

ACTIVITY 1:

How do we know what we know?

We all learn in different ways. In this activity, we think about our formal education and the various ways we have learned through life experience. We introduce how feminist popular education can contribute to liberating forms of learning.

Materials: Coloured markers, sticky notes or coloured cards, flipchart paper, tape, copies of handout: *Listening beyond words*

Plenary: Introduce the activity. Read *Listening beyond words* aloud and then invite people to brainstorm answers.

- What did the organisers fail to see in this case? Why?
- What assumptions lay behind their decisions?
- How does such a lack of awareness impact power dynamics within the group? And externally?
- What was learned in the story? Was anything unlearned?

The framework reveals how power is operating and where opportunities exist to expose, contest, and change power in relation to real contexts and issues.

Reflect on different ways of learning and knowing. We all learn in different ways – not only with our minds but also with our hearts and bodies. Some learn through reading and some through doing, while others are visual learners. Feminist popular education encourages us to critically question what we have learned and the underlying assumptions we carry, and to integrate our different ways of knowing the world.

Next, distribute post-its or cards and sheets of flipchart paper. Explain that the next step is for personal reflection and won't be shared with the group.

Individually: Draw the outline of a person on your sheet. Ask yourself:

- What are the different ways of learning in all parts of my life?
- Which do I value most now and why? Anything I have had to “unlearn” or question?
- What conditions enable me to learn best?

Write your thoughts on post-its or cards. Place each one on the heart, mind, or part of the body on your outline.

Small groups: Each of four small groups focuses on a different question. Groups select a moderator, a person to take notes, and a person to share in plenary.

- Group 1: Did our formal education take our lived experience into account?
- Group 2: How did our formal education portray the value and history of our communities, country, and the world?
- Group 3: What values and beliefs were reinforced by our formal education, and what values and beliefs were discounted?

- Group 4: What does our formal education say about who teaches, who has knowledge, and who learns?

Plenary: Groups take turns to share their thoughts. Invite discussion about formal education, drawing out the ways in which it can discount our lived experiences, distort history, reflect patriarchal and racist beliefs, and replicate colonial and capitalist values.

Ask:

- What assumptions lay under the surface about who has knowledge, who doesn't, whose knowledge counts, and what knowledge is and what it isn't?
- How do these assumptions relate to and reinforce inequities of power and privilege?
- What are the implications of this kind of formal education (sometimes called banking education for 'depositing' knowledge in people's minds) for those seeking liberation from oppression?
- How can we educate ourselves in ways that are liberating?

Note key points on flipchart. Point out that, without bringing consciousness in this way to what we "know" and why we know it (particularly as that is shaped by our identity – class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc – and how that positions us in the world), we may easily replicate power inequities and other oppressive dynamics within our communities, organisations, and movements. (We will go into this more fully in Chapter 4.) To close, introduce or remind the group about feminist popular education, particularly its focus on learning and unlearning in a way that catalyses change and liberation. Connect ideas on the flip chart summary to ways that feminist popular education as a political practice is liberating.