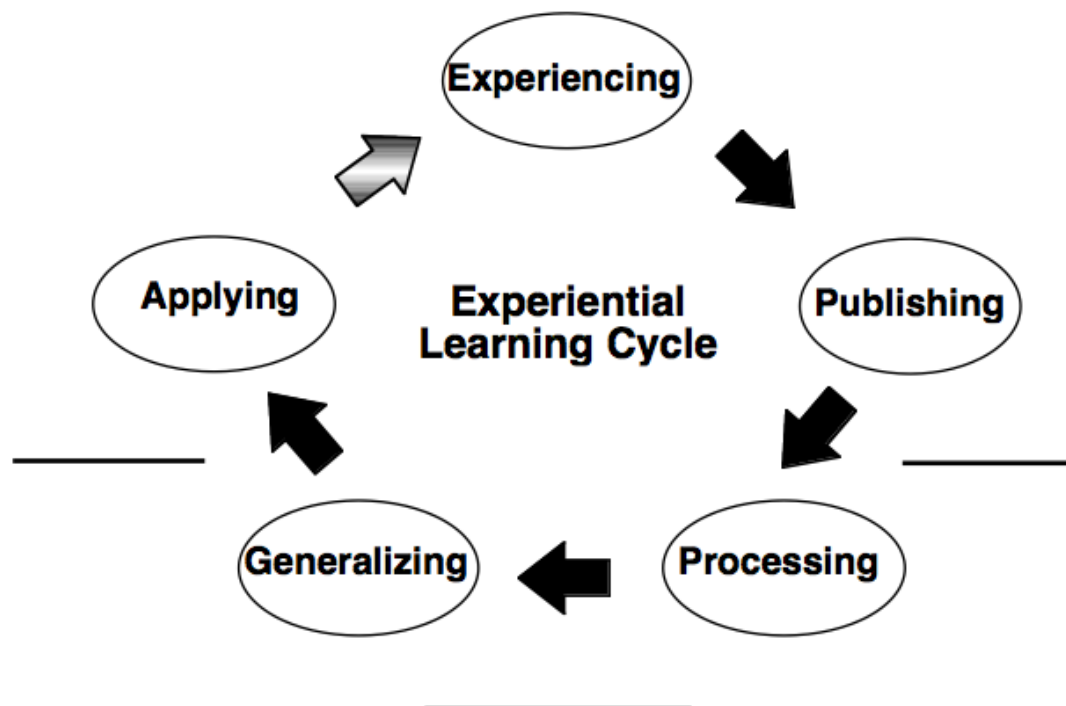


The Experiential Learning Cycle Summary

Experiential learning occurs when a person engages in some activity, looks back at the activity critically, abstracts some useful information from the analysis, and puts the results to work through a change in behavior.

- **Experiencing** - This is the initial stage that is used to gather data. The participant becomes involved in an activity; he/she acts or behaves in some way or does, performs, observes, sees, or says something. The initial experience is the basis for the entire process.
- **Publishing** - Following the experience itself, it becomes important for the participants to share or “publish” their reaction and observations with the others who have either experienced or observed the same activity.
- **Processing** - This is the “group dynamics” phase of the cycle, in which participants reconstruct the patterns and behaviors of the activity from the publishing phase. This is a critical phase of the cycle and should be planned thoroughly.
- **Generalizing** - In this phase, participants are focused to make comparisons between their real work or personal life and the activity. Using the information from the processing phase, participants can identify some principles that could be applied to the outside world.
- **Applying** - The “now what” phase. In this final phase, participants plan specific applications of the principles derived from the experience to the outside world.



Facilitating Initiatives

- Initiative vs Game
- Scout Role
- Facilitator as Observer
- Red Flag
- Applaud Effort more than Outcome
- Success/Failure Reframe
- Ready Circle

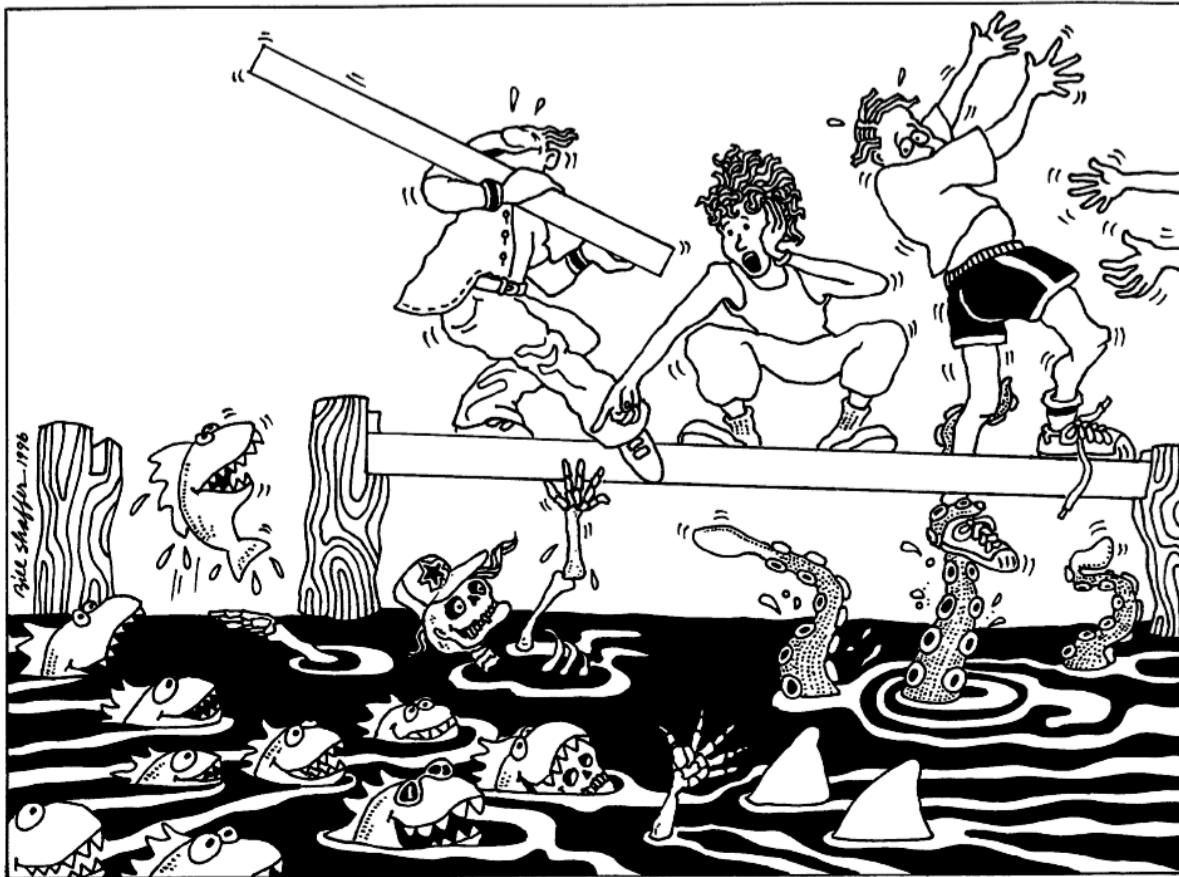
“Start by doing what’s necessary, then what’s possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”
– Saint Francis



Initiatives

This section focuses on the process of facilitating initiatives. Initiatives include: activities like puzzles, mind-benders, problem-solving scenarios, etc. They are typically introduced after games or energizers.

Initiative n. A game with a problem to solve.



***“Here, just do this, then this,
and wha-la - there you have it!”***

– What every facilitator wants to say
to a group at some point!

Key Concepts

Scout Role:

Some participants may choose not to do an activity for any number of reasons (see challenge by choice). They can still be involved and give value in the role of “scout.” In this role they watch the group from the sidelines and bring their observations to the debrief.

Facilitator as Observer:

Unlike in games, the facilitator’s role is to give instructions and parameters then observe the group’s process. The facilitator should not be involved in “solving” the initiatives for the group, i.e. rescuing.

Red Flag:

Situation where the facilitator is too directly involved in the group’s process. A Red Flag would be if the group says, “We couldn’t have done it without you.”

Applaud the Effort More than Outcome:

The act of providing positive feedback, reinforcement and celebration of the group’s effort at solving the problem rather than its successful outcome. The focus is on the process or “journey,” not the final outcome or “destination.”

Success/Failure Reframe:

No matter what the outcome of an initiative, frame the situation in terms of levels of success rather than pass/fail. For example, ask the group to rank their success on a 1 - 10 scale and ask them what it would take, or look like to achieve a higher rating. This approach keeps the group in the problem-solving mode.

Ready Circle:

The positioning of the group in the shape of a circle. The circular shape has the following benefits: Everyone is on the front row, hear and see everyone equally (no one at the “head” of the table) and encourages input from everyone. By calling a “Ready Circle” the opportunity is provided for the group to “step away” from the event and consider their situation, their strategy or their solution processes. A ready circle can be called by anyone at anytime. The group will not be penalized in regards to progress; however, if the event is timed, in most cases, the clock continues to run. The idea of “going slower to go faster.”

Consensus:

Consensus is finding an proposal acceptable enough that all members can support it; no member completely opposes it. It means giving 100% support to the idea, solution, etc. It is not unanimous or majority vote and not everyone may be “totally” satisfied. Consensus requires time, active participation, skills in communication, listening, creative thinking, and open-mindedness. Remember, not every decision need have the support of everyone – in fact, it is impossible to have such agreements in any group all the time. Some decisions need other strategies.

Processing

- **Processing the Challenge**
- **Processing Skills**

“Of all the elements in a challenge and adventure program, the facilitator has the greatest impact on the ultimate success or failure of the program.”

– Jim Cain, Teamwork & Teamplay



PROCESSING THE CHALLENGE

PROCESSING -- WHAT IT IS!

Processing is the art of guided reflection; thinking about what has happened and attempting to learn from it; remembering thoughts, feelings, and actions along with their effects; making comparisons and contrasts. Processing is the substance of learning from past experience and generalizing the lessons learned, so that proficiencies can be maximized and mistakes not repeated. Processing is making sense of an experience by utilizing a series of carefully chosen questions to fit the needs of the group and the objectives of the instructor.

PROCESSING -- WHAT IT IS NOT!

Processing is more than going around a circle of participants and asking what each one learned. However, that question is better than no question at all. Processing is not generalizing an experience further than it has application. As Mark Twain observed, *"We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it, and stop there, lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again and that is well; but she will never sit down on a cold one either."*

WHY PROCESS?

The educational value of a challenge experience is in the precarious position of being greatly reduced or even lost if the instructor does not take time to guide the group in reflecting upon their experiences. An initiative task can prove to be nothing more than a fun little game unless the participants are encouraged to think about what took place and are aided in expressing their thoughts. The instructor must keep in mind the objectives that were established for a particular group, and accept responsibility for helping the participants focus on their actions, feelings, and verbal or nonverbal participation. It is through such reflection that learning is actually experienced rather than from the activity itself. During the activity, participants are usually so engrossed in the action that the "process" goes unnoticed. However, it is the "process" from which most of the learning will come.

THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR/FACILITATOR

The instructor's role in translating the experience is not necessarily one of an interpreter. Even though group members will have very similar external experiences, not all of them will be in a position to make the same inferences. The challenge for the instructor is to facilitate the group's reflection so that their experience is seen in a meaningful light. The instructor might be likened to a bridge between each participant and the experience. In performing this role, help is given by way of stimulating each participant's mind for the ongoing development of generalizations and the transfer of that learning.

HOW TO PROCESS AN EXPERIENCE

The instructor is responsible for making sure that the actions involved in an experience do not pass by unquestioned, unrealized, and unintegrated. There must be an open sorting out of information and personal perceptions among the members of a particular group. Not only will individuals benefit from their own reflections, but each member will profit from the thoughts and feelings of others.

Planning needs to be done by the instructors in order for the group to benefit from a period of guided reflection.

The following are some suggestions for this planning:

1. **ALLOW TIME.** The amount of time needed will depend upon the age of the group, past experience with challenge course activities, and the desired objectives.
2. **APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY PROGRESSION.** Depending upon the desired objectives, activities should be selected that would allow for gradually increasing complexity.
3. **SELECT AN APPROPRIATE SETTING.** A group cannot be expected to think and talk about their feelings, fears, and impressions in a distracting environment.
4. **ORGANIZE THE GROUP.** A circle is the best configuration for a discussion because everyone is equal in position and everyone can see and be seen, and it encourages a sense of closeness.
5. **KNOW THE DESIRED OBJECTIVES.** A discussion can wander from topic to topic for hours if the instructor does not aim at definite targets.

OBSERVER ROLE AND DIRECTIONS

The observer is an “expert consultant” to the group and will not be directly involved in the activity. Your role is to observe, take notes, and give feedback to the group from a process perspective. You will not make content suggestions or observations.

Observe and take notes on:

- Effectiveness of problem-solving
 - problem definition
 - decision-making
 - how phases are followed (use observer checklist)
- Leadership
 - style of leadership
 - how helpful or unhelpful

You are official timekeeper:

- Start time when group begins
- Manage time-out(s) for processing
_____time-out(s) for _____minutes each
- Call time when allotted time is up

Report observations to group at process time-out:

- Use points below as guidelines
- Confer with staff, if desired, for suggestions on presenting feedback
- Be concise and allow time for response

Please share these with your group, giving specific information based on your observations of their problem-solving behavior:

- 1) These are some things that you did well as a group. . .
- 2) These are some things that seemed to hinder your effectiveness. . .
- 3) These are my recommendations for what you might consider doing differently in

- your problem-solving process and regarding leadership. . .
- 4) What questions do you have for me, based on my observations?
 - 5) Can you summarize what you want to do differently as a group for the remainder of the activity?
 - 6) Resume your activity (when processing time-out is up). You have _____ minutes left to complete it.

PROCESSING SKILLS

Ask open ended questions	What were some feelings you had during the activity? How was that for you? How was that experience?
Focus on feelings	How did you feel? What is everyone feeling right now, e.g., one word to describe your feelings?
Repeat feelings	You must have felt relieved, etc.
Draw out learning	What can we learn from that?
Focus on one issue at a time	We want to move on to that. Let's see what else there is on this topic.
Monitor verbal and nonverbal	Look for signs of confusion, boredom, behavior constantly anger, etc., look for people talking, writing/not writing.
Test out perceptions	What other feelings do people have?
Appropriate self-disclosure	I am confused. How do other people feel?
Ask the group to summarize	Where have we gotten to?
Review	We seem to have covered so and so. Does that sound right? Anything to add? Have I missed anything?
Focus on behavior	What was she doing that made you think that?
To explore more deeply	Can you say more about that? What would be an example?
Ask group to diagnose itself	What is happening here right now?
Diagnosing	Does the large amount of joking going on suggest avoidance of an important issue?
Remember...	The power of SILENCE!

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"The world is made up by us, out of our experiences, and the concepts we create to link them together."
– Otis Fritsch

Facilitation Extras

- Facilitation Tips
- Afflictions & Consequences

"Know why you do, what you do."

– Steve Balsters & Bo Bowles



Facilitation Tips

As we have facilitated programs and groups, taught train the trainer, prepared for programs; “Doing the Do” as we call it, much learning has taken place. Our own experiential experience process - called **REALITY**. Below are skills, concepts, techniques, and ingredients that we have gathered from...you guessed it, **EXPERIENCE!**

Some of what we discuss in this section can be found in Karl Rohnke and Steve Butlers’ book QuickSilver (Chapter 7, pp. 58 - 72. 1995). We have attempted to summarize points we have found valuable as well as discoveries that has benefited us as professionals. They are in no specific order or category.

Remember, “That which does not kill you, makes you stronger.” - Provided you are paying attention!

- First and foremost, **PRACTICE!** Whether it be an ice breaker, game, initiative or ropes course event, make sure you feel confident and comfortable with the instructions, set-up, rules, purpose and safety considerations. Standing in front of a group for the first time is no place to be making it up as you go. This will go far in establishing your credibility with the group, as well as, building your own confidence.
- **Use conversation.** When people are arriving to your training session, talk with them, not at them. This practice sets an early tone. There’s no “trick” to it, just engage in conversation about ordinary things - not related to the workshop: Movies, weather, sports, something funny or exciting that happened, etc. (QuickSilver, p. 58).
- **Display Casual Competence.** While you are talking with folks, don’t say or bring up things that draw attention to yourself. This is not a YOU time, this is their time. You must gain respect via your actions, not self proclamations. (QuickSilver, p. 58).
- **Go with what you know.** The beginning of is no time for unpracticed or experimental stuff. Remember you are establishing your credibility in these early moments. Use your “golden” activities. Ones that you are confident with, even in the face of a difficult group. This also is relevant in terms of your own expertise. As time passes, your circle of expertise will grow! If your not ready, or comfortable don’t do it.
- **K.I.S.S.** Keep It Simple Stupid! This is just wisdom. Some of the best experiences are so simple - they just work!
- **Use lots of Laughter!** If you get people laughing, you are well on your way. Be careful with humor, though - it must be appropriate, and not directed at anyone. A good way to initiate some non-intrusive humor is to casually tell a personally embarrassing story about something that you did. Make yourself the brunt of the laughter. (QuickSilver, p. 58).
- **Don’t Teach; Facilitate!** Present the learning scenario as simply, entertainingly and accurately as possible, then back off and become an observer. If the group gets into a bind, becomes frustrated, or wants to quit, remember it’s not your role to save them or teach them how...Your “raison d’être” is to extend the learning process by allowing them to experience the joys of discovery and the agonies of not reaching a desired goal. The debrief or processing piece will allow for teaching, awareness and behavior change strategies. (Quicksilver, p. 59).

• **Co-Facilitate when possible!** This is especially important when you first start using this stuff. Presenting with an experienced facilitator can provide lots of insight, feedback and stuff for your “Bag of Tricks.” We have noticed that this is also useful for experienced practitioners. Having another set of eyes, ears, and heart can provide useful ongoing feedback during a program. Different expertise and perspectives are useful, not to mention keeping the energy level high by alternating and sharing the load. This may not be an option for many reasons: cost, logistics, etc. However, we have noticed in our own situation many times that by having more than one of us facilitating has made the difference between an OK day and an exceptional day.

• **Participate!** Don’t be afraid to join in activities, especially early in the program. In activities such as ice breakers, stretching and games your presence identifies your interest. Your involvement allows you to model enthusiasm, silliness, cooperation, listening, coaching and supporting behaviors. As the day progresses into problem-solving and initiatives you can stay involved by encouraging, talking, and interacting.

• **Pay attention to what’s going on!** If you ignore your ability to influence by action rather than by words, you will have to work harder as a leader. Who needs to work harder??? (QuickSilver, p. 60).

• **DDADA - A Simple Guide to Presenting Activities!** If you’re the type that needs an easy-to-remember process for presenting activities, this acronym is for you. DDADA was used in the New Games Foundation to teach people about leading activities. Describe, present the activity making the rules as simple as possible, be creative in you presentation, but don’t confuse or “trick.” Demonstrate, A brief description will clarify the rules, a picture is worth a thousand words. Ask Questions, Before starting, check for understanding. If you don’t ask them, they may not ask you. Do, Play it! A good policy is to get into action. You can clarify any information or rules as you progress. Adapt, Check to see if people are engaged and having fun. This guide can provide structure to your presentation style. Remember this is only a guide, modify it to serve your needs. (QuickSilver, p. 61).

• **Rulz:** Part of a leader’s role is presenting and enforcing rules. Knowing when and how to enforce the rules can present problems. The answer to when, how, etc. depends on the circumstances. More specifically what rule is being broken, what is the consequence to individuals and the group. Here are 5 options for rule enforcement. Enforce the rule and its consequence. Observe the infraction and report it to the group (allowing the group to decide whether to abide by the consequence). Observe the infraction and not report it (potentially allowing the infraction to become part of the debrief by exploring issues of integrity and/or quality control). Modify the rule (perhaps adapting the rule and its consequence is the best alternative because it was misunderstood or misinterpreted). Ignore the rule. It’s OK to be strict with rules. In fact, it’s probably advantageous early in a program or on an initiative. It’s easier to loosen up later in the program. (QuickSilver, p. 63).

• **Fine Tuning:** Sometimes we make what we do harder than necessary. The following list of techniques may help you avoid some pitfalls.

- The Circle: Circling participants is a powerful tool. It creates an even playing field, everyone is “on the front row” (eye contact), it is an enclosed shape, thus easier to hear, and you can adjust the size to add people, or create space for demonstrations. Another good idea is to explain first, you can step into the center for demonstrations if you need to. This strategy can prevent confusion in trying to move and explain at the same time.

- Positioning: When the sun is shining down early or late in the day, it may prevent people from making eye contact. If you position yourself so that you are facing into the sun, no one in the

group will have difficulty seeing you. It may be difficult on you, however, it can make people more comfortable and keep them engaged. (QuickSilver, p. 70).

- Eye Contact: Eye contact is important in creating a comfortable setting. The use of sunglasses can put a barrier between you and me. We ask the sunglasses be removed as the group circles up and during debriefing so eye contact can be maintained.

- If you are co-facilitating, be aware of your positioning. We recommend NOT standing next to each other. Try to get across the circle from your co-facilitator. This allows you to easily give and receive feedback from each other. It also creates a balanced “feel” to the group.

• **Points of Play:** (QuickSilver, p. 72)

- 1) **Do whatever needs to be done to create a fun comfortable environment.** Know what you can do to allow people to have fun and do it; try to avoid doing too much and be sensitive to doing too little.
- 2) **No matter how good (or bad) an activity is, your leadership can always make it better (or worse).** Activities are interchangeable; it's what you do with them that is important. Your leadership is critical!
- 3) **The better you get at leading through an activity or initiative, the better you have to be.** In other words, the more skill you develop, the more complex the needs of the group become. You're using the activities to meet more complex goals: The more awareness you have, the more focused you need to be on what the group needs and wants.
- 4) **No matter what else you do, remember the point is to have fun.** It's easy to get caught up in rules, equipment, debriefing issues and questions, rainy day plans, attitude problems... the list goes on and on. As long as people are having fun, they will be interested and open to the learning available to them. If the fun is missing, the learning opportunities are diminished.
- 5) **Plan more activities than you need, especially when you are a novice leader (but always be ready to change the plan).** Having more ideas than you could ever use may make you feel more secure and confident, but you need to remember that you can't always predict how groups and individuals will react to the activities. You still need to give them whatever will make it fun.
- 6) **The first 15 - 30 minutes of a program can make or ruin the experience.** The first few minutes can have a large impact on the remainder of the program. Use your best activities, the sure-fire successes, to set the tone. Start every program with a BANG!
- 7) **Facilitate. don't recreate.** Good debriefs can transform disappointing experiences into powerful and valuable learning opportunities. Fun for the sake of fun is OK; just remember that fun is simply a tool to access the learning.
- 8) **If what you are presenting to your audience isn't enjoyable, people will not return for more of what you have to offer.**

Afflictions / Consequences

Why?

Trainers often ask about the use of “handicaps” or “consequences” used during an experiential activity. Most of the time, they are looking for a greater variety of less-than-desirable results for participants to endure after making some mistake. Less often it is a question of ethics.

Why use afflictions as part of the training activities? Some of the strong benefits of experiential activities come from the speed and clarity of consequences. If “this” happens, then “that” is the result and I should learn to do “this” differently next time. For example: If you lose your balance on the beam and step on the ground, you lose your sight. Maybe you need to get better support from others next time. Afflictions also make good use of metaphorical learning. I do not walk around the office with a blindfold over my eyes, but I do often become “blind” to situations because of my behavior.

Afflictions or consequences need to be a result of some action done by a team or an individual. Don’t exasperate participants by pulling handicaps from the air to impose them without a clear reason. And if a group is doing well, don’t inflict some terrible something on them just because. Afflictions are tools that should be used wisely and with purpose.

Below is a list of several afflictions for those trainers who want to add to their tool kit.

The Senses

Blind - Participant puts on a bandanna so he cannot see

Partial blindness - Participant puts on a bandanna so he cannot see out of one eye. It causes the person to lose depth perception, however, they can see what is happening.

Tunnel Vision - Participant wears coke-bottle glasses or glasses with side-blinders

Mute - Participant cannot speak

Deaf - Participant cannot hear Place headphones and a small cassette player on a participant with the music turned up loudly

Verbal

Little Caesar’s Disease or Double Talk - Participant says everything twice

Whiner - Participant says everything in a whiny voice

Contra Language - Everything the participant says is the opposite of what they mean.

Banana Language - After each word the person says the word “banana”

Weatherman’s Speak - Everything the participant says is in the terminology of what a weather man might say during his forecast.

Opera - The participant can say anything as long as it is sung to a tune such as Mary Had A Little Lamb.

Jeopardy - Everything they say must be in the form of a question. (This one is great for directive participants.)

Time

Start Over - The group stops their progress and begins the activity again

Loss Of Time - For each mistake or "rework error" the group loses some portion of the time they have to finish the problem.

Body Usage

Confusion - Participant is instructed to walk backwards wherever she goes

Unstoppable urge to hold the back of your neck - Participant places a hand on the back of his neck and keeps it there

Attachment Disorder - One participant keeps hold of another participant during the activity

Little Brother - Everything one participant does or says is duplicated by another person

Paralysis - Participant stiffens a leg or arm and may not bend it

Loss Of Limb - The participant acts as if a part of his body (arm, leg, hand, etc.) is no longer there.

