Making Democracy
(the political)
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Exercise 5: Training the Imagination to Go Visiting

Description
This is a listening exercise that can be done with small groups of 10-15. The purpose is to listen in different ways without cross-talk or further dialogue. This time again the form matters and this kind of exercise should only be tried with groups who have developed listening skills and relations of respect. The topic can change but it should connect the personal with the political without making students vulnerable by telling solely personal stories. It allows a space to voice the questions that matter. Hannah Arendt following Walter Benjamin speaks of ‘pearl diving’, discovering thought-fragments. Think about what ‘pearls’ we want to pass on to others and to the next generation through the stories that we tell one another about our present.

Aim
This exercise aims to connect a concept or value with an experience or story, this time by shifting relations in space and by creating an atmosphere of listening.

Learning outcomes
- Experience how sensibility shifts when spaces are re-organised, in particular when participants sit side by side, facing ahead.
- Identify connections between stories, experiences and concepts/values.
- Understand and experience the complexity of concepts and values and the different ways that people make sense of them.

Intended age group: 14-18 year olds

Duration: 20-30 minutes.

Resources
No additional resources required, other than reorganising spaces
You might ask students to prepare by reflecting on the theme.

Preparation
Chairs should be organised side by side in a triangular shape, facing either a corner or a window. Participants might be given a prompt before the session to reflect on. An example of this is “Tell a story of political shame or surprising solidarity”

Method (cont.)

- Everyone listens, reflects for a few moments after the person finishes, then sits in silence until the next person offers a story. This can be short or long, profound or light and humorous.
- The exercise continues for as long as people wish to contribute, or for a set time and then returned to.
- There should be no further cross-talk or dialogue. The themes may be incorporated into other exercises.

Tip
- If doing this exercise as a group, this should be sitting in a row or a triangle.
- The facilitator may like to begin with a story, though give enough time for others to decide if they want to contribute. Allow the silence.
- Be clear about the parameters. This space isn’t a space for further discussion.
- This exercise relates to other exercises on memorialisation, identity, and values. It is best followed by a contemplative exercises, perhaps drawing or making in response to a task.