

PEER-LED TEAM LEARNING LEADER TRAINING

FORMING TEAMS: THREE ICE-BREAKERS

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Training student staff is an important part of the work we do at the Rinella Learning Center, Miami University, Ohio. Each year we hire approximately 300 undergraduate and graduate students to provide academic support to students as Peer Leaders, tutors, Supplemental Instruction leaders and academic coaches. Like most educators, we understand student staff are better trained and more likely to enact our office's ideals if they are actively engaged during the training process. Group ice-breakers are a good way to communicate to students that the training session will not be a passive experience. They immediately set the expectation of engaged participation of the entire group. In order for ice-breakers to be a meaningful part of training we are committed to facilitating introduction and team-building activities that are related to concepts that will be discussed throughout the session. The three examples provided here introduce the concepts of group dynamics, metacognition, learning styles, sensitivity and the core principles of Peer-Led Team Learning. These ice-breakers effectively kick off training sessions while introducing concepts relevant to the students' roles as academic support providers.

PASS THE KOOSH® BALL

Materials: Koosh ball and stop watch

Time: 20-40 minutes

- PLTL Leaders stand in a circle and each person says his/her name. Go around twice to help participants learn each other's names.
- Explain to the group: here is a Koosh ball. The idea of this activity is to pass the ball to another group member and say her/his name before s/he catches it. You only need to know the person's name you throw to and do it in the same order each time. Complete this same sequence twice.
- At the beginning of the 3rd time around explain to the group that they will be timed to see how fast they can complete the circuit. Use the stop watch to time how long it takes the group to complete the circuit.
- Continue timing the group until there is consensus that the group is satisfied with the time earned.
Variation: Group members stand in different configurations to improve their times.

Ways to debrief the activity

Roles in Groups:

- ask individuals to identify what role they played in problem solving and what roles others played;

- have students reflect on whether that is the role they normally take in a group, prompt them to explore why they generally take that role or why they took on a different role in this situation;
- find out if anyone was unsatisfied with their role or the role of another participant;
- have group identify if people taking on different roles improves problem solving and why/why not;
- ask how the group decided when it had reached its goal, was satisfied with the time earned;
- relate activity to roles students will take in the PLTL groups and strategies Leaders should utilize to facilitate the groups.

Metacognition: periodically during the activity stop the participants and prompt metacognition by asking them the following questions: 1) What are you doing? 2) Why are you doing it?; 3) Where do you think it will get you? Chart responses on the board.

At the end of the exercise explain how metacognition (thinking about thinking) helps problem-solving because students are identifying their thought processes/abilities and regulating the thinking process. Discuss how the three questions used during the exercise encourage metacognition. Relate the activity to PLTL problem solving and strategies Leaders can use to facilitate metacognition. The benefits include identifying one's own thought processes, developing critical thinking skills and regulating problem-solving.

Being Mindful of Students' Thoughts/Feelings: at the end of the activity ask students to share what went through their minds when they first learned what they were being asked to do and what feelings they felt (responses will range from "Ugh, I've done this before" to "Please don't let me drop the ball;" disinterested to embarrassed).

- Write responses on the board and ask students to identify thoughts/feelings that aid problem-solving and thoughts/feelings that hinder problem-solving.
- Make the link that what they are feeling/thinking is mild compared to how students will feel at the first PLTL session.
- Have participants identify the different thoughts/feelings the PLTL students will bring with them to the first few sessions.
- Discuss ways Leaders can be sensitive to the students, help students move beyond hesitant feelings and win over those who are resistant to the process.

THE HULA HOOP RELAY

Adapted from Brian D. Biro, <http://www.briandbiro.com/team-building-game.htm>

Materials: 2 large-sized hula-hoops and stop watch

Time: 15-30 minutes

- Have PLTL Leaders hold hands, forming the group into a connected circle.
- Explain that there are only two simple rules to the hula hoop relay: You may not let go of one another's hands and you are to act as a team.
- Decide where you want to start the hoops (one hoop directly across the circle from where you place the first). You unlock the hands of the two people at the spot where you have chosen to start the first hoop, set the hoop over their hands, and re-lock them. Do the same on the opposite side of the circle with the second hoop.
- Explain that when you say go, the clock will start. One hoop must go clockwise around the circle. The 2nd hoop must go counterclockwise. When each hoop has made it all the way around the circle and returned to where it started, the clock will stop.
- Start the 1st attempt. As they begin, step back and observe. Listen to the level of cheering (if any) and enthusiasm. Watch for the level of energy. Are they really going for it? Or, are some casually making their way through? Notice whether they physically help one another. Also, is there anyone who keeps on trying despite getting a bit tangled up?
- Announce the time and congratulate the group. Have them try again and give them a new goal time of 30 seconds faster than the 1st attempt time. Again, observe for energy and encouragement.
- Announce the time, congratulate the group, give a new goal of 30 seconds faster and this time give them 2 minutes to strategize. Observe the group for those who dominate the conversation, those who standback and those who bridge these two types.
- Start the clock for the 3rd round and announce the time.
- For the 4th round give a drastically faster goal time, depending on the size of the group under 30 seconds or under 1 minute. Note the reaction and energy level of the group. Start the clock and announce the time.

Ways to debrief the activity

See Roles in Groups, Metacognition and Being Mindful of Students' Thoughts/Feelings (from Koosh ball exercise)

Setting Realistic Goals: at the end of the activity ask for reactions to the different tasks, what were participants thinking as the goals became more challenging. What did that do to the energy level/amount of encouragement? Relate the activity to the importance of setting realistic goals at PLTL sessions and ways to facilitate such goal setting.

How Attitude Impacts Outcomes: an alternate way to facilitate this exercise is to break the PLTL Leaders into two equal groups. Have one trainer facilitate his/her group in a positive, encouraging and energetic manner. Have a second trainer facilitate his/her group in a disengaged, negative and apathetic manner. Lead discussion with two groups to share their experiences and their results. Relate the activity to how significantly PLTL Leaders' attitudes/styles impact group climate, culture and outcomes. Discuss strategies Leaders should use to energize, encourage and engage students.

PLTL IS...

“Think/Pair/Share” was originally developed by Frank Lyman (1981). The responsive classroom discussion. In A.S. Anderson (Ed.). *Mainstreaming digest*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education.

Materials: paper, newsprint, markers

Time: 15 minutes

- Give each PLTL Leader a sheet of paper and instruct them to write down as many ideas as they can, stemming from the prompt “PLTL is....” They have two minutes.
- Have Leaders pair up and give them two minutes to continue the brainstorming process as a team.
- Have each Leader pair share their list with the larger group. Groups must cross off their idea if another group has the same thing written down. The trainer should note each idea on the board or sheets of newsprint.
- The pair with the most original ideas remaining on their list (not duplicated by another group) wins a small prize.

Ways to debrief the activity

Introduction to PLTL: use ideas generated by group as starting points for discussing the Critical Components of PLTL, roles of Leaders, goals of PLTL and facilitation dos/don'ts.

Think-Pair-Share: discuss the Think-Pair-Share collaborative learning technique used in this activity. Explain how Think-Pair-Share can be used in PLTL sessions. Have Leaders share the benefits and limitations of the technique.

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