

Activity 4.27 The Formal Debate – Barriers and blocks (The Arts)

Module: 4. Planning Social Action

Duration: Arts

Social Development Themes: Arts

Summary:

This exercise could be used as a way of building on a number of the previous arts activities and a practical way of pulling together some key learnings. It should complement the more practical project planning activities in the toolkit.

Participants engage in a debate, playing the parts of different characters in the community. The exercise could be useful for groups who have identified a piece of legislation they feel could be changed in the community to contribute to community wellbeing.

Learning Outcomes:

Skills in project planning and management

Approach:

1. Towards the end of Module 3, the group will have identified issues or changes they would like to see in the community and may have started to generate ideas about actions. They will have also started to look at available resources, potential challenges and existing power dynamics.

2. Choose an issue that could fall under one of these headings: youth empowerment, gender equality, advocacy for education, peace-building, the environment. Alternatively, choose an issue that the group feels passionate about.

3. Ask the group to revisit activities where the group has identified different people in their communities – teachers, farmers, politicians, school pupils etc – ask them to imagine what the issue looks like through the eyes of different stakeholders. What's their agenda? What's at stake for them?

4. Decide on what is at the heart of the issue and think about a provocative statement that will create a debate. For example, if the issue was about young people and employment, the statement could be:

'We should support young people through subsidised apprenticeships'.

5. Decide on two characters that could have differing opinions: one is 'for' the statement and one is 'against'. Ask them to sit in the middle of the space. They have teams behind them who can freeze the action and offer advice once the debate has started. It's important for facilitators to hold the space.

6. In small groups, use the same question/case and think of other settings where this debate could take place. Try to find three or four contexts and create a short role-play that focuses on the issue. Who is being represented?

7. How is this different? What other perspectives do we see? What does this tell us about the issue? Who's invested in this issue and what aren't they prepared to give up?

Alternate Approach:

'Televise' the debate, turning the whole thing into a 20-minute television show. Include an anchor to interview the two main spokespeople. The group could create banners, signs and recreate a protest outside the television studios. We could see the characters before the television show begins. Interior monologues could tell us more about what the characters are thinking – how they feeling about the issue?

The group could also create a newspaper article about the upcoming debate, getting quotes from the people involved. Invite them to play with the performance style – for example, each group could write a verse that is then given to the next group to respond to, similar to a rap battle.

Potential questions for World Café when thinking about the arts and social change

- Are the arts important for communities and community wellbeing? Can art be used as a tool for development?
- Art should not be a priority when there are so many more important things to think about – discuss.
- Where are we heading with Active Citizens and the arts? Are we interested in using the arts as a tool for social change in our SAPs? What other examples are there around us of this happening? What can we learn from people already doing this? Where else might we look?
- Is art only something that artists do? What makes us creative? When do we feel most/least creative? What inhibits our creativity?
- Why is innovation and creativity useful? What can it open up? What opportunities can it present?
- How could social change be possible through the arts? Why might it be useful in our journey as Active Citizens?
- What are the power and the limitations of the arts? Where might it not be useful? What are some of the barriers to using the arts?
- Are there assumptions or preconceptions that we need to be aware of, that might inform how people see the arts? Is this applicable locally, nationally, globally?