

LEARNING PROCESSES AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

This chapter addresses the three conceptual underpinnings of the training process in security management for HRDs: **popular education**, **adult learning methodologies** and **capacity development**. It provides guidance and suggestions to facilitators on how best to stimulate participants' understanding of security in the different meetings, encounters and workshop training sessions they will be involved in.

POPULAR EDUCATION

Popular education refers to a socio-pedagogical approach to emancipatory education or **an education for critical consciousness**¹, and it informs most of the contents of this Guide for Facilitators. Although the learning methods and techniques employed are similar to those used in adult learning (see Section «**Learning methodologies: How adults learn**» below), popular education seeks to construct an alternative educational approach that is consistent with rights, emancipation and social justice. Popular Education is popular because it prioritises working with the rural and urban poor, who are the majority in the Global South. It is a collective educational endeavour where teachers and students learn together. There are three parts to the process beginning, (a), with the **concrete experiences of the participants** followed (b), by **reflection on these experiences** which in turn lead, (c), to the **identification of actions to bring about positive change**.

Popular education traces its roots back to the 1960s and the literacy training programs of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. He taught his students to read and write by discussing basic problems they themselves were experiencing, such as lack of access to agricultural land. As the causes of their problems became clear, students analysed and discussed what joint action they could take to change their situation.

Freire coined the term “**consciousness-raising**” to describe the **process of action-reflection-action**, which led participants not only to acquire new literacy skills, but also to understand their own reality .

Popular education has certain principles, which have been applied in this Guide:

- The starting point is the **concrete experience of the individual HRD**.
- **Everyone teaches; everyone learns**.
- It involves **high levels of participation**.
- It leads to **action for change**: in this case, the promotion of a more secure practice in defence of human rights.
- It is a **collective effort**, focusing on shared rather than individual solutions to problems: similarly, defending human rights is usually a collective action.
- It stresses the **creation of new, place-specific knowledge**, rather than simply applying existing knowledge to new scenarios: security plans and practice should be created and owned by defenders, rather than adapted from pre-existing external “recipes”.
- It is an **ongoing process** that can be carried out at any time and in any place: the vision of capacity development inspiring this Guide is that security and protection for HRDs involves a journey.

¹ This chapter has been prepared by adapting A Popular Education Handbook, by Rick Arnold and Bev Burke (see http://www.popednews.org/downloads/A_Popular_Education_Handbook.pdf) and the website <http://www.practicingfreedom.org/offerings/popular-education>. Those interested in exploring popular education further should read Freire's seminal book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF FACILITATORS AS POPULAR EDUCATORS IN PROTECTION?

The role of the popular education facilitator differs dramatically from the role of teachers in conventional education programs, in at least four ways:

- **Shared leadership:** everyone teaches and everyone learns.
- **Joint construction of knowledge:** the starting point is the prior experience of the participants.
- **There is no so-called “expert”:** instead, there is mutual respect for the knowledge and experience that all participants bring to the process.
- **Working hand in hand:** facilitators help participants develop ideas and skills for action while themselves also committing to act.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that facilitators are not participants and that the learning process is far from spontaneous. The role of the facilitator is to ensure that the process – what happens and how it happens – encourages learning and the development of leadership in the group. How an activity is discussed is important, as the ways in which a technique is decoded are crucial to the learning of the group. Facilitators must understand the likely needs of participants and their perceptions of the security issues they face beforehand. They should know a good deal about the situation themselves so they can assist participants to change the reality under scrutiny. How the process is handled will determine the role HRDs can play in shaping the content and design of the program as it develops.

> THEORY AND PRACTICE: NOT JUST A METHODOLOGY!

Popular education seeks to get to the «heart» of issues of power and privilege. It is often – although not always – the case that facilitators enjoy several advantages compared to the HRDs participating in the workshops (being an outsider, being the “expert”, etc.). If this is the case, facilitators should establish a common language and a shared framework, whether through dialogue, presentations, or interactive exercises. They should create an environment that permits all participants to be heard and to explore ways forward so that each member of the organisation (or community) has a role to play developing protection measures, ensuring security and owning the process.

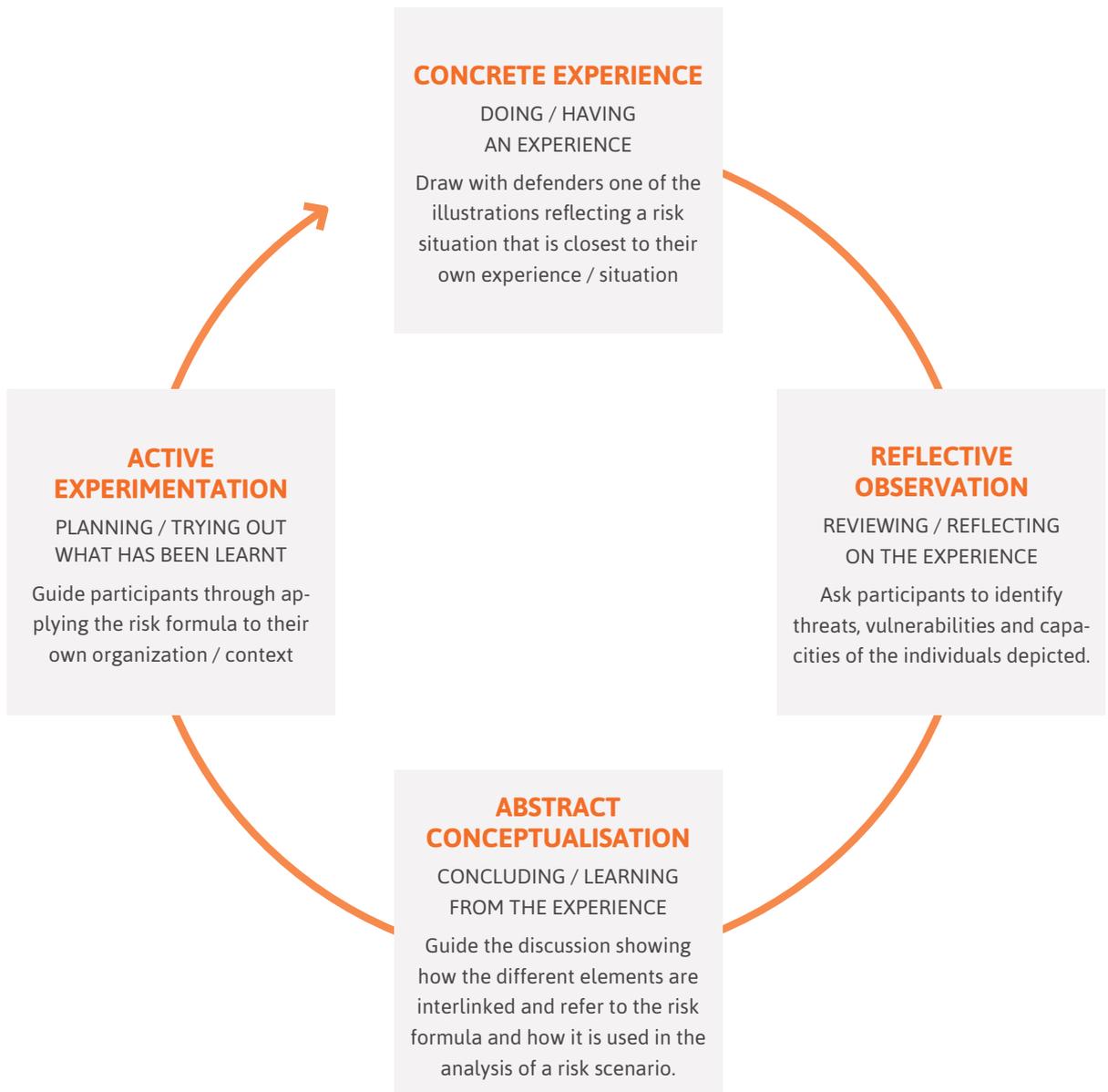
LEARNING METHODOLOGIES: HOW ADULTS LEARN

WHY PEOPLE LEARN

When planning a learning process, it is crucial for facilitators to understand what motivates people to learn. At the core is a **need**; in situations where individual HRDs, human rights organisations, networks or communities have faced serious security incidents, threats or even attacks, the motivation for learning may be quite obvious: to be able to improve their security and reduce the risks they face. This aspect is examined as part of the **assessment** phase explained in the next chapter. Second, **relevance** and perceived **benefit** are crucial factors motivating learning. In other words, participants need to understand that security management tools are relevant to improving the current situation. An improved ability to manage security matters will be directly beneficial at individual and organisational level. Thus, facilitators must actively stimulate and respond to these factors during the **workshop** and **follow-up** phases if their work is to have an impact.

HOW PEOPLE LEARN

Facilitators face the challenge of finding ways to structure the new information they want to transmit in ways that build most effectively on what the participants already know. One way of doing this is by building on the different steps of David Kolb's experiential learning cycle.² The illustration below shows how facilitators can support participants to derive new understanding from a concrete experience :



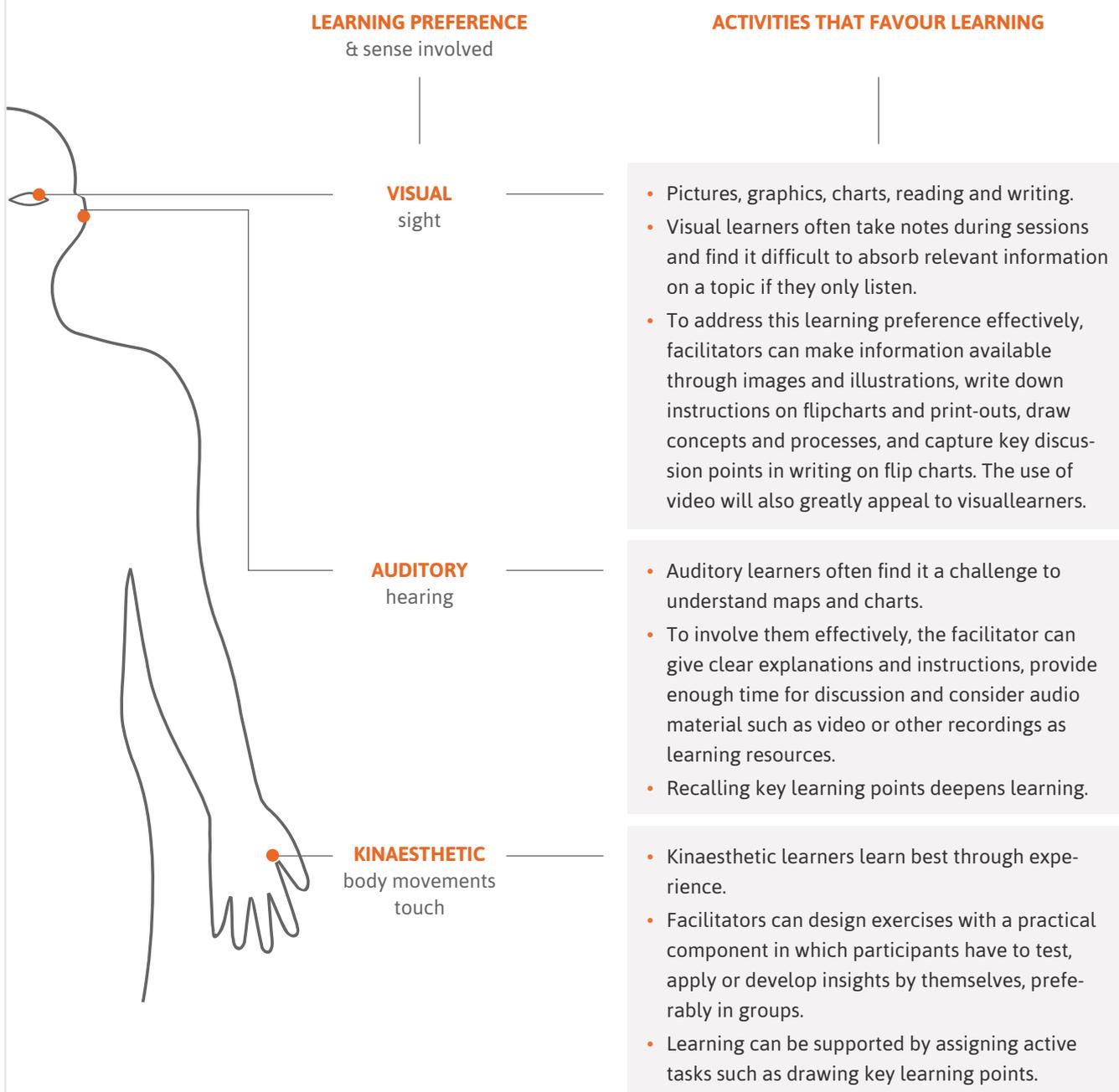
To further strengthen new ideas and the understanding of participants, facilitators should make regular reference to the insights gathered throughout the training, showing how different aspects interconnect and build upon each other. It is equally useful in later sessions to build on earlier exercises, using outcomes from previous assignments, exercises and discussions.

² Kolb, D and Fry, R. (1975). "Toward an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning". In C. Cooper (Ed.). *Theories of Group Process*. London. John Wiley. Experiential learning has since been further developed and widely discussed. A wide range of information on the topic can be found on the internet.

HOW TO REACH EVERY LEARNER

Human beings learn throughout their lives. Adult learners in particular have a rich set of knowledge and experiences. When facilitators build on this consciously they encourage and deepen learning. Yet it is important to recognise that people learn in different ways. Each person has a preferred manner of absorbing and processing new information more effectively.

An easy way to differentiate these learning preferences is by identifying which sense(s) individuals favour when processing information:



While participants will certainly use all their sensory organs in the course of a training session, one of is usually dominant. Furthermore, it is very likely that among a given group of participants all learning preferences will be represented. Facilitators face the challenge of addressing all of these and avoiding the pitfall of only addressing the preference that is closest to their own.

The more interactive the sessions, the more stimulus is provided for participants and their different learning preferences .

The following principles can help facilitators address the three areas of preference effectively in the sessions³:



³ AI SPA 2013, Barefoot Collective (2011). Designing and Facilitating Creative Learning Activities. A Companion Booklet to the Barefoot Guide on Learning Practices in Organisations and Social Change. See: <http://www.barefootguide.org/designing-and-facilitating-creative-learning-activities.html>

THE TARGET GROUP

HRDs are deeply committed individuals who rely on knowledge and personal experiences to carry out their work. They are embedded in complex networks and develop their activism in the process of making sense of their environment. They have a unique insight into the structure and functioning of their communities and are able to detect and influence social and political dynamics.

Facilitators face the challenge – which is also an opportunity - of recognising and using the vast resources that each individual participant brings to a training session, in order to:

- > **Help and deepen learning on an individual level;** and
- > **Support cross-fertilisation and learning from others' experiences.**

When facilitators recognise that they are not the only source of knowledge in a training context an atmosphere of exchange and mutual learning tends to develop, allowing new insights to be shaped and made relevant to the local context of participants.⁴

-  → **Facilitators are advised to design their sessions in ways that support the natural ways in which adults learn. The ability of human beings to acquire new knowledge and improve their practice is also shaped by their attitude towards learning. Helping participants achieve a positive attitude will facilitate the process of learning.**⁵
- **Build in regular elements of practice and sharing of experience.**
- **Be aware of different learning preferences. This will help you devise methods to ensure the active involvement of all participants in their training.**
- **Contextualise new information (i.e. relating it to what is already known and its benefit and relevance for participants). This will motivate participants.**
- **Repeating and regularly referring to previous learning points deepens learning.**

⁴ Hammond, Linda-Darling, K. Austin, S. Orcutt, J. Rosso (2001). *How People Learn, Introduction to Learning Theories*. Stanford University School of Education. See: <http://www.stanford.edu/class/ed269/hplintrochapter.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

THE TASK OF BUILDING PROTECTION CAPACITIES IS ALWAYS OPEN-ENDED

Nowadays the free exercise of the right to defend human rights is internationally recognised. It is, however, frequently the case that men and women who work as human rights defenders (HRDs) face opposition to their work from the authorities or from other social actors. And on too many occasions this opposition takes the form of repression: HRDs are threatened, stigmatised and criminalised; they suffer from physical aggression and even murder.

This is why this Guide for Facilitators focuses on developing the capacity of HRDs to take care of their own security and protection. The Guide is intended to provide a structured reflection on the topic that identifies ways HRDs can work jointly, within an organisation or a community, to improve their levels of protection.

WHAT ARE PROTECTION CAPACITIES?

The term protection capacities refers to the ability of HRDs, social organisations and communities to continue working for human rights in a safe and sustainable manner, even when faced by the threats or aggressions they receive because of their human rights work.

Protection capacities also have to do with power: “the power to”, “the power to do”. That is, they involve increasing the power of HRDs to make decisions when they are confronted with different alternatives, and the power to take these decisions in safety.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO DEFINE WHAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECTION CAPACITIES ACTUALLY MEANS?

The development of protection capacities is based on the conviction that every individual, every organisation and every community has certain capacities that enable them to confront threats or acts of aggression. It is, though, frequently necessary to develop and improve these capacities, especially when the risks faced on a day-to-day basis are elevated. These capacities can be developed directly by those who are affected, but external support is frequently useful to help them carry the process out.

No one is born “fully formed”, ready, in the natural course of a life, to face death threats or direct physical attacks. This is why we say that people who defend human rights are ordinary people facing extraordinary situations.

The construction of protection capacities is in large part a collective or organisational process. This is clearly the case for civil society organisations, whether urban or rural, but it is true also of individuals, because human beings learn from each other and alongside others.

This is why we speak of the development of protection capacities at different levels:

- **The individual level:** the protection capacities of each person;
- **The organisational or community level:** the protection capacities of an organisation or a community; and
- **The inter-organisational or inter-community level:** the protection capacities of networks and alliances between organisations or communities.

People who are interested in facilitating the development of protection capacities need to understand three particularly influential factors and to ensure they understand them thoroughly:

- **The ways in which an organisation or a community understands both its context and what it hopes to achieve;**
- **The ways in which this organisation or community understands and interprets the risks it faces as a result of its actions to defend human rights;** and
- **The protection strategy or strategies that it is possible to put into practice .**

HOW ARE CAPACITIES DEVELOPED?

A series of logical steps should be followed when developing protection capacities: they constitute a repetitive process in which learning occurs through reflection and action:

- **Reflection:** Analyse which capacities are needed to achieve protection in different contexts and in the face of different risks, and understand the range of capacities that already exist.
- **Action:** Design and implement a protection plan and evaluate its results permanently, so that it can be modified in the light of emerging needs and what has been achieved.
- **Reflection:** Analyse the results of the actions that have been carried out and decide which capacities need to be developed, or which actions are required to improve protection levels.

And so on...

Nevertheless, it is very important that the facilitator should always bear the following in mind:

- **A repetitive process does not necessarily mean an “ordered” process (see below);** and
- **It cannot be assumed that everything that is done is adequate, or that a given practice is the product of systematic reflection. And even where reflection has been involved it is not always correctly oriented. In other words, there is always room to improve practice through reflection.**

In few words, individual or collective learning requires key moments of analysis and reflection, which can either be internal or be enjoyed with the support of others.

This is why this Guide to Facilitation understands the development of capacities as a process, and why the moments of analysis and reflection are key to the process.

What do these moments of analysis and reflection look like? There might be many, but in order to simplify things, we are going to refer the two that we think are most important:

- **“Protection workshops”;** and
- **“Meetings”** that in one way or another deal with protection matters.

To illustrate the point, these moments of reflection are like the “clearings” in a “forest” of work, of the commentaries, exchanges, complicities, uncertainties, fears and specific activities of HRDs who, if they are to develop protection capacities, must opt to engage in these moments of reflection.

There will be occasions when an organisation decides to improve its ability to protect itself by organising a protection workshop. But there will also be times when a community suffers a security problem and decides, in response, to meet to deal with the issue immediately and then, maybe, to organise a workshop facilitated by outsiders that it hopes will improve its protection capacities. There will be other times when an organisation suffers repeated security incidents and whose members meet after each incident but remain unable to translate their reflections into action. In other words, organisa-

tion might be engaged in a fragmentary sequence of ordered or disordered meetings and perhaps workshops (some planned, some improvised when the need or the opportunity arises) that might occur amid calm or submerged in the stress and fear of events. This is the complicated backdrop against which protection capacities can and should be developed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POINT OF VIEW AND OF KNOWLEDGE ROOTED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF EACH INDIVIDUAL DEFENDER

The development of capacities is greatly dependent on the experiences and contexts which have marked the development of individuals and groups, because it is in relation to these that we construct our view of the world. It is important we understand that everything individuals do is imbued with meaning derived from their experiences. That is, their actions can be explained with reference to their personal narrative: what is happening (to me) and why I act as I do. In a risk situation it is impossible to separate the management of protection from the management of daily life. Nor can it be hoped that people will approach the risks they face rationally even if they are able to be rational in the ways they seek to examine and understand the whole range of information available to them.

Consequently, it is impossible to impose an external logic of security on the life story of an HRD. According to this point of view there is no such thing as an **objective** risk analysis (because it will always be **subjective**); and it is very difficult to arrive at an “overall” external approach to the subject of protection; those who are able to arrive at this “holistic” view of protection will not be able to achieve a deeply contextualised and culturally rooted perspective on HRDs. HRDs have a partial understanding, but an understanding nevertheless that is profoundly rooted in their realities. And it is from this this rootedness that they construct their protection, in a fragmentary but consistent way.

This is the point on which external facilitators should focus their own subjective viewpoints, alongside those of the HRDs, so that they may get to know and understand their (other) point of view. From this starting point it is possible to seek out the elements that are shared between the two perspectives and to begin to walk together along the same pathway.

In other words, this Guide to Facilitation invites its readers to abandon any view that the development of protection capacities is “linear”, or that it can be created during one or two workshops whose “lessons” may be “applied immediately”. Very much to the contrary, this Guide promotes a view of the development of capacities as a process inscribed in a context and in a culture, and which follows a mutable and complex route that is subject to multiple influences and interactions. Let us meet each other, then, along the way.

