

Tape on the Forehead

Preparation

The tape exercise has to be set up in advance with enough pieces of masking tape to give one per person. I make various colored shapes, one per piece of tape. The multi-colored pack of Sharpies work best. Some markers smear, but Sharpies keep their mark clearly. I make 5-8 of each shape (red triangles, blue rectangles, green parallel lines, etc.). Then I make 2 or 3 unique shapes (circle with two arrows coming out each side). You'll need to have the tape on a surface that it will come off easy--a clipboard, hymn book, leather or plastic notebook. Depending on the size of the group you will want at least 3 large groups and 2 unique individuals. With larger groups you can run more. If you get more than 50 people the logistics become more difficult.

How to Lead this Tool

Introduce the activity as a game, but don't say too much. Have people close their eyes. Tell them you will put something on their forehead, but to keep their eyes closed until you tell them to open them. You get a volunteer or co-facilitator to help put the tape on people if you have a larger group. If you want at the end you can put tape on the one helping you (with their eyes closed, of course).

Then tell people to open their eyes and "without talking in any language, form groups." Nothing more or less. Then you just observe and be patient. Let things develop. Sometimes people will go one way, then shift around to something else. Give it all time. Watch the dynamics around the unique individuals especially. What is their experience?

After things seem to reach a point of balance or conclusion, call an end. Then begin the debrief with people still standing.

First question always: "What happened?" Let people talk about it, any who want to start. Then steer the debrief first to the larger groups: "How did you come together? What did it feel like? How do you feel now?" Ignore as much as possible the unique ones early in the debrief to establish the mainstream experience and feeling. Then turn to the unique ones: "What about you? What was it like for you?" As they talk, feel free to prompt with questions about particular things you observed that they did or didn't experience. Whatever happens can be a learning. You can ask questions like: "Have you experienced or witnessed these dynamics in other settings? What was it like?"

Mainstream/Margin Concept Intro

Then you can introduce the idea of Mainstream and Margin, using some of the definitions in the handout. Maybe you can ask the group about ways people might be different in the group: male and female, with glasses and without, teens and adults, etc. List these all on the flip chart paper. (Alternatively, you could ask the group to describe the mainstream characteristics of their group.) Be sure to make clear that mainstream does NOT mean majority, though it may. The mainstream sets the culture, the understood rules about how things are done in the group, whether that mainstream is a small subgroup or a majority within the group. The margin are those who have to adapt to what the mainstream sets up.

Also, highlight that a person can be mainstream one way and margin another at the very same time, depending on what characteristics you are looking at. And if you are mainstream in this group, there are other groups in which you are the margin. We all have experiences in being in the mainstream and in being in the margin.

Optional: Closed Eye Exercise

After that brief content piece you can ask people to close their eyes again (not going to do anything to you). Have them get good and relaxed. Then ask them to remember a time when they felt they were in the margin, where they knew they were on the edges of the group, that they didn't really belong. Have them think of a specific experience where they keenly felt their marginness. Guide them in thinking about what things looked like, sounded like, felt like. What was said? What was done? What did you do? How did you feel? What was it like for you to be in the margin?

Then ask what the mainstream was like? How would you describe that mainstream person or group? What was their attitude? How did they act? How did they come across to you?

Then ask what they wish they could say to the mainstream person or group so that they would be better. If you could safely say what you wanted to say, what would it be? Give plenty of time for people to use their imagination and reconnect.

Then you ask them to share in small groups. They don't have to tell what happened, just what it was like to be in the margin, what the mainstream seemed like to them as margins, and what they as margins would say to the mainstream. Let that discussion go for 5-10 minutes. Try to get a sense of the energy of the groups and that people are focused. As they start to wind down call them back together, but staying in their groupings.

Harvest

Harvest by asking each group to give one characteristic at a time on each of the three questions:

"What was it like to be in the margin?"

"What did the mainstream seem like to the margin?"

"What would you like to say as margin to the mainstream?"

You can put those questions on flip chart paper and note down their responses. Go from group to group till all the paper is filled. I like to use different colors that alternate on the lists because then people can see each item listed much more clearly.

After you are all done tell them there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that we are all like this (point to the mainstream description and read off all the awful stuff). The good news is that we can learn from our margin experience so we can act better when we are in the mainstream. We can teach ourselves to.....(go through the list of things they wanted to say as margins to the mainstream).

You have to be pretty relaxed about working with a group and going with what they offer.

Where this Tool Comes from

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