Teaching Ice Breakers: Developing Challenge Course Program for School

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Chapter 6 - Teaching Ice Breakers

or

Teaching Group Formation Activities, Group Formation Tools, and Group Process Tools

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1. Teaching Group Formation Activities.

   So you are ready to share group formation activities with your class! Few educators realize that planning and carrying out a series of group formation activities is actually more fun than doing the games yourself the first time. While adventure-based activities are common to many teachers, a majority of educators in the country have not experienced the joy of using these activities to stimulate learning and push students physical and emotional limits. If you are in this larger group you may be feeling a little pushed yourself. This is a good thing! When we first began using adventure-based activities through environmental and adventure education programs there were a lot of raised eyebrows. “You’re just playing games,” they said. To which we quickly replied, “and having fun.” Before we explore how having fun helps build a context for learning, let’s back up and discuss how we should prepare ourselves for our first day of group formation activities.

   When starting work with a new group, it is critical that you model the behaviour and the energy required from the participants. In the words of author Meg Wheatley (1994), we have to create a “field” of possibility that reaches all of our participants. In her book Leadership and the New Science, Wheatley explains that you can feel the welcoming or disinterested attitude of store employees when you walk in. There are no visual clues as to what this feels like; it’s a “quality” that has permeated the store and its employees. I’m sure you have felt it too – upon entering a store you know exactly if you will be treated well or if your presence is a burden. When leading groups it’s up to us to create that positive feeling and hence a positive learning “field” in order to ensure fun which in return will ensure participation, growth, experimentation in our student. It is up to us, as effective educators, to use group formation activities to create a “fun field” of potential, learning, exploring limits, and communicating our feelings as the norm for the rest of the day. As Wheatley suggests, it is hard to explain why it works, its joyous when it does and painful when it doesn’t.

   Our style of presentation and personal energy has a great deal to do with getting the days activities off on the right foot or into the right “field.”

   So as you stand before your group, your energy is the first icebreaker of the day. If you are genuinely excited, ready to learn and experiment then you have a better chance of creating that atmosphere for your participants. Here is where being committed to being a life long learner helps. Your “style,” if you will, has an enormous impact on the effectiveness of the day’s events. For this reason, it can be beneficial to work with a partner, someone equally
committed and energetic to share the load of maintaining a day of high-energy activities.

Now that we have a better idea of what we may be looking for in our group, let’s start! Karl Rohnke (1995) in his book Quicksilver describes a simple mnemonic to help teachers effectively lead activities. Originally developed by the New Games Foundation, “DDADA” will help you remember how to effectively introduce and lead adventure based activities.

**Describe**: Start by sharing the rules with the group, making them as simple and understandable as possible. Remember to speak clearly and loud enough for all to hear. In addition to describing the rules you may want them written on a poster so students can also read them. Enthusiasm is important here.

**Demonstrate**: A quick demonstration can answer a lot of questions. Remember the old newspaper adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words”

**Ask Questions**: Ask if students have questions or need clarification. In our classes we have other students answer the questions as a way of gauging wider understanding of the activity being described. Don’t let the group become to bog down in questions- keep enthusiasm high. Consider a quick run through of the activity in order to clarify the purpose and get students involved.

**Do**: Run the activity! Students tend to catch on once the action starts. In other words, let the fun begin.

**Adapt**: Observe the participants to see if the activity is working. Mid course corrections can help with confusion or to more precisely target your goals. Watch student’s enthusiasm for the activity before it begins to sag move on!

2. Enhancing Learning Through Fun and Play.

Viewed from the outside, this “field of learning” can appear to be just so many games. Many times in our careers we have had to explain the role of fun and play as an essential ingredient for successful learning. What we intuitively felt in the early 80’s about the role of fun in learning had been borne out in research since the New Games era. While fun may be hard to define, Glasser in 1986 said it was one of humanities five essential needs. Having fun also has educational benefits. Bisson and Luckner (1996) noted that fun... “can allow learners to try new things without fear of making a mistake, looking silly or feeling awkward” (p.110). Having fun allows us to temporarily suspend any controlling social inhibitions. It can stretch time and space and help develop trust, camaraderie and feelings of “freedom of expression”.

Equally important, if not more important in today’s world having fun can reduce stress, and as we all should know, stress kills the potential for learning. Having fun, according to Bisson and Luckner (1996), creates a no fear/relaxed environment “where learners feel safe to take risks, be creative, make mistakes, and most importantly, keep trying” (p.111). And this is our goal when setting out to create the appropriate “field” for group formation activities.
In addition to the fun loving researchers mentioned above, the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) in both 1988 and again in 2002 stated that play is … “essential for all children” (p.33). ACEI describes play as… “a dynamic, active and constructive behaviour” (p.33), that “is an essential and integral part of all children’s healthy growth, development and learning across all ages, domains and cultures” (p.33).

The ACEI position paper goes on to explain that according to findings from brain-based research, “play is a scaffold for development” (p.33) it is a proving ground for children to practice skills needed later on in life. Play is more than a way of learning about the world – play allows children to learn about themselves and to “feel competent about their ability to learn” (p.36).

With this in mind, it is clear that preparing to lead a group through a series of icebreakers and deinhibitzers can be very important play. These activities provide the scaffold and field for learning throughout the day, week or semester. The sequence of group formation activities you choose will help students develop skills and learn more about themselves and their ability to learn.

3. Determining Group History and Group Formation Phases.

Sure you have prepared yourself along with some exciting activities, but as the group files into the room there are some new questions you must consider about your participants. As you scan the crowd, in the instants before beginning you should be aware of gender make-up, cultural differences, abilities and disabilities, age, mood and other unique group characteristics. This information helps you to choose activities, introduction styles and choice of words. For example, try to avoid the use of “you guys” in mixed gender groups. Be aware that some traditional American Indian children may find it inappropriate to hold eye contact for long periods of time or touch strangers. Do your best to discover differences in cultural practices and beliefs before beginning. We recommend immersing yourself in rich cross-cultural teaching and learning experiences and when those are not available the following texts may be of help: Why Are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly Daniel Tatum and Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education by Gregory Cajete.

When scheduling your session it is also important to know the history of your group. Are you working with a newly formed group or a group that has worked together before? Following are some tips for working with both kinds of groups.

Newly Formed Groups
• Start with liberal amounts of fun name games in order to increase the group’s familiarity with each other, open lines of communication and build group bonds.
• Use a number of shorter more active, mentally and/or physically, group formation activities in order to keep the groups energy high.
• Build group skills and reliance on itself for communication, trust, cooperation, and decision making, questioning and celebrating.

Pre-existing Groups
• Start with a more deliberate name game where participants reveal more information about themselves. Examples: Object Sharing (100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom) or What’s My Bag (100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom).

• Select group formation activities that keep the group’s energy up and that remind them of their previous functioning levels in group trust, communication and cooperation.

Another helpful tool in assessing your group’s abilities and ultimately their readiness to progress throughout the day is the GRABBS Modality Checklist (Schoel et al, 1988, p.80). While this tool is most often used to help sequence activities, it is also useful at the start of your day.

• GOALS: Have goals for individuals and the group been established for the day?

• READINESS: Is the group ready for a day of activities?

• AFFECT: What is the mood of the group? Are they exhibiting care for each other?

• BEHAVIOR: What is the group doing? Any signs of cooperation, communication?

• BODY: What is the apparent fitness level of your group? What information can be gleaned from medical forms relevant to the planned activities or location (indoors/outdoors)?

• STAGE: Is this a new group or an established group? For established groups, how well do they work together? Into which Tuckman phase of group development do they fit?

Group Formation Phases

Group formation phases are important to consider when selecting activities for all types of groups. Bruce Tuckman’s work in group development, as cited in Priest and Gass (1997) is helpful in this area. Tuckman, an educational psychologist, recognized that all groups go through distinct stages on their way to peak performance. A summary of these stages follows but the most important way to use these stages is in recognizing where a group is and then helping them to get to the performing stage.

• STAGE 1: Forming: in this stage of group formation, participants are concerned with being liked or accepted and controversy is avoided. Participants will focus on routine and gathering of information, avoiding conflict with the result being that the real work cannot yet begin or little progress is made.

• STAGE 2: Storming: Some minor confrontations arise as participant’s patience wears thin. Some group members view resolution of conflict as valuable work; others will strive to maintain the calm from stage 1.

• STAGE 3: Norming: As the group storming progresses, rules of conduct evolve and knowledge of each other’s skills and tolerances increase. The group is now becoming more cohesive and can conduct their work more effectively. Since people have invested a lot of time and energy in achieving this phase they are now reluctant to change and fear break-up in the group or return to previous stages.

• STAGE 4: Performing: At this stage, the group’s total energy can be dedicated to the task. Participants know each other well, trust all the members, group moral is high and work responsibilities can be swapped interchangeably. Group function can be characterized as seamless.

• STAGE 5: Adjourning: This stage is characterized by completion of tasks and dissolution of the group. Participants celebrate their accomplishments, feel sad about leaving the highly successful group but consciously move on to other tasks.

Attention to your group, in addition to your preparation is one of the most important tasks. What they do and say all have relevance to the day’s objectives. And often times, as Parker Palmer (2000) notes – “the words we speak
often contain counsel we are trying to give ourselves” (p. 6).


As we said previously, people that are introduced to challenge course curriculum will often be inclined to say, “a game is a game is a game.” However, when you become more astute with the art and science of adventure-based curriculum, you will soon realize that not all games are similar in content, purpose or intended outcomes. Actually, literature in the field of adventure programming has classified games under various categories. Many authors and practitioners have adopted the use of terms such as new games, ice breakers, acquaintance activities, warm-ups, de-inhibitizers, and stunts just to name a few. However, the most commonly used and accepted terms are “icebreakers,” “de-inhibitizers,” and “stunts.” These three categories are popular because they distinctively represent three important types of activities addressing three distinct and fundamental components of small group formation.

Icebreakers, de-inhibitizers, and stunts are all essential, purposeful and specific categories of “games” used to help the social development and maintenance of a healthy group relationship. This is why we call these games group formation activities. Now don’t forget that if at time these activities seem be just a bunch of games, it is because their common denominator is that they all have a certain “fun factor.” However, this does not mean that they are the same. To make our point clearer, let’s now look more carefully at each of these types of games.

Icebreakers

Activities that create a fun and safe environment in which members of a new group become acquainted with each other, learn names of other members, learn to have fun as a group, and start to establish a healthy group oriented relationship. Examples: Toss A Name Game (Silver Bullets); It Ain’t Me Babe (Quicksilver); Hospital Tag (Cowstails and Cobra II).

De-inhibitizers

Activities that create a fun and safe environment in which members of a group are able to take some social risks by allowing oneself to appear inept, silly or really skilled in front of the rest of the group or by feeling more comfortable with close social proximity or physical contact with others.
Examples: Have You Ever? (The Bottomless Bag); Samurai (Silver Bullets); Hog Call (Cowstails and Cobras II); Lap Sit (The New Games Book).

Stunts

Activities that create a fun and safe environment in which members of the group are mentally or physically challenged on an individual or group basis with the purpose to keep one’s involvement and curiosity high during breaks or waiting periods. Examples: Magic (Quicksilver); The Bends (Quicksilver); Dollar Drop (Quicksilver).

Curriculum Application

Let’s see now how icebreakers, de-inhibitizers, and stunts can be applied in your program. Using Icebreakers: When a group meets for the first time there is often some social uneasiness or discomfort. Members of a
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A newly formed group know very little about each other. The only information they have comes from the physical attributes and body language clues that everyone display in the first few minutes of group formation. Icebreaker activities are obviously designed to help break that social tension. Using De-inhibitizers: Most members of a newly formed group have a tendency to take little or no social risk. Attracting the attention of everyone is often the last thing we want to do. Deinhibitizer activities are specially designed to encourage members of the group to take some moderate social risk by becoming the focus of the group’s attention for a brief period of time. Using Stunts: Members of newly formed groups are often comfortable with each other when a leader is purposefully giving them directions, but as soon as the group is left alone with nothing to do, people often revert to their social self-consciousness and the strange feeling of social uneasiness seeps back among the group members. These undesirable but sometime necessary intermissions in your lesson can be used to keep the group engaged and stimulated without focusing on specific program outcomes. For example, when a group is waiting for someone to come back from a break or a bathroom run you can use filler activities known as stunts to keep the group from returning to a state of social inhibition.


Trust and communication activities are often referred to as group formation tools. These activities focuses on the specific skills required for working efficiently as a group. If your ultimate goal is to work on group behaviour development then trust and communication activities are the next logical step after group formation activities (i.e., icebreakers and de-inhibitizers).

Trust Activities

Trust activities are often the most misunderstood and misused component of an adventure-based curriculum. Activities like the “Willow in the Wind” (More New Games), “One on One Trust Fall” or “Trust Fall from Height” (Silver Bullets) are obviously focusing on physical trust. A form of trust that is not necessarily useful in a group context but that can be a departure to address the importance of social and emotional trust which are essential to the development of any healthy group. Trust activities are just a metaphor to underline the importance of being socially trustworthy, the importance to earn trust and conserve trust by behaving appropriately, and finally, by addressing the importance of learning to trust others.

Despite misconceptions around the use of trust activities, physical trust activities are often a cornerstone to challenge course curriculum because the nature of challenge course activities requires participants to trust each other with their physical well being. For instance, most low challenge course activities and all high challenge course activities using a dynamic belay require the participant to entrust their physical safety to a peer, the group, or the facilitator.

Communication Activities

Communication activities are also essential tools for any group social development. Communication activities are often group initiatives that emphasizes the need for effective communication among group members. Effective communication should not be limited to just effective listening which is the common issue among members of a newly formed group but should also address the fact that small group communication is a transactional process.
involving simultaneous transmission and reception of information from all members of the group including verbal and/or non-verbal cues (body language, proxemics, facial expression, tone of voice etc.) Examples of communication activities are: Trolley (Cowstails and Cobras II), Say What (Silver Bullets), Blindfold Polygon (Cowstails and Cobras II).


To facilitate the formation of the group you are working with you may want to consider using few essential group process tools. These tools – “Full Value Contract,” “Challenge by Choice” and “Goal Setting” – are commonly used in adventure-based curriculum and are often stated as fundamental to the philosophy behind challenge course programs. Learn to use and adapt them to your program needs and they will help you with the crucial “forming phase” of all your groups.

Full Value Contract[1]

A “Full Value Contract” is a group process tool that can help you establish a healthy set of explicit norms during the forming stage of any small group. A service mark from Project Adventure, Inc. the “Full Value Contract” is often introduced early on in an adventure-based curriculum and can take many forms. The initial “Full Value Contract” published by Project Adventure, Inc. in 1989 included the following:

- The agreement to work together as a group and to work toward individual and group goals.
- The agreement to adhere to certain safety and group behaviour guidelines.
- The agreement to give and receive feedback, both positive and negative, and work toward changing behaviour when it is appropriate.

(Rohnke, K. 1989, p.11)

Today, “Full Value Contract” can be pre established by you and include any behavioural norms you see fit to require of your students. Examples of behaviours that could be included in a “Full Value Contract” are: support each other, use proper language, participate fully, be safe, be punctual, and try new things just to name a few. You can also use a metaphor to help your students remember items in your “Full Value Contract” contract like the “five fingers contract” does. When using the “five finger contract” metaphor, you simply explain that like five fingers attached to one hand; five important behaviours should be associated with this group. Each finger, social or physical characteristics, becomes a metaphor for an expected behaviour. For instance, the pinkie finger because of its fragility should remind us to be safe for self and others. The left hand ring finger is used in our society to indicate commitment and therefore should reminds us of our full commitment to the group - experience hence requiring participation to all activities. The middle finger is often used in our society to express anger or to offend others, this finger will obviously reminds us that offending or disrespecting others will not be acceptable in this group. The index finger is often used to point at objects or people, this action will remind us that we should not blame others for our own actions and that each of us should be responsible or accountable for our behaviours. Finally, the thumb is often used in our society to indicate that all is okay, or to approve of someone’s action, hence the thumb will reminds us to openly support and encourage each other during our activities.

Five fingers, five explicit behaviours and a fun and easy way to remember them.

Group members can also help create explicit group norms. Which is a strategy that will actually empower the group. If they are mature enough to discuss this issue, ask them what behaviours they would like to see within the group? You can even ask them to write down them these behaviours on a large piece of paper and ask all of them to sign...
it, just like contracts are signed by agreeing parties.

In the end, remember that it is important to openly address the issue of accepted behaviours – norms – in a small group, so use a “Full Value Contract” to facilitate the process by explicitly identifying these desired behaviours. In addition, remember to address any digression from the “Full Value Contract.” Tell your students that you expect them to call each other on their own behaviour. The “Full Value Contract” belongs to all members and should not be left to you to enforce. Ask the group from time to time how they are individually respecting the “Full Value Contract?”

**Challenge by Choice**[2]

“Challenge by Choice” is another popular service mark tool from Project Adventure, Inc. While the “Full Value Contract” helps create a healthier group, “Challenge by Choice” is used to create healthier individuals. Introduced as a counter movement to the classic Physical Education philosophy “everyone must do it.” This concept tool allows you to refocus your curriculum on the student’s experience instead of the activity.

By agreeing that each student can ultimately choose his or her own level of participation in any adventure-based activities you are teaching your students to be responsible for their own life. This concept is presented early on in the program but not in the initial introduction. Play first; let them experience some icebreakers first before introducing this concept. If you introduce this concept at the beginning they might use it as a way to boycott your adventure-based program by claiming that they do not want to participate. In addition, make sure that your students understand that “Challenge by Choice” does not mean that they can chose to not participate at all. It is difficult to imagine giving this level of decision making to a student when state laws requires that they attend school, or that they are required to succeed to a certain level of competency in order to move on to the next grade. What “Challenge by Choice” really means is more like giving the student the right to choose the challenge of their choice, but they must still be involved and challenged in some ways. Laurie Frank (2001) explained well that by introducing and promoting the concept of “Challenge by Choice” the student might be allowed to chose to sit back during a particular activity but that he or she is required to carefully observe what is going on with the group. Sitting out and reading a book will not respect the concept of “Challenge by Choice.” To borrow the words of Mary Henton (1996) “Challenge by Choice is not whether or not I choose to be challenged, but what kind of challenge I will take on!” (p.63).

The application of “Challenge by Choice” in your program might look like this: During a classic trust activity such as “Willow in the Wind” (More New Games) a student might chose not to stand in the middle and play the role of the willow, which requires the student to take a high social risk, but that same student will then be encouraged by the teacher to help with the spotting required for this activity. If the student chose not to be involved in the spotting, than the teacher would ask the student how he or she would you like to be involved? As you see, the focus is on finding a level of participation, of involvement that is conformable for the student. It does not allow the student to be on or off the activity as they wish.

**Goal Setting**
“Goal Setting” is the third important group process tool used in challenge course curriculum. Laurie Frank (2001) stated, “goal setting offers students the opportunity to define who they are and where they are headed” (p. 25). It is a powerful unification tool that helps foster group cohesion and provide group identity.

At first, it could be difficult for a newly formed group to develop appropriate goals, so start with small, challenging but attainable goals such as how many hits will the group makes while playing “Moon Ball” (Cowstails and Cobras II). Later on, when the group has learned to establish appropriate goals as a group the new skill could apply to other class or school projects.

“Goal Setting” can also be applied to individuals when they are faced with personal challenges on the low or the high challenge courses. Here again it is important to allow the student to choose his or her goal for an activity and to assess the result of his or her performance. Assessing the performance will allow the student to reflect on the appropriateness of the goal he or she has set. A too easily achieved goal should be reconsidered for a more challenging one, while a too difficult goal should be readjusted to a more attainable goal. The art of setting challenging but attainable goals is a desirable life long skill for anyone of your students.

7. Sequencing Activities.

Dr. Tom Smith once said, “We must remember that the most important thing is sequencing. Then, we must remember that there is no sequence.” Smith was actually referring to adventure-based curricula and more precisely to challenge course programs. What Smith so eloquently said can be summarized in two important premises? First, sequencing is one of the most important programming factors in adventure-based learning. Second, sequencing cannot be reduced to one ultimate or universal sequence.

From this assessment, it appears that a balance between a flexible sequence and an overall direction is needed. Arguing for some flexibility has merit because, evidently, each adventure-learning group is composed of people with different personalities and is submitted to a particular set of group dynamics. It is therefore reasonable to tend toward keeping the sequence of activities as flexible as possible so as to adjust the type and order of these activities to the unique needs of each group.

On the other hand, some common progression is warranted since most newly formed groups will experience a series of behavioural phases that are predictable and common to the social maturity of any group.

Microsequence and Macrosequence

Adventure programming can be composed of two distinct types of sequences (Bisson, 1997), each operating at a different level in a planning continuum. At one end of the continuum one would find a level of “flexible planning” that relates to the “microsequence.” The other end of the continuum would contain a level of “fixed planning” relating to the “macrosequence.” (See Figure 1).
Figure 1 - The Planning Continuum.

In other words, the “microsequence” would refer to the adventure activity per se (e.g., Toss A Name Game (Silver Bullets); It Ain’t Me Babe (Quicksilver); Hospital Tag, etc.). This sequence would be flexible in nature and could be modified at any time by the adventure educator in response to the needs of a particular group. This can be a minute-to-minute adjustment. This is where as an instructor you have to think on your feet and readjust your lesson plan according the responses of your group. A lethargic group might need an active game like a tag game while a hyperactive group might need a more quiet mental game like “Passing Crossed or Uncrossed” (Silver Bullets).

The “macrosequence” would represent the phases the group experiences throughout its development. These phases were introduced earlier in this chapter as: (a) forming, (b) storming, (c) norming, (d) performing, and (e) adjourning. These phases, representing the “macrosequence” itself, would imply that some categories of adventure activities should be integrated and introduced in a specific order according to the social development of the group. In other words, the “macrosequence” would include a fixed plan of categories of adventure activities that would operate as catalysts for the social maturation of a group. Therefore, icebreaker and de-inhibitizer activities are logically introduced first to help the social formation of the group.

When to Move on?

This is the Holy Grail of adventure-based curriculum. This is where you as the facilitator must blend the science of programming with the art, instinct, and gut feelings in order to determine your next step. Here are a few important concepts to remember:

- It is not necessary to move forward in your list of activities. It is quite possible that a group will need to go back to an earlier activity or type of activity to revisit some important values or concepts. So feel free to start with a name game, then, after playing a series of fun ice breakers and de-inhibitizers return to another name game to test the group memory.
- When to move on is also important during an activity. The best activity will eventually become boring or “passé” if you let it go on for too long. Like gambling, quit while you are ahead. Stop or move on to another activity when the group is responding well to the game, they will look at you with that look at says “we want more” and this is exactly what you want to create.
- Move on immediately if you see or feel that an activity or a game is not catching on. The group might not be ready or the activity might not be the right one. In either case move a long and don’t look back.

For a more exhaustive resource on “When to Move On” tips, we would strongly recommend reviewing the recent work of Laurie Frank – The Caring Classroom – in which she carefully lists a series of observations that will help you determine when it is appropriate to move on from Group Formation activities to Group Process tools and so on.
8. Lesson Plan Samples.

In the following section we would like to share with you few examples of lesson plans for the various activities you could use during the group formation phase. Notice that we emphasize not only the activities description but we also indicate variations on these activities as well as examples of similar activities and their sources. We also give you few examples of possible questions during a processing session. The activities described below are great example of group formation activities (i.e., icebreakers and de-inhibitizers); group formation tools (i.e., trust and communication activities) and group process tools (i.e., “Full Value Contract,” “Challenge by Choice,” and “Goal Setting”).

Lesson Plan Sample – Icebreakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit:</th>
<th>Adventure Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stages:</td>
<td>Group Formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level:</td>
<td>Kdg.-Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>2-5 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting:</td>
<td>Indoor or outdoor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Name:</td>
<td>Toss a Name Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards:</td>
<td>See state guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>To help students learn names in a newly formed group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives:</td>
<td>Students will learn each other’s names and use them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment:</td>
<td>2-3 tennis balls or soft throwable objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety:</td>
<td>Clearly call a students name before lofting a ball in their direction, toss balls gently in arcs-no fastballs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity Description and Procedure:
1. Break into groups of 8:10, all standing in a circle.
2. The leader introduces the game by saying their name and tossing the ball gently to the person on their right or left.
3. Participants continue by saying their own name and tossing the ball to the next person until the ball returns to the leader.
4. The leader now calls out someone's name in the he circle and tosses the ball to them and that person catches the ball, calls another name and lofts the ball to that person.
5. This continues for a few minutes, as people begin to learn names, than another ball is introduced by the leader, increasing the action and the fun.

Activity Variations:
1. Introduce more balls in order to achieve total chaos and maximum fun.
2. If there are other groups playing, ask half of each group to transfer to another circle and begin again.
3. Allow individuals to change groups at will after hearing their name.

Similar Activities: Memory Circle (The Caring Classroom).

Processing and Closure:
• Why is it important to learn and use the names of people in your class?
• How do you feel when people call you by name?
• Now that you have learned names of students in this group, how has your feeling about the group changed?

Suggested Readings:
• 100 Ways to Enhance Self-concept in the Classroom; a Handbook for Teachers and Parents. (1976), Jack Canfield & Harold C. Wells, Prentice Hall, Inc.
• The Caring Classroom. (2001), Laurie S. Frank, Project Adventure, Inc.

Lesson Plan Sample – De-inhibitizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit:</th>
<th>Adventure Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Group Formation</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting:</td>
<td>Indoor or outdoor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Name:</td>
<td>The Lap Game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards:</td>
<td>See state guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>Help students feel comfortable with their own body, being in close proximity with other and being able to take some social risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students to learn to try new things and laugh together.</td>
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Teaching Ice Breakers: Developing Challenge Course Program for School Page

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to work together as a team to create a successful lap sit.

Equipment: None

Safety: Make sure the area being used has been cleared of obstacles, such as desks and chairs indoor and rocks and other obstacles in an outdoor setting.

Activity Description and Procedures:
1. Have students stand in a circle, shoulder-to-shoulder
2. Everyone takes a quarter turn to the right and places their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them.
3. Take tiny sideways steps into the middle of the circle until your toes touch the heels of the person in front of you.
4. Using a three count- slowly lower yourself onto the knees of the person behind you.
5. When all are comfortably settled in-remove hands from shoulders.

Activity Variations:
1. Before removing hands from shoulders, give each other a backrub.
2. Try creating a caterpillar merry-go-round by taking minute steps backwards in unison

Similar Activities: Aura, Hug Tag (The Cooperative Sports and Games Book).

Processing and Closure
- What difficulties did you encounter in trying to accomplish this activity?
- What actions helped your group accomplish this task?
- Describe how you felt sitting on someone's lap and having someone sit on your lap.
- What kinds of touching are acceptable?
- What are some guidelines for touching that might make everyone feel safe?

Suggested Readings:
- The Caring Classroom, (2001), Laurie S. Frank. Project Adventure, Inc.

Lesson Plan Sample – Trust

Unit: Adventure Education
Stage: Group Formation
Level: 3rd Grade  Time: 5-10min.  Setting: Indoor or outdoor
Activity Name: Willows in the Wind.  Standards: See state guidelines

Purpose: To introduce the concept of trust and the requisite abilities to show trust to the group.

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to initiate the appropriate communication sequence.

Equipment: None

Safety: Introduce proper spotting techniques and communication sequences. The willow needs to maintain a very rigid body posture; the faller’s head, neck, and shoulders should never be allowed to touch the floor.

Activity Description:
1. Have students get into groups of 8-10 in an area that is well cleared of obstacles.
2. A volunteer stands in the he middle and assumes a "falling position"
3. Standing with feet together
4. Arms crossed over the chest
5. Holds body stiff as a board squeezing the buttocks together helps keep the body from bending.
6. Students standing in a tight circle-shoulder-to-shoulder around the faller will assume the spotting position.
7. Keep the circle tight
8. One foot is placed in towards the center of the circle; the other slightly back and the knees are bent to provide a stable base.
9. Hands are held out in front of the body at shoulder height with the fingers up.
10. Have everyone practice the communication sequence between fallers and spotters
11. Faller: "I'm going for it!"
12. Spotters: "We're here for you (name)".
13. Faller: "Falling"
14. Spotters: "Fall, (name)".
15. Now the faller can lean backwards onto the hands of the spotters who will then gently pass the faller onto the next part of the circle.
16. Spotters should have at least three hands on the faller at all times, fingers should always be up and everyone should get a chance to be the willow.

Activity Variations:
**Similar Activities:** Trust Lean (*The Caring Classroom*); Circle of Friends (*The Cooperative Sports and Games Book*).

**Processing and Closure:**
- How does it feel to be surrounded by so many caring friends?
- How could you tell that the circle was caring for your safety?

**Suggested Readings:**
- *The Caring Classroom.* (2001), Laurie S. Frank, Project Adventure, Inc.
- *100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom; a Handbook for Teachers and Parents.* (1976), Jack Canfield and Harold Wells, Prentice Hall, Inc.

**Lesson Plan Sample – Communication**

**Unit:** Adventure Education  
**Stage:** Group formation  
**Level:** 3rd Grade  
**Time:** 30-45 min.  
**Setting:** Indoors or outdoors  
**Activity Name:** Trolleys.  
**Standards:** See state guidelines  
**Source:** *Cowstails and Cobras.* (1977), p. 82, Karl Rohnke, Project Adventure, Inc.  
**Purpose:** To promote group communication  

**Learning Objectives:** Students will be able to communicate effectively in order to solve a common task. Students will practice working together to achieve a common goal. Students will learn to recognize and effectively deal with various forms of frustration.

**Equipment:** Two 14’ 4X4’s with rope handles spread every 12”.

**Safety:** Students should alert their peers if they are falling so as to not knock others off. Caution students about bumping their first and last person off and that a 4X4 with the groups combined weight would not a comfortable on top of a misplaced foot.

**Activity Description and Procedure:**
1. Ask the group to use the materials provided as their “trolley” to, as efficiently as possible, move their group across a contaminated zone without touching the contamination with any part of their body or clothing.
2. Trolley materials are placed on the ground outside of the zone.

**Activity Variations:**
1. Rather than just crossing a toxic pool, groups can be requested to negotiate a course, say around some cones, between barrels and back to the starting point.

**Similar Activities:** Turn Over a New Leaf (*The Caring Classroom*).

**Processing and Closure:**
- How did you decide who would be where on the board and who would give commands?  
- Describe your decision-making and communication process.  
- Was this easier or harder than you thought? Why?

**Suggested Readings:**
- *Cowstails and Cobras.* (1977), Karl Rohnke, Project Adventure, Inc.

**Lesson Plan Sample – Full Value Contract**

**Unit:** Adventure-based Education  
**Stage:** Group Formation  
**Level:** 4th Grade  
**Time:** 20 min.  
**Setting:** Indoor  
**Activity Name:** The Being  
**Standards:** See state guidelines  
**Source:** *The Caring Classroom* (2001), pp. 66-67, Laurie S. Frank. Project Adventures, Inc.  
**Purpose:** To help students develop their own “Full Value Contract.”

**Learning Objectives:** Students will be able to create various norms desired by each member of the group. Students will be able to identify the various norms created and accepted by the group.

**Equipment:** Butcher paper, markers and masking tapes.

**Safety:** Make sure that the person being trace on the paper volunteered and that the students tracing the silhouette of the “Being” are respectful of the volunteer.

**Activity Description and Procedure:**
2. Divide the class into sub-groups of 4-6.
3. Give each group a long piece of butcher paper and various markers.
4. Have each group trace the body of one person in their group.
5. On the inside of the body outline, ask them to draw or write behaviours that are safe and respectful of self, others and the class.
6. On the inside of the body outline, ask them to draw or write behaviours that damage people’s sense of respect and safety.
7. Post the “Beings” and have each group present and explain theirs to the class.
8. Discuss if these “Beings” would be good reminders of how we should behave with each other in this group? Compare how much behaviour inside or outside the “Beings” are similar among the sub-groups.
9. Invite all students to sign all the “Beings” to confirm their commitment to these accepted behaviours.
10. Refer to the “Beings from time to time or when needed.

Activity Variations:
1. If the group is small (i.e., 6 to 12) have everyone work on creating one “Being.”
2. If appropriate have each member of the group create a “Being” of their own to reveal more about each members of the group. This could work well with a pre-existing group.

Similar Activities: Creative Heraldry (Quicksilver).

Processing and Closure:
- Are these “Beings” representing all of us?
- What behaviours inside or outside are similar to between each the “Beings?”
- How can this group use the inside behaviours, while working to diminish the outside behaviours?
- How might these “Beings” help remind us about making this a safe and respectful group?
- When these are issues that occur from outside of our “Beings,” how should we handle it?

Suggested Readings:
- Adventure In The Classroom, (1996), Mary Henton. Project Adventure, Inc.

Lesson Plan Sample – Challenge by Choice

Unit: Adventure Education
Stage: Group Formation
Level: 5th Grade Time: 10 min. Setting: Indoor or outdoor
Activity Name: Neighbours Standards: See state guidelines
Purpose: To develop a better understanding of Challenge by Choice, to take some social risk.
Learning Objectives: Students will be able to explain what “Challenge by Choice” really mean. Students will be able to explain why being challenge can be fun and promote learning.
Equipment: Place markers for all excepting one (poly dots, scrap paper, bandana, etc.)
Safety: Emphasize the need to walk when moving, no running or shoving allow.

Activity Description and Procedure:
1. Find or create an open space to allow the group to stand in a circle elbow to elbow. You stand in the centre of the circle.
2. Distribute the place markers to all students and ask them to place the markers at their feet.
3. Explain that the person in the middle will ask a question that is true to him or her. For example: “Have you ever been in Canada?” – Which is true for me so I can ask that question, but I could not ask, “Have you ever been in Mexico?” since it is not true for me).
4. Once the question is asked, everyone in the circle that can answer, “yes” to that question must step forward and look for another empty place in the circle except their own or any empty place adjacent to their place.
5. Meanwhile, the person in the middle also look for an empty place and take it which will leave another person without an empty designated place (i.e., place markers) to stand in the circle. That person hence takes the centre and asks a new question that is true to her or him.
6. Play the game until the majority of the students have been in the centre of the circle.

Activity Variations:
1. Ask your students to pair up and play the game in pairs, the pair in the middle must ask a question that is true to both of them and only the pairs sharing the same marked place can move if both of them can answer “yes” to the question.
2. Allow people that answer no to the question to move directly right or left of their marked place.
3. If the group is mature enough, play the game using chairs to make the place around the circle.

Similar Activities: Move Right (Games for Group, Book 1).
Teaching Ice Breakers: Developing Challenge Course Program for School

Processing and Closure:
- Would it be possible for some of us to not move even if we answer "yes" to the question?
- Did some of us not move when the question was too personal?
- Is it appropriate to keep personal information to oneself?
- Is it appropriate to keep all information to oneself?
- What happens when we share information to each other? What risk could exist when sharing personal information to each other?
- How this game relates to the concept of "Challenge by Choice?" What does "Challenge by Choice" mean to you?


Lesson Plan Sample – Goal Settings

Unit: Adventure Education
Stage: Group Formation
Level: 6th Grade
Time: 15 min.
Setting: Outdoor
Activity Name: Moon Ball

Purpose: To learn to establish challenging and attainable goals for the group. To create group connections and group commitment toward a specific goal.

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to interact and reach a consensus about a specific goal. Students will be able to work toward a specific goal and make group decisions on how to reach that goal.

Equipment: Large beach ball with a surface of the moon print if possible.
Safety: Make sure that the playing area is free of obstacles (i.e., trees, boulders, sidewalk curbs) and large enough for the group size and activity.

Activity Description and Procedure:
1. Ask the group to gather around you and tell them that you would need their help keeping this "moon" in the sky. Tell them that they can hit the ball with any parts of their body. Ask the group to determine how many hits they think that they can do as a group before the ball touch the ground? Let the group discuss and then when an agreement seems to prevail, throw the ball again and count the number of hits before the ball return to touching the ground.
2. Now ask the group to reconsider their goal and to make the decision only when they think that they have reached a consensus. Throw the ball up and start counting.
3. Repeat the previous goal setting process and emphasize the fact that they can either modify their goal or their strategies to reach their goal. Also emphasize the need for the group to assure that they are a consensus among them before starting again.
4. Repeat the experience until the group has met their goal and feel satisfy with their performance.

Activity Variations:
1. The same activity can be done indoor using balloons. Usually, a number of balloons corresponding to half of the group size will create enough challenge.
2. Increase the challenge by imposing the rule that one cannot hit the ball twice in a row.
3. Increase the challenge and the participation by imposing the rule that everyone in the group must hit the at least once for the attempt to be valid.

Similar Activities: Quail Shooter's Delight (Silver Bullets).

Processing and Closure:
- Did you reach your original goal? If not, why? What did you do to readjust your initial goal?
- Was your final goal challenging enough? What would happen if the goal were too easy?
- Did you have consensus among your group? How did you know that you had consensus? Why is it important to have consensus in a group challenge?

Suggested Readings:
- The Caring Classroom. (2001), Laurie S. Frank. Project Adventures, Inc.


While it is early in the game to apply extensive assessment questionnaires or ask probing questions, it is
an appropriate time to make critical mid-course corrections in order to make the best use of your time with participants.

The following question sets will help determine possible corrections in your selection and execution of activities or reaffirm your game plan. They may also help you to understand how the participants are coming together as a group.

I - How was my performance as a facilitator?

- Was I prepared? Did I have all of the necessary props? Did I practice?
- Was my energy level appropriate, genuine, and contagious?
- Was the group at ease with the situation?
- Did I provide adequate levels of support, direction, and feedback?
- Did I model appropriate behaviour?
- Was I coaching or leading, solving or enhancing other’s abilities to solve?
- Was I having fun? Did I employ appropriate humour?
- When beginning to turn over the reigns of control for group learning to the participants do I still have an appropriate level of control? Was I able to enforce the rule?
- Was I willing to do what I asked the group to do? Did I model foolishness or silly behaviour?
- Can I laugh at myself?

II - Did the activities accomplish what they were supposed to?

- Was there enough activity to handle the group energy?
- Were people having fun?
- Were participants talking, being energized and sharing with others?
- Was everyone involved?
- Did the activities create opportunities for learning and challenges for personal and group growth?

III - How did the group perform or when was the group performance at its best?

- Did everyone get a chance to meet everyone else?
- Was the group showing signs of: trusting, cooperating, communicating, being responsible for safety, supporting and encouraging its members?
- Were they having fun?
- Is the group recognizing its own strengths, variety of skills?
- Were group members willing to take risks?
- Was the group attentive to safety issues?

IV - Was the group honouring its “Full Value Contract” or obligation to each other and responsible treatment of materials?

- Is the group adhering to all components of the contract?
- Is the group asking questions, seeking clarification, and expressing support for one another?
- Am I, as the facilitator, still intervening on behalf of group actions?

V - What changes need to be made/noted on the lesson plan?

- Was there enough time?
- Do I need more energizers?
- Does the activity work on the prescribed goals, objectives and standards?
- What props/language worked well?
- Do any processing questions need to be added?
- What new activities might enhance this lesson?
- Are facilities adequate for the activities?

Processing Ice Breakers and De-inhibitizers

While to some this step seems excessive, a few questions at this stage helps frame the task or remind participants of the agreed upon goal and their roles in achieving that goal. It can also point out-group behaviours that might help or
hinder in future situations. At this early stage, if we can help groups recognize appropriate patterns, learning and development of group skills can be enhanced.

10. Lesson Check Sheet.

Before starting your group formation activities, group formation tools or group process tools, make sure you are prepared for what you are intending to do. Use this lesson check sheet to help you organized your instruction.

Adventure Based Activity Check Sheet for Group Formation Activities, Group Formation Tools and Group Process Tools

Review the following list of questions to assist your adventure-based activity planning prior to presenting your lesson.

Group Needs:
Is the group? ___ newly formed  ___ pre-existing

If the group is pre-existing, what phase of formation do you think the group is presently experiencing?

___ Forming
___ Storming
___ Norming
___ Performing

Lesson:
Did I review all lesson plans for all intended activities?
___ Yes  ___ No

Did I plan a logical sequence of my activities?
___ Yes  ___ No

Did I plan for more activities (i.e., backup activities) than the time allotted?
___ Yes  ___ No

Did I plan enough time for processing some activities?
___ Yes  ___ No

Did I review the learning objectives for these lessons?
___ Yes  ___ No

Logistics:
Do I have all the props needed for all planned activities and their variations?
___ Yes  ___ No

Can my props be funnier?
___ Yes  ___ No

If I plan to teach outdoors, can I do the same or alternative activities indoors?
___ Yes  ___ No

Safety:
Did I select a safe playing area outdoors or indoors?
___ Yes  ___ No

If going outdoors, do my students have the proper footwear and clothing?
___ Yes  ___ No

Did all my students have signed a release of liability form?
___ Yes  ___ No  ___NA

Have I notified the school administration that my class will be off school property?
___ Yes  ___ No  ___NA
Did I receive all parental consent forms?

____ Yes  ____ No  ____NA 

If the group has already participated in adventure-based activities with you, please consider reviewing the following information at the beginning of your new session.

**Program Review:**

What are the components of our “Full Value Contract?”

What does “Challenge by Choice” mean for this group?

What are the goals of this group?

Why do we need to process some activities?

**References**


**Suggested Readings**


[1] “Full Value Contract” is a registered service mark of Project Adventure, Inc. and may not be used without the written permission of Project Adventures, Inc.

[2] “Challenge by Choice” is a registered service mark of Project Adventure, Inc. and may not be used without the written permission of Project Adventures, Inc.