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# Solving problems

Learning to solve problems is an important goal in education, whether we are resolving temporary ownership of a soccer ball in elementary school or working out a marital disagreement in our fifties. Many of us wish we had learned effective problem-solving strategies early in life, so that we would not create as much conflict later on.

While problem solving is sometimes thought to be a rational and verbal process, there are ways of approaching problems with the whole body. Often the use of movement can provide the shift in perspective that is needed to clear up something people are stuck on.

On the following pages are experiments that can bring a refreshing whole-person perspective to problem resolution.

## SEA TREES

**TO THE LEADER** Often when a problem arises we go immediately to our heads to try to solve it. There are ways of solving problems that can use the whole of us.

If we are willing to see all of what is happening and to be all we are, then when we face a new situation or problem we can keep our balance and move from our center. Expanding to embrace the challenge is the focus of this experiment.

You might wish to have students remove their shoes when doing this activity.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** In puttylike slow motion, go to a place in the room where you can stand with space all around you. Shift your weight from side to side until you find the leg that feels most in touch with the floor. Let your weight settle down into your foot. Attach the bottom of your foot to the floor like a suction cup.

Keeping your other foot off the floor, let the rest of your body wave through the air as though you were surrounded by warm water that holds you up. Nibble, gobble, or slurp up whatever you need from the water/air around you. Especially reach from under your shoulders out through your fingers in all directions. Remember, your foot is stuck to the floor.

*(Continue for 2-3 minutes.)*

Now rest, and shake out your arms and legs for a moment. Try attaching the other leg to the floor, reaching and bringing in your catch. How does your body feel balancing on this side?

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**VARIATIONS** Here are two to read verbatim.

Think for a moment of a problem you have right now. How does this problem feel in your body? Let the problem attach your foot to the floor. Is it sticky or heavy or slippery? Let your whole body move around this problem, feeling it with all of you.

Choose a partner. Partner One, attach your foot like the stem of a flower, down into the ground. Let the rest of your body burst open toward the sun like the petals of a big flower. Remember that the other foot stays off the floor.

Partner Two, whenever you lightly tap Partner One, the taps being raindrops, Partner One has to close up his or her petals to get out of the rain. After a moment, Partner Two, begin beaming your body at Partner One, swirling around like the warm sun. When you feel the sun, Partner One, begin to spin and spread your petals again. Do this several times, then switch roles.

**COMMENT** Balance is connected to extension. Contracting away from a problem from fear or the belief we're not good enough keeps us from having access to all of our resources. Discussion of how we feel when we get smaller than we are, how we lose our balance when something new arises, and how to find it again could follow the experiment.

## GETTING STUCK AND UNSTUCK

**TO THE LEADER** Everybody gets stuck now and then. Life is not about trying to avoid being stuck; it's about how we

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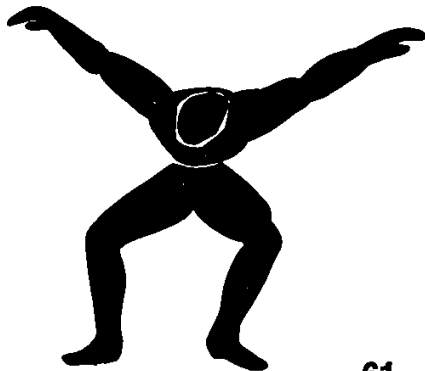
get stuck and unstuck. Trying to avoid being stuck can *really* get us stuck. A workable measure of progress in life is how fast we get unstuck, how often we get stuck and unstuck. Being stuck is usually about something we need to learn or experience. This experiment explores some of the ways we get stuck and some possibilities for getting unstuck. If we learn to get unstuck in our bodies, we can generalize that knowledge to other areas.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** We're going to explore a place that we probably all know—getting *stuck*. Those times when you can't go this way *or* that, nothing seems right. Sound familiar? How do we get stuck, and how can we get unstuck? Let's experiment with this sticky situation.

First, try sticking a part of you to the floor. Really fasten it down, superglue it to the floor. Now explore all the ways you can move the rest of you that's not stuck.

*(Do this for 1 minute.)*

Now ask yourself what is needed to unglue that stuck



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part? Try breathing into the stuck place, or imagining the glue dissolving into the floor, or inventing some other way. Now stick another part of you to the floor and see how you can move. Move as much as you can with that part *very* stuck.

*(30–60 seconds.)*

And then begin to unstick that part and let your body move all together . . . ahh, yes.

Now try sticking one part of you to another part of you, perhaps your elbow to your hand, or your foot to your thigh. You choose. Move around the room now with those parts stuck together, noticing how much you can move and how it feels.

*(30–60 seconds.)*

And now begin to unstick. Do you need to blow on the stuck place or rub it? What does your body need to unstick? Now try sticking one other part to another part of you and see how that changes your ability to move through the room.

*(30–60 seconds.)*

And again unstick, being aware of what this part of you needs. Good.

Let your whole body get stuck in one position. Try being stiff as a board or limp as a noodle. Can your body move when you're stuck like that? Try it . . . more and more until your body says let's try something else, and shifts.

*(30–60 seconds.)*

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Is there another whole-body stuckness you do sometimes when you're mad or frustrated? Let your body get stuck in that feeling. No moving! When you feel *really* stuck, ask that stuck place directly: What do you need from me in order to get unstuck? Listen with your ears, and also let your breath open wide to make space for the answer.

*(1-2 minutes.)*

When you get unstuck let your body continue moving for a while, enjoying the freedom.

We can get stuck in an idea about ourselves, too, such as I'm not good enough or nobody likes me or I can't do that, it's too hard. Think for a moment of some idea you sometimes get stuck in. Let that idea mold your body like clay until you look and feel the same as your idea. When you're stuck, a little or a lot, take a moment to love yourself, hug yourself inside for having that idea sometimes. Then begin to think a different idea about yourself: I'm totally lovable; I *can* do it; I like myself. Watch the new idea begin to melt the old idea and remold the clay, making it softer.

*(30-60 seconds.)*

Enjoy your free moving, and then find your seat again.

**VARIATIONS** In place of or in addition to the above, suggest that students get stuck in a particular movement pattern, a way of moving that's repeated such as limping or walking on tiptoe or leading with the head way out in front. Direct their attention to the changes that being stuck makes in how they notice other people, or their comfort and contact with themselves. Have them invent a new way of getting unstuck.

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Another variation is to stick different parts of themselves to the chair or desk.

## OBSTACLE COURSE

**TO THE LEADER** Problems often arise out of our placing obstacles between ourselves and what we want. In this experiment, participants construct their obstacles and learn to move through them. All types of environments are suitable for this one.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** Sometimes to get where we want to go we need to go around and under and over. Let's play with making up an obstacle course. Each of you will make your own. First imagine something you want or somewhere you want to go . . . now imagine all kinds of things in the way . . . moats, walls, tunnels, dragons, canyons, winds, and storms.

Start somewhere in the room and move toward your goal, encountering each obstacle that gets in your way. Take your time to really do what needs to be done to clear up and get through each obstacle. This is your journey, so notice what you need to be successful with each thing you meet. Okay, let's go.

*(Continue for 5–8 minutes, depending on degree of involvement.)*

Let's share what happened.



## THE BOX

**TO THE LEADER** This experiment can be used in a variety of ways, depending upon what's in the "box." It is structured here as a problem-solving activity; additional suggestions are listed afterwards. An open or semifurnished room is probably most suitable for this experiment. Music can provide a magical background; *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* by Vaughan Williams, *Mysterious Mountain* by Hovhanness, and any of Steve Reich's work are good journey music.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** Think for a moment or two of some problem you've encountered recently that you'd like to solve. It could be a math or reading assignment, a difficult theme, or something that's occurred between you and a friend.

Now close your eyes and imagine a box somewhere in this room. See its shape and size . . . notice any decorations or colors on it. Inside this box is something that will help you solve your problem, something new.

Open your eyes and look at that place in your room, imaging your body there with your eyes open. Let your body begin to move toward the box. Are you excited to find out what's inside, or scared, or hesitant? As you move toward the box notice if anything gets in your way, or if you need to take a long path to get there. What is your own way of reaching your box?

As you approach your box, take time to explore its outside. How does the box feel to your hands? How big

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is it? Let your imagination make it bigger than you are. Find out everything you can about it . . . how does it open? . . . does it have a padlock, a clasp, no lock? . . . how can you open the box?

When your box is opened, climb inside and shut the top, or leave a crack open so you can see out. Find out what is inside and take time to make it your own. Now find a way to bring what you've found back with you as you leave the box so that you can come back to the box for security and safety whenever you wish.

VARIATIONS In the box is

- something you need to help you take the next step in your own journey
- a secret, something great about you that you didn't know
- something you've been missing
- limitless good feeling.

## ROOM RUN

TO THE LEADER There's more than one way to. . . Flexibility is often the key to problem solving. Changing your perspective, seeing things another way, turning things upside down are expressions we use to describe the process of turning a problem over and examining new possibilities for solving it. This activity duplicates that process at the

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movement level. It can be a five-minute stretch break, an integral part of a new learning activity, or an extended experiment on its own.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** How do you usually get from one place to another? Use the whole length of the room and go across the way you usually do. Now we're going to experiment with many different ways of getting from here to there. I'll suggest a way each time you go across the room. Start by moving as slowly as you can

- without your feet touching the floor
- making circular patterns in space
- next to someone else
- without crossing anyone's path
- as quietly as you can
- leading with some part of you way out in front
- every way but front and straight ahead
- along the edges of the room
- backwards
- making straight lines in space with your body
- as fast as you can
- on one foot
- between you and a partner, using only two of your four feet and one of your four hands to touch the floor
- using neither your feet nor your hands
- via the most direct route
- the longest way you can imagine to get there

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- eyes closed
- eyes open but looking over your shoulder.

**COMMENT** Discussion can focus on the discoveries students make about the enormous variety of movement available when efficiency is not the most important consideration.