

FREE TO BE... YOU AND ME

Third Grade Coming Together

This exercise is about space and the visualization of three-dimensional space. It is also metaphorically about developing communities. This can be used with third-grade classes, but it can work with much younger and somewhat older students as well. It can be a jumping-off point for what is often a very inspiring conversation about community and connections between people.

This exercise is a Narrative Pantomime:

Narrative Pantomime is a Creative Drama technique in which a teacher or leader narrates a story and the students improvise/"act out" the story, each in their own space, the actions of the main character. In this exercise, the students eventually come together to improvise as teams and then as a whole class, but it begins with solo improvisation. What follows is the narration to read during the lesson. Naturally the exact words are not important--it is the developing story that makes the lesson. Following the narration is a description of the kind of processing conversation to have with the students after the story is through.

Story

Everyone find your own personal space in the room. Be sure you have enough room around you to turn all the way around with your arms outstretched and not touch your neighbor.

We'll begin our story now. Everyone crouch down and make your self as small as you can in your space.

Imagine you are inside a hard, transparent, spherical shell. The shell is only just big enough for you to fit, so you can barely move.

The shell is hard, but you discover that by pushing against the wall of the shell you can make a "dent." You can push one small part of the wall out away from you, and when you let it go, it doesn't spring back. Keep making more "dents" until you have actually made the whole shell bigger.

Keep pushing the walls out around you, smoothing out the dents as you go so you keep your shell smooth and round. It is hard work pushing the walls out.

Keep enlarging your shell until it is just big enough to stand up in.

Remember that your shell is a sphere--it is as wide as it is tall.

Have you ever seen a hamster in one of those clear plastic balls? It can roll the ball all around the room by "walking" inside it. You discover that you can do this in your own clear sphere. But remember how big your sphere is! You can't walk right up to a wall or other obstacle, because of the roundness of your sphere. Even more important--you can't possibly get near another person, because long before you can touch them, your invisible sphere will bump into his sphere. If you stretch out your arm, you should just be able to touch the place where your sphere touches another person's--that is all.

Explore the room inside your sphere, taking care to remember where and how big it is, and to visualize your sphere.

Now you see someone--one of your classmates--and roll your sphere towards theirs. (Each person must pick a partner and do this. If there is an odd number you the instructor can either make your own bubble to partner with one student or make one threesome.)

When your spheres touch, you notice that they join, leaving a tiny opening between them that you can just get your hands through. Reach through and shake the hand of your partner.

Now, working together, start making the hole between your spheres bigger by pushing its walls out. Keep going until you have made a single, smooth sphere big enough for two.

Explore the room a little in your new, larger sphere. You'll have to work together to control the way it rolls.

Now you see another pair of your classmates and roll towards them.

When you spheres touch, once again there is a tiny hole. Reach through

and shake hands. Then once again gradually enlarge the hole until you have made one four-person sphere.

(Repeat this as many times as necessary until the whole class has made one huge sphere.)

Now, working together, shove the walls of your sphere out until it fills every inch of the room.

Congratulations! We did it!

Discussion

Was it easy to imagine your shell/sphere as a real, three-dimensional thing?

How does your shell/sphere relate to the idea of personal space?

I think this is a great way to learn how to visualize space, but I also think it is a metaphor.

What is a metaphor?

A metaphor is a word or a story that can represent or stand for something else--like when you say your Mom blew her top, you don't mean she actually lost the top of her skull.

I think this story can be a metaphor for the way we move from being totally involved with ourselves to joining with friends and becoming part of the larger society. You start out life as a tiny baby, not knowing or caring about anyone but you. You live inside your own shell. But pretty soon you meet a few other people, and your world gets bigger. These people are your family, and they can help you to make your world even bigger by meeting other families or other people. Eventually you form communities. Even then, your world is pretty small. But today communities can come together to form larger communities. States form countries, countries form even larger alliances. Maybe someday even the earth will be just part of a larger community.

Think about the border between your sphere and your neighbor's. At first it is easy to see where one sphere ends and the other begins. But you kept pushing out and smoothing until you had one big sphere. What happened to the border? Could you even remember where it was? At first you were totally separate, but you came together so completely that

you couldn't even remember what kept you apart. What does that say to you? Can you relate that to your everyday life? To your friendships? To your communities?