SHANKILL
SIGHTS

An educational resouce for artistic research and community work

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WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK KYLE AND MICHEALA FROM IMPACT TRAINING, JENNY FROM R-CITY, BILLY FROM ALTERNATIVES, ROWAN AND JACKIE FROM THE SHANKILL PARTNERSHIP AND ELAINE FROM THE MAC FOR HOST-ING AND FACILITATING OUR WORKSHOPS IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS. THIS EXPERI-ENCE HAS BEEN VERY VALU-ABLE FOR US AND WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THESE OR-GANISATIONS WE WOULD HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS.

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Introduction

This resource shares the methods and findings of the site-specific research project in The Shankill area of Belfast called Shankill Sights. During this project, artistic methods of conversation were created that enable people to share their lived experiences without the initial verbal barrier that many traditional research methods tend to have.

As artisteducators, we applied our background in visual arts to the social issues that were presented to us when we were invited to work in The Shankill. Due to years of conflict in Northern Ireland, The Shankill camps with a diverse range of social issues, such as low educational attainment, high suicide rates and poverty. As a result of the conflict, a lot of land was left unattended creating derelict sites. The BUILD Project is a project initiated by Alternatives Restorative Justice, a community-based social justice organisation, that campaigns to renew these derelict sites. They invited us to join this project and use our practice to give them insight into the opinions of the young people growing up in the area. This subject paired well with our individual research interests in identity, citizenship and education.

We created four games that asked participants between the age of 12 and 18 to reflect on their identity in relation to the environment where they spend most of their lives. We used the mediums of drawing, photography and play as an alternative means of reflection in contrast to traditional ways of gathering information, such as interviews or surveys. Through this, we broke through the negative narrative that had been ingrained into the young people's minds. Inspired by the work of educator Paulo Freire and his concept of conscientization, we believe that these reflective exercises are a great way to work on young people's critical thinking skills and raise awareness on the potential of their environment that currently goes to waste.

Moreover, these games allow facilitators to gather data from groups affected by various social issues. This resource gives an insight into the kind of play and games we use to collect information about the opinions of young people in Shankill. We hope this acts as a helpful tool for researchers and facilitators interested in gathering such data and incites participants to take a critical and conscious position to their environment.

# Draw your timeline

This game is focused on under-standing the life of the participants from their point of view. A work-shop like this can be used as a way to introduce the group to each oth-er along with the facilitators lead-ing this workshop.

Since this is the first session, an introduction movement activity is recommended. An example of such a game is a quick throw ball game that allows for everyone to get their body warmed up, and work as a team together to reach a common goal.

The activity 'Draw your timeline' is presented to the participants as a way to reflect on impactful moments in their life. What they define as impactful here is up to them. The drawing of the timeline can be done through lines, squiggles, drawing images or simply writing about the moments, the choice is left up to the participants. For them this becomes a nice moment to reflect upon what they think have been defining moments in their life so far, this allows for the group to share who they are in ways other than a simple verbal introduction. For researchers or facilitators this exercise gives them the space to question the participants about why they drew a certain moment, why they chose it or if they could elaborate on the story.
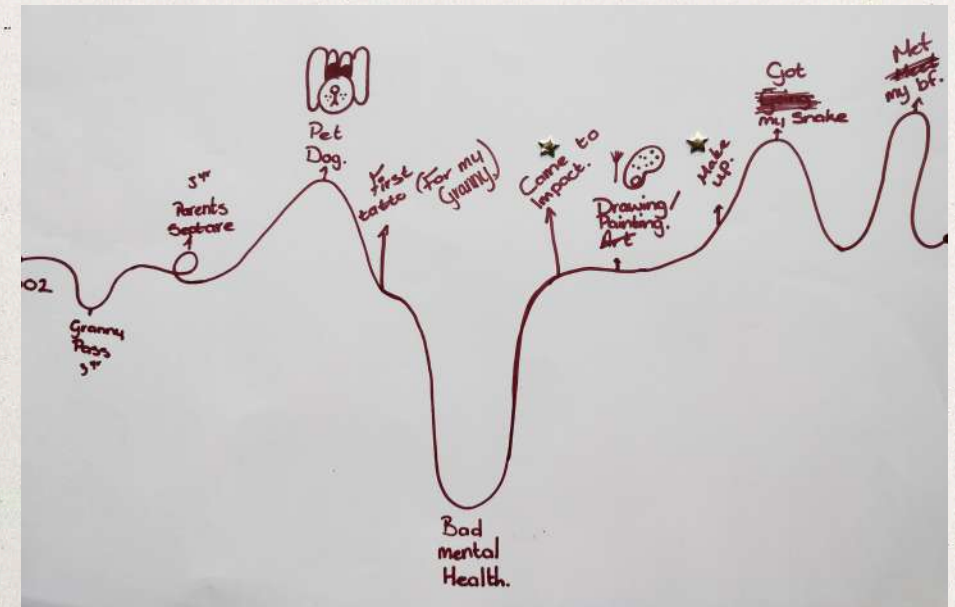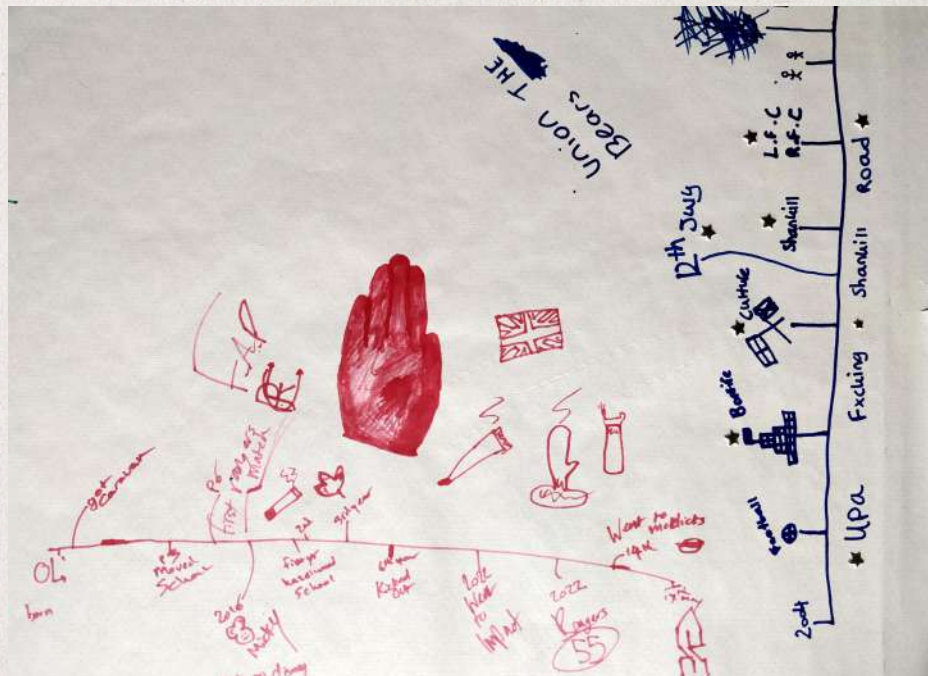
This allows for the participants to pick and choose what parts of their life they share, rather than be forced to give information they might not want to.
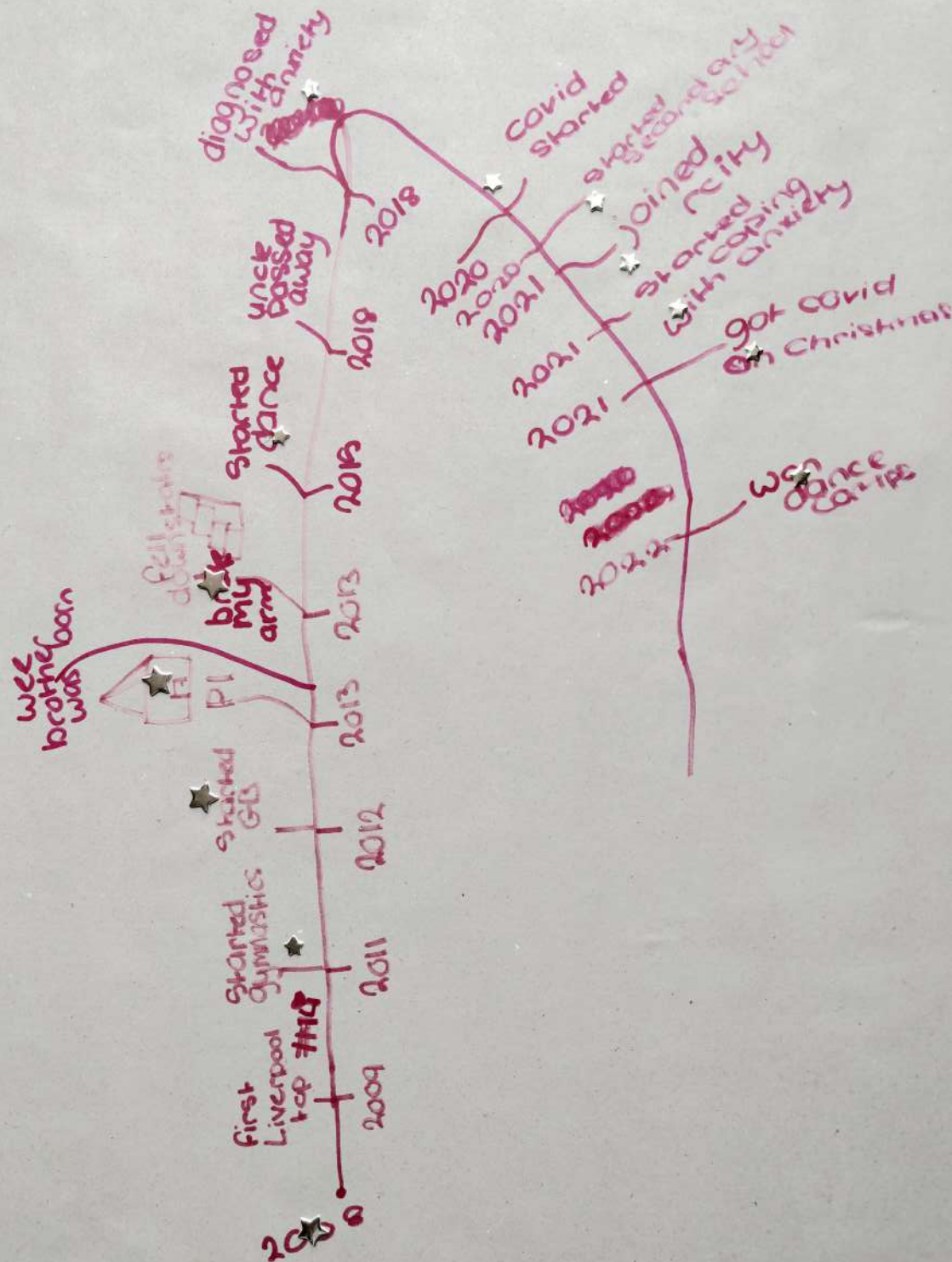
During the explanation of this exercise it is recommended to illustrate what a timeline' means, to give the participants an insight into what they could do.

Before the workshop, supplies such as rolls or individual sheets of paper, crayons or sharpies (based on preference) and tape should be bought to provide the participants with materials they can choose between. For our research we thought it would be best to perform this activity as a group on two big rolls of paper to have a collective image at the end with each timeline. We joined them in creating our own timelines on paper, however did not go into much detail.

After the participants were done with their timelines we went around discussing each person's timeline, letting them decide what they would be willing to share with us. During these moments the facilitators can ask questions to help the participants elaborate on some of the moments they have chosen to write down. Following this, provide the participants with stickers and ask them to mark every event on their timeline that has happened in the community they were in. This follow up activity was added to visualise the impact one's community has on their life. Some of the reactions we had from the participants showed us that this was the first time they were visually reflecting on how much Shankill has been a part of their life.

Photo Hunt

Following the previous workshop where the participants drew their lives and marked the connection between their social environment and life, this workshop seeks to physically explore this environment. The participants get control over which parts of their environment and community they want to share through an exercise we call Photo Hunt.

For researchers or facilitators, the main goal of this exercise is to see the environment they are researching through the lens of people that have a strong relationship with it. For the participants, education is provided by creating moments to reflect on their connection with the environment in which they spend a lot of time. In the case of the Shankill project, we worked with a group of young people that are not used to people listening seriously to their experiences and opinions regarding the environment and community. That is why an additional goal of this workshop was to give the participants control of the narrative of the space that is part of their identity.

A photo of the Peacewall was taken for the promt 'take a photo of violence'

Before the workshop, a list of directions for locations to be photographed should be written and printed for participants. This is the list we used in Shankill:

- Take a photo of something you dislike

- Take a photo of something you like

- Take a photo of your favourite spot

- Take a photo of the spot you know the best

- Take a photo of something hidden

- Take a photo of something you want to fix

- Take a photo of something you want someone else to fix

- Take a photo of a place where you have strong memories

- Take a photo of the car you like the most from what you see around you

- Take a photo of a place that is quiet

- Take a photo of violence

- Take a photo of love

- Take a photo of the most beautiful nature around you

- Take a photo of the ugliest nature around you

- Take a photo of where you would want to see more nature

- Take a photo of art that you like

- Take a photo that represents the future for you

- Take a photo of the past

- Take a photo of your favourite shop

- Take a photo of a nice view

" A photo of the library was taken for the promt 'take a photo a place with strong memories'

This example list was created after the first workshop, so we could incorporate information we gathered about the group. The list can be modified in many different ways depending on the topic, demographic, environment, and time. For example, for our research, it was valuable to get information about what kind of environmental improvement the young people would like to see.

The size of the group and how to divide them can depend on various aspects. We worked with groups of six to nine people and split them in half so that each group had one of us present to observe the participants' conversations and behaviour. Given their age and the area, we did not want the participants to go out unsupervised. Alternatively, if the participants are older and/or the environment is safer, they can go out alone to take the photos. This should be followed by a more in-depth conversation with the group after the exercise to ensure that the motivations behind the photos can be documented if necessary.

After the Photo Hunt has been completed, the group reconvenes to share the pictures. This is a great opportunity to start an in-depth conversation about the exercise and the experience. Questions the facilitator might ask are: 'What directions were the easiest/hardest?' ' or 'Out of the whole group, what photo is the most surprising to you?'.

Like the whole series, this workshop is essentially a tool to allow the locals of a particular area to share their lived experiences without the initial verbal barrier that many research methods tend to have. We noticed that the participants seemed to be surprised by the number of personal connections they experienced to the environment. Additionally, they expressed opinions that we had not observed from them before. It can be concluded that by using another medium, it became easier to express opinions that were formerly hard to verbalise.

WHAT IF...?

The 'What if...?' game was developed to get the participants to think realistically about the potential of their environment by brainstorming concrete ideas to implement.

At this point in the workshop series, we had gotten more familiar with the groups we worked with. That is why we catered this part to more specific dynamics of the groups. We divided this workshop into two parts, for larger groups we divided them in half and each group played one activity at a time.

Print out pictures of areas in the environment you want to brainstorm and start by hanging one of them up on the wall. Provide all the participants with post-it notes and pens and ask them to write down all the ideas they have on how to improve the area, and stick the post-it on the picture. Once this is done, take five minutes to reflect on the ideas, point out trends and ask the motivation behind the answers.

Now repeat this game but ask the participants to think about 'the other' that also lives in the same environment as they do. Try to make them think from a different perspective than themselves such as elderly people or single moms. Next, the game is repeated again but with a specific 'other' as a prompt. In our workshop, we asked the boys to think from the perspective of girls their age, because we had previously noticed that the lived experience between both genders had stark differences. The value of this exercise was shown by how challenging it was for the boys to try this, insinuating that this was not something they were used to doing.

When we worked with a group of girls from 12 to 13 years old, we modified the game because they did not need a prompt to think from the perspective of other people. So instead we did this:

The first part is the same as the previous rendition, hang up the picture and ask the group to brainstorm. Now that all the ideas are on the wall, ask the group to sort them out by hanging similar ideas in clusters. Then the second prompt is asked: 'Look at the ideas and imagine which group is not represented.' This challenges the group to think from even more perspectives and envision the lives of other people they share a living environment with.

Spectrum

This game is created to imitate a debate-style discussion. The premise of the game is to provide the participants with prompts (statements) and then ask them to place themselves on the spectrum in front of them.

For these workshops the spectrum was kept short, partic-ipants could either agree with the statement or disagree. However, this game can be played with a larger spectrum of choices such as *strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree*.

The prompts are written to fit the context of the partici-pants' lives so they can relate personally, containing top-ics such as school, community, gender and future. After the participants pick a spot on the spectrum, there are a few minutes where each participant can defend their po-sition. There is space for others to change their position too, in this activity, there is no fixed position. The prompts we provided the participants with were the following:

- Students should be paid to go to school.

- No one should ever tell a lie.

- It is easier being a man than a woman.

- Shankill is a safe place to grow up.

- Shankill has an accurate representation in the media.

- There is enough focus on mental health in education.

- I feel positive about the future.

The Spectrum game encourages participants to pick a side on the spectrum all while giving them the space to reflect upon their choice and whether they would like to change it or not. Such an exercise allows the participants to become more aware of their position in the world, or simply within their community.

Results

During Shankill Sights four games were developed to help facilitate young residents of The Shankill in expressing their opinion on their environment and gathering this data for organisations who are interested in their point of view. As artisteducators, we used our experience to come up with artistic methods to perform dialectical research and have fun at the same time. The output of the workshop sessions was used to further develop the ongoing activist BUILD campaign around the development of the derelict sites in The Shankill.

We believe the games apply to many demographics and places. However, we strongly encourage a flexible attitude as a facilitator in order to follow the needs of the specific group you work with. Both during the workshop session as well as in preparation. Although this resource mainly consists of an explanation of the games, we want to underscore that the conversations during and between the games are just as, if not more, valuable. What we as developers and facilitators appreciated the most was to see the participants open up to us more each week with sincerity and laughs.