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Experiential Learning Activities...

Professionals in the Health and Physical Education field have often spoken of the importance of getting their students involved in the learning environment. A key part to operationalizing this is a being teacher who demonstrates a style of instruction that facilitates learning by creating and supporting a learning environment which promotes students feeling comfortable to participate. Another vital component is to have a “bank” of activities which tie into the goals and objectives of the class. With so many activities, it is first important to focus on what you want to accomplish. From there, the sky is the limit!

CHOOSING THE ACTIVITY

Activities conducted in a classroom should have a purpose. They should tie into the goals/objectives of the curriculum and should be used to complement in some way the informational component of a lesson. Experiential learning activities are pro-active and participatory in nature. All students should be encouraged to participate since experiential learning is pro-social and interactive by nature. (If they choose not to, an alternative activity may be assigned). All activities should be sequenced and build upon the previous experience.

THE HAND RULE...

This is the fundamental principals of experiential learning. All students (and teachers) should follow the five simple rules. (This can be demonstrated through raising one’s left hand, palm out, fingers spread.

1. Have fun.....(thumb)
2. Be safe.....(pointer)
3. No put downs.....(middle finger)
4. Be committed.....(ring finger)
5. Involve everyone...(little finger)

PROCESSING THE ACTIVITY...

Experiential Learning theory suggests that following an activity, facilitators should discuss what the participants saw, felt and experienced. This includes

- Observations (what happened...),
- Generalizations (so what does this have to do with...)
- Applications (now what...)

Learning to take something out of the experience (more than just the activity) is the key to experiential learning. As a teacher, the real skill here is the ability to plan an activity that actively engages the student or group, and then following the experience, encourages students to “reflect” and personalize the results into a life lesson.

Facilitation and Processing...(from Chris Cavert, author of Affordable Portables, A Working Book of Initiative Activities and Problem Solving Elements")

"...the wise leader does not push to make things happen, but allows process to unfold on its own. The leader teaches by example rather than by lecturing others on how they ought to be. The leader knows that constant interventions will block the group's process. The leader does not insist that things come out a certain way:" (John Heider)

This quote suggests that the leader, or facilitator, "guides" a group through a process - through the group's own discovery of new experiences. From these new experiences, participants can learn how to relate new skills, ideas, and behaviors to future life situations.

The true function of a facilitator is to help "people maintain ownership of the process and the outcomes". In this way, the group is responsible for their own success and failure; for their own esteem and learning.

So what is the process? Group processing "may be defined as reflecting on a group session to (1) describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful and (2) make decisions about what actions to continue or change."

Experiential educators deal with process constantly. This is what separates experiential education from recreational participation in activities.

Proper ground work is important for the **"Experience"**. First you will want to choose an activity that suits the objective of your session. It should be appropriate for the ability and age of the group, and fit within the limitations of your program facilities. Next, you will want to give clear instructions and safety guidelines, then provide ample time for questions before the activity starts. As the group begins, you (the facilitator) become the watchful observer, keeping the activity safe at all times.

"What?" happens is up to the group. Some facilitators choose to ask questions about what is happening during the activity. Other facilitators wait until the end to ask. Some facilitators ask during and after the activity. This choice is ultimately up to the style that is most comfortable for the facilitator.

"So What?" were you feeling or experiencing during the activity, is next, this is where skills, behaviors, emotions, and feedback are encouraged. Keeping the discussions safe for all individuals will increase the bonding potential of the group and develop the trust levels needed to take further risks.

To complete the cycle, **"Now What?"** are you going to do with any new information that you have obtained? This statement pushes learning into the next activity and with hope, into real life situations. Making the learning relevant to future activities and life situations is where behavior change starts.

Many novice facilitators find the hardest part of the experiential process is not giving out solutions to problems. As adults, it is easy to tell someone how to do something, especially if we have a solution, However, *more knowledge is gained by self discovery than lecture*. Let the group discover what is the treasure chest, you can provide the key with thoughtful questions!

Title: Silent Telephone...(author unknown)

Topic: Communication, Critical Thinking,

Level: All

Time: 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Materials: None

Procedures: *Ask for volunteers from the group (7 to 10) will do
*Have them line up in a straight line in the front or along the side of the classroom.
*Explain that you will be sending a message down the line of the students. However, this message will be in a non-verbal format. Participants will not be allowed to speak or use any props other than their own bodies. They will be asked to turn around and face the opposite direction away from the facilitator. The person in front of them will tap them on the shoulder and they are to turn toward the person sending the message. Each person's job is to receive the message from the person in front of them and to send the message on to the next person.
*Have the line up face away from the facilitator.
*Tap the first person in line on the shoulder and they should turn and face the facilitator.
*Act out the following 6 motions...
 1. Jumping Jacks
 2. Bowling
 3. Throwing a football
 4. Dealing cards
 5. Fingers in ears/stick out tongue
 6. Shake the person's hand
*Have person send this message (one at a time) down the line of volunteers
Follow-up discussion...
*Once completed, ask the non-participants, the peanut gallery, (to stop laughing) and have them describe what they saw happened.
* Ask the volunteer participants to describe how they felt
* Ask last person in line to demonstrate the message they received.
* Demonstrate the original message

Wrap up the activity by asking what can be done to promote clearer communication.

Title: **Reverse Pyramid** (author unknown)

Topic: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Communication

Level: High School and up

Time: 10 to 15 minutes

Materials: This can be done with 10 polypots or 10 people per group.

Procedures: Have group assemble in an open area in the shape of a pyramid. (This is not a stacking pyramid but rather a one dimensional shape assembled on the floor.) Have 4 people make up the base line, 3 the second, 2 the third and 1 the apex.

```
      X
     X X
    X X X
   X X X X
```

Instruct the group that they are to reverse the apex of the pyramid by making only three moves. Their final product should look like this...

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  X X X X
   X X X
    X X
     X
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At the conclusion of the activity, ask each participant what role they played in helping the group achieve their desired goal

Title: **THE CUBE** ...(Earl LaBlanc, Affordable Portables, p157)

Topic: Problem Solving, Cooperation

Level: Middle school and up

Time: 15 minutes or so

Materials: 12 – 1' wide, 30 to 40 inch long pvc pipes (all consistent length)
 8 – 3 way corner pieces

Procedures: Assemble your Cube. You can hang it, place it in a bucket or have two people hold it in place balanced on a corner joint.

The idea behind **The Cube** is similar to **The Web**. Each member of the group will go through the Cube entering one hole and exiting another without moving the structure. (or if you can hang a bell off of it – without ringing the bell). If the Cube is moved, the entrance/exit pattern is closed. Keep this in mind – there are 5 exits for every entrance. There are 6 entrances. This makes 30 patterns to choose from. If you want to limit the patterns, just designate a few sides as entrances.

Facilitation/Safety:

- *Review spotting and lifting procedures
- *Inspect surroundings for hazards
- *At no time should a participant's head be lower than their knees.
- *The Cube should be no higher than the tallest participant's shoulders.
- *Present problem, and answer questions before group begins.

Just as in **The Web**, take some time to discuss the importance of safety before starting the activity. Ask individuals to spot at all times, even if they are not touching the person. Direct them never to “just let go” of a participant because he/she moved the Cube. Do not allow participants to dive through the holes. Lifting activities are considered high risk to most participants and facilitators. Keep a watchful eye on all movements and stop all unsafe actions. When lifting, always provide extra spotting around the participant's head and the neck.

Consider providing paper and pencil to the group so they can keep track of combinations.

Observations/Questions

- *What were some of the issues we had to consider before we even started this activity?
- *What type of planning took place? Who was involved?
- *What reactions surfaced while being passed through the Cube?
- *How is/was the safety level? Did you feel safe?
- *How did support come about in the group?
- *Did anyone ask for anything from the group?
- *What were the levels of involvement from individuals?
- *Is/was everyone involved in the spotting? Why
- *What system was used to keep track of entrance/exit combinations?
- *What factors determined group order? Was gender or ability considered?
- *How does the group determine success?

Variations:

Make the Cube out of hula-hoops by taping the touching edges.

- Title:** Mine Field...(Karl Rohnke, Silver Bullets, p 24)
- Topic:** Communication Skills
- Level:** Middle school and up
- Time:** 20 minutes
- Materials:** A large space
100 foot rope
Various objects to put on floor (ie stuffed animals, pollyspots, pieces of paper, almost anything that takes up space)
- Procedure:** (Preliminary information) Give a mini lecture on communication. Explain that communication is the exchange of information (*message*) from a *sender* to a *receiver*. Good communication also allows for the receiver to offer *feedback* to the sender. Diagram this for the group if possible in a circle. Discuss types of communication and potential barriers to good communication.
- *Have group members assemble themselves by all picking up the rope, tying together the ends and making the largest square possible.
 - *Have everyone pair up with someone.
 - *Ask for a volunteer pair. Identify one person in the volunteer pair to be the sender; the other the receiver. Have the other members of the group stand on the outside of the square.
 - *The object of this activity is for the sender to tell the receiver how to walk through the square without stepping on any item placed on the floor. If they do step on something, they will be vaporized! The sender should work to keep the receiver from stepping on anything since they have given the receiver their paycheck and it is now cashed and in the receiver's back pocket. However, the receiver will not be able to see. (avoid using blindfolds since they often cause undue psychological stress). The receiver also will not be able to communicate in any way back to the sender. No verbal or non-verbal communication is allowed. Before the activity begins, the facilitator should spread objects throughout the square. The sender can not come into the square and can not touch the receiver.
 - *Once this is completed, discuss with the participants how they felt and what they had to do to be successful. Ask the other pairs to offer their observations.
 - *Reverse the roles of the two volunteers so the person who was sending is now receiving. Ask them to complete the task. This time, the facilitator is to walk around the receiver and offer verbal distractions; remembering to not touch the receiver.

*Once this is completed, again process this with the sender, receiver and the other participants. What did the facilitator represent? (distractions) How did the sender/receiver deal with the distractions?

*Eventually, have all other pairs (who have been standing around the square watching) participate in the same activity all at once! Be sure to stress that the senders should not come into the square. Each person should play the role of being both a sender and receiver.

*Discuss individual feelings and how they overcame the problem of not being able to clearly communicate.

Title: **Pro and Con Chairs**

Topic: Communication, Family Life, Pedagogy (teaching Role Playing)

Level: Middle School and up...

Time: Variable

Materials: Two chairs

Procedures: Since every issue has two sides to it, this exercise is a convenient way to engage students in a discussion. Place two chairs in front of the room. Instruct the class that the chair on the right represents the “PRO” side of an argument. The chair on the left represents the “CON” side of the same argument. Let the class know that they are all invited to speak on an issue. They are to say one thing good (in support of) the issue, and one thing bad (in opposition to) the issue.

Examples... An advantage of being male,
 An advantage of being female,
 The parking situation at school,
 The legal drinking age,

The list can go on. The facilitator should assemble a series of statements pertaining to the unit they are addressing and have students one at a time, come up to the chairs and speak their mind. (Remember the hand rule!) All students must speak on each side of the issue. You can call on students, have them come up by rows, or let it be a free for all.

Ask students to come up with their own questions.

The clever teacher will pose questions that are tied into the discussion topics of the class.

Title: **What is Essential?** (R. Kaplan, etal, Group Strategies in Understanding Human Sexuality, Getting in Touch, p.109)

Topic: Family Life

Level: Middle school and up

Time: Varied

Materials: Paper and pen for each participant, Chalk Board or poster paper

Procedure: This is an effective discussion starter. Ask students to write down an individual list of 5 things they feel are essential for the success of a relationship. Make sure they have them written down. Once this has been completed, divide your large group into small groups of 3 to 5 students. Instruct each group that they are to come up with their own group list of what they feel is essential for the success of a relationship.

Once this is completed, have each group write their list on the board or on a poster paper and place it on the wall of the room.

Give each group the opportunity to discuss their list. Allow the rest of the members in the class the opportunity to ask the presenting group why they included the information they did.

Can you come up with one class list of 5? This usually leads to an interesting discussion of values...

Title: **The Pie of Life** (S. Simon, etal, Values Clarification, 178)

Topic: Time Management

You are being asked to account for how you actually spend your time.

Ultimately you will be making 7 Pie charts each representing 24 hours and writing a reaction paper.

Each pie chart will represent 24 hours.

Starting with yesterday, thinking back to 12:01 am., write down what you were doing. Keep adding to this to reflect the entire day.

Example: 12:01 to 6:00 am Sleep
 6:00 to 6:30 Wash and get ready
 6:30 to 7:15 Cook, eat, clean up
 7:15 to 8:00 Drive to work/school
 8:00 to 12:00pm Work/school
 Etc ...to account for the entire 24 hr day.

(Do not use segments any smaller than half hour time limits.)

Once this is completed, do this for 7 days in a row. Note it is important not to plan the days but to write out what they actually did. Beside the pie charts, list the total activities and time spent on each.

Once this is completed, convert your lists to Pie charts using WORD or any other software.

(In word, go to Insert, click on Chart, pull up Pie, click on Pie and load data. Label the Pie charts with the activities and time you spent doing each.)

Once this is completed, write a reaction paper answering the following questions:

What are the goals they have for the next 5 years?

What priorities do you have for the next 5 years?

Do your goals and priorities conflict?

(Example: Want to get into Med school but want to party a lot.)

What are you doing now to meet your goals?

What can they do to improve?

Write a summary paragraph explaining what they realized from this activity.

Stress Balloon Activity

Grades: Middle School to Adults

Materials: Large Balloons (Preferably Red) – Enough to distribute to each participant
(Caution-If using latex balloons, ask participants if they have any known allergies to latex and if so, exclude them from this activity)

- Distribute a balloon to each participant.

- Discuss that when we are exposed to a stressor (something that makes us react physically or mentally), we often store these reactions in our minds and bodies.

- Ask student what causes them to experience stress and when they mention the source, blow some air into the balloon.

- After three different source of stress have been blown into the balloon, ask a student to point to the specific stress in the balloon. They will quickly see that the three sources of stress have all blended together. (Discuss how when one experiences one stressor in their life, that it effects other dimensions of their life.)

- Continue to brainstorm with the class the sources of stress they experience and for each source, put air into the balloon. This will cause the balloon to greatly expand.

- When the balloon has expanded to near its limit, purposely pop the balloon. (You may want to warn the students of this prior to popping the balloon)

- Now attempt to blow air into the popped balloon. This obviously won't work.

- Discuss with students that humans don't break like the balloon did but when they experience too much stress; they do become dysfunctional like the popped balloon.

- Discuss that some stress can give a positive shape to the balloon while too much can cause problems.

- Discuss positive ways to release the stress in our lives (Demonstrate this by blowing up the balloon and releasing some of the air in it.)

Option: Assign a reflection assignment and ask students to explain what stress them out and how they have learned to cope with it.

