

PRINCIPLE PRAXIS MAKES PERFECT

Theory without action goes nowhere. Action without reflection is ineffective. That's why we have *praxis*: a cycle of theory, action and reflection that helps us analyse our efforts so we can be more effective.

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"PRAXIS REQUIRES US TO BE STUDENTS OF OUR OWN EXPERIENCE AND CONTEXT."

Effective activism follows a cycle. We start with our theory of how change happens. Then we take action based on our theory. Then we take a step back and reflect on how the action went, which re-shapes our theory. Basically, praxis means "learning." It may seem simple, but few activists actually *do* it.

Praxis requires us to be students of our own experience and context. It's not just about being smart and reflecting. It's also about building specific *behaviours* and *group norms* that promote habits of strategy, debrief, and revision. It's about your group's meeting style, organizational structure, and leadership dynamics.

Here's the difference that praxis can make:

Let's say we're in a student group at a college. If our group lacks praxis, we may say: "Let's bring Radical Thinker X to speak at our campus!" We think that the event will be "good." Then we have the event. It's somewhat well-attended, but afterwards our group has mixed feelings about it. We decide to keep moving forward and host another event.

That's a bit directionless. There was no actual theory, and no basis for reflection.

The Praxis Wheel. Art by Joshua Kahn Russell.

Instead, let's start with a theory. We start our group meeting by saying "Bringing Radical Thinker X to campus will help our

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Tactics

- Forum theatre
- Image theatre

Principles

- Build strength through repetition
- Change is the only constant
- Choose tactics that support your strategy
- Consensus is a means, not an end
- Do your research
- Don't expect a concrete outcome from a symbolic action
- Escalate strategically
- Fail forward
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win

campaign. They can talk about why activism is powerful, and it will reach a new audience of people who are not yet engaged in our campaign. Let's post flyers in our favorite coffee shops. Three hundred people will attend, fifty will sign up, and five of those people will show up at our next meeting."

Now that's a real theory. It has an explicit logic, a process of how you will carry out your action, and concrete measurable *outcomes* that you expect.

The event happens. Only one hundred people attend and most of them already work with your group, so only a few sign your list, and nobody new comes to your next meeting.

You now have a real *basis for reflection*. You can debrief your event, and instead of subjectively talking about whether you thought it was "good" or not, you can have a conversation about why it didn't measure up to your success indicators, and what to do next time. These lessons shape how you organize your next event.

Organizers should have the praxis cycle spinning in their heads all the time. We are always learning from what's going on around us. The point of building a *culture of praxis* in your group, however, is so your *whole group* can learn, not just a couple of organizers. When you develop your theory (your plan and your goals) with your group, and then have a real debrief after, the lessons are available to all.

If you don't take real time out to name your theories, and then reflect, revise, and learn lessons, you will be left spinning your wheels, with fewer and fewer people understanding how to do the work of your group.

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Hilary Moore and Joshua Kahn Russell, 2011

<https://books.google.com/books?id=uYpeyD1n7XgC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

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Beyond the Choir

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Theories

- Anti-oppression
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Revolutionary reform
- The tactics of everyday life
- Theatre of the Oppressed

Methodologies

- Artstorm
- Battle of the story
- Pillars of power
- SMART objectives
- SWOT

TAGS

Action design, Campaign strategy, Movement building