

Dear Teacher:

The activities used in the Woodleaf Communities class are based on the principles of experiential learning. This packet has some ideas to enable you to facilitate similar activities in your classroom or playground. Hopefully, you will find them useful after your class is back in school or next year before you come to Woodleaf. Included for you are:

1. A definition of experiential education by Dr. Michael Gass of the University of New Hampshire.
2. Some tips of what to observe while kids are doing an activity and some suggestions on what to ask afterwards.
3. Some suggested (tried and true) activities for you and your class to have fun and learn about each other with.

*“You are never given a wish without also  
Being given the power to make it come true.”  
-Richard Bach*

## DEFINITION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is founded on the belief that learning must focus on involving **direct experience** in processes of growth. All learning has some form of experience as a base for its origin, yet experiential learning asks that the learner be placed as close as possible to that base of origin, seeing that this process is often more valuable for the transmission of knowledge than other forms of learning.

Given this perspective, experiential learning often requires problem solving, curiosity, and inquiry of the learner. It is sometimes loosely defined as learning by doing and reflecting. It is an active rather than passive process, requiring the learner to be self-motivated and responsible **to**, and **not for** the learner.

Experiential learning is also predicated on the belief that change occurs when learners are placed outside of positions of comfort (e.g., homeostasis, acquiescence) and into states of dissonance. In these states, students are challenged by necessary adaptations required to reach equilibrium. Reaching these students directed states requires change and resulting growth and learning. Several qualities that occur during this process include:

- The learner participates
- The learning activities require student motivation in the form of energy, involvement, and responsibility.
- The learning activity is real and meaningful in terms of natural consequences for the learner.
- Reflection is a critical element of the learning process.
- Learning must have present as well as future relevance for the learner and the society in which they are a member.

Experiential education is not a product of learning. It is one learning process that should be implemented under appropriate circumstances.

Dr. Michael Gass  
University of New Hampshire

## ACTIVITIES

### ***EVERYBODY UP***

Two people sit facing each other, with knees bent at 45° angles and toes touching, they hold hands and try to simultaneously pull each other to their feet. Try three people, four, five, go for record! With more than 2, hold on at elbows or shoulders. *Variation:* sit back to back with locked elbows.

### ***BLINDFOLD BIRTHDAY LINE UP***

Blindfold entire group (maybe groups of 8-12 at first). Have them line up according to their birthdays – month, day, year. Watch for “quality” – peeking. *Variation:* No blindfold, no talking. Blindfold plus no talk. Line up by color of eyes, no talk.

### ***PROGRESSION***

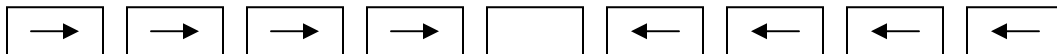
Good warm-up, energy burner. Stand in middle of kids and have, or memorize, a list of activities for them to perform in sequence. For example: shake hands with someone on the other side of circle; spin around twice; shake hands with someone on other side of circle, spin around twice, whistle “Row, row, row, your boat”. Repeat those three and then add another, and another, etc.

### ***MOONBALL***

Scatter group on field or basketball court. Group’s objective is to hit aloft a well-inflated beach ball as many times as possible before the ball strikes the ground. Rules: (1) A player cannot hit the ball twice in succession, and (2) one point for each hit. Go for your own “world record”.

### ***TRAFFIC JAM***

Object is to have two groups exchange places on a line of squares that has one more place than the number of people in both groups.



To begin: one group stands facing the open square from the left, the other group from the right (facing each other).

**Legal Moves:** (1) person may move into an empty space in front of him/her. (2) A person may move around a person who is facing him/her into an empty space.

**Illegal Moves:** (1) Any move backwards. (2) Any move around someone facing the same direction you are. (3) Any move which involves moving two persons at once.

You don’t have to know the solution to give this initiative to a group, but if you must, try it with some toothpicks on a table.

Keep the group small, 6-8 people. Use carpet squares or pieces of paper.

\*This is a cerebral problem and can be quite difficult. Usually it is best accomplished when one person does the directing (but don’t tell them this). After they get it, have them quickly try it again. After they are confident with their solution, try it while everyone holds their breath, except the leader.

Variation: Arrange squares in a semi-circle so those in back can see what's going on.

### ***ANTS ON A LOG***

Materials – 30 ft. log, 1 ft. in diameter or telephone pole or anything close. With a group of about 20, have half the group facing in from the left and the other from the right (like traffic jam). Now the two groups exchange ends of the pole without touching the ground. Time them and add 10-second penalty for each touch of the ground. After one attempt, let them talk it over and share ideas. In successive tries, they can try to beat their PB (personal best).

### ***THE MONSTER***

Divide the group into groups of seven. The seven people must get from one point to another (20'-30') using only four anatomical points of simultaneous contact with the ground. No props. All persons must maintain direct physical contact with each other.

*Variation:* 5 people and 3 points of contact.

### ***MINE FIELD***

In a 10' x 15' space, use anything as borders (shirts, cones, balls, etc.), place inside an assortment of stuff, i.e.: various balls, a chair, paper tubes, etc. Have one person at one end of mine field with blindfold on (change order, or disorder, of objects in field after he/she is blindfolded). The rest of group is at the other end and talks the person through the mine field so they don't get blown to smithereens by touching any of the objects. You might break up into groups of 5-10 people, but insist that all members must participate. Let them brainstorm ideas.

*Variation:* Do as partners; time them, 10-second penalty for each contact. By constant re-arranging of objects no overall competition is possible.

### ***BODY ENGLISH***

Form two groups. One group is given a word or maybe after practice a well-known proverb or saying. Using their bodies as letters, they spell out the word while the other group guesses what it is. Switch groups. Give them time for discussion and decision making.

### ***QUAIL SHOOTERS DELIGHT***

Materials: many balls and other soft objects. Two or three people stand back to back to each other while the rest of the group stands around them in a 20'-30' diameter circle. Each person in outer circle has 1 or 2 objects. On a "go!" or "throw!" they loft their objects toward the waiting targets. The object is to see how many objects the inner circle can catch. Let them all try. This is actually very hard, and the fun is in the relative failure to catch many – so down play success and competition.

### ***PARALLELOGRAM***

Groups of 10 are good. Have a length of rope 30' long. Blindfold group, have them go find (holding hands) the rope which you have placed 20'-40' out in front of them. Stagger the starts of groups if more than one so they aren't bumping into each other. Once they find the rope, they begin to design the shape you have asked them to – parallelogram, rectangle, heart, etc. Each person must maintain contact with the rope until they have decided they are done. They leave their shape on the ground to observe their results. Discussion and possibly another attempt (with different shape) should follow.

## ***LAP SIT***

Remember this from Sunday night? Make circle with right shoulders on side; slide in until all toes are touching heels in front of them. Try to get a circle and not an oval. Remind them that to make it work everyone has to believe in it. One doubter can make the whole thing fail. Hands go on the shoulders of the person in front of you. On a 3 count, everyone sits down. Keep legs together, guide the person in front of you down to your lap. Rise back up on a 3 count. If you fall, talk about it as a group and try again.

## **ONE MORE THOUGHT**

Hopefully these activities will be both fun for you and your class, and provide a medium for interaction and discussion that causes them to begin to look at how they function in a group. Remember, without thoughtful debriefing, an experience is just an experience and nothing more. The classroom provides an excellent setting for this type of learning to transpire.

Creativity cannot be taught, it must be nurtured. Problem solving within a group is something we do our whole lives long – except for those few hermits and Rip Van Winkle types. Are these skills not at least as important to develop as basic math, reading, and science skills?

You want more of these kinds of activities, some books I recommend are:

“Silver Bullets” and “Cowtails and Cobras” by Karl Rohnke

“Islands of Healing” by Jim Schoel, Dick Provty, and Paul Radcliffe

Leading your students through activities such as these allows you the opportunity to observe personal and group dynamics in a controlled situation. When you debrief the behaviors exhibited in these activities they are usually the same behaviors exhibited in class. It has been said that, “The way we do anything is the way we do everything”; however, it is less threatening and potentially more constructive for them to consider, and modify their behavior in the context of these group discussions versus more personalized general class behavior. Cooperation and communication skills learned in these activities may be reinforced and transferred to other arenas of the student’s life.

Let us know how these activities work with your class and share new activities/debriefing techniques with us. “May the circle be unbroken”!

*“People do not quit playing because they grow old.*

*They grow old because they quit playing.”*

*-Oliver Wendell Holmes*