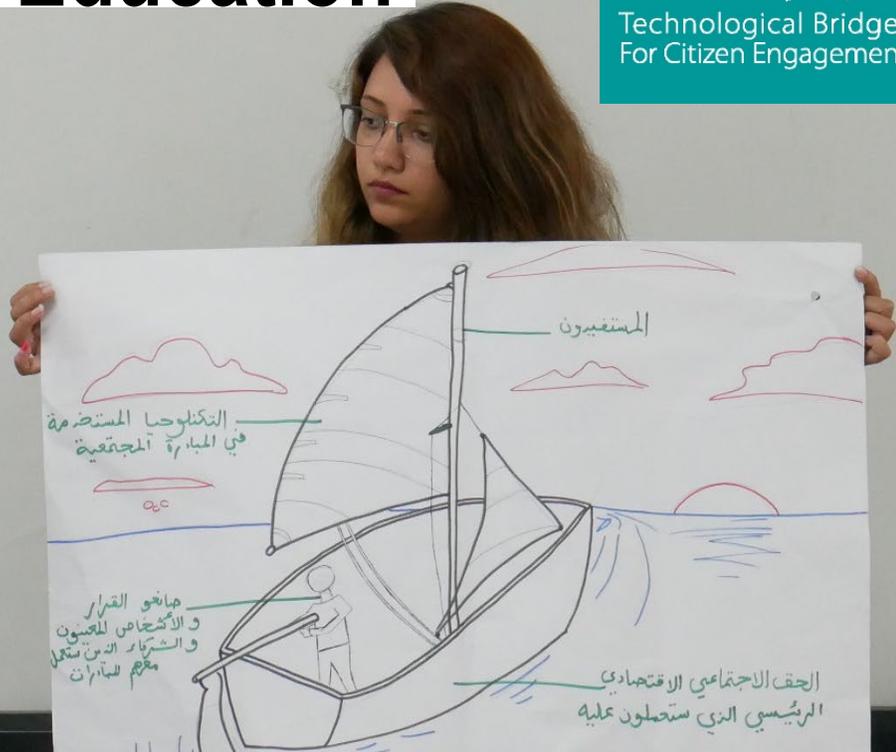# A **Participatory Approach** to Human Rights Education

Definition

of the **Participatory Approach**

The participatory approach is an educational approach based on the belief that the purpose of education is to expand the ability of people to become shapers of their world by analyzing the social forces that have historically limited their options.

A participatory approach in HRE promotes and values the sharing of personal knowledge and experience of human rights, and encourages critical reflection on individual beliefs and values. It is founded on principles of mutual respect and reciprocal learning and seeks out and includes the voice of the learners in the learning process. It enables people with different backgrounds, cultures, values and beliefs to learn effectively together and learn from each other. It encourages social analysis aimed towards empowering adult learners to develop concrete actions for social change that are in accordance with human rights values and standards.

3 **Pillars** of a **Participatory Approach**

The three fundamental characteristics – or pillars – of a participatory approach are:
- Starting with the participants' experience
- Critically analyzing and reflecting
- Developing strategies for action

These three conditions must be met both in the design and in the implementation of Human Rights Education training according to a participatory approach.

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The Learning Spiral – A Tool for Designing Training According to a Participatory Approach

As human rights educators working with adult learners, we need tools that can help us to put the concepts of a participatory approach into practice. One such tool, the Learning Spiral, illustrates how a participatory approach can work. The Learning Spiral is the instructional design model that guides how the participatory approach is implemented in HRE. It is applied at various levels, from individual activities to a whole HRE program.

A participatory approach is particularly appropriate for HRE because:

1. Learning begins with the experience of the learners (i.e., their knowledge, skills, values and lived experience of human rights).

2. After the learners have shared their experience, they analyse that experience and look for patterns (i.e., what are the commonalities? what are the patterns?).

3. To complement the experience of the learners, new information and theory from experts are added or new ideas are created collectively.

4. Learners need to practise what they have learned, practise new skills and strategies, and plan for action.

5. Afterwards (usually when they are back in their organizations and daily work) learners apply in action what they have learned.
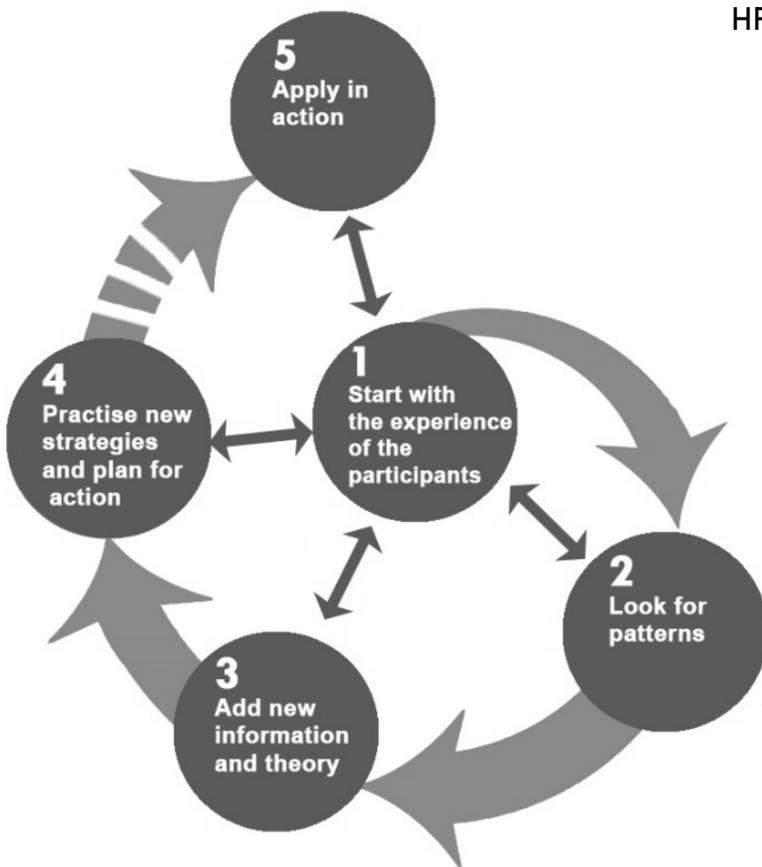
Implementing a Participatory Approach: Techniques and Strategies

The participatory approach is necessarily put into practice through the use of many different techniques and strategies. In turn, these techniques are also participatory in nature and must reflect the three pillars of implementing a participatory approach.

Techniques for implementing a participatory approach refer to the methods used during activities. These techniques include brainstorming, dinamicas, flip charting, power mapping and countless others. Any one of these techniques can be participatory or non-participatory in nature, depending on the approach facilitators take in designing and implementing the activity. The three pillars presented above will help ensure that a technique is delivered according to a participatory approach.

Strategies refer to cross-cutting actions and behaviors that condition the way a training session is organized and delivered. They help ensure the conditions corresponding to the three pillars are met. Often, activities are designed and delivered in order to introduce these strategies, which are then used throughout the remainder of the training. Because the participatory approach to HRE is implemented in a group context, many of the strategies focus on creating an appropriate learning context and group dynamics. Strategies allow the learners to experience an open, safe and democratic environment that is grounded in human rights values. Sharing learning needs and expectations and developing group guidelines are examples of strategies that contribute to this. Strategies can also help participants understand the learning process. For example, using diagrams and models, such the Learning Spiral, helps participants reach common ground in understanding the participatory learning process and situate themselves within it.

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