Digital Stories, Mapping Our Lives:
Youth Voices from Brooklyn to Palestine

Participants will watch digital stories (3-5 minute digital collages) that Palestinian youth wrote, recorded, and edited themselves about their experiences under occupation. Following a brief discussion of the stories, participants will go through the same story-telling process (life mapping), which was used to make the digital stories. Participants will then share their life maps with the group. This activity can be effective as a content-based trust building activity with a group that will be working together for some time. It can be done in one longer session or broken into multiple days.

Goals:

1) Participants will gain a deeper understanding of realities facing Palestinians through the stories of young people.
2) Participants will develop and share a life map that expresses key events in their life.
3) Participants will think about their stories in relation to others.

Length of Time: 2-3 hours

Materials Needed:
- Digital Resistance DVD (DVD or http://www.youtube.com/user/youthsolidarity)
- DVD player and projection/audio equipment
- Large paper (one for each participant)
- Construction paper
- Markers
- Pencils/pens
- Magazines and newspapers
- Glue and tape
- Scissors
- Computer with access to Internet and printer (optional, for supplemental images if desired)

Recommended Age Range / Grade Level: Written for a high school audience but easily adaptable for adults and perhaps for middle school as well

Number of Participants (if applicable): 15-20 participants (if more or less, time for sharing life maps will need to be adjusted)

Preparation:
- One facilitator should complete a life map ahead of time as a sample.
- Queue Digital Resistance DVD and/or load the digital stories on YouTube.

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Sequence of Activities

Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Facilitator begins with this question:

*When you hear the word "Palestine," what pops into your head? (images, words, anything!
If your audience is very unfamiliar with Palestine you may wish to use the word "Arab"
or "Middle East")*

Facilitator captures answers up on the board.

2. *Where do we get this knowledge?*

Facilitator takes notes on board. Draw from these questions to deepen and guide the discussion:

*Who's telling us what we hear?
Where do we see the images we see?
Do we get our information from other youth?
Are we getting most of our information from Palestinians? If not, then from where?*

Digital Story 1: Kholoud's Story (15 minutes)

Sub-Goal: Participants will gain a deeper understanding of realities facing Palestinians through the stories of young people.

1. Introduce digital stories by briefly explaining the process by which they were made:

Artists, educators, and organizers from the U.S. joined together with artists, organizers, and youth from Aida and Dheisheh refugee camps in the West Bank. They spent about a week together as the youth began with life mapping and then wrote their own stories, gave each other feedback, recorded their own voice-overs, chose their own music, and learned how to use the editing software. The digital stories you are about to see are the product of this process-- the youth specifically created them as tools not only of their own healing from traumatic and oppressive experiences, but for us here in the U.S. to educate ourselves about their daily life and struggle.

2. Watch Kholoud's digital story (Kholoud works with Lajee Center in Aida Camp).
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuSGUDgD4tc

3. Facilitator can draw upon the following questions to guide reflection afterwards:

What is Kholoud's dream?
What is "blocking" it?
How does she (begin to) overcome that?
Did you expect to hear or see anything different?

Digital Story 2: Khaled's Story (15-40 min)

1. Now watch Khaled's video (Khaled is from Ibdaa Cultural Center in Dheisheh Camp) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiIRoz7Cj8E

2. Questions to draw upon while reflecting afterwards:

What does the key do and what does it mean? Khaled describes the fields of trees near his old home as "vast." How do you think this is different from the place that he lives now? Why would these two spaces feel so different? How does the space feel in your own neighborhood? What are some positives and negatives about it? (note: try to draw out positives and resistance as well as negatives in order to create a more empowering connection)

3. Use this question to transition into the next activity:
How do these digital stories relate to our own?

4. If you have more time and are interested in making this a more writing-based program, here is an optional writing prompt:
Step 1 (5 minutes)
What questions do you have for your ancestors?
Step 2 (10 minutes)
What keys have you been given?
Step 3 (10 minutes)
What keys are you still looking for in your life?

Life Maps (1-1.5 hours)

Sub-Goals: Participants will develop and share a life map that expresses key events in their life; participants will think about their stories in relation to others.

Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Facilitator shares quote and sets up activity:

"You don't know where you're going until you know where you've been."
    -Malcolm X

In order to better understand the experiences of others, we need to understand what our

journeys have been and who and what has helped shape, challenge, and direct us...

2. Facilitator places up on the wall or holds up his/her example "life map," which is a visual representation of her/his personal history:

Here is my life map which helps me actually visualize the experiences/people/places/ideas/ dreams/memories/social forces which have shaped me.

What do you notice in my life map?
Can you tell what have been some of the most important experiences in my life so far?

Getting Started (10-20 min)

1. Participants are encouraged to make their life maps in whatever form makes the most sense to them. Facilitator should explain that they will later be asked to share these with the group. To help participants think through the process of mapping their lives visually, facilitator asks:

What images and design techniques did I use to represent my life path?

Examples: spirals, wheels with spokes, chronological timeline, flow chart....the example the facilitator shared is only one way of doing it and can help get people thinking visually (which is often difficult for some) but it's important to also not limit participants' ideas of what it has to look like.

2. Participants are encouraged to use the following questions to guide their life mapping. They should be written up clearly and posted where everyone can see and refer to them while they're working. Participants and facilitator should read through them out loud before beginning to work individually. If you have enough time, it can be very helpful for everyone to do a **10 minute freewrite** (writing continuously whatever comes into your mind without worrying about spelling or grammar) in response to these questions before moving into the visual work.
    1. Where do I come from?
    2. Who has supported me?
    3. What challenges have I faced?
    4. What ideas and experiences have helped shape who I am?
    5. What is my daily life like now?
    6. What problems do I face now?
    7. What are my hopes and dreams for the future? And what are my fears?
    8. What is most important to me in my life?
    9. What do I want to be doing in a year, 5 years, 10 years?

Making the Maps (30 min-1 hour)

See materials list for things that will be useful to have for making meaningful, satisfying, and serious life maps.

Conclusion, 30-45 min (depending on how many participants)

1. Participants share their life maps in a circle, each person getting 2 minutes to present their life map, highlighting a couple of things they chose to focus on, and 2 minutes to hear questions and feedback from others.

2. In closing, facilitator asks:

What have we learned about life in Palestine today?
What have we learned about each other's lives here in this room?

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