Working with Younger Participants

NWCCN Conference Notes 11/10/18

We had a small but eager group at the workshop for working with younger participants. I shared some of my success stories of facilitating with 4 and 5 year olds for my thesis work.

Things to remember when working with younger participants:

- Be flexible and roll with the changes. Younger children have their own ideas for how things will go. Lots of times it is different than you imagined but it's not a bad thing. Think about the goal you want them to accomplish and if their way gets there, great.
- Think about your materials. Building a tower out of index cards is hard for adults and darn near impossible for young kids. They will get discouraged easy. How can you get the same objectives across by using different materials? Maybe blocks instead of index cards.
- Kids like to be moving and to be silly. Debriefing can be hard because they don't like to be in one place. Break the debrief questions down into simpler questions. Walk them to the point you want addressed if you need to. They'll have very insightful answers you just have to be patient and help them get to where you think they might want to go.
- When providing guidelines for activities be aware of what kids are thinking. They might be trying to compete with other groups unless you explicitly say not too. This can cause them to miss the point of the activity.

A few questions that came up were:

- How do you get engagement with the younger participants?
  - The best way I would answer this is too think about the activity you're asking them to do. They want to be moving and engaging with their friends. Does the activity allow that to happen? If it does great, if it doesn't it could be a hard time.

We also went through the attached packet and talked about the various activities. The favorite among my pre-kindergarten students were:

1. This or That – they loved the constant movement and getting to see what their friends choose.
2. Tower Build – They liked working as a group to build big towers. This one caught on even outside of the activity.
3. Link-Up – finding something in common with a friend is always great.
4. What Goes There – Admittedly, the enjoyed this one more because they liked being the 'spotters'
5. Partner Introductions – fun but quick.

Link Up

Purpose: Build community within classroom by learning about one another.

Facilitation Instructions: *Link Up* is a simple, yet effective activity.

*Group facilitators should join in and Link Up in the chain when they find a commonality.

- One person begins by sharing a fact about themselves with the group.
- If the fact shared is also true for another group member, the two participants should link arms. If the fact is not true for anyone else the participant should keep sharing facts until they find a similarity among the group.
- The second participant then shares a fact about themselves.
- A different individual in the group will link arms with participant number two if their fact is also true for participant number three.
- The process continues until the whole group is linked together in one line.
- The final individual should find something they have in common with the first person to create a circle connected by similarities.

Variations: There are multiple variations the facilitator may choose to implement. The following suggestions could be used to change the activity to better suit the age of participants or better achieve a goal. They are merely suggestions to get the facilitator's mind moving. More exist and if the classroom teacher is the facilitator they know their students best.

- For younger groups it may be best to explain the activity by them saying something they like. If someone else likes the same thing they can link arms. For instance favorite foods, television shows, and colors are wonderful ways to start.
- For older groups the facilitator may require participants to share a fact they haven't told anyone in the group before.
- Depending on the group the facilitator may have participants share facts centered on a set of topics. If the group is a class at the beginning of the school year they may choose to share school related ideas.
- Conversely, the facilitator may require the participants to not share facts of a certain type. If a sixth grade class is participating the teacher could require the students to share facts that occurred outside of school.

Debrief: After the activity it is important to discuss as a group things that occurred which could help build chemistry among participants. The facilitator should start by leading the debrief conversation and allow the group to take control if appropriate. Younger age participants will probably need more guidance through a short discussion.

- Did you enjoy *Link Up*? (for younger ages it may work well to ask for a thumbs up or thumbs down)
- What's one thing you learned about someone else?
- Were you surprised by any facts shared?

- Did it take anyone multiple times to find something in common?
- How did you feel when you linked up with a classmate?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

Learning is a social experience, especially in early childhood education. This idea can be seen right away by walking into an early childcare center. The children are not sequestered by themselves at desks. Instead they are interacting with one another. Playing games, building with blocks, creating art is all done as a group. There are times that one child may be off by themselves tackling a problem. They might be figuring out how to get Lego pieces just right to make their ship or building a ramp that is steep enough to make a marble roll down and into a nearby cup.

Laura Elena Ciolan published the article *Play to learn, Learn to play. Creating better opportunities for learning in early childhood* in 2013. While the article specifically focuses on the importance of learning through play, an idea we'll explore further in other activity explanations, there are a few key ideas I would like to bring to your attention. "Early childhood education is a key stage of human development, bringing significant contributions to the personal, social, emotional, and cultural development of a child. Moreover, it has already been proved that investing in this stage of education bring a return of investment even higher than that investment in universities" (Ciolan, 2013, p. 187). Ciolan goes onto further explain the importance of social play and "social function: including in early education programs the new social development and the social requirements towards early education, as well as the skills to function in social groups (socialization)" (Ciolan, 2013, p. 189).

The importance of a child building community and feeling secure in that community cannot be overstated. Abraham Maslow (1943) created the 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs' to explain what each individual needs to succeed. The most basic needs of an individual are physiological (food, water, shelter) closely followed b safety (security and safety). These two make up the first group of basic needs. The next step up is under psychological needs and includes intimate relationships and friends. The very top of the pyramid is self-actualization where true learning can occur. A child who does not feel accepted by their community cannot reach self-actualization. *Link Up* is one activity that can help a classroom begin to bond and build the community needed for deep, sustained learning to occur in whatever form best suits the students.

Partner Introductions

Purpose: This activity will help build classroom community by providing opportunities for students to learn about classmates in a low stress environment.

Facilitation Instructions: *Partner Introductions* is simple and effective. It can be done in a very short amount of time.

*The classroom teacher/facilitator should join in if able to.

- Instruct the class to split into pairs. As a teacher you may decide to assign partners or instruct them to choose someone they don't know well.
- Once all the students have found a partner they should learn one fact about their partner. The whole class should be learning the same thing.
  - Examples: favorite ice cream, how many siblings, favorite book, hobbies.
- After enough time has been given for both partners to share the group should be brought back together.
- Once the group is together take time going around the circle and having each student share what they learned about their partner.
- Once the class is done everyone should have learned a new fact about each member of the class.

Variations: For *Partner Introductions* the variations are limited. They vary around the type of information you want your class to learn about each other. As a teacher you know your classroom better than I do. These are merely suggestions and ideas to get the process moving.

- For younger classes you could have them learn their friend's favorite toy to play with or maybe their favorite game to play.
- For older classes they could learn about any fears of the upcoming school year or their goals for life.

Debrief: Debriefing *Partner Introductions* can seem unnecessary. It does not require a long conversation but in most cases it should not just end and the class moves on to the next activity. Some questions that could be used during a debrief include:

- Did anyone have the same favorite ice cream as you? (Substitute in whatever they were learning about.)
- Did anyone share a fear you've had before?
- Did you learn anything that surprised you?
- Did you feel more or less comfortable introducing someone else than if it was yourself?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

  Partner Introductions falls under the same need of belonging to a community and feeling accepted as *Link Up* does. Maslow (1943) goes in depth when discussing human needs and their importance to learning. A famous quote in education, attributed to Nicholas Ferroni centers

around this very idea. "Students who are loved at home, come to school to learn, and students who aren't, come to school to be loved." – Nicholas A. Ferroni. The idea of students needing love and acceptance before learning can occur is not new. I've seen it myself in my classroom.

Children have a hard time finding a reason to listen and learn if they don't feel cared about. However, that feeling of worth and acceptance needs to come from the whole class and not just the teacher. If it only comes from the teacher students will open up to the teacher but not to a whole class. A strong, supportive community does wonders for a classroom. The method of partner introductions allows students to build a connection with a peer. For students who may be shy they don't have to speak about themselves to the class, instead they're speaking about their classmate and the pressure is lifted. Their ideas are not being shared and the fear of social rejection is gone. The anxiety is no longer something to worry about.

Tower Build

Purpose: Groups will learn to work collaboratively together. This activity helps improve their communication and ability to think differently to accomplish tasks.

Facilitation Instructions: *Tower Build* is a more complex activity that requires time to complete.

* The classroom teacher/facilitator should not participate in this activity if possible. Some groups may need help. If this is the case the teacher should not do any building or leading of the group. They should merely provide suggestions and guidance.

- The class should be split into groups of at least three and not more than five and each group should be given the same amount of building materials. (Pine planks and note cards work best.)
- Explain to the class that each group will have five minutes to build the tallest free standing tower they are able to.
- Allow the groups a minute to plan their strategy.
- Start a timer for five minutes and let the groups build.
- At the end of five minutes measure the height of each group's tower.
- Tell the class they will have another five minutes to build the tallest free standing tower they are able to.
- Allow the groups two minutes to plan their strategy.
- Start a timer for five minutes and let the groups build.
- At the end of five minutes measure the height of each group's tower.

Variations:

- The difficulty level of the challenge can be changed by the materials given to each group.
    - Pine plank blocks provide an easier difficulty to build up for younger students.
    - Note cards provide a much more difficult challenge. If a group is given note cards they should also be provided with scissors.
    - Dominoes are another material that works well. If giving groups dominoes groups should have a large number of them. The higher the tower is able to be made the more unstable it becomes and requires more communication and teamwork.
- Changing the time each group has to build towers.
- Handicapping a member of the group in some way.
    - One group member may not be able to touch the materials.
    - A group member might not be able to talk.

Debrief: The *Tower Build* activity is full of opportunities to debrief. The following questions are ways to get the conversation started but will not be the only questions asked.

- Which tower was taller; the first or the second?
- Did everyone feel like their ideas were heard by their group?

- Did you ever feel frustrated during the activity?
- Did your tower fall down?
- Did any leaders emerge during the activity? How did the lead?
- What helped your group succeed?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

Through my time as a challenge course facilitator I've heard how traditional challenge course activities can help participants begin to think outside of the box and build critical thinking skills. While I was able to see the benefits of activities I haven't been able to perform a research study myself. As a teacher I know ideas can be presented that may not be connected to research. *Tower Build*, as I call it, does have research backing. In 2014 the article titled *Development of the Logical Operations in Preschool Children* by Irina Pogozhina was published supporting activities like *Tower Build*.

Pogozhina studies 54 children ages 5 – 7 and tested Jean Piaget's theory that "logic is not inherent initially, but is formed gradually" (Pogozhina, 2014, p. 290). Testing the theory required Pogozhina to work with the children in a multi-week study and teach them different activities that were part of Piaget's different stages – sensorimotor intelligence, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational (Pogozhina, 2014). The children were given "16 sets of objects that differ in [color], form, size, [and] material" (Pogozhina, 2014, p. 292). The children were taught during weekly classes how to group the objects in different ways. The results showed "subjects [who] completed the work on formation of conservation principle understanding … were able to solve control tasks of Piaget on the classification, seriation, and conservation 9in the two tests) correctly… All control group subjects (27 persons) failed to solve the conservation Piaget tasks" (Pogozhina, 2014, p. 293)

Pogozhina's study provides support to the *Tower Build* assisting students in building their critical thinking skills and logic building. They are participating in an activity which develops "knowledge formation… of logical operations made preschool children possible to shift from pre-operational to concrete operational logical thinking stages" (Pogozhina, 2014, p. 294).

Working in groups to accomplish the task of building a tower as tall as the can requires students to think logically. They must plan out how to best utilize their resources (50 blocks or so) to maximize height. The stability of the tower must be considered and members of the group will have differing ideas. If they just did this once and were done the logic development would not be there. However getting a second chance with time to plan again allows them to think at a deeper level and look at the problem critically allowing them to move through Piaget's stages of logical development.

Collaborative Stories

Purpose: Build community within the classroom by participating in a fun, unique activity.

Facilitation Instructions:

- Explain to the class that the group will be working together to tell a story.
- Each person will have a chance to contribute by saying up to a whole sentence of the story.
- The classroom teacher can start with a simple phrase such as "Once upon a time" or "A long, long, time ago."
- Let the story move around the group with each person having a chance to add in their own part of the story.
- Tell the last person in the group the will have to end the story so to be ready.
- Let it go around until it is complete.
- Film or record it if you can.

Variations: Change how students are involved in different ways.

- Students may only be able to say one word of the story.
- Let the story go around the circle twice, giving everyone the chance to contribute two different times.
- Have the story follow a theme chosen by the group. The theme could be required to switch at certain intervals.
- Outlaw popular words from being included. Maybe the story isn't allowed to include dogs, spaceships, or cars.
- Have half the class tell the story while the other half acts it out. Switch it up so everyone does both parts.

Debrief: Similar to *Partner Introductions* there isn't much to debrief with this activity but it shouldn't just be left alone.

- Did anybody feel like their idea wasn't built on throughout the story?
- How did you decided what your part was about?
- How would you have made the story different if it was just you telling it?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

The activity of collaborative story telling comes from community building principles. The definition of community requires the members to have shared experiences. While a class is building community they are also creating a classroom culture. Culture is different than community and revolves around shared ideas, stories, customs, and history. Creating a story as a class helps develop a classroom culture which is necessary to a strong classroom community.

It would be possible to allow organic stories to occur in the room or read various books and allow these to become shared stories. However, the idea of improvisational teaching

provides a reason for *Collaborative Stories. The power of improvisational teaching* (2015) by M. Elizabeth Graue, Kristin Lyn Whyte, and Anne Elizabeth Karabon is a fascinating read for any teacher. The authors look at early childhood educators and their teaching methods. They found that teachers all seemed to have something in common. "What they had in common was an understanding of children. And that is what makes early childhood education unique; it starts with the child and not the subject matter. (Elking, 2009 in Miller & Almon, 2009, p.9)" (Graue et al, 2015, p. 13).

When a teacher truly understands children the can tap into the child's sense of learning and elevate it to a new level. The teacher can create experiences that are specific to one child, or a group of children, in the class. They use their knowledge of the students' interests to build learning experiences that the student will enjoy. (Graue et al, 2015) Teachers go further than that though. They understand that each child possesses their own unique "funds of knowledge (FoK) – bodies of knowledge that are foundational to everyday wellbeing" (Graue et al, 2015, p.14). The funds of knowledge that a child may possess includes their knowledge of superheroes or their love of animals. It could include what they've learned through exploring the outdoors or the abilities they've discovered doing art. Whatever it is, each child possesses unique funds of knowledge.

When the class gets together to create a story together the teacher is telling the children he or she is "willing to go on a creative journey… without knowing exactly what is going to happen" (Graue et al, 2015, p. 14). This is magical for children because they don't always have the opportunity to direct play with an adult. The interactions aren't always there but a teacher practicing improvisational teaching is keying into the interests of the children and letting it guide the activity. The story that is created by a group of five your olds is like no other you will ever hear. It becomes a beautiful mix of characters from all across the realms of story. Creatures from Greek mythology can meet characters from popular children books. Movies and tv shows will collide and no one know how it will end – not even the kids! It does end though and the final product is one the students are proud of and love to share with anyone who will listen.

This or That?

Purpose: Build community by getting to know classmates in a fast paced decision making game.

Facilitation Instructions: Before starting this activity the teacher should create a line down the center of classroom.

*If possible to join in, the teacher should.

- Explain to the class they will be hearing a series of items that are paired together.
- When they hear a pair they will have to move to one side of the line that corresponds to their choice.
- Start easy with something such as "Coke or Pepsi." Point to one side of the line when you say 'Coke' and the other side when you say 'Pepsi."
- Encourage the students to pick a side quickly when they are given options.
- Run through a list of choices they have to make quickly. The choices could include
    - Cats or Dogs
    - Coffee or Tea
    - Inside or Outside
    - I like to Lead or I like to Follow
    - Introvert or Extrovert
    - Going to the Doctor or Going to the Dentist
    - Cookies or Ice cream
    - Building with Blocks or Building with Legos
    - Football or Basketball
    - Elsa or Anna
    - Talking or Listening
    - Outer space or the Ocean
    - Hot dogs or Hamburgers
    - Christmas or my Birthday
    - Visual learner or auditory learner (if kids ask have kinesthetic learners stand on the line in the middle)
- After you as the teacher have run through a list let the kids come up with their own for the class.
- This activity can go on for quite a while as participants keep coming up with options. Best to have an ending time in mind and stick with it.

Variations: This activity can be changed easily to suit different ages or different goals.

- For younger ages incorporate more ideas of what they would get excited about which can include their favorite games, movies, books. It also works well to phrase it as " I like _____ or I like _____ "
- For older ages you can get deeper. Instead of just asking "leader or follower." You can also include "In the game or on the side"

- If the group is getting really into it and trying to persuade people to the other side you can require them to be silent. Everyone then has to make choices on their own.
- *This or That*? Can also be used to start academic discussions
  - 'Romeo or Juliet'
  - 'George Washington or Abe Lincoln'
  - 'Fractions or decimals'
  - 'Physics or chemistry'

Debrief: Depending on the goal of the activity to start the debrief discussion can go in multiple directions.

- Did anybody find themselves all alone when choosing a side? How did that feel?
- When more serious choices were presented did the mood of the room change?
- Were you surprised about having something in common with someone else?
- Did you feel comfortable putting yourself out there and choosing a side each time?
- Were there any times you didn't know what to choose? What did you do?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

The research behind *This or That* falls under the importance of feeling part of a community before a student can learn. Maslow's (1943) Heirachy of Needs cannot be overstated. The idea of turning it into a game creates play based learning. Play based learning is "a context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, as the engage actively with people, objects and representations' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 6)" (Edwards, 2017, p.6).

Susan Edwards gave the keynote address at the 2016 Early Childhood Australi National Conference where she addressed the theme *Inspire – be inspired to reach beyond quality*. Edwards talked about her career in early childhood and the struggles she faced trying to reconcile play-based learning with real teaching. In her address Edwards (2017) quotes John Dewey on page five when she says
> *Play is not to be identified with anything which the child externally does. IT rather designates this mental attitude in its entirety and in its unity. It is the free play, the interplay, of all the child's powers, thoughts and physical movements, in embodying in a satisfying form, his [her] own images and interests. Negatively, it is freedom from economic pressure – the necessities of getting a living and supporting others – and from the fixed responsibilities attaching to the special callings of the adult. Positively, it means that the supreme end of the child is fullness of growth – fullness of realization of his [her] budding powers, a realization which continually carries him [her] on from one plane to another.*

She goes on to explain that like others in the field such as Piaget and Montessori, Dewey "understood play as a forward movement" (Edwards, 2017, p. 5).

This or That creates an opportunity for children to play while learning about their friends. They could sit in a circle and raise their hands for which ever choice they prefer but instead they're actively playing and moving. Instead of being passive while learning they are being active. They're taking charge of their own learning instead of just sitting. The active engagement

will help students retain the information longer and provides them with a shared experience with friends.

What Goes Here?

Purpose: Improved communication among peers

Facilitation Instructions: This activity requires preparation ahead of time. Bags should be made up that have identical objects in them (colored popsicle sticks, dice, dominoes all work well).

- Split the class up into pairs and have them sit back to back with their partner. Each student should have a bag of objects which is identical to their partner.
- Have the pairs choose one to be a leader.
- Instruct the leader to make something with their objects and not let the other person see.
- When the leader is done they must describe what the made to their partner without looking. The partner cannot look at what the leader made.
- When a pair is done have them look at what they created and correct anything that is wrong.
- Now have them sit back to back again and repeat the process after switching roles.

Variations: This activity has a few variations but not much. It is a classic activity that relies upon verbal communication.

- This can also be done in groups of three. Either the leader could describe it to both group members and they create their own understandings or they can work together to recreate what the leader made.
- Providing one bag with more objects can create a wrinkle the must overcome. This only works if the follower has the extra objects.
  - *Pick groups carefully when doing this variation. It can cause quite a bit of frustration at first.*

Debrief: With this activity being all about communication the debrief has the chance to really move in different directions that the group wants to take it.

- How did what your partner make differ from what you described? Why weren't they the same?
- Was it difficult describing what you made? Did you describe it well?
- What was the hardest part to describe?
- What challenged you the most in this activity?
- If you completed this activity again, what would you do differently?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

What Goes Here is an extremely simple activity to facilitate and provides enormous feedback. The basic premise in this activity is the need to communicate. Humans are social creatures and the most popular method of communication is verbal. While *What Goes Here* focuses on communication it also requires students to think through how they are explaining information. The leader created something without the prior knowledge that they would be explaining it to their partner to build. When they begin their explanation they have to carefully

explain their viewpoint to be successful. This requires critical thinking skills. Merely saying "I made a square out of the popsicle sticks" could be correct. However, they have not identified how big the square was, which colors were used, where were the colors located. *What Goes Here* requires students to think deeper and make their best attempt to look at their situation with a blank slate. Their partner has no idea what they are going to make and the ideas have to be conveyed clearly.

Over Here!

Purpose: This activity can be used to make randomly selected groups for projects. While the groups are made the students will learn about each other.

Facilitation Instructions:

- Have the class self-group. The number in each group depends on the size needed for the project. Groups of five work well.
- Once each group is settled have them identify the tallest person.
- The tallest person moves to the group on the left or right (it's up to the teacher).
- With the new groups have them determine who is wearing the most different colors.
- This person now moves groups.
- This can go on until the teacher is satisfied the groups are a good mix.
- Additional categories can include:
    - Coolest scar
    - Most siblings
    - Shortest
    - Earliest or latest birthday in the calendar year
    - Traveled to the most states or countries
    - Ate the most fruit in the last 24 hours
    - Can play the most different musical instruments

Variations: This activity can be stand alone for the class to get to know each other or it can be used before a group project.

- The size of groups can fluctuate depending on the needs
- Groups could find two individuals (tallest and shortest) and both of them move groups in different directions.
- The selected participants who move groups could switch other ways beside clockwise/counter clockwise. Groups 1 and 3 could switch while Groups 2 and 4 switch.
- The participants selected could form their own group instead of moving to an already established one.

Debrief: This particular activity doesn't have much debrief. Its primary use is to lead into another activity that groups are needed. If done as a standalone some debrief questions include:

- Did you like being removed from one group and added to another because of one characteristic or fact?
- Why did you select the groups you did at the beginning?
- How did it feel to have groups constantly changed? Did you ever think they were done changing just for it to happen again?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

Play-based learning is a big component in many challenges, especially when working with kids. The game like atmosphere provided by the challenges help create a sense of excitement. It's also important to note that within the term play-based learning "the concept and definition of play is not always agreed upon; however, in early childhood education and care, play is often described by using a number of greed upon characteristics (Hewes, 2014) such as, it is voluntary, freely chosen, symbolic, intrinsically motivating, pleasurable and process-oriented (Shipley, 2008)" (Barblett et al, 2016, p.37). *Over Here!* provides students with an opportunity to play a game. They're making decisions based on situations provided (tallest, most states visited, wearing the most colors, etc) and having fun while doing it! I think in education with all the standardized testing the aspect of having fun can be forgotten. This helps students really learn because it's not play-based learning if there isn't fun. *Over Here!* succeeds because students learn about their classmates in a fun environment. It can then be used to form groups for activities and these students already have something in common with their group mates!

Pokerface

Purpose: Teach about inclusion. Bring a class closer together by breaking down social circles.

Facilitation Instructions: For this activity you'll need a deck of cards. For a smaller group you can take out half the deck.

- Give each student one card and tell them not to look at it.
- Have the students hold it on their forehead. They should not tell anyone their card.
- Now instruct the students to walk around the room and treat each other based on the value of their card.
- Allow this process to continue for a few minutes.
  - Be aware of how students are acting and feeling. This can be a triggering activity.
- Once the students have grouped themselves as they see fit stop the activity.
- Allow the students to look at their cards.

Variations: The basic premise of this activity is reliant upon the participants not knowing what is on their head.

- Instead of cards colored stickers can be used.
  - The instructions would be changed to "Group yourselves" – Make no mention of the colors being of importance.
- The cards could only include one face card and all the rest as numbers or vice versa.
- The cards could be all low numbers or all high numbers

Debrief:

- How were you treated? Who was treated poorly? Who was treated nicely?
- How did you feel during this activity?
- Why did you make the groups you did?
- Why were some people treated nice and others poorly?
- How did it feel to be pushed away from a group?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

Pokerface is a successful activity because it forces participants to face the reality of life – we sort people into groups and then treat them dependent upon the group they've been sorted into. When we're confronted with the idea that people don't want us, don't want to be around us, or don't treat us nice it hurts. It goes back to Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. A person "hunger[s] for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world" (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). *Pokerface* creates a game like atmosphere for students to learn Maslow's principle. They feel the need for acceptance and in some situations are not receiving it. This can become a profound lesson for students as they learn through play.

Coin Game

Purpose: The class will work together towards a common goal. It seems easy to begin with but is difficult in reality.

Facilitation Instructions: Very simple set up - requires a large circle and a writing instrument.

* This activity is hard for the teacher to participate in as well. If a student volunteers to draw the coin it may be possible for the teacher to participate.

- Draw a large circle at the front of the room.
- Ask the class to describe a penny.
- When the group describes a feature draw it in the circle.
  - For this activity you may need to help the group get started. For instance 'We know Lincoln is on the front."
  - When they agree that Abe Lincoln is on the front, the class should determine which way he faces before drawing him.
- When new features are brought up wait for the class to decide where they go on the coin.
- After the class feels they are done pass around pennies for them to check how close (or not close) they were.

Variations:

- Have the class describe different coins for added difficulty – nickle, dime, quarter, fifty cent piece, dollar coins (Susan B. Anthony, Sacagawea, Presidential)
- Require the class to describe the obverse (front) and reverse (back) or the coin.
- If it pertains to a subject being covered in class the students could describe a coin from readings (gold doubloons, Roman coins, British pounds)
- Hand out small envelopes with different coins inside of them. Allow students to look at their coin without revealing what they have. Then have the group describe a particular coin.
- The group doesn't need to describe a coin. For a younger audience (who usually don't know coins well) they could describe something else they know. Maybe a book cover or a favorite toy. It needs to be something they are familiar with.

Debrief:

- What was difficult about this activity? You see coins every day.
- How did you decide to listen to someone and trust them?
- What teamwork was needed for this activity?
- Is there a coin you could give a better description of?
- If I asked you to describe the back of the coin how would you do?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

The group must work together to accomplish a simple task. Describe a coin. It's not that hard but in reality it becomes much harder. As the group makes suggestions they have to determine if they should trust their fellow students ideas. Being able to trust another person comes down to how strong the community is and how strong the relationship between two individuals is. For instance, if this activity were done with 12 randomly selected people off of the street it would probably be even more difficult. No one knows anything about one another. It's possible one person is a rare coin dealer and knows an immense amount about the coin being described. However, they can't necessarily prove their points since they don't have any common ground to build a relationship within the group.

In your classroom you'll be working with a group of individuals that know each other. They'll have an idea of who has a good memory, who's special awareness is good, who may be a fan of coins! Building relationships with one another is an important step to being able to solve problems that may be presented.

What Goes Here (Large Group)

Purpose: Improve communication in a large group setting.

Facilitation Instructions: Prior to starting the activity some design or structure should be created out of sight of the students. No one should see what was made until the activity starts.

*The teacher will not be able to participate in this activity.

- Split the class into three or four groups.
- Inform the class there is something built just out of eyesight that they will work as a group to re-create.
- Have each group choose someone who will go look at what has been made. This person will be the groups 'eyes'.
- When every group has chosen their 'eyes' tell the eyes they will get to go look at what is made and then must come back to their group and describe it. The eyes are not allowed to touch the materials at either location (the original design/structure or their group's)
- Inform the rest of the participants that they will need to stay in their groups areas and rely upon the description provided to them by the eye.
- The eyes can go back and look at the original design/structure as many times as they need. However the can only communicate with their group once they are back with them.
- Allow the groups to create their understandings of the design/structure attempting to make it as close as possible.

Variations:

- The complexity of the design or structure can make this challenge wildly different. Making a familiar design such as numbers, letters, or shapes can make it easier to describe.
- Consider making a three-dimensional structure to challenge groups.
- If space allows create a simple obstacle course for the eyes to complete on their way back to the group.
- Allow additional group members to become 'eyes'. However, once a group member is an eye they can't touch the group materials.

Debrief:

- How did it feel to be your group's eyes?
- For the group members that stayed back. Did you get frustrated at all? Why or why not?
- What was difficult about this challenge?
- How close did you get to the original?

Connection to Research and Further Explanation:

Similar to *What Goes Here* for partners communication is key. The large group activity adds a memory component however. Now the eyes must process what they see and remember it as the return to their group. They then must describe it in detail. Detail is key in this experience and it can be difficult to remember the detail with everything else going on.

This activity has a high chance to get loud and crazy. Groups are trying to understand what they have to build, 'eyes' are running back and forth, there's disagreements as groups get frustrated. It all becomes a big lesson in effective communication. Groups rely on verbal communication but might have to find other ways. It challenges the group to get creative and think outside of the box. It creates a new way of learning that is not always seen in the classroom anymore. "One of the main reasons … for the erosion of play-based learning was the introduction of a pushdown curriculum that focused on learning area knowledge and skills" (Barblett et al, 2016, p. 38). As a focus on standardized testing has risen in the education system "the erosion of play [occurred due to] the misunderstanding and undervaluation of play-based learning by colleagues and leadership staff" (Barblett et al, 2016, p. 39).

Barblett, Knaus, and Barratt-Pugh highlight how play based learning has been pushed out for curriculum focused on learning area knowledge. This has the chance to hinder students ability to develop the skills that come from social interaction such as improved communication, social problem solving, and self-help skills. *What Goes Here (Large Group)* can highlight these lack of skills if the group's eye is not able to effectively communicate or figure out a way to help the group.

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