**Team-Building Games**  
**Metaphors for Understanding**

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Handout is available at [http://jillspencer.pbwiki.com](http://jillspencer.pbwiki.com)

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**Why bother to take the time to use team-building activities?**

- Team building helps develop a sense of community that leads to a safe environment. Stress and fear can decrease learning potential. By taking the time to build a community of learners, students and/or staff are more likely to engage in learning activities.
- Between 25-33% of the population learn best through kinesthetic experiences.
- Metaphoric thinking helps people internalize concepts. Games can be used as a metaphor for a variety of concepts.

**When to use team-building activities:**

- To begin the year or a class/meeting
- To maintain a sense of community throughout the year
- To welcome new students/teachers to the class/staff
- To add a kinesthetic component to a lesson or unit or discussion
- To energize a group
- To create meaning through metaphor and stimulate higher level thinking skills

**Research On Metaphors and Learning**

From Marcia Tate’s *Worksheets Don’t Grow Dendrites* (p. 50)

- Most of our normal system of concepts is metaphorically structured. In other words, most concepts are understood only as they relate to other concepts. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)
- Students should make new learning fit into their personal world by capitalizing on the brain’s ability to connect the new to the known. (Caine & Caine, 1994)
- Making associations forms new connections between neurons and encodes new insights similar to a tree growing new branches. (Sousa, 1995)
- Creating and analyzing metaphors to enhance meaning and higher-order thinking skills is a teaching strategy that involves left hemisphere skills. (Sousa, 1995)
- Metaphors link abstract, difficult to understand concepts with personal experiences and promote a sense of creativity. (Whitin & Whitin, 1997)
- Metaphors can make otherwise forgettable concepts memorable, placing them easily and quickly into the brain. (Deporter, Readon, & Singer-Nourie, 1999)
- Metaphor allows a concept to be viewed from a broader perspective, such as how it is applicable to other content areas, to the student’s home environment, or to life as whole. (Allen, 2002)
- Comparing, contrasting, classifying, and using metaphors are all instructional strategies that increase student achievement. (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001)
- Metaphorical connections stretch the thinking of students and increase the likelihood that their understanding of a topic or concept will be broadened or retained in the future. (Gregory & Chapman, 2002)
**Synectics** is a way to connect new information to something that is already known or to take a fresh look at something that is well known. It works because:

- Makes comparisons
- Helps the brain connect new information to what is already know
- Has a strong visual or concrete image for the kids
- Is novel—young adolescents like novelty
- Is social—students get to hear other students’ thinking so they can clarify their own

The original model is far more complex than the one I describe below.

**4 Square Synectics (Bruce Wellman & Laura Lipton)**

- Brainstorm with the students a list of categories: food, sports, games, places, etc.
- Choose one of the categories and then brainstorm examples within the chosen category.

For example:

**Food: pizza, corn on the cob, ice cream, spaghetti**

- Create a 4 quadrant chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pizza</th>
<th>Corn on the cob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>spaghetti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The chart reads ******* is like ******* because. You fill in the blanks with the topic you are studying and the item you picked. One curriculum topic per chart.
  - Revolution is like spaghetti because
  - Polynomials are like baseball because
  - Gravity is like ketchup because

- Give partners or small groups a few minutes to brainstorm some responses—you will be amazed at the thinking your students exhibit! The first time you do this with kids, it’s best to model your thinking in one of the quadrants, then do the next quadrant together, and then let the kids try the last two on their own.

For example... The American Revolution is like spaghetti because:

- Like spaghetti there were many strands that made up the entire event (battles, diplomatic methods, etc.)
- Spaghetti has meatballs that stand out of the dish like the Revolution had standout
leaders—Adams, Franklin, etc.
✓ Spaghetti has many ingredients that blend together just like the Revolution had several colonies that came together.

THE GORDIAN KNOT (TeachmeTeamwork.com)
Sometimes It's Not All About Our Problems!

Materials: Enough 24 inch lengths of rope to give one to each pair of people in the group

Have people break into groups of 6 or 8 people (must be an even number). Then have each group break into pairs. Each group forms a tight circle with pairs standing opposite one another grasping each end of their rope. (see graphic below)

Keeping hold of the rope, members of the group create a knot in the center of the circle by moving under and over one another while criss-crossing the circle. (Do NOT let go of the rope) Continue this knot tying process until there is only about 4 inches of rope remaining.

Each group carefully puts their knot on the floor and moves on to another group's knot. Grasping the rope ends, and without letting go each group untangles the knot.

Processing Questions:

▪ What thoughts did you have at the beginning, the middle, and end of the activity?
▪ How did your group do with this activity?
▪ Who did the talking?
▪ What was said that was helpful?
▪ When did you know you were going to succeed as a group?
▪ How might this relate to our work, our unit?

Bandana Relay from TeachmeTeamwork.com

Materials:
✓ Bandanas
✓ Marbles
✓ Paper cups

Teams must move from Point A to Point B.
• Split group into teams (4-8 people)

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• Each person must hold onto the bandana with both hands
• The bandana must be held out straight
• The cup is balanced upside down on the bandana
• The marble is perched on top of the cup
• The team moves from Point A to Point B without dropping the marble; they must start over if the marble rolls off.

Processing questions:
• What strategies did you use to solve this challenge?
• How might you adapt and apply these strategies in other situations?
• What do the marble, the cup, and the bandanna each represent?

All Toss
From Leading Together: Foundations of Collaborative Leadership Curriculum
(Frank, Carlin, & Christ)

Materials: a soft 3 dimensional object that won't hurt if it lands on your head. One for each participant.

Objective: to throw all of the objects into the air at once and have each one caught before it hits the ground.

Rule:
• Participants may not catch their own object or the one from the person to their right or left.

Process:
• Clear a big enough space that everyone can be in a circle.
• Each participant places one of the soft objects at his/her feet.
• Start with one object. Count to three and throw the object up in the air. Model gentle throwing, not propelling it through the air at warp speed.
• If it's not caught, try again.
• Then move on to two items. Ask another person to pick up his/her object, count to three and both of you toss the objects.
• If they are both caught, move on to three objects and so on.
• Anytime an object is dropped, it is removed from that round. For example, if seven objects are thrown and two dropped, the two that hit the floor are removed. The next toss goes back to five items. When the five are once again successfully tossed and caught, add a sixth.
• As the challenge becomes more difficult, allow participants time to strategize how they might accomplish their goal.
• An alternative is to allow participants to set a goal of how many objects to try to toss and catch.

Processing questions:
• When did the group decide to communicate? What led to that behavior?
• How were decisions made?
• How is this All-Toss activity like real-life events you have experienced?
Keeping on Track

Materials: Each participant has a section of track. Each group has one marble.

The goal: To pass the marble as quickly as possible from point A to point B using the tracks without touching the marble with fingers or dropping it. Participants may not move their feet while the marble is in their piece of the track. Dropping the marble means starting over.

The process:
- The group forms a circle facing inward with each participant holding a piece of track.
- As quickly as possible the group moves the marble around the circle.
- After the time is noted the group sets a challenging goal and a strategy for improving the time and then tries again.

Variations: Groups can form straight lines rather than circles. Groups can compete to see who can make the marble go fastest.

Challenge: The facilitator takes half of the tracks away. Same goal and everyone still needs to participate.

Process questions:
What was most challenging about doing this the first time?
What did people do differently that made for improvement over the first or second time?
How is this activity like keeping each student on track for learning?