

“Dividing Lines” Workshop

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Inspired by an upcoming project in Little Village and North Lawndale
Keywords: race, culture, division, borders, gang lines, immigration, Latino, African American

Artist Jasmin Cardenas

Jasmin is a professional actress and educator who uses her love of theatre and humanity to help break down personal, cultural and social barriers. She believes these dividing lines keep people from realizing their full potential and reveling in the beauty of our diverse human race.

Community Leaders:

Lawndale Community Church: Terrence Gadsden and Theo (youth); Nueva Vida Community Church: Matt DeMateo and Henry (youth)

Session Notes:

The train tracks between the neighborhoods of North Lawndale and Little Village are used as the geographical dividing line.

Program Process:

Initially participants developed agreements that were decided upon by youth. After the agreements had been decided games are played. The group played a game called fruit bowl. The game entails giving participants names, (apples, oranges, bananas). You need a marker to keep your spot. When your fruit is called you must move, the person that doesn't have a spot, they must go to the middle. This activity allows individuals to share true statements about themselves.

Participants are asked to sit or stand in a circle during all activities, to bring unity.

Next game: Name game, self sculpt for yourself. Individuals say their name and show an action of activities they like to take part in. They must freeze in action. Participants shared activities, like writing, football, playing accordian, laughing, skiing, etc.

Next game played with community youth: Take a symbol that can mean a number of different things. Use the symbol to communicate different thoughts. Symbols used to communicate were letters, "Aa", "li", "Oo". Participants feedback was that everyone sees symbols differently. Similar feelings were being represented but through different medians. Also that our body language speaks many words. Jasmin spoke on how sometimes our words deceive us, as sometimes our body language is more precise and more accurate.

Individuals partner up with fellow participants. Individuals face partner and one individual is the leader, and the partner is the follower. The purpose of this game is to not allow outside individuals to know who the leader is. The activity is silent. Participants are asked to take others into consideration, as everyone has a different body type and is able to do different activities. During the movement process, participants freeze, and the roles are switched.

Participant feedback:

- Incredible focus on yourself and on partner, how your movements were affecting your partner and you.
- Fun activity about you and your partner, about working together.
- Some participants found it difficult to take part in activity, it asked for intense eye contact with an individual that they didn't know very well.
- Switching to be the follower served as a challenge.
- Participants shared how they are aware of themselves and others when they walk in the community. For example one individual spoke about how they change their demeanor when they are in different environments to make others feel comfortable.

Next game: Facilitator shares statements, you go to one side if true, opposite side – not true, in the middle – unsure. Participants are asked to take note of who they may or may not be in the same group with. Statements provided by facilitator are: you like where you grew up, you speak another language, you'd like to be famous, you ate dinner with your family every night, you've **walked** in another community other than your

own, you like to work in groups, you like to work alone, you'd like things to change in your community.

Participant feedback:

- really allowed individuals to see what they had in common with other participants.
- Activity challenged assumptions about individuals and communities.
- Similar activity is introduced, "walked the line" – activity allows students to see that they are not alone. The participants in this activity included teachers and students so students are able to see that their teachers are also "human"

BOOKS of Interest on Theatre of the oppressed: Theatre of the Oppressed and Games for actors and non-actors by Augusto Boal. The work of Augusto Boal is very open to interpretation. His idea is to take the information and use it.

Theatre can be brought together with different mediums of art.

When funding is received what action are we going to take?

Activity to determine

Youth statements from participants of the "dividing line" : "

"They're all Mexican"

"Some of them don't like Latinos"

"I feel nervous and worried for those people, because I don't know what they are thinking or feeling"

"Everyone on the other side is dangerous and its scary to walk over there"

"Mexicans are scared of black people."

Participants are asked to talk about their given statement, next groups come up with how they might implement the project. In the end, individuals will present and share their ideas to assist in the "Dividing Lines" program

“They’re all Mexican” Group

So much segregation and stereotypes due to segregation. Lots of violence and fear issues cause individuals to say these statements. Media image on gang violence on communities, individuals and negativity make it difficult. Not knowing our own background, we are lost on our needs.

Action: to bring schools together from different groups, involve in activities, a cultural tour of the neighborhood, involve schools in sports activities, have them involved in a mural art or photo representation, to have people that look different from the stereotype. Taking photos and making video with different groups of people would help remove stereotype. Having them create a rap or hip hop presentation may help dispel the myth. Use the resource of the Mexican Fine Arts Museum, educating individuals on people that live in the neighborhood. Teach the cultural aspects of the culture. From an artist prospective, a cultural tour that is youth led and youth driven, so that the youth are involved. Something to be able to really visualize and engage with a story. The MFAM did an exhibit on beautiful portraits, exemplified the deconstruction of culture on one human being.

“Some of them don’t like Latinos” Group

Spoke a lot about how that was a quick barrier. Closing off all opportunities for change in the future. It’s more than a stereotype, it becomes a belief. It was visualized as a shield, called it ignorance.

Project title, “reflecting on the shield of ignorance”

Start with youth, with an incubator period where they begin their leadership skills, learn more about the community by doing interviews within the community. Individuals develop flyers, develop a video to display on a web site, a possible painting. Maybe a screening in the park, or a block party by the train tracks. To really take that geographical line and make it not so negative.

An idea was to take the space between the CTA and Metra to show the example of a combined community.

“I feel nervous and worried for those people, because I don’t know what they are thinking or feeling” Group

This statement could have been said by either side. Physically crossing the dividing line to expose commonalities.

A photography project with people from both sides, starting with a dialogue with community. The community would be the ones to form the question and choose the medium although the group thought photography would work well for that. Initially participants photograph the places that are important to their community, and then go to another community to photograph what they feel is important to the other community. In the end there would be an exhibit that would show the evolution of the process, the pride in one's own community, the development of a relationship between two communities. In the end because this exhibit couldn't be in one place or the other, maybe developing a book that would be sold and the proceeds go to continue the process. This will allow for sustainability of the project and idea. It is very important to physically be able to cross the border.

“Everyone on the other side is dangerous and it's scary to walk over there” Group

Stereotypes make you scared, why are the train tracks present. Maybe they put the tracks there for a reason to separate cultures. Fear is still going to be present.

16 week plan, bring families together, and find out what they feel should happen. Have individuals from NL and LV go to opposite communities and really learn the history of the community and surrounding areas. Having a dinner, a big group dinner with both communities present allowing individuals to talk about stereotypes. Also, funding is a challenge, so finding

a cheap way to bring people together. Maybe going to the neighboring community church on a Sunday, experience religion from another side.

“Mexicans are scared of black people” Group

We’re all afraid of something. IT is a fear of the unknown. To break it down would be to know and to somehow incorporate knowledge. Use the visual “dividing lines” by painting a mural in that area. Or writing a story, taking photographs, and putting those stories together to make it ONE item not separate. The first half is collecting of neighborhoods, prep work, and then the second half doing the painting and constructing and then celebrating. Maybe start the process with letters of communication between both sides. Pose questions, that may explain why we are scared, a hand written letter will allow for greater intimacy.

A project similar to this idea has been done.

Next Steps:

Participants can get involved by contacting artist, or the Shanti Foundation. The plan is to have the project completed by the time summer comes. Participants were able to leave feedback for facilitator.

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