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A Narrative Pantomime

Introduction

This activity is 1 of 4 in a series that exposes students to the concepts of and work done by the HERMYs Project (Historical Ecology and Risk Management: Youth Sustainability):

1. A Narrative Pantomime
2. Risk Assessment
3. Risk Hazard Identification
4. Local and Traditional Knowledge & Risk

“Historical accounts of remote Alaska can only offer documentation of events that have taken place in the last 150 years or so. Ancient cultures, on the other hand, have documented thousands of years through oral history and storytelling. Although there is some added fiction to make the stories more fun, this local and traditional knowledge (LTK) allows us to examine REAL events from the perspective of ancient cultures.” – Hollis Yenna

Objective

Students will understand how the environment is interconnected and the role that they serve as a citizen of their community and of the world. This activity should show students that all members of a community work together – we all rely upon each other. This is true for everyday living as well as disaster-relief and planning.

Procedure

This exercise is about the visualization of three-dimensional space. It is also a metaphor about developing communities and it can offer very inspiring conversation about community and connections between people.

Materials

- Open Space
- Good Music
- Several Rowdy Kids

This exercise is a narrative pantomime in which the teacher narrates a story and the students act it out. The following story can be read verbatim, or changed a bit depending on the teacher.

Story

“Everyone spread out 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 yourself as small as you can in your own little space.

Imagine you are inside a hard, transparent, round shell like an invisible shield. The shell is only 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 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, isn’t it?

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? The hamster can roll the ball all around the room by walking inside of 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 you sphere. You can’t possibly get near another person, because long before you can touch them your invisible sphere will bump into their 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 you 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 – go ahead and roll towards them. When your spheres touch, once again, it creates a tiny hole. Reach through and shake hands. Gradually enlarge the hole until you have made a sphere big enough for four-people.

(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 you are so hungry you could eat a cow. You can't actually eat a whole cow, but you say it because you feel so hungry.

I think this story can be a metaphor for the way we all start life being so involved with ourselves, then we start to become friends with others and eventually become part of a larger society. You start out life as a tiny baby, not knowing or caring about anyone but yourself. 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. Cities form counties, counties form states, states form countries, and countries form even larger alliances.

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? How can you relate that to your



everyday life? To your friendships? To your communities?

Extension

Not applicable

Assessment

Not applicable

Author / Credits

This lesson was developed by PolarTREC teacher Hollis Yenna <yennahjh@gmail.com>.

Standards

None, not applicable