

Building Bridges

Learning Objective: To introduce the idea of teamwork, communication and creative problem solving.

Group Size: Small groups of 5-7 people.

Space Required: a room with ample space for movement.

Time Required: 1 hour

Props Required: Lots of newspaper, rolls (6-8) of masking tape, a gallon jug 1/4 to 1/2 full of water, a plastic dishpan type container, CD player, CD with "William Tell Overture" or music with a hectic pace.

Activity Instructions: "You are going to build a bridge using only the newspaper and masking tape. The bridge must be strong enough to hold this bottle (show the bottle and let them check the feel of it for weight). Also, the bridge must be tall enough for the pan to pass underneath it. The bridge must be free-standing; not attached to the wall, a piece of furniture, a person or an article of clothing...FREE-STANDING."

Tell the group they are to line up according to birth month and day and CANNOT talk while doing this.

Next, starting with January each person reveals the month and date of birth. If any person is out of sequence, the groups is to say loudly "unh-hah".

Count off so that they are divided into teams.

Rules Summary: (Clarify understanding of rules. I also write them on flip chart.)

Cannot use materials other than newspaper and masking tape.

Each group to build a bridge that the dish can pass under and hold the gallon jug for 10 seconds.

Cannot stick/tape to another person or furniture.

7 minutes to plan; 8 minutes to build the bridge.

Process:

Tell them they will have 7 minutes to plan, discuss, etc., and to be sure everyone in the group is included. DO THEY HAVE ANY QUESTIONS? Time the 7 minutes. After the 7 minute discussion period, pass out the newspaper and tape. Inform the group they will now have 8 minutes to construct their bridge and, by the way, there will be no talking allowed during this 8 minutes.

At the end of 8 minutes, allow the groups 30 seconds to speak to each other and then an additional 3 minutes of SILENTLY work to complete their bridge. During this last work session, play the "William Tell Overture" (or other such music) loudly.

Call time and have one group at a time present their bridge. A spokesperson from each group will tell about their bridge and pass the pan under and put the jug on top. When the jug is put on top, all will count for 10 seconds. (This will be done for each group).

Processing/discussion questions:

How did you work as a group?

Which part was the most difficult?

Did everyone participate in some way?

Did you feel like you contributed to the group?

Did you feel like you were part of the group?

Was there one particular person that kept the ball rolling?

Were there individuals who were particularly quiet?

How was their quietness interpreted: agreement or disagreement?

What influenced the type of bridge built by each group?

Why were no two alike?

How did communication or lack of it affect the work of the group?

What characteristics of teamwork became evident during this exercise?