



New Jersey School of Conservation

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Group Initiatives Lesson Plan

Group Initiatives are a series of mental and physical challenges which simulate the scientific method of developing a hypothesis, experimenting with variables, then evaluating the process. The challenges will be presented to the group and will require collaboration among all the members for the most effective approach. This provides opportunities for creative problem solving, communication of critical ideas, insights or observations, and leadership development. Just as scientists and researchers begin investigating new questions with gathering information from colleagues, then analyze data for innovative applications, the group must follow a similar paradigm in Group Initiatives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The excitement generated from student discoveries is a dynamic and powerful tool that could be better used in our teaching. Discovering something will lead to more intrinsically motivated learning than by lecturing. Intrinsic learning is self-motivating, students learn because they themselves want to know more about the subject. While extrinsic learners just want to get a better grade or to please another person. Intrinsic learners better understand concepts and are more able to apply them to new and unusual situations. Conversely, extrinsic learners often simply memorize the material for the test then forget it. Knowledge retention is also improved when the learners discover the information rather than are told it.

The basic concepts of group cooperation, communication, and creative thinking in order to solve physical and mental challenges are practiced and reinforced. However the level of challenge increase with each succeeding obstacle. In this way the learning is cumulative and allows for all group members to contribute to the group's success. A debrief is conducted following each activity. This is a time to process the things the group learned during the activity and also to identify areas where the group could improve. The debrief is critical because it creates educational experiences out of activities that on the surface may seem to be merely recreational in nature.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

It will be at the discretion of the School of Conservation staff which specific activities the group will be confronted with. This allows the staff member to best use their experience and judgment to offer those challenges which best fit the needs of each group.

One of the major benefits of facilitating a Group Initiatives class is that the leaders have the opportunity to observe the total group interaction. The leaders have the opportunity to observe how the dynamics of the group evolve during the class. This perspective allows facilitation for even greater learning. For example, if an "autocratic" leader emerges, then the SOC teacher

may want to silence him/her by "muting" them. The debrief following the activity may focus on the effect of "muting" on both the group and the muted individual.

Other types of "handicapping" include blindfolding or even restricting the use of an arm or leg. If the strongest person is no longer able to lift others at a station, the group may then realize that no individual is indispensable, and that the group contains the necessary strength. Another topic for debrief following a task which involved "handicapping", might be to relate how it felt to be restricted. Then empathy (not sympathy) for situationally disadvantaged people might be discussed and promoted. This is a good example of how the lessons learned in the Adventure/Challenge program at SOC should be "transferred" back to the "real" world.

The specific objectives of Group or Team Initiatives are to provide each student (within the context of a group) with the opportunity to:

1. Be confronted with physically and mentally challenging activities.
2. Be creative in developing a plan or strategy.
3. Communicate their ideas to the group.
4. Develop and practice leadership skills.
5. Show consideration for the abilities and limitations of all group members.

Revised 2017 JCK and TC

NJ Student Learning Standards:

COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 2.1.8.PGD.4: Analyze the relationship between healthy behaviors and personal health.
- 2.1.8.SSH.3: Demonstrate communication skills that will support healthy relationships
- 2.1.8.SSH.4: Compare and contrast the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- 2.2.8.MSC.5: Predict the impact of rules, etiquette, procedures, and sportsmanship on players' behavior in small groups and large teams during physical activities and games
- 2.2.8.MSC.7: Effectively manage emotions during physical activity (e.g., anger, frustration, excitement) in a safe manner to self and others.
- 2.2.8.PF.2: Recognize and involve others of all ability levels into a physical activity.
- 2.3.8.PS.1: Assess the degree of risk in a variety of situations, and identify strategies needed to reduce deliberate and non-deliberate injuries to self and others

SCIENCE

- 3-5-ETS1-2 Generate and compare multiple possible solutions to a problem based on how well each is likely to meet the criteria and constraints of the problem.

LIFE LITERACY AND KEY SKILLS

- 9.4.5.CT.1: Identify and gather relevant data that will aid in the problem-solving process

- 9.4.5.CT.4: Apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies to different types of problems such as personal, academic, community and global

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

All of our field lessons integrate the concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills found in the [New Jersey's Core Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Competencies](#).