



# Worksheet 1: Democratising the learning space

## Introduction:

The way a group starts, transitions people into the space. What you decide to do in the first 15 minutes is a way of stepping into the space of the group and establishes the guiding principles for how the group will run. It also establishes certain ways of working. Establishing starting rituals that the group decide on is one way to encourage ownership and sharing of responsibilities. For example, do the group collectively help set up, and pack up the space? Is the starting activity always a check in with each other? Is it a song? These decisions can be collectively made.

## Introduction activities

Here are some ideas for introductory activities that might help people to ease into the space, and encourage an active learning space.

We all know how ordinary it can get if the first activity is to go around and say your name and where you are from. Some other ideas:

- Say your name with an adverb that describes you (e.g. I am fierce Simphiwe; I am gentle Unathi)
- Introduce yourself to the group with a number that is a temperature for how you feel today (1 is awful, 10 is amazing) and why if you feel comfortable to do so.
- Once the group is more familiar with each other in subsequent sessions, you can ask people to Introduce themselves in different ways: if you were a meal, what would you be and why? An animal? One person from history you would love to meet and what question would you ask them?

If the group likes to start each session with a song, try to encourage a new participant each time to decide on which songs to sing for that session.

## Ice Breakers

These are games or activities that get people laughing, moving, and into the group and their bodies! Ice breakers are known as the quickest way to democratize the space: if we are all laughing, making mistakes, and focusing on something other than ourselves this can help level the playing field: we are all in this together.

Examples of quick physical ice-breakers:

- Knee Tap (everyone pats their own knees to protect them while moving around the space to tap as many other knees as possible). This is a very quick game – it is tiring so don't let it go on for too long!
- Fruit Salad: This needs a chair for each person in a circle and is ideal for a group of 9 people or more. One person always in the middle. Choose a category and 3 or 4 things from that category (eg fruit; you can choose a theme you are working with for example countries in Africa). Assign each person one of the items from the category (Apple; Banana; Orange). The person in the middle shouts one of these items and everyone needs to change places by rushing across the circle while the person in the middle grabs a chair. The new person then shouts another item etc.
- Ask the group as quickly as possible to: touch as many things in the room that are black; are made of wood; that are smooth; rough, begin with the letter T etc.
- Cat and Mouse: This is fast, very fun but needs a clear space that is not slippery. Pairs stand scattered around the space . A stands behind B with hands on B's shoulders. One pair starts (A is the cat, B is the mouse). Mouse starts running chased by the cat. The mouse can save themselves by placing their hands on anyone's shoulders from the back. This releases their partner who becomes the new mouse and must immediately run. They can save themselves by then placing their hands on someone else's shoulders, and so it goes on. If the cat catches the mouse, the mouse then becomes the cat: give the new mouse a few seconds head start to run away.

### **Activities that develop group work**

In any learning situation, participants need to feel physically and psychologically safe. Part of this involves trust: developing a group dynamic where people work to build each other and feel safe to make mistakes, voice an opinion, etc. This develops over time. The following exercises can be used to develop skills such as working together to achieve a goal, or listening, or focusing as a group.

- **Counting to 20:** Standing in a circle, the aim of this simple game is for the whole group to count to 20. Sounds easy? This is how it works. Without consulting, but with deep listening, someone starts with 1. The next person says 2, etc. However, if anyone also starts or says that number at the same time, the group must go back to 1 again. The aim is to see how high the group can get without having to start again.
- **Zip, Zap, Boing:** This is a passing/rhythm game that follows the sequence zip, zap, boing. Zip is a clap pass to the right; zap is a clap pass to someone opposite you; boing is a imaginary bounce across to someone else in the circle. If you receive a zip, you must pass a zap as zap; if you receive a zap, you must pass a boing; if you receive a boing

you must pass a zip... etc etc. Start with everyone saying the zip with the action. Once the group has a rhythm going, stop saying the words. So we should hear 'clap, clap, silence' as the rhythm.

- **Silent shapes:** ask the group to walk around the space, filling gaps between people and noticing people in the space. Once they are comfortable doing this ask them to stop. Then instruct that the facilitator will call out a shape and start counting down from 10. The group must work together silently to make that shape together in the time. Start with a circle; then decrease the count down to another circle; extend to other shapes ( a triangle; a square) and letters (the letter T; P); or something fun ( a plate of egg, sausage and chips!).
- **Sharing stories:** a great way to get people to know each other better and to start finding their voice in a safe way is through pair story work. Story topics can relate to the theme you might be working with that session, or something that helps comrades get to know each other better. For example, the facilitator could set a topic such as 'a story about justice' or 'someone important in my life who influence me' or 'why I became an activist'.