

EXERCISE

Word Rivers



Time: 15 minutes solo, then 5 minutes evaluation, and optional 15+ minutes in conversation



Setup and materials: pencil/pen and paper



Good For: individuals and groups

Framing:

The term internal dialog describes the numerous conversations that go on in our heads. In this exploration, we take a step back and look at the world we create, the environment that exists inside our mind.

Steps:

1. For three minutes, listen to the undercurrent of words flowing through your mind. Notice the single drops (words) and the rivulets (sentence fragments) and the torrents (floods of commentary.)
2. After three minutes, take up a pencil and write exactly what you hear for twelve minutes. This is not like writing in a journal or composing a narrative. The writing will most likely go in various directions, for example, “I don’t have any thoughts, oh, I guess that’s a thought. Sitting on this floor is uncomfortable, I’m going to move to the chair. What should I have for lunch today? Twelve minutes is a lot of words. This pen is nice, I wonder where I got it. Is everyone as scattered as I am?”

The answer to that last question is yes. Our minds go in multiple directions. As you write, just transcribe the words you hear in the way a court reporter writes down exactly what is said in the courtroom. If you can’t keep up with the flow of words, draw an ellipsis ... and keep going with the next words you hear in your head.

3. At the end of your writing time, stand up, stretch, wiggle your fingers (your hand might be tired!) Move away from the space where you were writing and take your paper with you.
4. In this new location, take on the role of a scientist, like a sociologist or anthropologist. Look at this artifact that you have found. It was written by someone and you are going to study it to discover something about the world that the person who wrote these words inhabits.

5. Alone or in conversation, explore these questions:

What do you notice about the world that is described here?

What patterns or themes are revealed in these words?

How would you describe the voice(s)? Are they judging, or supportive? Is the tone humorous or reflective? Or...?

How appealing is it to live in this place (1 – 10)?

What habits of mind would raise that number?

How could you enrich the world you live in by altering your internal dialog?

As a scientific observer, become curious about the person who has created this internal world. Who are they? Begin to define the thinker underneath thought.