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Getting Them out of Their Seats— Active Ways to Start Conversations and Process, Review and Reflect

Jen Stanchfield, MS

Two weeks ago I submitted the post “Bringing Learning to Life Through Reflection” which explored the use of metaphor in reflection. I mentioned that by using a variety of reflective methods—ranging from group dialogue, active reflection methods, artwork and the use of tangible objects, images, or metaphor—we can help participants view reflection as an exciting and dynamic part of group experience instead of “that boring thing you do after the engaging experiential activity.”

A great way to engage participants in reflective conversation and meet the various learning styles of participants is to invite participants to leave their seats and blend dialogue with movement. Recent brain research makes a strong case for using active experiential methods in therapy education and training. Eric Jensen (1998), author of *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, shares research that validates the use of movement and community building activities as integral tools for brain development, and for helping cement lessons. Physical involvement in learning life lessons creates “body memory.” If learners reflect on a lesson about leadership, communication, or physics in an active way, evidence shows that they might retain this type of learning longer and integrate it better into their life and future learning.

I was already getting participants out of their seats by beginning programs with my favorite icebreaking activities. Then I realized that these activities that work so well at the beginning of a program to initiate dialogue and create connections between group members, make for excellent reflective activities! Think about the active and interactive icebreaker activities you choose to start of a group. Could they be used later to engage participants in reflection?

Some of my favorite ice-breaking activities are also my favorite ways to actively engage groups in processing sessions, or students in reviewing curricular content in the classroom setting. “Concentric Circles” is the perfect example. Years ago my friend and colleague Paul Hutchinson shared Concentric Circles as an icebreaker. It is active, fun, and a fairly non-intimidating start up because each person is asked to converse with partners instead of the whole group. After using it as a warm-up, I realized it could also be a reflective, review, or closing activity (Cain, Cummings, & Stanchfield, 2005, page 76).

Concentric Circles

Facilitation Suggestions:

- Divide the group in half, and have them form two circles with the participants facing each other in an inner circle and an outer circle.
- Ask participants to greet each other by name and have them participate in a cooperative activity together such as “finger fencing,” “gotcha,” or “one-handed shoe tying” (see Karl Rohnke’s and Steve Butler’s Quicksilver Book, or Rohnke’s Fun & Games for creative partner activities).
- After completing the activity, ask participants to share their answers to a “get to know you” question asked by the facilitator (e.g., What is the most unusual food you have ever eaten? What was your favorite vacation? What do you want to get out of today’s program?).
- After a few moments of conversation, invite the inner circle to form new partners by moving four spaces to the left, greeting the other participants they pass. Ask the new partners to greet each other, provide another cooperative activity, and another question to discuss.
- The activity continues with alternating movement between the inside and outside circle, followed by activities and questions.

“Have You Ever...”

Another well-used and appreciated icebreaking activity that I enjoy using is “Have You Ever” (Rohnke & Butler, 1995). This activity establishes commonalities within the group.

- Have your group form a circle, facing the center.
- One participant stands in the center of the circle (or on a specially designated spot within the circle) and asks a “have you ever” question. For example, the person may ask, “Have you ever flown a kite?”
- Participants who have flown a kite leave their spots and find a new one. Meanwhile, the person in the middle tries to grab one of their empty spots, leaving a new person in the middle to ask the next question.

Patrick Torrey shared his reflective version of this game with Michelle Cummings, Jim Cain, and I for our collection of activities in A Teachable Moment. It has since become a favorite of mine, especially in school settings when I try to help teachers come up with activities that will get students out of their seats to review a lesson. In the reflective version, I change “Have you ever...” to “Anyone who....” For example, the middle person asks, “Anyone who tried something new today?” or “Anyone who helped someone else today?”

To review academic lessons, it could be fun to ask review questions in this manner, “Anyone who knows the capital of North Dakota?” Then the movers could volunteer to answer the question.

These are just a couple of many introductory ice-breaking activities that involve dialogue and movement and could intentionally be used for reflection or reviewing lessons. I am sure you will find that many of your favorite ice-breaking activities could be used in similar ways. For even more ideas on varying your methods for reviewing and reflection see *Tips & Tools* by Jennifer Stanchfield, *Open to Outcome* by Micah Jacobson & Mari Ruddy, *A Teachable Moment* by Jim Cain, Michelle Cummings, & Jennifer Stanchfield, and *Reflective Learning* by Sugerman, Doherty, Garvey, & Gass.

Resources

Jacobson, M. & Ruddy, M. (2004) *Open to Outcome: A practical guide for facilitating and teaching*. Bethany, OK: Wood ‘N’ Barnes Publishing.

Jensen, E. (2000). *Brain-based learning*. San Diego, CA: The Brain Store.

Jensen, E. (1998). *Teaching with the brain in mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Cain, J., Cummings, M., & Stanchfield J. (2005). *A teachable moment: A facilitator’s guide to activities for processing, debriefing, reviewing and reflection*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Rohnke, K., & Butler, S. (1995). *Quicksilver*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Stanchfield, Jennifer. (2009) *Tips & tools: The art of experiential group facilitation*. Bethany, OK: Wood ‘N’ Barnes Publishing.

Sugerman, D., Doherty, K., Garvey, D., & Gass, M. (2000). *Reflective learning: Theory and practice*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

This lesson is compliments of Jennifer Stanchfield, author of “*Tips & Tools: The Art of Experiential Group Facilitation*”.

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