that connects young feminists. The organization of the Network is participatory and planned by potential users. "Natalia and I both know that having a support network is invaluable and we want to create that experience, along with lots of resource-sharing and collaboration, for other girls and young women."

Organize a Blogging Carnival

A blogging carnival is traditionally a week or so long and features posts by guest bloggers on one or a few specific themes. Curating a blogging carnival involves reaching out to a number of people, usually bloggers but also activists, students, your cousin – anyone who you think more people need to hear from.

The goal of a blogging carnival is generally the initiation of discussion, so it's important to promote the carnival – by word of mouth, on Facebook, via email, etc. – and then make sure that people who are comfortable talking about the themes you pick are on-hand to moderate those conversations. Not only are the conversations that come out of blogging carnivals super-inspiring, they're also really well documented! You can have a blogging carnival on your personal blog (starting a blog using Wordpress or Blogger is really straightforward) or you can organize one on a site like Girls Actions' *kickaction.ca*.

Actions to Influence Structural Changes and Systems Change

United Nations

Ophelia's Voice, in Sherwood Park, Alberta, takes action in partnership with the United Nations Association of Canada Healthy Children Healthy Communities Project. It investigates the social determinants of health of youth across Canada. In this project Ophelia's Voice evaluates the Child Health Action Manual. To do this, a group of young women from Ophelia's Voice participate in two national conference calls, facilitated by the United Nations Association of Canada; two evaluation sessions; and a meeting with their Municipal Government to present their recommendations on improving the social determinants of health for the youth of the Sherwood Park area. The girls want the local government and community to be informed about media influence, body image, racism, lack of access to education, poverty, peer pressure, employment, and access to recreation facilities as important determinants of health for youth in the area.

World Urban Youth Forum

After organizing with young women for a while, you might be able to attend something like the World Urban Forum to talk about youth engagement and girl-specific engagement.

Here is an excerpt from the World Urban Forum and Youth Declaration:

In the weekend preceding the World Urban Forum III over four hundred youth leaders, representing over forty countries, assembled in Vancouver to share our experiences with, and strategies for, urban development. Over three days, youth attended workshops, training sessions and had impassioned discussions about the

issues plaguing our communities. From these discussions, an overarching theme emerged and held prominence: the most important challenge to overcome for youth today is to be engaged and involved in the decision-making process.

The Miss G Project

The Miss G Project for Equity in Education is a grassroots, young feminist organization working to combat all forms of oppression in and through education, including sexism, homophobia, racism, and classism. Dedicated to feminist anti-oppression politics with a strong focus on education, their mandate is to provide young people, particularly young women, with the opportunity, support, and resources necessary to analyze and influence issues that affect their lives and futures. This includes acting as a community resource and mounting political actions towards the ongoing improvement of publicly funded education to meet its own policy commitments to equity in education, respect for diversity, critical thinking, and the provision of a safe and secure environment. Their current objective is to get a Women's and Gender Studies Course into the Ontario Secondary School Curriculum.

i Mike Hudema. *An Action a Day: Keeps Global Capitalism Away* (Toronto: Between the lines Press, 2002).

ii "Lobbying" as defined in *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. Canadian Edition (New York: Lexicon Publications, 1988).

iii "Civil Disobedience" as defined in *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. Canadian Edition (New York: Lexicon Publications, 1988).

iv University of Washington, Centre for Communication and Civic Engagement, "Culture Jamming: Culture Jamming and Meme-based Communication: An Interview with Kalle Lasn": <http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm> [consulted February 19, 2009].

v John Emerson, *An Introduction to Activism on the Internet*, Backspace (2005): <http://backspace.com/is/in/the/house/work/> [consulted September 4, 2009].

vi "Demonstration" as defined in *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*. Canadian Edition (New York: Lexicon Publications, 1988).

vii Wikipedia, *Demonstration*: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sit-in> [consulted February 18, 2009].

viii B. Levine, "Mass Society and Mass Depression: Depression becoming epidemic in consumer societies," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* 15, 1 (May 2008). Excerpt is from Bruce Levine's book: *Surviving Americas Depression Epidemic* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007).

Reflect on Practice: Evaluation

It is critical to take time to stop, be still, and reflect; these moments allow us to harness key learnings that have emerged in our work and then strategize next steps for improvement.

*Reflection also reminds us of your purpose, vision, and objectives.
Reflection and action is the foundation of our practice at Girls Action.*
~ Tatiana Fraser, Executive Director, Girls Action Foundation

In our experience a really great program is one that is owned by girls at every stage of the process and which is continuously shaped by young women's input and feedback. This means being committed to remaining adaptable and relevant to the changing realities of girls' and young women's lives.

In the popular education spiral, reflecting on practice means considering how effective your actions have been in furthering social change. This is established based on the stories of lived realities that participants share and your collective analysis of what could be changed to improve **oppressive** or negative situations.

Reflecting on practice should not only happen at the end of an activity, workshop or action; it should happen constantly throughout. In every aspect of the spiral model it is important to incorporate a moment to consider how things went, how they could have been different, and what you would do next time. This demonstrates the popular education principle of *praxis*, a constant process of action followed by reflection (which is followed by more action, and so on!).

Similarly, evaluating at each stage is important for a program as a whole. Reflection or evaluation should not happen just at the end. It should happen as you go through each stage of a program cycle, which includes establishing a need for a program, planning the program, implementing a program, as well as when you assess the result of a post-program evaluation and when you act on the findings of your evaluation.