

# 6

## TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Here are some teaching activities shared by Listen Up! media educators that can be used for team-building and media skill development. The activities are grouped in the following clusters: group process, production exercises, critical viewing, and connecting to community.

### **GROUP PROCESS**

Group process focuses on how people work together—how they communicate, solve problems and make decisions. Youth media practitioners from the Listen Up! Network note that it's important to facilitate group process in a way that encourages a sense belonging, motivation and cohesiveness among team members. Below are several types of activities that promote effective group process.

#### **Icebreakers & Warm-Ups**

Icebreakers and warm-up activities are useful ways to introduce your program to the participants, ease the group into the subject matter and communicate your style and role as a trainer/facilitator. These activities can also:

- ▶ help participants get to know and feel comfortable with one another.
- ▶ energize participants about the project or group.
- ▶ set the tone for the program and process.
- ▶ invest participants in the learning and creative process.
- ▶ link to the subject matter, program goals, or project philosophy.
- ▶ provide instant gratification if, for example, youth can see the results of their efforts (or themselves) on video.
- ▶ allow learners to open up about their own struggles, strengths and weaknesses.

*In the PSA workshops, almost all of the icebreakers doubled as team and trust building exercises. Because we had such a diverse group, gender-wise, racially, ethnically and geographi-*

*cally, very few of the youth knew each other or were very comfortable with each other. In fact, issues around their differences were bound to come up and it was very important to set a tone of tolerance, respect, honesty, and open-mindedness so that when we got into group discussions about complex and sensitive topics, everyone would feel safe enough to express themselves truthfully. Although on the surface many of the games and exercises may seem light, I am convinced that had we not taken time in each workshop to playfully and creatively interact, we would not have accomplished what we did. The exercises we used were also critical in helping people break down their defenses and creating a sense of community in the workshop.*

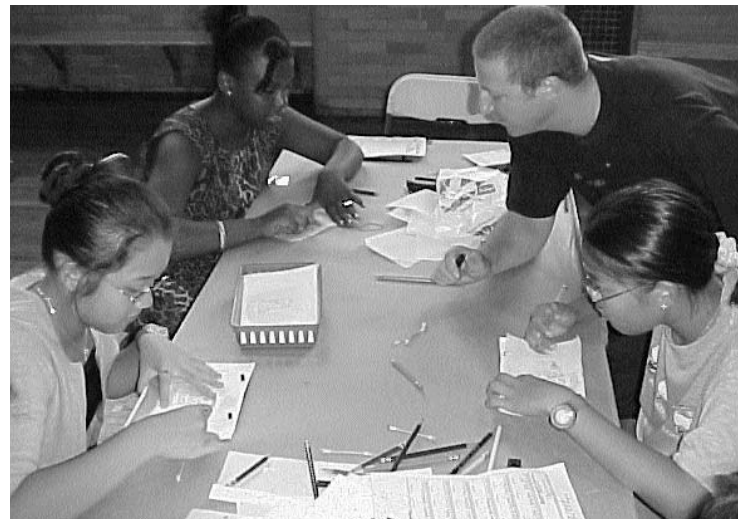
MINDY FABER, VIDEO MACHETE

*“Two games that we use as ice-breakers are “The Outrageous Truth” and “Two Truths and a Lie.”*

*“The Outrageous Truth”: On a slip of paper, have each person write down a brief sentence about themselves that is absolutely true but that others might find hard to believe. Nothing else should be written to identify the player in any way. Collect the slips and pull them out of a hat one at a time and read aloud to the group. Going around the table, have each player say aloud who they think wrote that statement (obviously, the one who wrote it is going to give someone else’s name). Then, after all the statements have been drawn, the individual who stumped the most members of the group wins an inexpensive prize. The game can be hilarious and astounding, but the players should be warned to keep their revelations “sanitary” to a Pg-13 level.*

*“Two Truths and a Lie”: Sitting around a table, begin by having one person reveal two things about him or herself that are true and one thing that is a lie (for example, “I’m from Texas, I eat Thai food at least once a month, and I play the electric guitar.”) Each member of the group then tries to guess which items are true and which is a lie. When everyone in the group has made a guess, then the person in the hot seat reveals which statement is false (“I’ve never eaten Thai food.”) Each member of the group then takes a turn in the hot seat.”*

DAN VILLALVA, COMMUNITY MEDIA



Clifford Cohen from AnimAction (Hollywood, CA) helps students in Brooklyn, NY create animated public service messages.

See the **SAMPLES** section for the document “Icebreakers & Warm-up Exercises.”

## Teambuilding

Teambuilding activities are designed to strengthen rapport among learners, foster individual commitment to group goals and build a sense of community for team members.

Teambuilding activities can focus on:

- ▶ building trust and mutual respect
- ▶ creating a comfortable learning environment
- ▶ clarifying project goals and desired outcomes
- ▶ prioritizing issues and tasks
- ▶ articulating problems and solutions
- ▶ addressing concerns and fears
- ▶ overcoming obstacles to group effectiveness
- ▶ improving inter-group communication
- ▶ developing relationships and bonds



**Youth at the Listen Up! "New Voices, New Activists" weekend workshop participate in a teambuilding exercise.**

Simple teambuilding activities include sharing experiences and stories. For example, consider beginning and ending every session with a “check in” period when participants are able to articulate the state of their thoughts and feelings at that moment. You can prompt this check-in by going around in a circle and letting each person respond to a specific question such as:

- ▶ What has your day been like so far?
- ▶ What’s the best thing/worst thing that has happened today?
- ▶ What word describes what you want today’s session to be like?
- ▶ What did you enjoy most about our work together today?
- ▶ How would you describe what we did today to a friend or family member?
- ▶ What stood out to you about what we did today?
- ▶ What did you do well today and what would you like to do better?
- ▶ What would you change about how we worked together and/or what we worked on today?

The responses can signal the trainer whether it’s appropriate to go ahead with other activities as planned or if it’s necessary to make changes to the agenda or even take time out to address people’s feelings.

To share experiences, you can have small groups or the full group reflect on and then share a story of:

- ▶ a time they felt a sense of community
- ▶ a time they felt a sense of power
- ▶ a time they felt creative
- ▶ a time they felt confident
- ▶ something important that happened to them in the past year

After group members share, the facilitator can ask questions to help make connections between their stories (for example, draw out common threads about what caused young people to feel creative, powerful, confident, a sense of community). The facilitator can also pose questions to the group to help make connections between participants' answers and what the group wants (for example, how can we create a sense of community?); what the group needs (for example, how can we feel a sense of power?); the goals of the program; and any issues, obstacles or challenges the group is facing.

Sharing food (having lunch or dinner together) tends to build a sense of family and provide participants with time to relax and build rapport while not working directly on media projects. Potlucks, where everyone brings food that reflects their family heritage, can become a great forum to discuss culture, family history, personal identity and other issues of ethnicity.

*“Icebreakers have worked for me in getting kids engaged with each other before we begin to engage them in ideas and technology. The best icebreakers I have found are ones that require physical movement and a challenge to figure out. Many times leaders will emerge who can also lead the group in media ideas and creative works. The relaxing and laughter begins a session where idea exchanges and brainstorming are more comfortable for the group and then serious work can come forth.”*

DEBBIE DONOVAN, 4H GLASGOW, MT

**TOOLBOX****Building Trust**

BY JESIKAH MARIA ROSS

Building trust and rapport helps to facilitate effective learning. When participants feel supported and respected, they are able to participate more fully, share doubts and questions, and contribute their ideas. When working with a group, attend to basic safety and trust needs by allowing time for participants to become acquainted with each other and with you.

Here are some tips for building trust:

- ▶ Start with a welcome and a quick icebreaker. What's your favorite T.V. show? What's your least favorite show? What impact do you want your PSA to have on the viewing audience? What community change would you like to occur as a result of making your PSA?
- ▶ Allow ample time for introductions, sharing of strengths and weaknesses, and background information relevant to the participants' interest in community media. Share about yourself as a facilitator how you got started, how you learned, what helped or hindered you. Introductions help participants find a place to belong in the group.
- ▶ Elicit expectations, fears and concerns. Allow for a sharing of strengths and skills that participants bring to the group.
- ▶ State clearly the objectives of your training session and the agenda for your time together.

**Setting Ground Rules**

Ground rules are guidelines established by a group for how its members want to work together and relate to each other. Common ground rules include:

- ▶ showing up on time
- ▶ following through on assigned or delegated tasks
- ▶ respecting different points of view
- ▶ respecting cultural, educational and geographic differences
- ▶ not interrupting someone else while speaking
- ▶ encouraging all participants to share their ideas and experiences (for example, girls may be more soft spoken than the boys)
- ▶ not discussing what comes up in the group with people outside the group

- ▶ agreeing to disagree on ideas, aesthetics and interpretations of media pieces
- ▶ giving constructive feedback

*We always begin the first session by asking the participants to come up with their ground rules, including “safe space” and “one mic.” Safe space means asking team members to respect each other’s ideas and be open to disagree respectfully. The one mic rule means that one person speaks at a time. Everyone comes up and signs the written ground rules like a contract and this agreement is left up for the remainder of the program and is referred to when necessary.*

SUSAN SIEGAL, GAP

Setting ground rules helps create a safe and comfortable learning environment by letting participants know what they can expect and count on, as well as how their concerns might be addressed during group process. It’s best to set ground rules early in the project and make sure that everyone honors the established guidelines. If a participant breaks a ground rule, you can refer back to the ground rules. As the facilitator, highlight how you feel the ground rules are being stretched or broken, and engage the group in a problem-solving activity to find a way to move past the broken agreement and get back on track in a positive and meaningful way. Sometimes it’s useful to create ground rules for different types of activities such as dialogue sessions, production work, constructive criticism or team activities.

### **Determining Project Topics**

Youth media facilitators in the Listen Up! Network report a variety of methods to get participants thinking about topics for their media projects. Brainstorming is the most common. Whether done as a group or individually, the process stimulates imagination and creates a forum where everyone can contribute ideas. After brainstorming, the full group can explore and assess the range of ideas generated and prioritize their preferences.

*“The teens split up into groups of two or three to brainstorm and then meet back as a whole group and discuss and vote on the best PSA concept.”*

AMY BASKIN, NOVAC

*“We have all of the young people get on the floor with big pieces of paper and markers and write free flow for five minutes about “what’s important to us?” Then the groups read each other’s writing and look for similar ideas/concerns to consider as topics for the PSAs.”*

STARR HOGAN, DAYDREAMZ PRODUCTIONS

Visualization is another technique you can use. Pass out index cards and have everyone write down topic ideas. Sometimes you can prompt ideas by asking questions such as: What do you think are the top issues facing youth today? What are you most concerned about in your life right now? What changes would you like to see happen in your community? Tape the cards on a wall for everyone to look over and discuss. Have participants cluster ideas into categories, discuss the types of issues that have come up, note which categories seem to have more ideas in them, and explore ways to achieve consensus on which issue(s) to tackle.

## TOOLBOX

### Guidelines for Brainstorming

BY JESIKAH MARIA ROSS

According to Sam Kaner in his book *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* (New Society Publishers, 1996), more than a hundred variations of the brainstorming technique have been created and documented. Here are some common guidelines in leading a brainstorming session:

The time for brainstorming should be short and intense.

- ▶ Specify a particular amount of time (5-10 minutes) for the process.
- ▶ Recognize that the purpose of the brainstorm is to generate ideas and to quickly get thoughts flowing, which tends to make it a high energy exercise.

Every contribution is valid and worthwhile.

- ▶ Encourage wacky, "out there" ideas and notions.
- ▶ Promote free association, whatever comes to mind.

Try to suspend judgement.

- ▶ Remind participants not to evaluate or censor ideas (theirs or others).
- ▶ Note that the group can discuss ideas in detail later.

**SPOTLIGHT****Defining Topics for PSAs at Video Machete**

BY MINDY FABER

At Video Machete, identifying topics for PSAs was the result of a process that took place over several weeks. Many of the participants were highly motivated by the possibility their PSA would air on television so, their first inclination was replicate what they had already seen on TV, topics like anti-smoking, anti-drug, and anti-alcohol. While we didn't want to censor them, we did want to encourage the participants to identify topics directly relevant to their lives and to think critically about why certain issues—and not others—were appearing in television PSAs. We also needed to discuss how youth perspectives—particularly youth of color—are rarely made visible on television. To this end, we screened both mainstream PSAs and commercials, as well as alternative and youth-produced PSAs and programs.

For many participants it was difficult to see how their “personal problems” could be interpreted as “social issues” We needed a process that would 1) help them understand how the personal is nearly always embedded in a web of political and social conditions, 2) give them a way to translate their own life experiences into PSA topics about which they felt passionately.

During Week Four, we led participants through a process designed to help them determine topics for their final set of PSAs. First, they were asked to answer the following questions in their journals, being completely honest. (They were told that they didn't have to share, but that the facilitators might look in their journals.)

- ▶ What are you most passionate about?
- ▶ What do you fear most in your life right now?
- ▶ What is the number one challenge you face in your life right now?
- ▶ What are you doing about that obstacle or challenge?

Next, they gathered in their teams and were given 15 minutes to discuss the obstacles that existed in the lives of teenagers. Then they were given various objects—shoeboxes, Frisbees, balloons—and told to write one obstacle on each object. One of the facilitators then scattered the objects around the room and blindfolded one member of each team who then had to get through the “obstacle course” without touching any of the objects. His or her teammates could help, but they could not use words or touch the blindfolded team member. The purpose of this exercise was to bring up the issues of personal isolation and alienation among youth, to discuss alternative strategies, and to emphasize that everybody needs help to succeed. The teams struggled with this exercise, but the ensuing conversation took them deeper eliciting topics like teen pressure, depression

and suicide. As they began to open up, the facilitators were able to help make the links between personal problems and social/political issues. At the end of this process each team identified two issues for their final PSAs.

The following week, teams worked to research and begin storyboarding their ideas. Later we brought in an African American journalist and educator—with extensive knowledge of film and Hip Hop—who reviewed the topic ideas and then helped participants deepen their understandings of the historical and political issues surrounding their topics.

## PRODUCTION EXERCISES

Youth media practitioners report using variety of production exercises. When choosing an exercise, it's important to keep in mind:

- ▶ the goals and objectives of the program/project
- ▶ the composition of the group
- ▶ the expectations of the group
- ▶ the amount of time you have
- ▶ your learning philosophy
- ▶ your teaching style
- ▶ your comfort with leading and debriefing the exercise

Remember to visit the **SAMPLES** section at the end of this chapter for more production exercises to experiment with and adapt for your youth media program.

### SPOTLIGHT

#### Video Production Exercises

BY LISTEN UP! MEMBER SITES

Here are some video production exercises used by members of the Listen Up! Network:

*“We play a word/story game with the camera. We get the group in a circle and each person has to add one word/phrase to a story that continues around the circle. The cameraperson films each participant saying his or her word/phrase. The stories get more and more creative and crazy. At the end we have a montage of faces telling a story.”*

JENNIFER PLEVIN, COMMUNITY MEDIA PROJECT

*“In workshops we learn about shot types and then show video work and ask the group to shout out what they are seeing. For example, is it a long shot? close up? establishing shot? It’s kind of an ice breaker and gets kids and adults to loosen up. Producing video for our groups is pretty loud and lots of fun.”*

BJ HAWKINS, VID-KIDS

*“We introduce visual storytelling at the beginning of our video workshops by having youth draw a comic strip. It’s a simple way of letting them think visually. We underscore the importance of the visual by screening scenes from a silent movie. Then, we have them apply their comic strip skills to storyboarding their own silent video, which they then shoot and edit in-camera without a great deal of concern for technical perfection. The whole comic strip to silent film process takes only a couple of hours and the participants see results fast. That’s exciting and gets them hooked.”*

PAUL SANTOMENNA, NATIVE VISIONS

*“After teaching camera basics and media terminology, we have producers create production teams and go and “find” different types of camera shots in a “video scavenger hunt.” This teaches camera terminology, trouble shooting, and teamwork.”*

MALLORY GRAHAM, 911 MEDIA ARTS CENTER

See **SAMPLES** section for scavenger hunt handout.

*“Here are two production exercises we use: 1) Students are asked to select a commercial and re-edit it to communicate a new message. This assignment introduces students to the artistic strategy of appropriation and media criticism; 2) Students select a piece of writing (poetry, lyrics from a song) and create a visual interpretation of the text, with an emphasis on image/sound relationships.”*

DIANE NERWEN, JOHN JAY HIGH SCHOOL

*“One very effective project is to do a mock PSA in a single lesson, using in camera edits. We start with a funny idea like “why it’s uncool to walk around with your eyes closed.” All students rotate jobs for each shot. We use a monitor and very specifically call attention to all the important considerations they need to be aware of (lighting, composition, framing, etc.),*

*using proper terminology and teaching group teamwork skills at the same time. Another useful project is to select a PSA the youth have created, re-shoot the whole thing, and discuss learnings and experiences in reworking the piece. This help builds critical perspective on the work and promotes the idea of continuing to refine media productions.”*

AMY BASKIN AND COURTNEY EGAN,  
NOVAC



Craig Hunter of the Global Action Project (NY).

*“We have students shoot a “chase scene.” It helps them to start thinking about spacetime issues (as they relate to shooting and editing) and though it is derivative, it’s something that they can readily engage in and have fun doing.”*

KRISTIN KONSTERLIE, NORTHWEST FILM CENTER

*“To communicate the concept of point of view (POV), discuss how a camera can be a character by placing it strategically to get shots from different points of view. Have students brainstorm possible POVs and then go out and shoot them. During viewing have other students guess what the POV is (e.g., point of view of a trash can, inside a locker, chalkboard, etc.).”*

MALLORY GRAHAM, 911 MEDIA ARTS CENTER

*“In terms of interviewing techniques, our lesson starts with the teacher tapping into the students’ knowledge. Everybody has watched interviews and most of us have gone through some sort of interview at some point in life. The teacher starts by questioning students about their interview experiences, what they’ve seen or gone through. Students are asked to isolate different characteristics with the instructor facilitating the process. These characteristics or discoveries are written down and a discussion on different types of interviews and interviewers takes place. Students are then invited to rotate as interviewees, interviewers, camera, sound and lighting persons. The exercise is recorded and viewed by all. They are deconstructed by the whole group to establish different styles of interviews and different ways to approach people and to gather the information you are looking for.”*

TATIANA LOUREIRO, DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY TELEVISION