

PODER

Creating brave
and transformative
learning spaces



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*There is no such thing as a “safe space” –
We exist in the real world.
We all carry scars and have caused wounds.
This space
seeks to turn down the volume of the world outside,
and amplify voices that have to fight to be heard elsewhere,
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But
It will be our space together,
and we will work on it side by side.*

Facing History & Ourselves, “Untitled Poem by Beth Strano”

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Introduction

This toolkit is an outcome of the PODER project.

PODER - Power Dynamics in Education Revisited is a project that aims to explore power relations in adult education. We aim to identify the power relations that may exist in a training course (age/gender/class/social race/etc) and to understand how they can potentially generate tensions between educators and participants. PODER co-constructs pedagogical tools based on popular education and the theatre of the oppressed to develop skills to understand and decode these conflicts.

Why do we need a toolkit on brave and transformative spaces?

When holding educational activities, the creation of a suitable, supportive environment for learners is essential. Each learner will come with their own set of experiences, identities and history related to the topic - emerging group dynamics will influence and shape the environment. Educators should be aware of these dynamics in order to support everyone's learning journeys. However, exploring dynamics in educational spaces can be a challenging task. These conversations can bring up strong emotions and reactions. Social identity aspects such as race, sexuality, gender, economic status, ability are at play in any group setting (whether we are conscious of it or not). It requires skills and knowledge to be able to work with and address power dynamics in a way that feels transformative and supportive to participants, rather than daunting and reinforcing emotions of guilt and shame.

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This toolkit is aimed at adult educators to guide them in creating a strong and solid group container to encourage participants to tackle arising power dynamics by stepping into uncomfortable conversations with courage and care.

But How?

You may have heard of the concept of “safe spaces” where the goal is to create a learning environment for groups that feel safe to be in and work in. Is it really possible to create an environment that is truly safe for everyone, including the educator, though? The “safe space” concept aims to create an environment where participants will not need to experience discomfort or feel challenged when discussing sensitive topics or working with others. However, being in a group and working with power dynamics often involves difficulty, risk, and discomfort. The concept of safe space runs a risk of unconsciously pushing the needs of marginalised people to the side and centering the more privileged people’s needs.

The brave space concept on the other side acknowledges the risks and limits of the safe space and invites participants to take active responsibility for creating an environment where everybody can bring their authentic selves. Brave space conveys the idea that all participants will embrace the discomfort of challenging conversations with courage and care in order to learn, change and transform. At the same time, it is also acknowledging existing power dynamics related to social positionality and different access and ability to express needs we will have related to that.

This toolkit is designed to support educators to deeply understand the brave space concept and guide them to set it up. The toolkit contains session plans on brave space container building, support structures for the continuity of this container, facilitator tips for handling difficult conversations, well-being practices and tools to explore different aspects of power dynamics in group settings.

What is a brave space and the difference from the safe space?

The term "safe spaces" is frequently used to characterise environments that foster constructive conversations. Years of training and non-formal education practices showed us that many times safety is understood as a synonym for being comfortable. The concept of a "safe space" implies that participants won't encounter discomfort when addressing sensitive subjects. Yet, conversations on the topics of privilege and power often entail challenges and potential risks. Given that individuals from marginalised communities often experience discomfort and challenges in their daily lives, expecting "safety" can be perceived as an expression of privilege. Dialogues around power involve different levels of risks for participants of different social positionality.

Alice Monypenny's research on safe space shows us the possible effects of the word "safe" in social justice dialogue:

"Three worries raised about the use of 'safety' in the classroom relating to educational ideals of liberation and social change:

Concealment of Inequality: *When classrooms are presumed safe, it's expected that all students can participate on equal terms. But inevitably, inequalities creep into the classroom - talk of safety merely obscures their effects.*

Propagation of Inequality: *Members of privileged groups can avoid uncomfortable or challenging acknowledgement of their privilege by classifying them as 'unsafe'.*

Evasion of Responsibility: *Appeals to safety from backlash can allow students to avoid taking responsibility for the consequences of their speech."¹*

Learning most often happens through stepping out of a comfort zone, risk-taking and working through challenges. The benefit of engaging with challenges should outweigh the risks related to self-disclosure of identity and related experience within an educational setting. Those risks affect both privileged and marginalised individuals. The latter might experience a repetition of patterns of discrimination present in the wider society. This may lead to a withdrawal and undermining of trust. Privileged individuals may experience guilt, resentment, anger, and subsequent resistance toward effective dialogue, resulting in withdrawal. This is not only detrimental to all participants and the conducted training; but also to the overall efforts towards social justice.

As a result, we propose moving away from the safe space concept to the brave space concept, emphasising that conversations around power and privilege require risk-taking and are challenging (most of the time).

¹ What is safe about safe space poster. Alice Monypenny Blog.

<https://alicemonypenny.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/what-is-safe-about-safe-space-poster.pdf>

The primary idea of brave space comes from “courageous conversations about race” (Singleton and Hays, 2008) a strategy developed specifically to encourage taking risks in dialogues focused on the topic of race and racism.

A brave space is a space where participants feel comfortable and challenged enough to learn, share, and grow. A brave space is inclusive of all identities and lived experiences related to ethnicity, sex, gender, ability, religion, class, immigration status and other social positionalities. The brave space concept encourages participants to try to honour each other’s experiences and opinions and move towards a place of mutual understanding, solidarity and transformation.

Brave space conveys the idea that all participants will embrace the discomfort of hard conversations with courage and openness.

References

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Monypenny A. What is safe about safe space poster. Alice Monypenny Blog. <https://alicemonypenny.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/what-is-safe-about-safe-space-poster.pdf>

Principles for Building Brave Space Culture

Brave space concept as we understand it is based on a set of principles. We can understand these principles as lifetime practices in a sense - they are not things we simply do or don't do, but more a direction we align with, an ethical compass. We develop the related skills and capacities over time and with the support of various practices, processes and relationships. Those principles are not rules, and we may fail to accomplish them while learning, but they can give us a sense of direction, especially in difficult situations.

They can be adapted to suit the age and experience level of participants.

There are different ways to set the principles. You can be creative depending on the time available for this activity, but it is important to start the educational activity (workshop, training, etc.) with "container building" with a brave space activity as part of it.

No Attacks

"We will not intentionally cause harm to each other"

The first and basic principle underlies the importance of coming together with good intentions and not with an aim of harm - we don't want to be racist, ableist, sexist, xenophobic, etc towards each other. It helps clarify the learning space's purpose and lays the foundation for understanding the difference between an attack and a challenge.

Especially when engaging in conversations about power and privileges, we may feel threatened or as if we are being harmed. So it is important to emphasise that a brave space is not a place for intentional harm, while at the same time, it does not mean avoiding challenging conversations and discomfort.

Solidarity

"We recognize each other humanity"

Not only we don't want to intentionally harm each other - but we also come together on the basis of fostering solidarity and supporting each other's growth and learning. Not only are we avoiding or reducing harm, but also actively moving towards recognising each other's humanity, inherent dignity and learning edges, alongside our interdependence. This principle emphasises the care dimension of the brave space concept, this also includes self-solidarity and self-care.



Embrace complexity

“Things are not either or”

In a world where binary thinking is constantly promoted, it may be sometimes challenging to engage with complexity - it usually brings up discomfort! We are conditioned to think in certain ways and value things as either bad or good. The world however is much more complex and so are social issues and human behaviours, too. Our behaviours and ways of thinking are conditioned by cultural, structural and psychological elements. Social oppression has many dimensions. Embracing complexity is important in the process of opening up space for curiosity and transformation. This way, we allow ourselves and others to learn and grow our awareness.

Controversy with respect

“Varying opinions are accepted”

Brave space values encourage and honour different views. However, it is different from agreeing to disagree. This principle tells us that conflict is not something to be avoided but a natural process expected to occur in a diverse group. When we are in a conflict because of different opinions on an issue, instead of avoiding it, we can continue to engage and explore where our differences are coming from, so it allows us to stay connected and in a relationship with each other. This kind of engagement strengthens our relationship and belonging to the group. A multitude of opinions and experiences is something that will support a learning process, as long as we can foster solidarity and reduce harm alongside honouring the differences.

Listen to understand

A principle that is fundamental to engage in difficult conversations and navigate through complexity and tension. Many times, we listen to respond rather than focusing to understand what is being said. Active listening needs attention, energy and focus. The meanings we give to each word, our skills to use a language, ways of expressing ourselves with words can be very different. Understanding each other and engaging in a generative dialogue needs a particular kind of attention. Skills in active listening will support the development of this attention.

Owning intentions and impacts

“Acknowledging and discussing when well-being of another was affected”

The impact of our actions is not always congruent with our intentions. Positive or neutral intentions might result in a negative impact on someone. When our words or our actions create a negative impact on another person, we shouldn't leave the impacted person to deal with this impact by themselves - this would deepen the harm and reproduce unhelpful social dynamics of separation and marginalisation. It is crucial to acknowledge the harm done and receive guidance from the impacted person on how they would like to proceed, implementing the harm reduction principle in practice. This way we can start transforming our behaviours and expand our understanding of the social dynamics at play.

Challenge by choice

"We have the option to step in and step out"

The principle underlying all of the above is our own agency in assessing and acting within our capacity. Each person who is part of a brave space decides for themselves how much they want and can be engaged in activities, conversations and tasks; depending on abilities, physical energy, emotional energy and social positionality. Only the person themselves can determine how ready they are for certain risk-taking or whether they are falling too much into their panic zone. Different activities and conversations will have a different impact and require different levels of energy from participants, depending on their history, social positionality, familiarity with educational spaces and abilities. It is also an invitation to step up or down - depending on the access to power and privilege participants have.

*The list of principles is based on materials from Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training (<https://crossroadsantiracism.org/>)

Group Formation, Learning Zone and Brave Space

Paying attention to the process of group formation is crucial for creating a brave space. We need to think consciously about managing or mitigating assumptions and expectations right from the start, as well as consider factors such as the kind of group we are bringing together, the existing culture, values, potential needs and a range of social identities in the space, etc.

It can be useful to open up space to explore the needs of people in the group - being curious about what fears and expectations are there, and what can support members of the group to bring their best selves to the process. These are valuable practices in the early stages of group formation, but long-standing groups and organisations also need to review these dimensions of group life regularly. The model of the learning zone is one we have found particularly useful in working with group formation and brave space setting (see diagram).

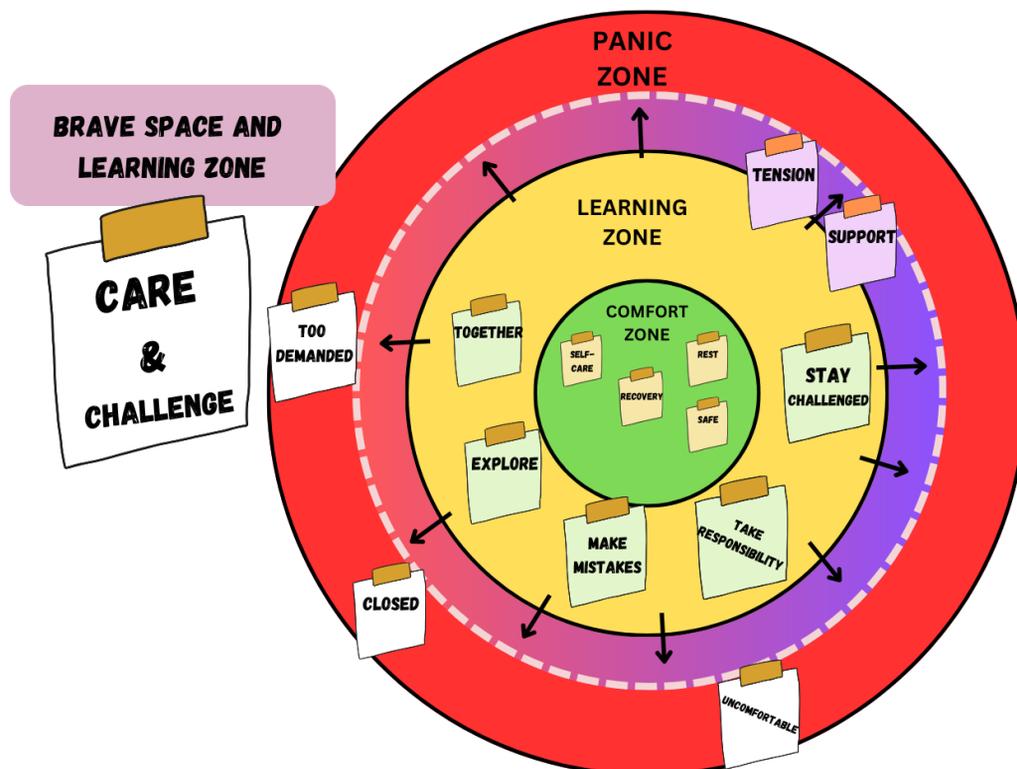
A group culture that supports us to step into the 'learning zone' together is based on a shared understanding that the group is a context for learning and growth which requires courage; and that we can all contribute to building a group container, within which we can explore, make mistakes, and stretch ourselves. Exploring the question of how we can help each other step into the learning zone is a useful way to frame conversations about group agreements or codes of conduct, and build a culture that is both caring and encouraging engagement with discomfort and growing edges, which are fundamental values for a brave space. The learning zone model can offer a lens through which to reflect on our experiences of group life and perspective on challenges that may emerge, especially in areas where we are likely to make mistakes (like around active solidarity, for example).

- This model can be a useful way to frame and understand ourselves, our learning spaces, and our groups.
- It can be helpful to explain and set up brave space culture in the group
- We can apply it to help us think about how to best support and challenge ourselves to learn
- When in the comfort zone we feel relaxed, safe, open and at ease. With this, we may also feel a bit 'dull' - not at our sharpest. It is important to be able to spend time in this zone, resting, recovering, practising self-care etc. But when in this zone, we are probably not learning very much. We will have different access to the comfort zone, depending on our social positionality. For those coming from marginalised backgrounds, access to a comfort zone might be rare and precious.
- When in the learning zone we are likely to feel more of a sense of challenge. We are more engaged, stimulated, we are required to make an effort, use our energy, and take responsibility. We are ta-

king new information/experiences in, assimilating, making sense of, etc. This requires effort, but it also gives us energy. It can sometimes feel demanding, but this is part of how we grow and bring fulfilment, aliveness etc.

- If we push the challenge and demand too far, however, we will end up in the panic zone. Here, things have become too much for us, there is too much threat (to our sense of self, to our identity, to our cherished views or values, to our sense of safety in whatever way) and we will generally close down to protect ourselves. At this point, we have lost the optimal conditions for learning (because we are closed and somehow 'hardened' by our protection mechanisms).
- So it can be useful to ask: what are the conditions that will help me to spend more time in the learning zone, feeling supported and safe enough, being challenged enough, without habitually falling into comfort or panic?
- Over time, it is possible for us to stretch and expand the learning zone, with our tolerance and capacity to meet challenges (resilience) becoming stronger and more established. This will enable us to spend more and more time in the learning zone.
- During this stretch and growth we may feel the tension in our body, emotions, and mind but also in the group. The support from the facilitators is important, but also between the participants to hold each other feel safe and support personal growth. Because growth comes with tension, and the antidote to tension is supported in group learning settings.

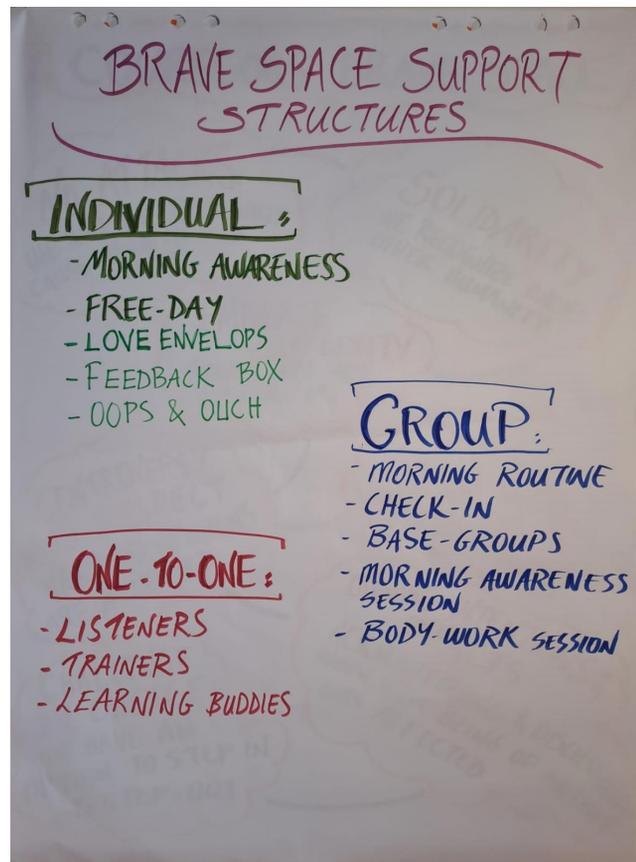
Especially when working with topics that are related to power dynamics and oppression, individuals may feel uncomfortable, it might be challenging to open such topics up in a group setting. The colourful area on the diagram below represents the zone between learning and panic zone, which often is a place we find ourselves in when discussing topics related to power and privilege. If we want to successfully bring an anti-oppression approach to training, we need to learn to sit in this area, sit with uncomfortableness to learn, unlearn, and transform.



Support Structures and Tools for Maintaining Brave Space

The longer the educational activity is (such as training or workshop), the need for structures to create a culture of care, and a brave space and maintain the group container is greater.

Below you will find some examples of structures that help hold and strengthen the group container, they can be divided into 3 categories: Individual level, group level and one-to-one.



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Individual level

Awareness practice

Awareness practices can be offered by the facilitators and/or participants. Cultivating awareness practices can be guided meditation, breathing exercises, and grounding practices. These kinds of practices allow participants to observe and be in connection with their mental state, physical and psychological state. It helps participants to be more grounded and gives them the ability to hold various emotions without being consumed by them.

There are risks related to introducing and holding mindfulness-based activities. Make sure you understand and feel confident in implementing a trauma-informed approach to awareness. Sensitivity around cultural appropriation and different awareness and mindfulness practice lineages is essential as well.

Free-day / Free-time

In long educational activities, it is important to give space to participants for self-reflection and rest. This way they can reflect on the learning, filter and digest what is important for them and come back with fresh minds. It also allows participants to connect with each other and share their experiences outside the session time, in an unstructured way. As a facilitator, you can offer guiding questions for self-reflection and recommend activities such as walking in the landscape, etc.

Make sure you prepare and hold participants during the unstructured time. Offer additional support to those who might struggle and/or are on the margin of the group.

Love envelopes

Participants write appreciation notes for each other and put them in an envelope (the creation of the envelopes can be part of the practice). It requires some level of familiarity between participants - best introduced after a few days into the training. It might not be the most appropriate tool if the duration of your event is less than 5 days. It encourages participants to practise appreciation for each other and oneself. It can be seen as a gift, a reminder. These notes also help us to see who we can be, and they can be powerful reminders for the times when we feel down.

Feed-back box

The feedback box encourages communication with facilitators and taking responsibility to create the brave space together. It allows for communication on difficult experiences, needs and requests in an anonymous way if necessary. It gives an extra opportunity for participants to name their needs during the training. For some people it takes time to feel courageous enough to name their needs in front of others, so this way facilitators can be aware of what is happening in the room and can address these with care.

Oops and Ouch and Whoa

It is one model for acknowledging and interrupting harm. It is particularly useful in the context of systemic oppression, where large-scale social forces and patterns have set us up to participate in behaviours that reinforce oppression, even when we may not be aware of it. The basics:

“Ouch” is for when you want to publicly acknowledge that you have been harmed. Remember that feeling uncomfortable is different from being harmed.

“Whoa” is for when you witness something that reinforces some type of systemic oppression or dehumanisation, and you want to draw everyone’s attention to it.

“Oops” is for acknowledging when you have done something that caused harm or reinforced systemic oppression. It acknowledges that you may have caused harm and that it was a mistake or you didn’t mean to.

Part of the ouch-whoa-oops philosophy is that in a group setting when harm happens or a form of systemic oppression is reproduced, it is important for the whole group to acknowledge that there was an impact - even if not everyone present fully understands what happened. Harm affects everyone present, and our response to harm at the moment can normalise it or challenge it within each of us. Private, in-depth conversations with individuals may be necessary for healing as well, but public recognition of harm is important to decrease the chance of normalising the dynamics.

Group level

Morning routine

Creating a more reflective space in the mornings of a residential training might be a useful way of supporting participants (and facilitators!) in processing and digesting the training content. The format for holding such a space can differ depending on what is appropriate for the particular group you are working with. It might be a meditative/awareness practice session first thing in the morning, or a reflective journaling session, a walk in nature or holding silence in communal spaces for some part of the morning, before you start formal session time. It is important to judge what kind of activity would be most helpful to the group you are working with and provide a sense of repetition or routine with it - for some people having a rhythm and a regular dedicated space for reflection might create a sense of safety and support a deeper engagement with the training content.

Check-ins

Before starting to work on the content, it is important to create a space to hear how each individual is doing. This allows the facilitator and the group to be aware if there are issues or needs arising. It also allows the group to share the responsibility to take care of each other and support each other if needed. It supports building a culture of care and helps nourish relationships and a sense of solidarity and belonging in the group.

Base groups

These are small groups of participants created by the facilitator randomly or based on identities or needs. Another name for this type of group is affinity groups. These small groups are a space where participants can create a safer space for deeper connection and sharing. They can be seen as support groups for the members of the small groups where they seek advice, emotional support and deeper reflections. They can be also designed as part of sharing responsibilities of maintaining the facility where the educational activity is taking place. Small groups also allow some participants to share their emotions, challenges and thoughts better than a big group, it helps them to fully engage even if they may not be seen as very active in big group sessions. You can also integrate time for base group meetings within the program design.

Body-work session

This is a space where participants can share their body-centred practices. During the content sessions mostly our brains are active and bodywork sessions help participants to work with their bodies, it helps them to release any tension accumulated in the body, helps for relaxation and also allows exchanging activities for body-care and mental care. They can be optional sessions. Activities may include dancing, playing games, yoga, trust games, walking in nature etc.

One-to-One

Listeners

Listeners is a practice where participants offer their listening ears to others who need to talk and reflect on what is going on with them. Listeners are participants, too. Each day of the educational activity, depending on the group size and the content, 2 or 3 people who feel they have the capacity to listen for that day can be volunteers to listen to whoever approaches them. This way people who process information and emotions through talking can have an opportunity to do so if they need it instead of holding it within. Listeners only offer their listening ears. When explaining

the listeners' roles, it is important to underline that they are not there to give advice or solve any problems of others, but just actively listen.

Trainers / Facilitators

It is obvious but also important to mention that facilitators can be also approached by participants when they need to reflect, process or express their needs. A facilitator or trainer's role is to create and facilitate the learning process for a group, which sometimes involves emotional holding. Although it is important to be transparent and honest when participants can approach a trainer or facilitator. Because a facilitator or trainer role also involves program design and conduction; and to execute a good learning process, trainers also need to take time for their own self-care.

Learning Buddies

This is a practice focusing on learning in a buddy system. Buddies can be formed with an activity or randomly, or based on language etc. They are there to support the learning process. New contents, theories, and models can be reflected in these buddies to digest but also difficult emotional learnings, sometimes unlearning can be also shared in buddies where each buddy tries to support each other in their learning journey. It is useful to give time and involve learning buddies at the end of sessions for reflections, bringing out new questions or digesting the learnings.

Key facilitator skills for responsive facilitation to deal with power-related issues in the learning space

This section includes some key facilitation skills to understand and hold conversations when power-related or any other incidents occur in the learning space. Conflict and/or incidents are a natural part of any group process because a group is formed by diverse individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge on a particular topic, group process, and participation. We as facilitators and educators should have some basic skills to facilitate the learning process for a group, but sometimes when incidents/conflicts occur, it is crucial to help the group unfold the incident and find a constructive way to deal with it and learn from it. These skills can help you to navigate these incidents/conflicts.

Before looking into these skills, we would like to offer an understanding of how triggering events around power issues happens. We as facilitators undoubtedly are part of this process, our presence and how we handle the incident will have an impact on participants and on other trainers/facilitators. Facilitating these conversations can be challenging and stressful. It involves exploring difficult emotions and situations that are not usually dealt with in traditional learning environments. Whether conscious of it or not, facilitators and participants bring most, if not all, of who they are to the learning environment, including their fears, biases, stereotypes, memories of past traumas, and current life experiences.

Consequently, many facilitators express being profoundly affected by the remarks and behaviours of participants, experiencing intense emotions such as anger, fear, embarrassment, pain, and sadness. Many professionals in the field utilise the term "trigger" to characterise the immediate and unconscious reaction to stimuli without accompanying conscious thought. How we as facilitators typically respond to triggers can impact our ability to effectively appraise, diagnose, and respond during difficult dialogues. It is imperative that we as facilitators effectively manage ourselves when we are triggered so that we both model the skills and attitudes we are teaching in the session, as well as uphold the principle of "no attacks."²

Kathy Obear, who is a trainer on managing diversity, team and organisational effectiveness, and conflict resolution, brings us a conceptual framework to deeply understand how triggering events happen. She offers a "triggering event cycle" model and insights to navigate the cycle. It can help facilitators be conscious and intentional as they choose how to respond when they feel triggered, and is useful in diagnosing and interrupting a triggered reaction. It can also re-establish a sense of emotional equilibrium in order to thoughtfully choose an effective response at the moment.

² Adapted from Obear, K. Summer 2007. *Diversity Practitioner Tools, Navigating Triggering Events: Critical Skills for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues*. The Diversity Factor, Generational Diversity Volume 15, Number 3

Seven Steps of the Triggering Cycle

Step 1 Stimulus occurs.

Step 2 The stimulus "triggers" an intrapersonal "root" (a memory, past trauma or experience, fear, prejudice).

Step 3 These intrapersonal issues form a lens through which a facilitator creates a "story" about what is happening.

Step 4 The story a facilitator creates shapes the cognitive, emotional and physiological reactions s/he experiences.

Step 5 The intention of a facilitator's response is influenced by the story she/he/they create.

Step 6 The facilitator reacts to the stimulus.

Step 7 The facilitator's reaction may be a trigger for participants and/or another facilitator.

Many times we as facilitators may not be aware if we get triggered. Reading the room and energy is something that our facilitator's gut helps us to do. Understanding the structural aspect and depth of triggering events is critical. Many facilitators who intend to create an inclusive space can get triggered by what's happening in the training space. In Obear's research, she clearly names that common triggers for facilitators are offensive remarks by dominant group members — often white, male heterosexuals — who portray themselves as "victims" of "reverse discrimination" or refuse to "own" their privilege, arrogance, domination of "airtime," bullying or controlling behaviour and challenge to the competence or credibility of the facilitator which is clear enough to see the structural oppression in these incidents. So that is why we need to create enough awareness on these topics to be able to identify if we feel triggered to manage the situation constructively. Once we are aware we can self-regulate our body and reactions (please look at the regulating nervous system tool for how to).

Also, centering ourselves is a powerful practice for holding difficult emotions, and we can carry these emotions without being carried away.

It is critical that facilitators understand how their current life issues, unconscious feelings and past experiences can shade and drive their perceptions, appraisals and interventions, and result in inappropriate and counterproductive reactions.³ This kind of awareness helps us to read the situation better. One way to do this is self-reflection on the question of why we feel triggered. The story we create of the incident of course involves our way of seeing. In this situation, we can talk to other team members to receive different perspectives if there are, we can ask for a break to re-center and analyse our feelings and the roots of why we feel triggered.

When triggering events occur, it is always useful to remember how we can navigate this through:

- Opening up respectful conversation on the incident
- Understand how participants are affected
- Be very mindful of margin voices in the group when giving space (margins change in every group setting, if many participants are comfortable speaking in English, low level of confidence in speaking in English could be margins or when many able-bodied present, then disabled participants could be margins)
- Use the incident as a transformative learning opportunity. When the

³ Argyris, C., 1973, *Intervention Theory and Method: A Behavioral Science View*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

American Society for Training and Development, 1996. *On Elements of Competence for Diversity Work: Creating Competence for Inclusive Work Environments*. Bell, L.A., Washington, S., Weinstein

container is strong enough and the group can hold the process of unpacking the incident, participants feel empowered and ensure that there is constructive assistance when they bring issues that bother them without turning them into incidents; then they will find these transformative moments everywhere.

- Remind brave space principles to create safety to open up emotions, different opinions
- Be aware of when to use high-risk activities, check if the group container and trust among participants are well established before using it and get prepared for any outcome
- Use engaging communication skills to go deeper, which are described below:

Transformative skills for navigating difficult conversations

One of the important aspects of using the brave space concept is to create a container that centres care and support to encourage participants to take part in difficult conversations around power dynamics for their transformation. The idea of “transformation” implies that facilitators bring an agenda to situations of conflict. Here we focus on power dynamics-related incidents/conflicts in educational spaces.

This can already be a hard task for a facilitator or trainer. To hold those difficult conversations and to address critical incidents when they appear needs some transformative facilitation skills and some level of experience.

A facilitator with transformative skills:

- empowers participants to strengthen their sense of self;
- empowers participants to increase their confidence that they are taken seriously by others as people with a history, an identity worthy of respect and needs that must be addressed;
- treats them in ways that honour and support their own resources for making decisions and pursuing solutions to their problems.

To empower participants in this manner, it is essential to convey, through our eyes, body language, and tone of voice, a genuine eagerness to comprehend the situation from their perspective. The message should be clear that we won't reject them based on their views, and that we acknowledge their significant internal resources for addressing the conflict. Active listening is a crucial skill for communicating this understanding and attitude. Facilitators commonly use three specific listening skills: paraphrasing, summarising, and reframing.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing in group facilitation refers to the skill of restating and mirroring back what someone has said in a group discussion. It involves summarising the content of a participant's message in a way that reflects understanding and encourages further communication rather than shutting down. Sometimes these messages may have a negative impact on other participants and the participant may not be aware of this impact. In those cases paraphrasing can help participants to understand that their comment can be offensive without making them feel judged.

THE PURPOSE

HOW CAN YOU USE IT?

Clarification: Paraphrasing helps ensure that the facilitator and the group members have a shared understanding of the ideas expressed. It allows for clarification of any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

Listen Actively: Pay close attention to what participants are saying, focusing on both the content and the emotions behind their words.

Validation: Paraphrasing can make participants feel heard and acknowledged. It demonstrates that the facilitator is actively listening and values the contributions of group members.

Rephrase Succinctly: After a participant has spoken, paraphrase their message using your own words. Be concise but capture the key points accurately. A paraphrase should be shorter than the speaker's own statement. Preface your paraphrase with a comment like one of these:

"It sounds like you're saying . . ."

"Let me see if I understand you . . ."

"So your understanding is that..."

Encouraging Reflection: When a facilitator paraphrases, it provides an opportunity for the speaker to reflect on their own thoughts and potentially revise or expand upon them.

Check for Accuracy: After paraphrasing, check with the speaker to ensure that your interpretation aligns with their intended message. This demonstrates your commitment to understanding and valuing their perspective. "Is this what you mean?"

"Did I get it right?" Verbally or nonverbally, the speaker will indicate whether he/she/they feel understood. If not, keep asking for clarification until you understand what they meant.

Building Connection: Paraphrasing fosters a sense of connection within the group by promoting effective communication and mutual understanding. It encourages a collaborative atmosphere.

Use Neutral Language: Aim to use neutral and non-judgmental language when paraphrasing to maintain a positive and inclusive group atmosphere.

Do not say:

"I know exactly how you feel. I've been in situations like that myself."

Instead, say:

"You feel that..."

Managing Conflict: In situations where there might be disagreements or conflicting viewpoints, paraphrasing can help de-escalate tension. It allows the facilitator to acknowledge differing opinions while maintaining a respectful and inclusive environment.

Encourage Further Contributions: Paraphrasing can serve as a segue to invite other participants to share their thoughts on the topic. It helps keep the conversation flowing and encourages a diversity of perspectives.

Summarising

Summarising is similar to paraphrasing, but summarising collects the key elements of several comments made over a more extended period while paraphrasing can be done any moment on any comment. Facilitators can use this approach to encapsulate and reflect the primary points of either an individual's or the group's viewpoints, to create a shared perspective. Moreover, regularly condensing the remarks of all participants is a beneficial technique for facilitators to ensure the discussion remains focused and purposeful.

THE PURPOSE	HOW CAN YOU USE IT?
To close a group discussion to move on to the next topic	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Restate the question that began the discussion: "We've been discussing the privileged identities and ranks."2. Indicate the number of key themes you heard: "I think people raised three themes."3. Name the first theme, and mention one or two key points related to that theme: "The first theme was how identities are constructed. You explored the social and individual aspects of identity construction."4. Repeat this sequence for each theme: "Another theme was privilege and norms".5. Make a closing statement that bridges to the next topic: "We've explored how identities, privilege and ranks work. Now let's discuss how they can affect power dynamics in an educational space"

Validating

Validating is the skill that legitimises and accepts a speaker's opinion or feeling, without agreeing that the opinion is "correct." We may be wondering if it is possible to validate someone's opinion without agreeing to it or taking sides. A facilitator should be sideless a lot of the time (unless in situations that require harm reduction and/or are clearly related to fundamental values of the space - such as anti-oppression) and validating is a good opportunity to show that by just recognising a group's diverse opinions without taking any side. Validating is acknowledging that this is one way of looking at the topic and there are other ways as well.

THE PURPOSE

To encourage a participant to open up more, especially when it is a controversial topic

HOW CAN YOU USE IT?

Validating can be done in 3 steps: First, paraphrase. Second, assess whether the speaker needs added support. Third, offer support.

1. Paraphrase or draw out a participant's opinion or feeling.
2. Ask yourself, "Does this participant need extra support? Has she/he/they just said something that takes a risk?"
3. Offer that support by acknowledging the legitimacy of what the person just said.

For example:

"I understand what you're saying." "I see that it feels important to you." "I get why this matters to you." "I can see how you got to this point." "Now I understand you more."

Brave Space As A Container Building

SESSION PLAN 1

Name of the Tool Brave Space

Total Time needed 2 hours

Materials needed

- Flipcharts
- markers
- learning zone flipchart
- brave space principles flipchart

Key Benefits and Aims

- Creating a strong group container for holding difficult conversations around power dynamics
- Encouraging participants to bring their authentic selves
- Working towards building a culture of care and support
- Gathering information about how to take care of others/ourselves in the group setting
- Considering and exploring good conditions for supporting learning
- Building group trust, connection and safety

Facilitator Notes It is very important to give enough attention to group formation as it creates a base for further group work. Managing assumptions and expectations right from the start encourages participants to take responsibility for their learning processes. Designing the group formation process needs to take into account the kind of group you will be working with, existing culture, values and needs of participants.

The longer you are bringing a group together for, the more important the group formation process is. When the 'container' is not well established and cared for, people are likely to begin to feel 'unsafe', and are much more likely to resist, 'kick-back' against things/facilitators and find themselves in conflict with other group members. This session plan is designed with longer training processes in mind.

On a longer training of a week or more, we will give most of the first day to this process! You can use this as a teaching/skill-sharing tool for people to take back to their groups or into their own facilitation, at the same time as using it to build the 'container' of the group you are working with.

In this session plan, the Brave Space concept is being used to create the group container.

Make sure, if you are using this for container building, that the whole group and facilitation team is there, to contribute to the process and hear the range of needs - otherwise the purpose is compromised.

Origin of the tool

The brave space concept comes from *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators* by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013)

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

Setting up the activity (5 mins)

Explain what is container building and what kind of group culture you are aiming to form.

Learning-zone model introduction (15 mins)

Start with explaining the “Learning Zone” model as a basis for the creation of a brave space and a culture of care and support. Explain the importance of care and support as a fundamental part of creating a brave space.

Explain the difference between brave and safe space and why you are proposing to create a brave space.

It is important to encourage participants to understand this concept in practice - give examples of what it looks like to be in a comfort zone, in a learning zone and in a panic zone. To be in a comfort zone could be going for a walk in nature, reading, or having a shower; learning zone activities can include exploring unfamiliar concepts, discussing, asking questions, and being curious; in a panic zone, we feel like we under attack, frozen, angry, over-sensitive, heavy breathing, stressed and sweating etc.

Particularly you can also talk more about making mistakes and amendments to encourage participants to see it as an opportunity to learn and transform which also helps each participant to bring their authentic selves into the space.

Give emphasis to the area between the learning zone and the panic zone. This is the zone where most conversations and learnings around oppression lie. Refer to the learning zone model when introducing activities later on during the training and encourage participants to reflect on their engagement through the lenses of this model. Sometimes some exercises require some level of challenge and this is what we call risk-level. How much risk the group will be prepared to take is defined by the strength of the container built.

Brave Space principles (20 min)

Once participants have an understanding of the “Learning zone” model and the culture needed to hold this, introduce “Brave Space Principles”. For each principle, if you have extra time you can go deeper but in this session plan, we simply introduce it and explain what they are and why they are important.

It is also important to mention that they are not rules but principles.

Hearing the needs of the group (30 min)

After the presentations, move to a practical exploration of what the group needs in order to implement the presented principles.

This activity will be done in small groups.

Break down into smaller groups of 4 - 5 people, taking a sheet of flipchart and some marker pens for small groups.

- Participants will have 30 minutes in small groups to discuss and write down responses to:
“What do I need to step into the learning zone in this group?”
or, more simply,
“What do I need to be able to bring my best to this group?”
(you can offer them both questions.. they should elicit similar responses)

In small groups, individuals do not need to share the same needs in order to write them down, individual needs can be also written on the flipcharts, it is important to mention this.

- We will be sharing these in the bigger group later.
- After 25 minutes give them a 5-minute warning and bring them back as a whole group.

Sharing the needs in the big group (5 minutes for each small group)

- Inform them that the group is now going to hear what each of the smaller groups has produced, listening and taking on board what others are saying they need. Explain that we are not aiming to tie things down into agreements at this stage, we are just hearing from people and making sure we understand what they are saying/asking for.
- Hear from each group for around 5 minutes, letting them explain and clarify what they have written on their flipchart. Invite the rest of the group to ask questions if they need to.
- As the facilitator, you or someone else in the team needs to either remember or note down any needs that are expressed that will need a more formal agreement (for example, someone says they want everything shared in the group to be confidential, or someone says that they want to smoke in a way that doesn't impinge on others but doesn't leave them feeling ostracised. These things are not needs that can just 'be heard', they need the group to agree on a protocol of some sort. You will come back to these at the end).
- Having heard from and clarified what everyone has said, inform the group of the following:
In this group, we want to try an approach of assuming that, in most cases, it will have been enough to have heard and discussed these needs and preferences, and that, based on that, we can go forward with a sense of care, respect and understanding for one another (as a starting point)
- It is not necessary to make agreements on everything now! There will be various structures in place during the training which will offer opportunities for feedback, making requests, expressing further needs, taking steps to address any conflict that could be arising, and so on.

Then introduce Brave Space support structures (20 minutes)

Explain each support structure that you choose to offer and explain how they are going to work.

Tying down the needs (20 minutes)

However, before we finish, there might be a couple of things people have mentioned that will need an agreement, so we will give a bit of time to that now.

- Name the things you have noted down that you think need an agreement and check with the group that there isn't anything else that you might have missed.
- With whatever time you have left in the session, endeavour to reach these few agreements. There shouldn't be more than 2 or 3, and it should be possible to get them tied down. If it gets complicated, and you run out of time, you will have to tell the group that you will come back to it at the start of the next session or whenever is next most appropriate.
- If the group haven't mentioned confidentiality themselves, it's probably worth you suggesting there is an agreement made about this - it is likely to come up later if you don't. You might also want to mention approaches to timekeeping if that hasn't come up.

SESSION PLAN 2

Image theatre with safe space and brave space and talk about the differences, attitudes

Name of the Tool	Brave Space
Total Time needed	2 hours
Materials needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flipcharts• markers• learning zone flipchart• brave space principles flipchart
Key Benefits and Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploring the difference between safe space and brave space• Understanding the concept of brave space• Working towards building a culture of care and support• Gathering information about how to take care of others/ourselves in the group setting• Considering and exploring good conditions for supporting learning• Building group trust, connection and safety
Facilitator Notes	This session plan focuses on the concept of brave space. It is not a session for container building, though it will help participants understand the concept and can be used as a container building later. You can still combine it with the “Learning Zone” model.
Origin of the tool	The brave space concept comes from <i>The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators</i> by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013)
How to use the tool - Activity Instructions	<p><u>Setting up the activity (5 mins)</u> Explain to participants what the goal of the session is, which is exploring the concept of brave space and finding differences with the concept of safe space. In this session, we will use Augusto Boal’s image theatre.</p> <p><u>Image theatre (70 min)</u> Explain what is image theatre and the importance of using our bodies rather than our minds. You might want to consider doing a warm-up activity, to ease participants into using their bodies and imagination. See the book “Games for Actors and Non-actors” By Augusto Boal for inspiration.</p> <p><u>Step 1 (10 mins)</u> Divide the group into two smaller groups and ask each to create an image/a sculpture with their bodies representing the concept of safe space without much discussion. Encourage participants to be creative and rely on what comes to the body and imagination.</p> <p><u>Step 2 (15 mins)</u> Once images are created, ask each group to present the images to others. Ask the group what they see in the image - what is interesting, what is surprising, and what feelings are evoked by this</p>

image. Invite different participants to share in the form of 'brainstorming' and sum up all that was shared at the end.

Step 3 (10 mins)

Invite the groups to form an image of the concept of brave space.

Step 4 (15 mins)

Similarly, ask participants what they observe in the other image, what are emotions present in the image, and what are the people in the image doing. And once more summarise all that has been said.

Step 5 Debrief (20 mins)

Now bring the group back together and lead a discussion about the differences between safe and brave space concepts. What did they observe? What does it mean for group dynamics? What does it mean for participation? What does it mean when dealing with conflicts? What does it mean when talking about difficult topics such as privileges?

Input (30 mins)

Present the principles of brave space and connect them with the previous discussion in the group.

If you have time, you can discuss each principle with the group.

Tools for Creating Brave and Transformative Learning Spaces

DIVERSITY WELCOME

Name of the Tool	Diversity Welcome
Which competence area can the tool support?	Sensitivity to group dynamics Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers/ participants
Estimated Time needed	15 minutes but can be longer if desired
Materials needed	Handout or an excellent memory
Facilitation skills needed and tips	<p>The more you are able to speak to the group and look at them (rather than read from your notes), the better - it creates more connection and makes the opening more heartfelt. Make this text as much 'yours' as possible, trying to make sure it does not feel like reading a list, but a genuine welcome to all of the mentioned parts of the groups' diversity. Bring in your style(s). Keep into account that the main goal of this exercise is to start building the group container by creating a welcoming environment. In your preparation for leading this exercise, you could ask yourself what feels welcoming to you?</p> <p>Take pauses after some of the parts of the Welcome, and invite participants to add things, name things themselves ('Is there anything else?' 'Is there any other language present in the room?' etc)</p> <p>Make sure you don't rush it, it is meant to be repetitive and spacious. It often creates a sense of tenderness and can be moving to the group. Give it space and enjoy it!</p> <p>If you can get some information about the participants' backgrounds and identities in advance of the session/training, that will help you frame your Diversity Welcome so that it is more tailored. In terms of ordering the list, you can name marginalised identities or margin beliefs, values and behaviours before mainstream ones to give them even more visibility.</p> <p>Take the content of the wider workshop/training into account to adapt the text.</p>

Key Benefits and Aims

- Welcoming the group
- supporting people to feel seen/acknowledged in the diversity of their identities, behaviours, experiences, feelings and backgrounds to facilitate people's participation; create a sense of belonging
- Establishing an atmosphere of care and supporting trust in the group (container building) and creating an initial space for people to regulate potential anxieties related to entering in the space and not knowing people
- Preparing the ground for active solidarity work

Considerations on its use

It is generally used at the start of a training, meeting, or workshop to set the tone and to create a space where everybody feels welcomed. It might feel shallow or tokenistic, if you are not using a general anti-oppression approach and lenses to your session/training.

Relation to brave space

It can lay the foundations for building a culture of respect and solidarity. This activity creates visibility to a whole range of identities, beliefs and attitudes that are present in your group. It is aimed to make them feel seen and welcomed. It is a form of active intention setting for the space and an expression of values. As a facilitator you have significant power to influence and guide a group's culture - this activity helps to start shaping a culture of expression, belonging and deeper learning.

Facilitator Notes (background info)

This can be a powerful tool for acknowledging the diversity in the room. It can be adapted according to the people that are in the space. It can be short or long. Making marginal identities more visible will help you create a stronger container for the group. Try to be genuine and warm as much as possible and don't treat the text as a way of ticking boxes, but rather a genuine invitation to participants to bring their full selves into the space.

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Origin of the tool

This activity is an adaptation of a tool used by Training for Change.

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

- Start with a personal story (to model vulnerability and risk taking) on what is difficult for you showing up in a new space, group. As such you start framing what is coming up next.
- Welcome participants into the space, by going through and naming some of the things listed below. Feel free to name more things than are listed here, as feels appropriate. Change the order to what might suit your group better.

"I want to welcome:

- all people who have travelled from far away, welcome people who come from nearby. Where have people come from?
- different languages spoken in this room: (fill out languages you might expect to be present, check sign-up forms), sign language, ... , What else do people speak in this room?
- people who are not so at ease in (large) groups or are and those in

between. Those who don't find it easy to connect to (new) people and those who look forward to it

- all ages, teenagers, people who feel their age, feel younger/older than their age. Which ages we have ?
- something on the content of the training eg themes they work/campaign on... and/or themes that will come up in the training that people might/ might not be familiar with
- something on identities that relate to the content eg activists, organisers, changemakers (or teachers, educators, facilitators ...) and those who don't identify as such
- our bodies and different ways we experience and engage with them
- our emotions: joy, excitement, grief, rage, indignation, contentment, disappointment, nervousness, any others?
- our different ability levels: those who identify as having a disability, visible or invisible
- different health conditions: those who identify as healthy or not, those living with chronic illnesses, physical pain
- different ways our brains work and process information
- educational background: those with the experience of formal education on different levels and those without that experience, those familiar with workshop culture and not (if you are leading an online space: familiar with online learning spaces and not)
- different ways we learn: visual learning, verbal learning, learning through reading, doing things, problem solving, storytelling and all the other ways we learn
- - all our genders: those who identify as trans, non-binary, man, women, on or out of the spectrum of gender, all the ways we experience and express our genders
- - all our descents: Latino descent, African descent, Middle-Eastern descent, Asian and Pacific descent, European descent, and people of mixed, multiple descents
- migrants and people living in the country they were born
- our class backgrounds: working class, middle class, owning class, those who do not know where they fit in those definitions and all the different contexts of class dynamics we come from
- our sexualities: those sexually active and not, those who use labels and not, those who identify as gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, heterosexual and all the ways we experience our sexualities
- our faiths, religious traditions and practices, those who identify as atheists, seekers
- those who support us to be here: the team behind this event, your organisations, groups, families - genetic and chosen, friends, supporters, ancestors and spirits"
- At the end, ask participants if there is any other element of diversity in the group that you have missed and welcome them, as participants mention them.

(If you are doing it in an online space, you can also invite participants to write their suggestions in the chat - read the suggestions from the chat out loud, so the suggestions are verbally acknowledged and included in the welcome.)

CIRCLES OF IDENTITY—WELCOMING DIVERSITY

Name of the Tool	Circles of identity-welcoming diversity
Which competence area can the tool support?	<p>Sensitivity to group dynamics</p> <p>Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers/ participants</p> <p>Creating awareness of structural inequalities/power dynamics.</p>
Estimated Time needed	15 minutes
Materials needed	Space to allow participants to stand in circle
Key Benefits and Aims	<p>The first part of the sequence “circle of identities” is an easy introductory activity which allows participants to get to know each other by exploring what identity elements they share with each other and what differentiates them as unique individuals.</p> <p>The second part of the sequence, “welcoming diversity” is an activity whose objective is to offer a symbolic gesture of recognition to all members, in particular those that represent a minority – whether or not it is visible.</p>
Facilitator Notes	<p>The facilitator should learn as much as possible about the diversity represented in the group.</p> <p>The facilitator should also think of what type of visible or deep diversity can be relevant to the theme of the training.</p> <p>“Circle of identities” can also work with people who already know each other. To make the activity more relevant to the training topic, you can ask people to propose statements that are connected in some way to interculturality (e.g.: “I don’t live in the country where I was born”).</p> <p>In our practice, we have not experienced any incidents during this activity, but we were told about one.</p> <p>In that situation, a participant proposed “I identify as black”, to which a young man from Albania took a step forward. At this point, a debate exploded, as other participants who identified as black did not recognize the Albanian participant as black. If something similar should happen, we recommend you do not try to clear the debate instantly, but give importance to the incident, and promise to address the issue later. Invite participants to take note of the emotions that the incident triggered so that later on we can use those emotions as indicators to explore what actually happened.</p> <p>After the “welcoming diversity” activity you can make a transition to the “ground rules” necessary for a good collaboration (see the respective method sheet).</p>

Origin of the tool

LaXixa Theatre (Barcelona) – originally developed as two different activities that we have connected into this sequence

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

Step 1

Invite participants to stand in a circle, tell them you're going to start to get to know each other, and show the process: a person thinks of something true for her/him, goes to the centre of the circle and proposes the statement, e.g.: "I speak at least three languages."

All the participants for whom the statement is true, move towards the person in the centre, to the extent that the statement is true. Propose a couple of statements, then let participants propose their own statements. After a couple of free statements ask participants to think of identity elements that they feel are relevant for the subject of interculturality.

Step 2

Once all participants who wished to do so proposed a statement that could differentiate them, thank participants for all the sharing. Point out, that a conclusion from the activity is that we all have multiple identities, and that some of them connect us to other people, and depending on the context some of them make us unique individuals.

Step 3

Take a moment to welcome the diversity in the group, with a sentence such as "to close the sharing, I'd like to take a moment to welcome all the diversity represented in the group."

List the elements of identities that you have explored through the circle, paying attention to cover the possible diversity on the dimensions you mention. For example: "I'd like to welcome..."

- people who are older than 50 and younger than 50
- participants who were born in the country where they live and those who were born elsewhere
- participants who have a religion, those who do not have one
- men, women, those who do not identify as either, and those who sometimes identify with one and the other

After listing some dimensions, ask participants to add what diversity we should welcome.

When there are no more additions, close the sharing, acknowledging that all this diversity will make the training richer and more interesting, but that occasionally it may also trigger challenges. Invite participants to take care of this diversity so that it can be a stimulating force in the training.

CAUCUSSES SMALL GROUPS

Name of the Tool	Caucusses small groups
Which competence area can the tool support?	Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers/ participants
Total Time needed	65 minutes
Materials needed	No materials needed
Key Benefits and Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides participants with safer conditions to explore topics that might be more painful or tricky to explore in groups, where there is no shared experience of certain kind of oppression, marginalisation or identity• Supports to release tension (connected with power dynamics around social privileges) if there are any arising in the group• Offers an opportunity for authentic connections and vulnerability• Supports groups to explore topics of solidarity, inclusivity and equity
Facilitator Notes	<p>Within all of our groups forms of oppression connected with the wider systems of oppression will show up unavoidably (in one way or another). Due to their pervasive and historic nature, they will often bring significant pain with them. They will produce visible or invisible dynamics connected with social privilege, influence, power and entitlement.</p> <p>Being socially privileged (like being socially marginalised) is not an individual characteristic - it is a systemic characteristic that shows up at an individual level. It is not chosen by an individual but ascribed to them by society, based on (constructed) social group membership. Recognising privilege is not about blaming those who benefit from it, nor about feeling guilty or ashamed of our social positioning. It is about becoming aware of the existing dynamics, in order that we are better able to transform them and more fully support one another's empowerment and flourishing for the benefit of everyone!</p> <p>The most important thing is to see, acknowledge and name the damage caused by oppressive behaviours - and to protect people from further harm. These are the first and necessary steps for healing and rebuilding the safety in a group. We will need to consider whether and what kind of space we make to address the issue. We might hold a specific session on anti-oppression work or on a specific kind of antagonism or discrimination; we might need to hold a conflict resolution or restorative space for the group; we might need to come back to our group agreements and ad-</p>

just or improve them. Some form of group discussion can be necessary in these situations (even if the majority of the restorative work is happening in smaller/less collectively visible contexts), but this needs to be facilitated well, being mindful to not put the responsibility of educating others on those who were marginalised or hurt. We need to use accountability mechanisms that are rooted in core values of care and compassion, rather than reproduce a culture of shame, blame and individualisation.

Often the way we deal with power dynamics around different identity issues is by pretending that the differences don't exist. It's much more useful to acknowledge the existence of differences and imbalances to be able to work with them. A good tool to offer people an opportunity to speak with others of similar experience is a caucus gathering. The caucus might come together around a theme: gender, race, ability, class or shared experiences of oppression; for example POC caucus, women and trans caucus, LGBTQ+ caucus, sex workers caucus, etc. It might seem like a tool that divides, but surprisingly enough it often results in creating more of a bond in the group. Often, people have more ease in dealing with challenges and discomfort when in a group of people who share similar experiences in relation to the systems of oppression (including holding privilege). It might be just for check-in, sharing or also to work on tools, methods and behaviour proposals for the whole group around fighting imbalances.

Make sure to mention to the group that this tool is designed for supporting vulnerability, exploration and open conversations, rather than dividing and closing the conversations down.

Work skilfully with shame and blame, support those caucusing around privileged positions to remain curious, open and not fall into quilt patterns. Make sure you bring the group together afterwards, so that caucuses can feed in any information they would like to bring to the whole group - it might be bringing up an issue, opening up a conversation or making a concrete request to the rest of the group.

Caucus spaces support empowerment and validation of experience. In turn, boundary setting and giving and receiving feedback becomes more skilful and less reactive, people are able to relate from a centred space.

You can propose caucus 'themes' or you can simply put a slot for caucus meetings on the workshop agenda and ask people to form the caucuses as they want to. Some of the examples might be: queer, BIPOC, white, TIGV, sex workers, working class people. Bear in mind that people will be finding themselves at the intersection of different identities and oppressions, so take this into account when proposing the groups.

Origin of the tool

Unknown! Probably goes back centuries, as humans we would always gather in groups to share and debrief!

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

1. *setting up the activity (time)*

Decide which process you will use and if you have enough information about the participants to propose the caucus groups or if you will leave it to them to self organise. Depending on the group you might want to have a facilitator involved in the caucus meeting - if they are sharing that particular identity. But it is not a requirement, participants can self-organise.

2. *facilitating the activity (60 - 80 minutes)*

Usually 60 minutes will be enough for people to meet in small groups. People can use this time in whatever way they want to - chatting about their experiences in general or in particular in this group.

3. debriefing the activity (time- depends on the context and situation)

Make spaces on a morning check in, community meeting or later in the day for groups to feed anything back to the whole group - it might be bringing up an issue, opening up a conversation or making a concrete request to the whole group.

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- Emphasise the importance of spaces in which we can relax around our identities and the importance of being with others who share similar experiences
- Emphasise the importance of coming back from those spaces to be with others and build trust and understanding across different experiences

REGULATE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Tools for Creating Brave and Transformative Learning Spaces



Name of the Tool Regulate nervous system

Which competence area can the tool support? Awareness of hierarchy/status in our own communication style
Sensitivity to group dynamics
Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers/participants
Dealing with discriminatory accusations/manifestations
Creating awareness of structural inequalities/power dynamics.

Total Time needed 110 minutes

Materials needed pre-prepared flipchart diagrams / presentation

Key Benefits and Aims

- Understanding trauma and/or stress responses, and when and how they happen
- Learning some simple regulation techniques
- Normalising trauma and stress responses and adopting a depathologizing approach
- Acquiring a deeper understanding of one's own body and physiological reactions
- Becoming more equipped to support oneself and others when under stress

Facilitator Notes

Our bodies are the foundation for everything in our lives. All of our experience is mediated and processed in and through the body. Our capacity to sense, feel, and intuit resides there. Even our 'thinking' faculty, which we might conceive of as 'other' than the body, depends on our brain tissue, nervous system, capacity to metabolise, and so on - there is no such thing as unembodied thinking (yet!). Our bodies provide us with the information we need to live, relate and understand. They act as our primary interface with the world. Our race, gender, sexuality, ability and other identities are all bound to the relationship between the body and how it is perceived by culture and society. And our commitment to and expression of values, meaning and purpose, happen by physical action - they too are 'embodied'.

Unfortunately, we are working against a lot in this area. Dominant western culture has, in many ways, prioritised rationality over the feeling, intuiting and sensing faculties. The result of this is a form of socialisation which can disconnect us from our bodies and the felt sense of what is going on. Consequently, we often don't know how to read signals from our bodies or how to process the information they offer us.

These factors undermine our ability to metabolise and recover from stress and intensity. This kind of alienation also prevents us from gathering somatic information that supports awareness of ourselves and empathy with others. Our bodies are a source of information about our own and other peoples' states. To be able to be in connection with others, our environment and ourselves, we need to reclaim and restore connection with our bodies.

Being more connected to our bodies will mean we are:

- More in touch with subtle information such as 'gut sense' of ethics or rightness
- Better informed and prepared to respond to feedback from our bodies and through this prevent burnout and secondary trauma
- Able to spot, transform and ease symptoms of stress
- Better equipped to process emotions
- More able to rest and restore energies
- Freer from systemic oppressions shaping our bodies in particular ways and more empowered in reclaiming agency over our bodies, personally and collectively
- Able to communicate and work with others in a more authentic and transformative way
- Embodying our values more fully and not only connecting with them on a cognitive level

This process of becoming more aware of sensations and feelings in our body, which were previously less conscious to us, as well as being more connected to our bodies, is what we refer to as embodiment.

Make sure you practise the below mentioned techniques on your own before bringing them into a group. You do not have to be an expert, as they are simple techniques, but trying them out will mean you understand the bodily experience participants will go through and it will support you in holding the session.

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

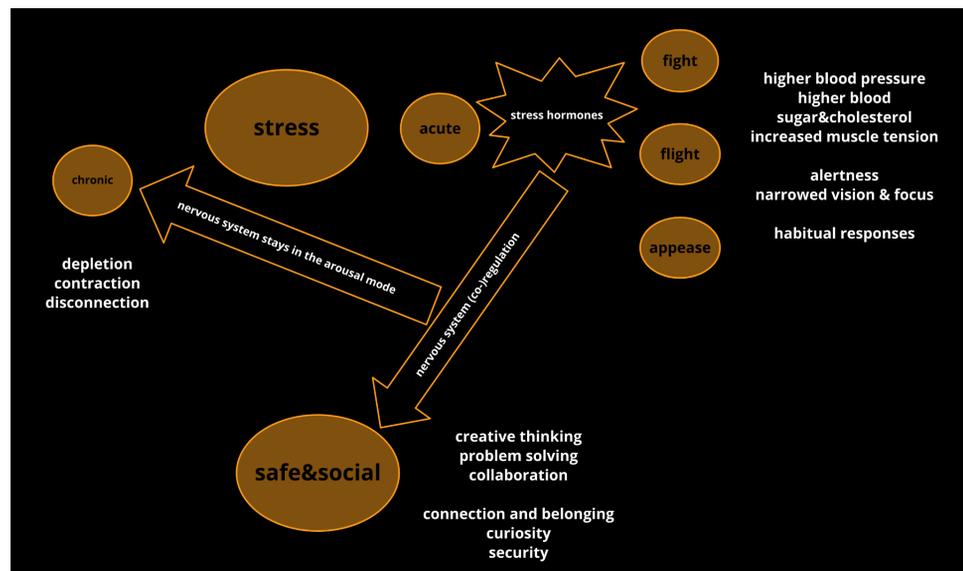
1. Physiology of stress presentation (20 mins)

Setting up the activity (0 mins)

(this doesn't need a set up, just begin it)

Facilitating the activity (10 mins)

- Using the diagram below, talk in simple words about what happens in our body when we experience stress:
 - We all feel emotions in our bodies. They need to be fully felt for the body to be able to process them.
 - Processing stress is NOT connected to the presence of a stressor - dealing with the stressor does not mean dealing with the stress response. These are two separate processes. We can deal well with a challenging situation - like a police interaction or an insult on the street (stressors), but that does not mean we dealt with the experience in our body (stress). That's why we often feel the reactions in our body long after the stressor is gone - the conversation finished, the interaction passed. Sometimes a 5 minutes interaction can result in us processing for months or years.
 - The chart below shows in simplified ways, what happens in our bodies when we experience stress.
 - It is important to point out that when under stress we act in automatic, limited ways. We don't have a choice about our reactions because they are so deeply conditioned. Only when we are in a safe and social state are we able to be more flexible in our thinking and acting, creative and curious. Being in stress response does not support us in relating to others. That is why stress response might so often lead to conflicts and tensions in groups.
 - Another important thing to point out is the difference between 'acute' and 'chronic' stress reactions. It is healthy and good for our bodies to experience stress! The so-called 'stress hormones' help us to take care of ourselves and achieve things - like working hard towards a deadline or jumping away from an approaching car. We need those reactions. They become not useful when we cannot regulate our nervous system back to feeling safe and social. Losing the ability for regulation might be connected with different factors. Often unprocessed trauma or functioning under social oppression means that we are in a state of chronic stress most of the time. This is depleting for our bodies and minds and often interconnected with burnout.



Questions and comments (10 min)

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- We all have wisdom in our bodies, sometimes we just need to tap into it
- Stress and trauma are not unknown to our systems
- There is no medical knowledge needed to recognise trauma or stress response
- Because these reactions are familiar to us and are part of our bodily functioning we also have ways of navigating those in our bodies. We often don't use those resources because of social conditioning or because we have learned a specific coping mechanism that becomes a default but is not always the best one to go to in all situations
- It is very common for most people to carry and experience some trauma/stress responses. Because it is so common, we need to find ways to navigate it without medical pathologisation, so that we can collectively heal.
- Being in the place of stress response limits our social abilities and our creativity. This in turn will influence how we work together and how we vision about possible futures. Attending to individual and collective healing, bringing the topic of trauma into our groups and understanding how it plays out in the bigger social context will support us in dismantling oppressive power dynamics, attending to and transforming conflicts, fostering personal and collective growth.

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2. Techniques practice (80 min)

Setting up the activity (5 mins)

- Let them know that you will be introducing 4 nervous system regulation techniques. They are all designed to support body connectivity/awareness, presence and regulation. Some of them will involve touching somebody else and that you will demonstrate activities involving touch so that they can choose if to engage with them or not.
- Reiterate that anyone can opt out, or stop at any point, if they need/want to.

You will need to:

- Explain and/or demonstrate each activity before you invite participants to try it out themselves.
- Give them an option to decide after the demonstration to participate or sit the activity out.
- Ask them to find a pair after the demonstration of the activity (when relevant).

Facilitating the activity (1hr5 - 1hr25)

Technique 1: Orientation / Name 3 Things in the Space (5 - 10 mins)

- This is a very simple technique that helps our body to anchor and orient in space. It soothes the nervous system and helps the body to regain a sense of connection and spatial awareness.
- Encourage participants to look slowly to the right, taking in all that they see as they move their heads. Do the same with the left side. Then look around to the front, opening the vision and taking in everything they can see that is in front of them. Then look back, over the left and right shoulder. Then look up towards the ceiling/sky. Encourage really slow movement and soft, open gaze as they look around.
- After you have explored all the directions, ask participants to find 3 things/objects/elements from the landscape/environment and take a mental note of those 3 elements, they can be situated in any of the directions.
- Whenever they feel like they need anchoring during the session, they can go back to those 3 elements in the space, as if they were doing a 'checklist': this is still here, this is here, this is here.
- This will be a quick way of regaining a sense of connection to wider space and environment, encouraging presence, grounding/earthing and connection.

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Technique 2: Centering (25 mins)

Centering is an easy technique that can be used to regulate our emotional states, support us in navigating stressful or heated situations or just a daily practice of getting in touch with ourselves, our sense of values and belonging. You can use this in sessions to break up activities and get people out of their heads. You can use it to follow something stressful or challenging to support settling and soothing. You can use it to explore awareness and emotional literacy themes. It is very versatile and can be returned to repeatedly, as a practice.

This exercise comes from different forms of movement - the centering blanket is a physical theatre exercise, modified but taken from post-Grotowski theatre tradition. The basic posture and somatic centering come from feminist self defense techniques, which in turn stem from different martial art traditions.

You will find references to the centre of gravity and centering techniques in all kinds of movement practices - from martial arts to dance.

Exploration of directions in the body comes from Feldenkreis technique - a somatic practice developed to support restoration from trauma.

To be able to lead these activities, you need to have a certain amount of embodiment/body awareness and need to have practised them yourself. Participants are going to copy the way you are using your body (for those of them who are able to see your body), so it is important that you train the posture yourself, ideally with someone else who can give you feedback.

Setting up the activity (3 mins)

- If you haven't already given them any framing on embodiment etc (wanting to just commence with the game to begin) then you may want to offer some theory/explanation now
- Let participants know that you will stand (or sit if that is needed) for about 10-15 minutes. Advise them to ask questions as you go, if something feels uncomfortable, not quite right or if they have any doubts. Encourage them to look for comfort and check-in with themselves as they engage with the activity (perhaps reminding them about the learning zone model if you have introduced it earlier).
- Encourage participants to do it with eyes open, if it feels comfortable to them. This enables us to practice centering in connection with the environment and each other and makes it a practice we can use any time without any special conditions needed.
- Then ask them to join you - you can explain and demonstrate while they do it with you..

Facilitating the activity (10 - 15 mins)

- Demonstrate the Centering posture and invite participants to join you as you do so, doing the exercise with them and talking them through your own practice of it (while staying aware of them)
- Start with the feet - flat on the ground, encouraging as much contact with the floor as possible, allowing the feet to sink into the floor and root strongly into the floor (you might suggest imagining actual roots growing from the sole of one's feet and rooting deep into the earth below the floor). Feel how the gravitational pull creates a solid ground for you to grow from, to reach up.
- Move towards the knees and find the right amount of tension/extension - not over-straightened and not too bent - so that keeping the posture is more or less effortless. You might want to bend and straighten your knees several times to find the right place, perhaps shaking the body a little bit through vigorous knee bending.
- Move towards the pelvis. Bring your tailbone underneath (imagining that you still have a tail and want to bring it between your legs and towards the front) and your pubic bone up. This will increase tension in the buttocks and thighs, creating a strong, active base for your posture.
- From there lengthen your spine, allowing the lower spine to elongate towards the floor and the upper part of the spine towards the ceiling. Feel how the strong base of your legs allows you to lengthen your upper body, encouraging both grounding, as well as the converse pushing upwards, growing.
- Bring your chin towards your chest slightly, encouraging length in the neck.
- Allow the shoulders to drop and rest on the skeleton. Encourage a sense of equal opening between the shoulder blades and across the chest.

- Demonstrate over-doing (over lengthening, overly opened chest, etc) and go back to neutral, centered so that participants can see the difference. Correct participants if necessary.

After setting up the basic posture, guide participants through a short, deepening centering practice.

- Encourage rooting down and growing up towards the ceiling. Inviting more space in the spine, between the vertebrae, between the ribs, relaxing the belly, allowing the shoulders to drop. Opening the jaw. Expanding the length of the body - up towards the ceiling and down towards the ground.
- Encourage participants to notice what changes in the body as they do so, what sensations and feelings arise. Reassure them that it's OK if they don't notice much and if they are noticing, whatever arises is OK - we are just observing. Remind them that they can stop the exercise at any point if it starts to feel too uncomfortable or unpleasant. Encourage them to take care of themselves and move towards pleasure/enjoyment/ease in the body (if there is any).
- Encourage participants to now expand the body a little bit more to the sides, allowing/imagining a sense of space in the armpits, in the ribcage, in the hips, between the ears. Again, invite noticing what happens as they allow the body to grow a little bit more in this direction.
- Encourage participants to feel the edges of their body - the place where the skin ends and meets the environment. Invite them to open up to their peripheral vision a little bit more if that feels comfortable.
- Ask them to now allow the front and back of the body to relax a little bit more and to allow their bodies to take up space in this direction - front to back, back to front. Allowing the chest and belly to fully open and move with the breath - as much as it feels comfortable. There is no need to alter how the breath moves through the body. Encourage participants to look for space between their forehead and back of their heads, in the throat, and throughout the upper body and legs, allowing the body to take up a bit more space, as much as it feels comfortable.
- Lastly, ask them to place their hand just under their belly buttons - on the centre - feeling for the place where all those explored dimensions meet and cross.
- After a couple of breaths, let go of the hand and posture, move gently to the sides, wiggle fingers and toes and transition towards debrief.

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Debriefing the activity (5 mins)

Ask participants how they felt, what was easy or difficult. What did they notice?

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- This posture will feel unnatural and difficult in the beginning, this will shift with time
- Sometimes micro adjustments make a huge difference - moving the hips slightly either way or shifting the weight slightly from back to front or the other way
- Each body will find its own way into this posture with time
- This is a practice which will become easier and easier with time and can become an accessible, quick tool for difficult situations and conversations

- It is easy to practise wherever we are, as we don't need much to do it - just our bodies!
- Its main aim is to create a sense of grounded spaciousness in our bodies so that we feel more resourced and aware of what is happening to us at the moment.

Technique 3: Sitting Back to Back (10 mins)

- Demonstrate sitting back to back with your partner on the floor* like this:



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*unless sitting on the floor is not viable/comfortable for them, in which case, offer them the option of using stools or chairs with the backs of the chairs to the side/out of the way, so there is still contact between bodies.

- Encourage them to find a position that is comfortable, balanced and easy - they will be sitting like this for about 10 minutes - it's not supposed to be effortful for the muscles..
- Once everyone's in position, spend 10 minutes or so 'dropping in' comments, suggestions and reflections, to help them be present with their experience. Don't talk continuously but don't leave the silence too long as people will end up distracted. Possible suggestions might be:
 - Try to relax. Notice any tension, worry or awkwardness you might be feeling or holding and try to just relax and take it easy - give yourself permission to lean into your partner
 - Notice how your body is feeling, notice what is happening with your breath
 - Notice the breath of your partner.. What is that like?
 - Notice what it is like to be supported.. And that you are also supporting someone..
 - Come with an attitude of openness/curiosity - there is no expectation about what kind of experience anyone should have.. What is happening.. What does sitting like this with someone bring up, today, right now?
 - Keep coming back to sensations.. What does the body feel like physically? What is happening emotionally? What is coming to

your mind? ...as much as possible try to stay present in the room

- Is it possible to have a non-judgemental kind of awareness/attention - noticing if there are ideas and preferences about our experience, what is good/bad experience etc.. what happens if we let them go for a while and just let experience be experience?
- What happens if you look for or lean into a sense of comfort? Ease? Enjoyment? Warmth? Pleasantness?
- Notice what changes are happening? How do you know there is a change?
- What is it like, sitting here, simply, leaning into the warmth of another human, not having to 'do' anything.. Just two human animals, on the ground, back to back, breathing, alive..
- Where tension or painfulness arises in the body, see what happens if you relax with it. Is it really continuous? How does it change?

..and so on.

- Let them know they can gently transition into a few minutes of debriefing (pointers as above).

Technique 4: Body Tapping (5 mins)

- This exercise is used as a warm up exercise in many different movement based practices - such as contemporary dance or martial arts. It encourages blood and other fluids to flow and invigorates the body. It might be a very good tool to use to move a body from being 'stuck' or to transform a 'freeze' reaction.
- Demonstrate first, tapping your own body, explaining which parts you will cover and the amount of pressure etc:
 - Use your fist to tap on parts of the body that are more muscly and use fingertips on your neck, head and face. You can adjust the force - do whatever feels more pleasant to their bodies
 - We will tap the body from feet, through the legs, up to hips and bum, through the belly, lower part of the back, chest and shoulders, arms and palms of the hands and up again towards the neck, head and face
 - You can skip any part of the body if it feels too uncomfortable to engage with
 - Decide if you want to engage with the exercise, and remember you can stop if at any point it doesn't feel helpful any more.
- Invite the group to stand in a circle and instruct them to follow you as you tap your body.
- Start with tapping with one or both of your fists on the left foot. You can do it standing up but if it is a challenging position to be in - sit down on the floor or on a chair. Tap the foot and after a while move up towards the calf, tap on the front and back of the calf, move up to the thigh and do the same. Move up to the left hip and left bum cheek.
- Repeat on the right side.
- Move up to the belly - encouraging participants to be much more gentle here.
- Move to the lower back - again with a lot of gentleness and awareness.
- Move up towards the chest and towards the collar bones, tap along-

side the collar bones.

- Using your right fist tap onto the left shoulder, front and back. Swap to the other side.
- Use your left fist to tap on the inner side of your palm, move onto the outer part and then up the forearm and arm back to the shoulder. Swap sides.
- Now use your fingertips to tap on the back of your neck, move up towards the skull and tap on the top and sides of the skull. Go down towards the ears and lower down onto your jaw. Move up again and onto the forehead. Tap around the eyes, onto the nose, onto the cheekbones and around the mouth.
- To finish, 'brush' (vigorously stroke) the body with open palms - brush through each leg, belly, chest, shoulders and arms and through the head and face.
- Throughout the exercise encourage participants to find their own tempo, adjust the force they are using to what feels good and only go to places that feel right. Listen to the body/experience and practice adjusting and responding (rather than ignoring or overriding)
- Debrief..

Debriefing the whole activity (15 - 20 mins)

- After doing the activities, invite them to spend 5-7 minutes in pairs debriefing - how did they find the exercises, which one resonated with them most, what did they notice.
- Debrief with the whole group:
 - any reflections they want to share
 - anything that came up for them during the activities
 - what effects did the activities have on their emotional state? Their bodies? Their mood?
 - Check for any questions.
- Wrap this part of the session up, saying that there are a lot of different techniques and exercises people can do. Some will work better for some people and the clue is to find those that we feel comfortable with and that are effective regulators for us.
- Ask the group to name some other regulation and co-regulation practices and techniques that they know or benefit from.

You can use a flipchart to note the mind storm down so that the ideas are captured for the group.

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- Our bodies are very wise! If we can tap into their wisdom, we will be able to receive a lot of important information about what is happening for us and other people.
- The more we engage with our bodies the more comfortable we will get with them. We are socialised into disconnecting from our bodies and treating them as separate beings we need control, rather than being encouraged to inhabit our bodies fully. It takes time to unlearn this conditioning.
- It might be challenging to get into our bodies, if we store a lot of stress/unprocessed emotions. Always, always encourage anyone you

work with to go towards comfort when doing embodied activities. Pushing oneself into them might be more damaging than beneficial. If someone is not used to embodied practices, allow them to try it out in small chunks, with enough space around to digest and debrief the activity.

- Even though debriefing the activity verbally after doing it with our bodies might take us out of the embodied process - it is a crucial element for digestion and integration of the activity. It is also a relief space for those, who are not so used to engaging with their bodies. It is a safety mechanism that should be built into any activity we do during trainings. For those, who want to stay with their embodied experience, rather than verbalise it - they can take the activities with them and practise more alone, outside the group context.

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Name of the Tool	Giving and receiving feedback
Which competence area can the tool support?	<p>Sensitivity to group dynamics</p> <p>Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers/ participants</p> <p>Creating awareness of structural inequalities/power dynamics.</p> <p>Dealing with discriminatory accusations/manifestations</p>
Total Time needed	60 minutes - 85 minutes
Materials needed	Pre-prepared flipchart and/or handouts
Key Benefits and Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• developing self awareness/knowledge• strengthening personal/emotional robustness• group trust and relationship building• supporting feedback loops/structures/mechanisms• developing listening skills• developing communication skills
Facilitator Notes	<p>No matter how much self-reflection and analysis we do, it is often very difficult for us to be aware of our blind spots, unhelpful behaviours and obstructive habits. Feedback from others can often be the most potent way for us to learn about and transform our behaviour. We need our colleagues and friends to help reflect these things back to us.</p> <p>Creating a group culture in which people are comfortable and adept at offering and receiving feedback is therefore vital. If we can create cultures of care, that means people feel safe enough and are invited/encouraged to offer feedback, if we can make these practices the norm in our groups - supported by self-awareness and emotional literacy practices - we do a lot to mitigate the inevitable tensions and conflicts that will present themselves over time. For the feedback to be useful, it needs to be the truth. For the truth to come out, there needs to be a strong relationship and trust. With trust it is easy to have a constructive feedback discussion, and no one will take offence to the feedback if there is value and it creates an opportunity to grow.</p> <p>However, it requires skill and understanding to do well. Here is a set of simple guidelines that can help us to ensure that feedback is given and received more helpfully.</p>

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

OFFERING FEEDBACK

Check and state your intention

Explain why you are giving this feedback. Constructive feedback almost always comes from a place of wanting to improve something e.g. your relationship, the group dynamic or effectiveness. Explaining this at the start will really help to open a safer space for the person to be able to hear you and hopefully minimise their defensiveness due to assuming you are trying to harm them in some way. If, on reflection you realise your intention is not constructive, then offering feedback is unlikely to be useful.

Take responsibility for your own needs in the situation

A very common situation is that our need to offer someone feedback is driven by one or more of our own needs not being met. It will really help the person receiving feedback to hear what you are saying without becoming defensive if you explain what need it is of yours' that is not being met because of their behaviour. By explaining this to them you are helping them to feel compassion for your situation rather than putting the emphasis on blaming them which is likely to trigger shame and therefore defensiveness.

Offer appreciation early on

It is much easier for someone to trust that you are not trying to harm them and that your intention is benevolent if you express something positive about them or your relationship before launching into the problem. Of course only do this if it feels authentic, however if you are not feeling any authentic appreciation for the person you may want to question if now really is the right time to talk to them about the situation. It is likely in this case that you are still 'triggered' by what's going on in some way and not fully taking responsibility for your own emotional baggage. Some kind of regard practice, in advance of approaching them, can be of invaluable assistance here.

Taking responsibility for your own emotional baggage

It is rare for situations to be entirely one person's 'fault'. Situations that arise between us and others, almost without exception, contain within them our own emotional baggage. To be able to offer truly constructive feedback we need to be able to take responsibility for our own 'stuff' or emotional baggage in the situation and group more generally. The more we explore our own inner world the more we are able to take responsibility for both our own behaviour and our reactions to other people's behaviour. Understanding our own 'stuff' and what it is we bring to group dynamics is a lifelong journey. Therefore it is wise to have a certain amount of humility when offering feedback and to voice your recognition that whilst you may not be aware of your role in the situation, you are aware that these things are complicated and involve dynamics between people, rather than being about one person 'getting it wrong'.

Timing

If possible, it is wise to wait a while before offering feedback so that you are able to reflect on some of the above issues and come from the most integrated and constructive place possible. Being constructive does not mean not bringing your emotions. It simply means bringing them in a 'clean' way that includes taking responsibility for your own emotional baggage. The danger of waiting is that we tend to rationalise our emotions and in the process repress them. This is not the purpose of waiting. Indeed it is wise not to wait too long either - it is easy to talk ourselves out of offering feedback when it can be uncomfortable and painful for us. Once time has gone on, it is easy to feel like the 'moment has passed'.

We also need to consider whether it is an appropriate moment for the other person. Is it a time when the person we want to offer feedback to will be able to be receptive? Do they have too much on? Do they have the capacity to listen?

Respond constructively to defensiveness

It is rare that someone does not become defensive when presented with challenging feedback. Feedback that challenges someone's 'sense of self' or 'ego' is most likely to trigger defensiveness in them.

When defensiveness does occur, support the person with compassion and empathy. Firstly recognise that defensiveness comes from parts of the person that are vulnerable and fragile. Try to imagine how you might feel in their situation and what might be useful to support you to hear what is being said without being defensive. Perhaps even voice this process ... explaining that it is not your intention to cause them pain or harm and that you feel a bit lost as to how to say what you are feeling in a way that they can hear it. Being honest about how you feel about their defensiveness, can be really helpful. Bear in mind that defensiveness at the time of hearing feedback does not mean that they will not hear and process what you are offering, later.

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Listen; seize the gift

A common tendency when faced with challenging feedback is to close down and try and push the other person away by being defensive. Because it may have taken quite a lot of courage for the person giving feedback to approach you, becoming defensive does indeed often serve to close them down. But if this happens, you will have missed the opportunity to learn and grow and to deepen your relationship with this person. Indeed, feedback of any sort is always useful, no matter how challenging it may feel. It is very rare for there to be absolutely nothing useful in what the person is telling you.

Feedback is a gift in that it is a rich opportunity to learn about yourself in groups and to transform your tendencies. Sadly it is rare that feedback is delivered in a way that it is easy to hear, even with the best of intentions. We therefore need to be patient and make the choice to (attempt to) learn from this situation – no matter how challenging.

Often it can be hard to discern between what is actually the other person's own 'emotional baggage' and which bits really do relate to your own unhelpful behaviour. Again, listen carefully and trust that there is always something to learn from the situation – even if it is simply observing your reaction to what they have to say.

Try to stay aware of this tendency to become defensive and/or close down and instead make the choice to take this opportunity to learn and grow and listen fully to what is being said. Often when we are really listening, rather than being defensive, we discover that what they are saying is extremely rich and complex and not nearly as hurtful as it could seem if we are lost in our reactions.

Take responsibility for emotions arising

If you feel emotions arising then voice this in a way that takes responsibility for them (rather than blaming the other person for them). This can help to keep the situation authentic and support the other person to empathise with how you are feeling. "I am noticing that I'm feeling hurt by this, and like I am not seen for the efforts I make" rather than "you are really hurting my feelings, you never appreciate or notice anything I do!", for example.

Ask for space to reflect

If the situation feels too challenging in the moment or you find yourself really not agreeing with what they are saying, then it is perfectly okay to explain you need some time to reflect on what they have said. This might also be an opportunity to check with others on what their sense is (in a way that is constructive rather than gossipy). Be sure that you do come back to them afterwards and share whatever reflections you have had – again, seeing this as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Express gratitude, if authentic

It can be really helpful to express gratitude to the person giving you feedback in recognition of their good intention and the courage it may have taken for them to speak out.

Expressing gratitude sends a strong message to the person offering feedback that you are listening and gives them some reassurance that you are intending to act on their feedback. Of course, in more heated situations it may not feel authentic to thank the person ... stay authentic but stay grounded and remain aware of what emotional baggage you may be projecting onto the other person.

Don't fake 'niceness' but be aware of how easy it is for our anger to be distorted and harmful. There is nothing wrong with anger, but very often because we live in a world that tells us it is wrong to be angry, we can have a lot of repressed anger that may burst or leak out in situations like this.

THE SESSION

In this session, we can offer these guidelines to the group and create an opportunity to practice using them. This can be done in small groups of three or four.

It is important to emphasise the qualities of kindness and constructiveness when framing the activity and model this in how you are communicating. Feedback is not about self-righteously making other people wrong, it's about supporting one another to grow, supporting our groups and endeavours to flourish, in service to our bigger aims. We all probably know it's good and necessary, and almost none of us like it! This is a great opportunity to practice, hopefully in a safer environment - encourage them to make the most of that.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This session has some obvious risks. You are giving the group tools/suggestions for how to give/receive feedback constructively but you have no control as to how well individuals will manage to implement these. If someone accidentally presses someone's buttons, or communicates clumsily/unhelpfully, or someone else's defensiveness levels go haywire, you have a potential bit of conflict or rupturing that will need attention to resolve. For this reason it is good to consider who from the group works with whom:

- are there existing tensions in the group that mean it would be best that certain people didn't work together? Or would it be good to suggest they do work together?
- Is there a level of relationship established between them that can hold a bit of risk/difficulty?
- do you want to trust the group to make this decision based on their own sense of it, or be more directive as the facilitator?

A more general sense of the levels of care, empathy and maturity in the group will inform your decisions around this too. And obviously, it's probably not worth running this session if people don't know each other at all! (Although you might still want to introduce the principals, in this case).

In general, you can probably trust the group to go in at an appropriate level for them. Sometimes you will find that a small group decides amongst themselves to only give each other 'positive' feedback, for example. Although this may seem like a bit of a shame after having encouraged them to make the most of the safer space to explore the challenges of this, one can also see this as the group taking care of itself.. If you are especially concerned, you can always keep the groups in the room with you, so that you can keep an eye on anyone who might seem to be finding the activity upsetting/destabilising.

Origin of the tool

Difficult to say but after World War II, the mechanical feedback system logic was started to be used in relation to personal development.

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

Setting up the activity (20 mins)

- Introduce the theme and concepts thoroughly, as they are described above, with the assistance of a flipchart and/or handouts, showing the key headings. (They will need a copy of this to take with them when they break into smaller groups, so if you are only using a flipchart, you will need to ask them to copy the pointers down)
- When you are satisfied that the group have a good enough understanding of what you are sharing with them, let them know that they will spend the next [X] minutes in smaller groups trying this out
- Acknowledge that this can be a challenging area. If you haven't already done so, state the importance of emphasising the qualities of kindness and constructiveness. This is a great opportunity to practice, hopefully, in a safer environment.
- Checking for questions/clarifications
- Break into groups of four

Practicing giving and receiving feedback in small groups (60)

- They will practice with one person giving feedback to another, with the other two people witnessing and then offering feedback about how the feedback was given. Each person should have an opportunity to offer and to receive feedback.

Debriefing the activity (10-15 mins)

EXPLORING PRIVILEGE, POWER AND RANK



Name of the Tool Exploring privilege, power and rank

Which competence area can the tool support? Awareness of hierarchy/status in our own communication style
Sensitivity to group dynamics
Recognising and dealing with the diversity of identities amongst trainers/participants
Creating awareness of structural inequalities/power dynamics.

Total Time needed 105 minutes - 120 minutes

Materials needed

- flipchart paper
- markers

Facilitation skills needed and tips To evoke an energy of trust and openness, you could precede this with a trust-building exercise and/or explanation of learning through discomfort.

Key Benefits and Aims

- Building awareness around privilege and power dynamics in groups
- Becoming more aware of power and privilege individuals hold in groups and considering ways of navigating this well
- Building skill, literacy and courage in speaking about these themes
- Self-awareness and emotional literacy
- Strengthening trust and deeper connection in the group

Considerations on its use

Talking about power and privilege might bring up resistance in participants and might be difficult emotionally, especially for those who have not had a chance to explore the topic in depth previously. Make sure to encourage kindness towards oneself and others as the group engages with the session and acknowledge that the topic might bring up challenges.

Emphasise that the session's aim is not to bring up guilt or shame, but to engage in reflection that will contribute to more awareness, well-being, resilience and ability to take care of and empower one another and ourselves.

Reactions of shame and guilt might arise - encourage participants to embrace them as much as possible and normalise them, as something we are strongly conditioned into. More about shame and guilt mechanisms, here. Only do the session with a group in which there is enough of a sense of trust to engage in challenging conversations.

Origin of the tool

Based on process work methodology and derived from Arnold Mindell's book "Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity." + Hand-out on rank and privilege by Training for Change

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Facilitator Notes (background)

This session will support participants in exploring privileges and power they hold in groups. The session focuses mostly on self-reflection and how to navigate the issue of power helpfully on the individual level so that we best use our resources to serve the group's purpose and contribute to everyone's wellbeing. Unskillful use of power and privilege can often be a source of conflict and lack of resilience in social movements. Learning how to recognise unhelpful patterns and how to work with power beyond shame and guilt will make our movements more effective and long-lasting. The session uses the theoretical framework of 'rank' to look at power and privilege.

What is rank? Rank can be described as a sum of someone's privileges and power at any given moment.

Rank refers to the privileges we have relative to one another in relationships, in our groups/communities and in the world.

Privilege refers to the access to benefits and resources that result from our membership of certain groups e.g. being white, being born a man, and having received a lot of education.

Rankings are complex in that at any one moment we will have a mix of high and low ranks in relation to each other. It is also contextual. Often we are not aware of our high ranks and we notice more easily when we have low ranks. When they are ignored they cause conflict in our relationships and groups.

Types of rank:

Social rank - is the power you have (or lack) based on identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic standing, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, education, health, physical abilities and language. This may be global or depend on the context.

Structural rank - is the power that belongs to your position in an organisation. This also refers to hidden or unspoken hierarchy such as informal leadership. It determines whose opinions are respected and whose are not

Psychological rank - is personal power you acquire through your life experiences. It relates to feeling secure in oneself, self-awareness, overcoming difficulties and coming out stronger and or confidence developed from childhood (love and positive feedback from friends and family). Confidence to speak out and know what you say will be valued.

Contextual rank - changes depending on the situation, every group and organisation has its own rank structures, based on the norms and values it establishes. For example, in some contexts, you may have a high rank as a man, and in some, it may be low (this does not negate the privilege of being a man in all contexts, under the system of patriarchy). We notice contextual rank when we move to another context and are seen and valued differently.

Spiritual rank - a sense of power that comes from being connected to something bigger than ourselves (not necessarily understood in religious terms) or something that keeps us centred and at ease in the midst of difficulties. This is linked to belief systems and inner wisdom one holds.

It's important to see that rank and privilege are structural and not individual. It has nothing to do with being good or bad. It's not about guilt or shame.

We can't get rid of rank or run away from it while these systems of oppression remain in place. But we can become aware of the rank dynamics and privileges in our interactions with others. And we can learn to use our rank and privilege more wisely for each other's benefit.

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How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

Setting up the activity (5 mins)

Introduce the activity in the context of whatever session/theme you are using it. Emphasise strongly the purpose of talking about rank: to build deeper connections with oneself and others and transform unhelpful dynamics that limit group potential rather than contributing to group development and resilience.

Facilitating the activity (80 - 90 mins)

a. Introducing the theory (15 - 20 mins)

- Explain the theory of rank, drawing on some of the material above, giving clear definitions of privilege and rank, and the difference between them. Give lots of examples from your own experience and make space for questions and comments from the group. If it's new, the subject can be tricky to grapple with. It's not about people 'getting it right' - invite curiosity and questioning as much as possible. Some essential points to make would be:
 - Rank is a conscious or unconscious social and personal ability/power that comes from culture/society, community support, personal strength and spiritual power
 - Rank is fluid, it changes. There are different kinds of rank
 - Some rank is unearned (being a certain sex, race, class, ...)
 - Some rank is earned (accomplishments, service performed, inner work)

- You can't hide rank. We sense one another's rank through body language, communication styles, ways of relating etc
- Usually, we are unaware of our high rank but aware of areas where we have a lower rank than others.
- Reiterate the purpose of talking about this, acknowledging that it might be hard to talk about the power we hold as individuals and emphasise that power in itself is neutral - it's what we do about it and how we use it that matters!

b. Individual reflection (15 mins)

Give the instructions:

- You'll have approximately 10 minutes to reflect on some questions I will give you. I will show the questions on a flipchart as we go along.
- As you reflect, use the medium of writing/journaling to support you.
- Think of a specific group context - it can be a historical context or context you are in currently - and then answer the following questions:
 1. Go over the list and identify in the context that you choose if you have high or low rank for each of them
 2. Now choose two types of rank from the list:
 - One that makes you comfortable
 - One that makes you uncomfortable
 3. Reflect for yourself which privileges (advantages) the latter gives to you. What do you gain from this? What gives you the advantage and sustains your position? How do I use this power/influence? Is it conscious?

Ask for questions that come up.

4. Individual reflection: How was that for you? Invite participants to stay with their own feelings/questions. Wanting to talk to others might be a way to run away from this. If you have a question, raise your hand

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c. Group exploration (50 mins)

Invite participants to form groups of 4 (can be random, though the more diverse the groups will be, the more interesting the conversations). They will work in groups for around 45 minutes, exploring the topic of rank.

Depending on the consistency and strength of the group container in your group, you could opt for caucus groups instead of random groups.

Once in their groups, give the instructions:

- Each person will take 10 minutes to be the focus of the conversation, and the rest of the group will support them in their reflection by asking questions
- Each person chooses one area where they have high rank and tells their group:
- What is this area in which they hold high rank?
- What are the risks and how could they abuse their power in that group?
- How might they use it for the good of the whole in the specific group context they are thinking of?
- The rest of the group asks open-ended questions that will support the focus person to go deeper in their reflection. Try to refrain from giving advice or sharing your experience and stay curious about the other person!

- Ensure you have the questions written up and visible to the groups.
- Keep an eye on the groups and make sure you remind them to move to the next person after each 10-minute slot. Bring people back together for the debrief.

Debriefing the activity (15 mins)

Allow space for people to share how it was for them to engage with the topics in the whole session.

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- How was it to reflect on the topic of rank?
- How was it to share this with others? How was it to listen to other people's reflections and support them in the exploration?
- What has the session brought up?
- What else?

Acknowledge that ideally, it would require much more time and that this is work they might choose to continue on their own. This kind of exercise can also be done in a group which works together.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS/SIGNIFICANT POINTS TO TAKE AWAY

Holding power, privilege and rank often make us feel guilty and ashamed, especially in social justice circles. Being able to shift our thinking about the power we hold from contracting, shameful attitudes towards a more open/neutral thinking about power as a resource we can use for the good of the whole or abuse if we are not aware of it and not handling it with skill, is a key competence to support the growth of our movements resilience and effectiveness - we want them and each other to be powerful!

Ideally, these kinds of exploration would be an ongoing process in our groups and movements - it is never 'done'.

Exploring the topics of power and privilege requires trust-building, emotional awareness and courage!

Alternative session plan

1. Start with an exploratory exercise on power

This can be done through the Theatre of Oppressed method called "The Great Game of Power". It is an activity that explores representations of power through the construction of a visual image made of everyday objects. In this case, we are going to use chairs.

- Ask a participant to set up 5 same type of chairs to create a constellation in a way that one chair becomes more powerful than others. Ask the volunteer to explain why they did this constellation and which chair represents the most power for them.
- Discuss with others what chair they believe has more power and why
- Ask other participants to set up new constellations of power.
- Keep exploring.
- Reflect on these questions:
 - What are some of the different ways we saw power represented in this activity?
 - What makes someone or something powerful?
 - Who or what is powerful in our world now/was powerful then? Why?

- Explain different ways of exercising power:
 1. Power over
 2. Power with
 3. Power to
 4. Power within

Power Over

Power over is how power is most commonly understood [1, 2]. This type of power is built on force, coercion, domination and control [1, 4], and motivates largely through fear [4]. This form of power is built on a belief that power is a finite resource that can be held by individuals, and that some people have power and some people do not.

Power with

Power with is shared power that grows out of collaboration and relationships. It is built on respect, mutual support, shared power, solidarity, influence, empowerment and collaborative decision-making. Power with is linked to “social power, the influence we wield among equals”. Rather than domination and control, power with leads to collective action and the ability to act together.

Power to

Power to refers to the “productive or generative potential of power and the new possibilities or actions that can be created without using relationships of domination. It is the power to make a difference, to create something new, or to achieve goals.

Power within

Power within is related to a person’s “sense of self-worth and self-knowledge; it includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others”. Power within involves people having a sense of their own capacity and self-worth. Power within allows people to recognise their “power to” and “power with”, and believe they can make a difference.

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2. Then explore what brings up discomfort in groups (10 min)

- In a circle ask participants to share a statement that applies to them such as «I enjoy listening more than talking»
- The other participants can step in if the statement applies to them too, or not move if it doesn't
- Later, ask participants to share a statement that makes them feel uncomfortable in a group
- The other participants take one step back if the statement applies to them, too, or not move if it doesn't

3. Explain the connection between rank, power and privileges. Go deeper on the different types of rank (20 min)

4. Ask participants to reflect on their rank in a specific group (50-60 min)

- First individual reflection
- and afterwards share it in small groups

Useful resources

To know more about privilege and how to navigate it in groups see:

- Leticia Nieto, Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment
- Arnold Mindell, Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity
- Neon Introductory Guide: Power and Privilege, A handbook for political organisers

MAPPING MAINSTREAM AND MARGINS IN GROUPS



Name of the Tool Mapping mainstream and margins in Groups

Which competence area can the tool support? Awareness of hierarchy/status in our own communication style
Creating awareness of structural inequalities/power dynamics.

Total Time needed 60 - 70 minutes

Materials needed

- pre-prepared flipcharts (below)
- flipchart paper
- markers

Key Benefits and Aims

- Understanding Mainstream and Margins Dynamic
- Putting Mainstream and Margin theory into practice
- Uncovering existing tensions in the group
- Deepening trust between participants
- Developing conflict and tension resolution skills

Origin of the tool Training for Change

Considerations for its use

This session has some risks that go with it. Drawing attention to and talking about these kinds of dynamics can be painful and/or triggering for people, they might create harm. If it is not held well, this can end up leaving the group feeling polarised, exposed and hurt. So it's important to keep a strong framing of the ways looking at this stuff will help make us more skilful, inclusive and more resilient in our groups. It's not about shaming the 'clueless' mainstream, nor about victimising the margins, but about drawing attention to something that is always present, to some extent, in group dynamics, in a way that can help us make our relationships and groups stronger.

So sensitivity and care are key, to be modelled by the facilitator. At the same time, coming in with confidence - that there are dynamics here and we don't have to be afraid of talking about them or tiptoe around them - will help the group feel safer and encouraged to leap in.

Considering when (in the course of a training) you might place a session like this is also important. Obviously, the group needs to have a sense of itself and the people in it in order to talk about itself. At the same time, an activity like this can be a helpful way to support a group to get to know itself better and form if it is going to be used in a group of people who are working together. Either way, there should be a good degree of safety and containment (ie. some work has already been done on 'getting to know each other' and on group building and safety such as brave space) before attempting this.

Following up on the strength of the group container (and diagnosing that) you make a judgement call on which version of the exercise you put forth. Basically, the amount of risk you are asking the participants to take to advance their learning and you feel they can take without going completely into the panic zone. A strong enough container is crucial for this. If not, start with a lower-risk version.

As a general guideline (to be looked at with care) you could say:

- Lower risk: taking experience outside of the room (to a group that they are part of) by mapping it, making skits, ...
- Middle risk: taking experience outside of the room recalling a situation where they felt in the margin
- High risk: taking experience inside of the room to mapping this group
- Highest risk: taking experience inside of the room to where position themselves (sociogram) in terms of where they feel in this group

Depending on the mainstream learning style in the group (the one that is most valued), it is important here (but I would say for any exercise) to bring in learning styles that are overall in the margin (maybe structurally) but especially linked to what is a margin style for the group you work with at that time (for example for a group of movement therapists, auditory learning might be in the margin)

In short for any tool/exercise, I would say, ask yourself the following questions

- Who is in the current margin/mainstream of the group?
- Can your choice of moment and learning style potentially harm participants? Especially for those in the margins.
- Who will (by choice of exercise and learning style) potentially benefit most from this exercise? Are they currently in the mainstream or the margin of the group?
- Is there a risk that mainstream might benefit in its learning based on experiences/emotional processes by the margins?
- Is the built container strong enough to hold processes and do you have support structures set up?

And depending on your current capacity (to hold) at the moment, ask yourself finally:

- Is this choice potentially in my own comfort, discomfort, or panic zone? Take the answer into account seriously.

As always, a co-facilitator to support anyone who needs it is a must.

Facilitator Notes

The “Mainstream & Margins” dynamic

The Mainstream & Margin dynamic is part of every group’s life. No matter how homogeneous a group or organisation, a close observation will show that some characteristics or qualities in the group are marginalised. Eg, in a group that has a reputation for having vibrant social events and throws great parties, there may be a margin which loves quietness. As a group evolves over time, different qualities will shift between the mainstream and the margins, so the dynamic is always changing. Each person in the group might have some characteristics of the margins, and some characteristics of the mainstream, and that too will change.

The benefit of learning about this dynamic is to bring awareness, understanding and offers the capacity to make choices about how we participate in the group. It allows us to better tolerate and even welcome some of the tensions that these dynamics produce. Without the mainstream a group wouldn’t exist, however, without the margins a group wouldn’t grow. In the short term, a group can grow by increasing the size of its mainstream, but for long-term sustainability, a group will grow by supporting it’s margins to participate on their own terms.

The margins (or ‘edges’ - if you’re into permaculture) of the group can be the most fertile place for growth. The mainstream is identified by the qualities, behaviours and values supported by and deemed worthy by the group. The mainstream sets the tone, communication style and way of working in the group. A mainstream doesn’t necessarily mean a numerical majority. Some characteristics of mainstreams:

- Feeling at home in the group
- Taking on more visible or ‘responsible’ jobs
- Using language like “we all think...” “everyone knows that...” “this is normal...” “that isn’t appropriate...”
- Perhaps not noticing that some people have different experiences or beliefs to them
- Talking confidently in the group, and being listened to by others
- Putting a lot of work in to the group, and feeling invested in it.

The mainstream does essential work in holding the group together. Sometimes people in the mainstream can feel guilty for having this power. It’s normal that the mainstream is ‘clueless’ to the existence of the margins. If the dynamic starts to shift, and the margins come into their power, the mainstream can feel confused, and feel like new opinions or behaviours have come out of nowhere. The mainstream often tries hard to stay comfortable, and might reject challenges from the margins, feeling attacked and alienated. This doesn’t mean they have suddenly become marginalised! They need to practice being with the discomfort of what is being pointed out, and listening. If a group’s mainstream refuses to positively engage the margins, ultimately the group will fail to thrive, so the mainstream has a big opportunity (and responsibility) if it can develop it’s awareness of this dynamic. The margins are the qualities, behaviours, and values that are pushed to the periphery of the group. When the mainstream of a group is unaware, and until the margins of the group find their power, the characteristics of the margins can look like: - Leaving a part of their identity ‘at the door’ in order to fit into the group - Feeling like they aren’t included in

decision-making (because they probably aren't!)

- Doing work that is undervalued, not noticed by others, or not taking on jobs at all
- Losing confidence in the group
- Feeling isolated and not listened to
- Expressing views that might seem 'irrelevant' or 'outrageous' to the mainstream.

Being on the margins of the group can feel alienating. However, as the margins get more empowered and demand to be more seen and heard, it is also a powerful place to be. The margins have a freedom that the mainstream doesn't have. As the current existence of the group doesn't depend on the margins, they have a freedom to participate or leave as they choose. It is very common that the people on the margins have a much clearer understanding of the dynamic than the people in the mainstream do. How does this dynamic relate to privilege?

There are many social factors that influence the power we have, or don't have, in society. However 'right on' a group is, these systems of oppression, many hundreds or thousands of years old, will undoubtedly influence how it interacts. It can be the case that the people in the mainstream of a group also have power in society in general, but is not necessarily the case. For example, if a group has a mixture of middle class people and working class people, it's likely that some of the mainstream characteristics will resemble middle class culture.

However, this isn't a rule – it's better to notice what's actually happening in the group than make assumptions about what you expect the dynamic to be.

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

1. *Introducing the theory - presentation (20 mins)*

Or start with an experiential exercise (see at the bottom) and introduce theory in the generalisation phase

Setting up the activity (5 mins)

Frame the session, letting the group know what you will be covering and why. Situate the session in the context of the training as a whole.

Facilitating the activity (15 mins)

Introduce the Mainstream and Margins theory using visual representation (see below). You can draw on the theory in the Facilitator notes above.

Key things to mention will be:

- What is the Mainstream-Margins dynamic? What do we mean by this?
- Why is it useful to talk about this?
- What characterises the mainstream?
- What characterises the margins?
- How do these things relate to power/influence and privilege?
- To support you in explaining the theory, you can use a pre-prepared flipchart like this:



- Then you can draw up - as you talk - a similar diagram but with concrete examples of the behaviours/views/practices/identities/ etc that you might find in the mainstream or the margins of western culture right now. For example:



...you can also ask the group to contribute to this, as you go.

2. Exploring mainstreams and margins for this group (40 - 45 mins)

Setting up the activity (5 mins)

- Explain to the group that you are going to do something similar to the above diagram but for this group. Return to the diagram and give some examples that you might find more specifically in this group, for example, a mainstream practice of getting up early, or being on time for sessions; or a marginal identity such as 'parent' or practice such as eating meat.
- Let them know that they will:
- Be in a groups of 4-5
- Have 25 minutes
- Draw their diagrams on a flipchart, as they discuss, for sharing later

Facilitating the activity (25 mins)

- Set the groups off, keeping an eye on progress - you can go and assist any groups who seem to be struggling
- Let them know when they are halfway through, and when they have 5 minutes left
- After 25 minutes, ask the groups to swap their flipchart with another group, so they are looking at another group's work
- Then ask them: "What are some of the tools/approaches we could use to address some of these polarities? What practices or tools could we use to help us notice, and better include, those on the margins of the group?"

Invite them to write on the other group's diagram, drawing on tools or practices we might already have looked at on the training, or others they are aware of.

You can offer them an example or two, such as: Giving and receiving feedback, or an exercise such as Step with me. They can also be more 'informal' practices, such as 'practising being honest' or 'strengthening friendships'.

- Let them know they will have 25 minutes for their discussions and writing, and that the work will be shared.
- Again, keep an eye on the group and give any assistance required. Let them know half way through and when they have 5 minutes left
- Finally, give the group around 10 minutes to walk around the space and enjoy a "flipchart gallery" - looking at and learning from the work of the other groups.

3. Debriefing the activity (10 - 15 mins)

- All a good amount of time for unpacking and debriefing this session, supporting the group to process anything sticky or tricky that might have come up.
- Points to draw out/questions to ask:
 - Did the session go how you expected? How are you feeling now? Were people uncomfortable? Did you have ways of managing/holding that discomfort?
 - If the group is feeling a little tender or it feels like there are unresolved threads or fragments, it can be worth just naming that this stuff is tricky, is not resolvable in one session (or probably one lifetime!) and requires a fair bit of courage to talk about. Reiterate that the intention is not to point fingers or 'fix' people in particular positions/dynamics (M&Ms are not static) but to build our capacity to have transparent conversations about these things, in ways that don't have to be confrontational or conflictual - deep down, we all want what's best for ourselves, each other and the group.. Affirm people for their willingness and care.

Alternative session plan

- 1. An exercise you can use at the start (10 min) for example:**
 - The person in the middle says «the sun is shining on...» followed by a statement related to being in a group, that is true to themselves
 - If anybody else feels represented they will move from their spot
 - They can't swap places with their right or left neighbours, so they need to use the central space in order to move to another spot
- 2. Share a personal experience (5 min)**
 - Choose a story that reflects how the elements that play in society tend to be reproduced in a group
- 3. Guide participants through a «closed» eye experience (10 min)**
 - Ask them to find a comfortable position
 - Bring them to a moment in their lives when they didn't feel part of a group
- 4. Ask participants to share their experiences in small groups (10 min)**
- 5. Invite participants to discuss similarities, patterns and qualities, and detect behaviours and attitudes (30 min)**
 - First in small groups... and then with everyone else
 - Write conclusions on a flipchart
- 6. After these conclusions, explain how mainstream and margins dynamics work (15 min)**
- 7. Hold a silent discussion in the whole group (15 min)**
 - Put a big piece of paper in the center of the circle and ask participants to write down things they could do in their organizations to create space for people in the margins

AGENTS AND TARGETS SKILL SETS



Name of the Tool Agents and Targets Skill Sets

Which competence area can the tool support? Dealing with discriminatory accusations/manifestations
Creating awareness of structural inequalities/power dynamics.

Total Time needed 150 min

Materials needed

- Pre-prepared flipchart diagrams/presentation
- markers
- pens and flipchart paper

Key Benefits and Aims

- Understanding a range of different skills needed to navigate the reality of systems of oppression and privilege dynamics
- Drawing new understanding from past experiences of conflict/tension around the dynamics of power and privilege
- Creating a shared vocabulary

Origin of the tool

Leticia Nieto, Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment;
<https://beyonddinclusionbeyonddempowerment.com/about-the-book/>

Facilitator Notes

Important to hold complexity in mind, various intersecting identities. Skillsets are about increasing the ability to make choices.

When we speak about ‘oppression’, we understand it in terms of *systems of structural power that have been established historically and give certain constituted groups of people influence and dominance over and at the expense of others*. These systems of power are *structural* in the sense that they are built into and perpetuated through *specific institutions and reinforcing cultural norms*.

These institutions can include forms of government, education systems, economic structures, religions, and laws. And within our groups, they show up in the ways decisions are made, how power is distributed, our economic relationships, and the ways certain voices are valued over others.

Institutional structures tend to embody particular beliefs about the world and humanity, which often coalesce as ideologies. Whereas ideologies are generally conscious, social systems are also underpinned by less conscious preferences and assumptions which manifest through cultural norms (for example through the performance of gender roles or individualistic competitiveness). Through the process of socialisation, we unconsciously internalise these norms in ways that both shape who we are and that further reproduce them throughout society.

SKILLSETS MODEL

The model of skillsets here does not describe “stages” of development

As we grow and practise our anti-oppression skills, the skills we learned earlier don’t disappear, but they are included in a repertoire.

The larger skill sets give us more choices, more possibilities for action, and a truer sense of ourselves and others. The earlier skills are still with us, though, and we will still use them much of the time.

Like with the alphabet!

One stream of oppression - one set of skills, we need to develop them again in relation to another stream (obviously it will be easier and there are overlaps).

Agent Skillsets

→ *Indifference*

we are able to not notice the existence of Targets and their life conditions, and the whole system of Rank.

It can be as innocent as saying, “I don’t know any _____ people.”
“I don’t know,” “It’s not my problem”

→ *Distancing*

allows us to hold members of the Target group at arm’s length, to keep them “away” from ourselves

Emphasising differences :

- distancing out: «I don't have anything against... but»
 - distancing down: «They should be in jail. This is wrong»
 - (may show up as wanting to help)
 - distancing up «They are special!»
- (often connected with appropriation)

→ *Inclusion*

we focus on the similarities between Target group members and ourselves and emphasise similarity and connection
("We're all children of God," "fundamentally, we're all the same,")

As Agents, we experience Inclusion as liberating.

It feels like we've finally gotten out of the oppression business. We can appreciate members of the Target group. This seems terrific, to us.

We feel happy to welcome Targets – but we unconsciously expect them to conform to our expectations, to make us comfortable

→ *Awareness*

requires us to move well out of our comfort zone

It's a difficult transition that we're unlikely to make without a powerful motivation.

Awareness is initially experienced as unpleasant.

We feel cold, paralyzed and even disoriented by emotions such as guilt and shame.

We realise that we don't know what it's like to experience oppression in this particular Rank channel

→ *Allyship*

is fully aware of the reality of oppression and of the privilege we receive under the rank system

- We acknowledge that we can never fully understand
- the experience of Targets in that rank area.
- We see the Rank system operating within us and in others, and we recognize the dehumanising effect this has on all of us.
- At the same time, we remain able to think and act. We are not paralyzed; we can choose to work against oppression, a growing sense of being comfortable when being uncomfortable

Target skillsets

→ *Survival*

Enables us to stay alive by conforming. Approximating the agency or fitting the stereotype. Goal: make the agents feel comfortable. Unconscious agreement with norms. Exhausting (constant shape-shifting).

→ *Confusion*

We begin to see the privilege dynamics but lack the language/support to make full sense of it. Contradictions, doubt: "That doesn't seem fair but there must be an explanation"

"I am taking it personally"

→ *Empowerment*

Requires a lot of work. We might need access to non-mixed spaces/ chosen mixed spaces. A constant need to talk about the experience of oppression.

→ *Strategy*

Choosing our battles, less reactive, more freedom to make choices. Conserving skills and maximising effectiveness. Allying with other target groups. Complexity.

→ *Recentering*

Strong connection to the inner sense of values. Being guided by an inner ethical system, not reactive to the system of oppression. Centering our values, well-being and compass towards systemic transformation.

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

1. Skill sets model presentation (35 mins)

Setting up the activity (3 mins)

Let participants know that you will spend a significant amount of time exploring the model of skill sets. Explain that you will focus on the theory and presentation of the model for the first 30 minutes and the rest of the session time they will spend applying the knowledge by reflecting on specific case studies from their experience.

Acknowledge that we will be talking about experiences of oppression and for most people in the room this will be their lived experience and daily reality and that it might bring up emotions of grief, anger, and sadness but also useful language to name our experiences and insights helping us make sense out of our experience.

Facilitating the activity (30 minutes)

Present the model of skill sets, starting with the Agents of Oppression skill sets. As you do that, take a lot of care, and make frequent pauses for people to take words in or make notes and ask questions/make comments. Invite participants every now and then to breathe and move their bodies. Even hearing about the Agents of Oppression skill set model might be difficult for some, as people might have been on the receiving end of the described behaviours and it might bring up difficult memories.

Giving examples is useful, but make sure not to reproduce harmful language. If giving examples, give examples from your own life and about groups that are not present in the room (ex. If there are people with disabilities in the room, don't give examples of harmful behaviour towards that group of people). When explaining the Targets of Oppression skill set model you can also use examples from your own life, even if there are people in the room who might share that experience. You might let the group know that you will use your own examples related to a certain stream of oppression so that they know it's coming. If you don't have any lived experience of being a Target of Oppression, it's best that you do not present this model to the group and find a co-facilitator who could do that.

Debriefing the activity (10 minutes)

It is best to make small, frequent pauses during the presentation to see if there are questions or comments. In addition to that, give some space for comments and questions at the end of the presentation. If you notice the group being silent or very impacted by the presentation, you might want to invite them to turn to their neighbour and just chat for a few minutes about how they have heard the presentation.

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

2. Exploring case studies (110 mins)

Setting up the activity (10 mins)

Ask participants to think about a situation they were part of which involved tension or difficulty related to oppression and privilege dynamics. Ask them to choose a story that on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is not intense and 10 is very intense, is 'a 3-4'. The idea is they do not choose the most difficult story they have experienced, but something mild enough to be able to reflect and work on, without being re-triggered. They will either be in a position of Target or Agent of oppression in those stories (even if they were a witness to a situation). If you are delivering a longer training, it is good to let people know a day earlier that you will work on case studies, so that they can think about them and come to the session prepared. You can also let participants know in advance of the training about the case study work and ask them to come to the training with a case study prepared.

Facilitating the activity (100 minutes)

Forming the groups and choosing a story (15min)

When (most of) the participants have a story in mind, ask them to divide into two groups, based on the positionality they were in when the story took place - either Targets or Agents of oppression. If people don't have a story they want to work on, ask them to choose a group, based on their overall positionality - are they more often an Agent or Target of oppression?

Within those two groups divide participants further (if needed, depending on the size of your group), so that you end up with groups of 4-5 people. In those small groups give them 10-15 minutes to briefly share their stories and choose one they will focus on for the rest of the session. The case giver needs to be ready to work on their case, as they will need to be strongly engaged in the process.

Emphasise that even though not all of the stories will be reflected upon, we learn through listening to other people's experiences.

First stage of the reflection process (30 mins)

Now ask participants to explore the case using the questions below. The case giver will be providing information, while the role of the rest of the group is to be curious, ask questions and deepen the reflection. Refrain from giving advice or synthesising at this point. The idea is to open a reflection space, where new information can come into the picture.

Questions:

1. What happened?
 - Incident + build-up
 - What led to it all?
 - How was the situation taken care of? What was done/not done?
 - What was helpful or unhelpful?
2. Context
 - Where did it happen?
 - Cultural and organising context
3. Who was involved?
 - Who else?
 - How were they involved?
 - Which of the skillsets were they using?

If you had explored the concept of rank with the participants, you can also ask: What was their rank in that situation and context?

- How did you and others feel? What was happening in the body?

The first stage of the reflection process - debrief (15 mins)

Bring participants back and ask them to shout out feelings and bodily reactions that they were named in the groups - a mindstorm. Record those on a flipchart.

Ask them what was helpful and unhelpful in the ways the situation was dealt with, again in a mindstorm fashion and recording things on the flipchart. There might be things that will appear on both flipcharts and that's ok.

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- There is no magic or one-fit-all solutions to deal with situations of tension around oppression and privilege dynamics
- Those situations usually bring up stress and difficult emotions in our bodies. Regulating and co-regulating strategies are crucial for transforming and taking care of those situations.

Second stage of the reflection process (40 mins)

Ask participants to go back to their groups and explore follow-up questions - a set of different questions for the groups of Agents and Targets of oppression. Ask each group to finish with a round where everyone (case giver and other group members) shares how they feel now having done this and what are their takeaways, lessons learned and insights they gained through this process.

Debrief

Follow-up questions:

Targets of oppression

- What requests do you have/did you have towards the Agent group(s)?
- What did you do to take care of yourself?
- What kind of other support/resource would you have benefited from?

Agents of oppression

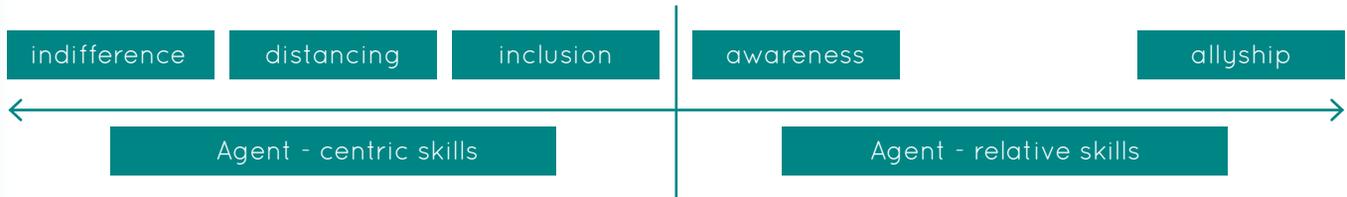
- What questions are you left with?
- What did you do to attend to the situation?
- What else could have been done or done differently?
- What is your long-term learning project here?
- What kind of resources did you access? What other resources are there?

3. Debriefing the activity (15 minutes)

Ask some people to share what have they learned, ask Target group members to share some of the requests towards Agents they have named in their case study exploration.

You can finish with something embodied like sitting back to back, centering or shaking the exercise of to help participants move through any difficult emotions and support learning integration.

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT SKILL SETS - THOUGHTS, COMMUNICATION, BEHAVIOURS, BODY REACTIONS AND BODY USE



INDIFFERENCE

we are able to not notice the existence of Targets and their life conditions, and the whole system of Rank.

It can be as innocent as saying, «I don't know any ___ people.» «I don't know.» «It's not my problem»

DISTANCING

allows us to hold members of the Target group at arm's length, to keep them «away» from ourselves

emphasising differences

distancing out: «They should be in jail. This is wrong» (may show up as wanting to help)

distancing up «They are special!» (often connected with appropriation)

INCLUSION

we focus on the similarities between Target group members and ourselves and emphasize similarity and connection («We're all children of God,» «fundamentally, we're all the same.»)

As agents, we experience inclusion as liberating. It feels like we've finally gotten out of the oppression business. We can appreciate members of the Target group. This seems terrific, to us.

We feel happy to welcome Targets - but we unconsciously expect them to conform to our expectations, to make us comfortable

AWARENESS

requires us to move well out of our comfort zone

It's a difficult transition that we're unlikely to make without a powerful motivation.

Awareness is initially experienced as unpleasant.

We feel cold, paralysed and even disoriented by emotions such as guilt and shame.

We realize that we don't know what it's like to experience oppression in this particular Rank channel

ALLYSHIP

Fully aware of the reality of oppression and of the privilege we receive under the rank system.

We acknowledge that we can never fully understand the experience of Targets in that rank area.

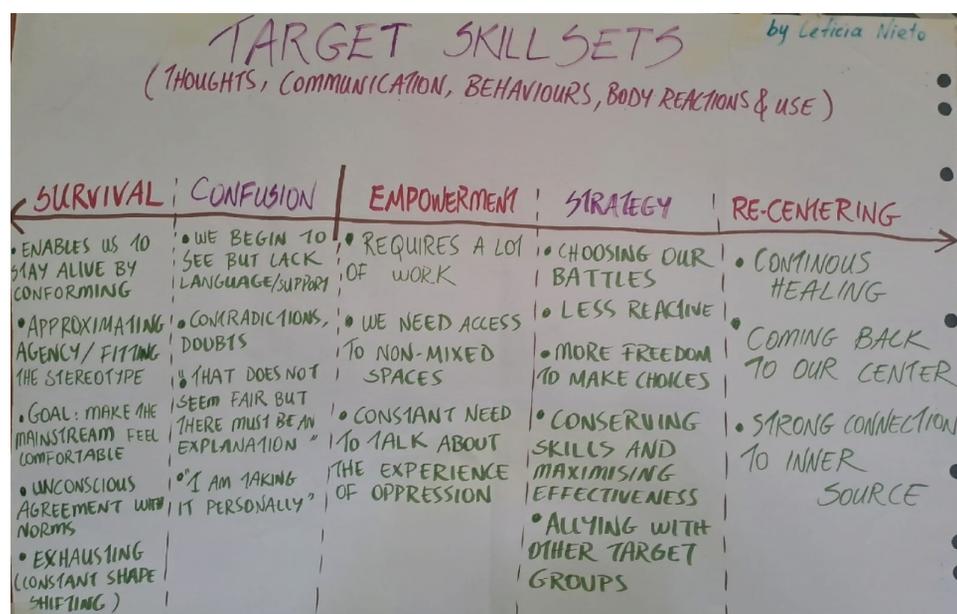
We see the Rank system operating within us and in others, and we recognize the dehumanizing effect this has on all of us.

At the same time, we remain able to think and to act. We are not paralyzed; we can choose to work against oppression,

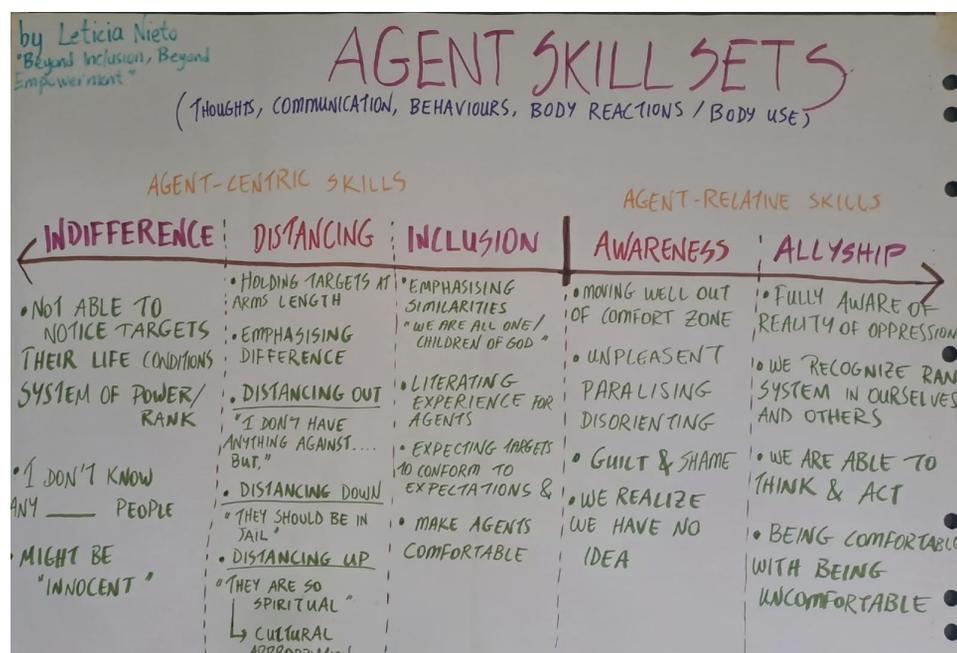
a growing sense of being comfortable when being uncomfortable

Alternative session plan

1. Introduce Leticia Nieto's skill set model and explain the concept of Systems of Oppression (5 min)
2. Ask participants to name some of the systems of oppression (5 min)
3. Invite participants to reflect on a situation where they have experienced tension related to privilege and oppression (30-40 min)
 - Ask those who came up with a story if they would like to dig into it
 - Create small groups around the storytellers
 - Explore the case studies in those groups using reflection questions
 - Bring the group together and gather some of the feelings and body reactions that they identified in their stories
4. Explain Leticia Nieto's skill set model for agents (20 min)
5. Invite participants back to the small groups to reflect on how the target and agent skills were present in their stories (30 min)
 - Which of the skill sets were used?
 - Which skills would have been more helpful and what would support them in using a different skill set in the long and short term?
6. Invite the whole group to have some final reflections (10 min)



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EXPLORING GUILT, SHAME AND REMORSE



Name of the Tool Exploring guilt, shame and remorse

Which competence area can the tool support? Dealing with discriminatory accusations/manifestations

Total Time needed 90 - 100 min

Materials needed

- Pre-prepared body flipcharts (per small group)
- pre-prepared questions flipchart
- flipchart paper
- markers

Key Benefits and Aims

- Recognising unhelpful dynamics connected to shaming and blaming in the context of social change, especially in the context of navigating social privilege, being in the margins of societies, and our emotional reactions to these situations.
- Finding ways of moving towards deeper compassion and solidarity
- Building a culture of care
- Developing self-awareness and emotional literacy

Facilitator Notes

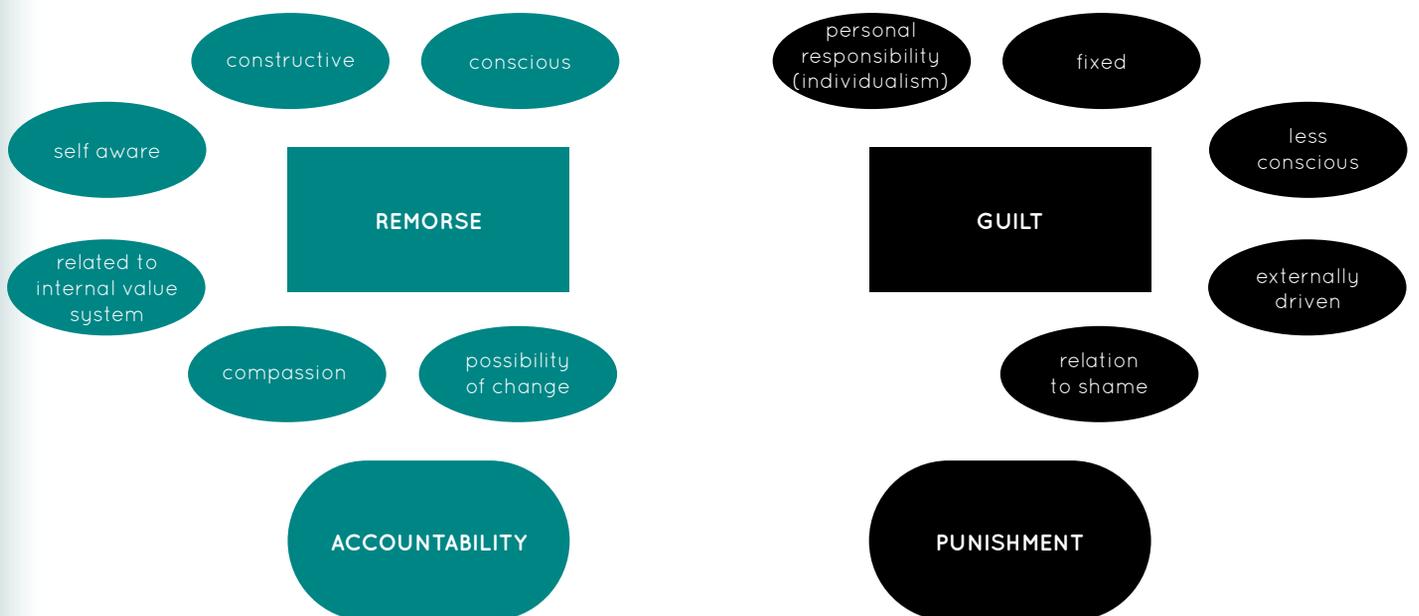
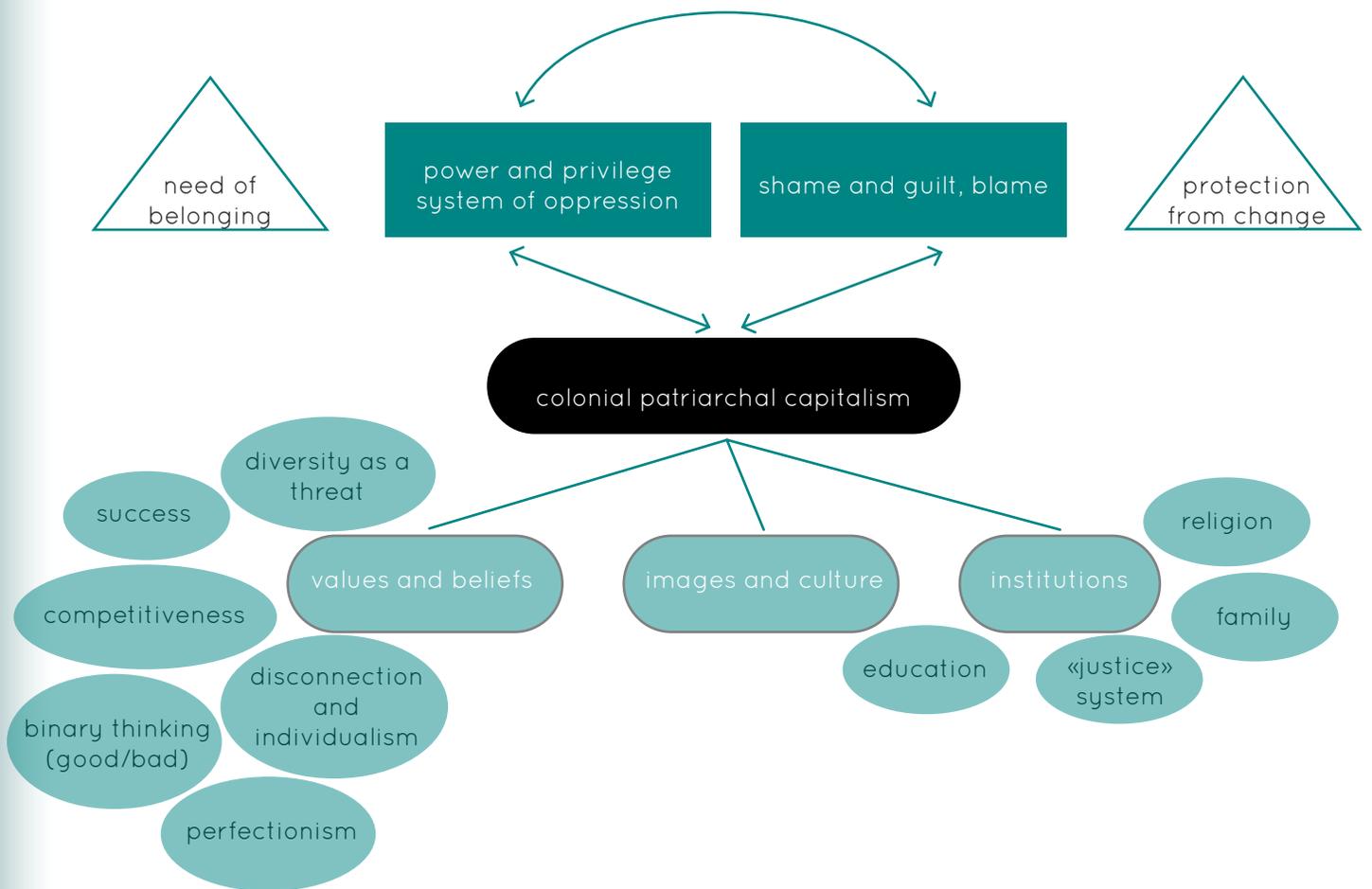
Through Western neo-liberal society we are socialised into a culture of achievement and perfectionism, as well as in most cultures shame and punishment mechanisms. This builds a fear of making mistakes and limits our ability to navigate challenging situations or create accountability processes not based on punishment, in our groups and movements. Added to this is the culture we create around social privileges - many of us feel personally responsible and ashamed for holding social privilege, rather than creatively thinking about how we could be in solidarity with each other using our privileges (while simultaneously holding ourselves accountable and working towards transformative processes of privilege recognition). Shame and blame show up as contractions in our bodies. Connection and openness are antidotes to that contraction. Critical to transforming shame and blame mechanisms are practices such as; working to increase our tolerance for discomfort by allowing it to be present, cultivating curiosity towards mistakes, developing our capacity to work with change, letting go of a fixed notion of self and creating space for vulnerability and courage in our relationships with ourselves and each other.

Shame and blame mechanisms lead to lack of resilience, through:

- Encouraging a culture of overworking and self-sacrifice
- Contributing to tiredness and contraction, pain and suffering
- When feeling shame we have less resources to engage with action, less creative energy
- Encouraging us to act out of a sense of inadequacy and fear rather than an open feeling of generosity and inspiration that gives us the will to keep trying to change the way things are.

The session may bring up difficult experiences. Encourage participants to take care of themselves and remind them to begin this work with experiences that feel mild and not too challenging. Encourage kindness and model care and non-judgement.

Rely on collective knowledge and people's experiences with how shame and blame show up in our organising - you don't have to be an expert!





Definitions:

Shame

Feeling that there is something wrong with you. Related to what or who you are and to the sense of self. Shame affirms (dominant culture) normativity.

Guilt

An emotion experienced when you think you have done something wrong and you personally feel responsible for the action. Guilt affirms morality.

Remorse

Constructive regret over wrong-doing. Remorse affirms internal value systems.

How to use the tool - Activity Instructions

1. Building shared definitions and locating experience (30 - 35 mins)

Setting up the activity (5 mins)

- Frame the activity in the appropriate way, making sure they group understand what is being covered and why. You can draw on the material above or from the chapter.

Facilitating the activity (20 mins)

- Give 5 - 10 minutes to 'mindstorming' any associations people have with the words 'shame' and 'blame' - capture this on a flipchart as people say things
- Once you have a range of associations ask them:
- What do we think is the difference between shame and blame?
- How do they show up?
- .. again, write responses on a flipchart.
- Divide participants into groups of four and invite them to spend 30 mins talking about:
 - What are the most shameful beliefs in your life?
 - How do shame and guilt show up in your life around social privilege/social positionality?
 - What are some of the beliefs related to that?

Debriefing the activity (5 - 10 mins)

- Ask the group what they noticed - they may want to share some of what they have written/drawn..

Points to draw out/questions to ask:

- Shame and blame are based on our beliefs...
- Feeling shame is unpleasant and we often treat it with aversion, it is hard to be curious about it! Exploring it is already, therefore, beginning to 'undo' it
- Both shame and blame are very automatic, deeply rooted protection mechanisms. We can often fall into them without really knowing it is happening. Thus, building more awareness of how we experience them will give us more choice over our reactions.
- Bodywork/embodiment practices really help with this, as do relational/feedback-type activities where one can listen, understand, reassure and help reframe for one another.

Input

Present how the system of oppression uses shame and guilt.

Ask the group how we can move through shame and guilt. Collect ideas and present missing practices with a flipchart.

We might experience a lot of shame around our social privileges, especially if we work with communities less privileged than ourselves.

- Being able to identify how shame and blame dynamics are created in our groups and movements, what conditions lead to them and what the consequences are, is a first step towards shifting the dynamics and finding new, creative ways of being.
- There are no fixed solutions and we need to put a lot of work into reworking old patterns we were socialised into. Awareness, discussion and feedback really support this.
- Transformative justice principles might be helpful in further exploring the topic of accountability instead of punishment.

Alternative session plan

1. Start the session by asking the group if they have experienced feelings of guilt or shame in relation to social privilege. Invite them to discuss it in small groups. (30 min)
2. Ask participants to create two groups and invite them to discuss what guilt means for them. (15 min)
 - Then, ask each group to create a sculpture that represents guilt
 - Invite the other group to share what they see in the sculpture
 - Ask participants doing the sculpture how they felt doing it
 - Repeat it with the other group
3. Introduce to the group the concept of remorse (5 min)
4. Now, ask participants to repeat the sculpture exercise representing remorse (15 min)
5. Explain to participants the difference between guilt & remorse (15 min)
6. Ask participants how they cope with these feelings and open up a discussion on remorse (30 min)
7. Make a list of helpful practices and add other ideas of practices for moving towards remorse

Power dynamics
in education
revisited

PODER ●
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