

11

Exploring weight

We are concerned in this chapter with our relationship with weight, the way we experience the relative solidity of our bodies. A weighty argument, a feather-light touch, a sense of being off-center, all can remind us of the basic nature of the sense of weight. Gravity is the most fundamental aspect of weight that we all deal with so constantly that we're generally not aware of the ever-present pull of the earth. Awareness of this relationship can increase our overall responsiveness to the ups and downs of life. If we can get behind our weight, we can have real impact. Conversely, if we give up, our weight tends to give in, to pool into a blob, and we are less effective in our interactions with others. Sensitivity in communication depends largely

Exploring weight

on our fluidity along the weight continuum from the delicate suggestion to the demand.

The experience of being centered is grounded in our sense of weight. Activating the movement potential of the pelvis awakens a true power and groundedness that allows us both to sink into the support of the earth and to reach out to others. Weight is related to support, both self-support and the capacity to encompass another's needs.

The activities in this chapter introduce different facets of weight. As with time and space, weight factors are integral parts of other experiments. Consult the *Index* for these listings.

SAILOR WALKING

TO THE LEADER This experiment focuses on the moving center of the body. It is particularly designed to help ground and relax students in a way that can be generalized to other activities.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Some sea movies show sailors down on the dock dancing to a sea chantey. They hold their arms in a certain way that I'd like you to try. Hold one forearm over your lower belly and bend the other behind you over the small of your back. Yo ho ho and away we go! Feel your breath move your hands in and out. Rest them gently against you as you begin walking a few steps forward, a few back. Let your body move from your belly

Exploring weight

and pelvis. Do you walk differently when you move backwards? Try moving in a circle or sideways and notice any changes in your sailor ways. Hold your breath a moment as you walk. Does that change your sense of being low in your torso? Now take some breaths deep into your lower back. Does your hand move? Now for a moment lower your arms and see if you can keep the same sense of moving from your center, gliding along easily and smoothly. Great!

BUILDING BLOCKS

TO THE LEADER We can use our weight in many different ways. Finding ways of supporting others and receiving support is one of the most satisfying. A carpeted, open space is most suitable for this experiment. It's helpful to emphasize the trust-building possibilities of this experiment to assist students in taking care of each other.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Find a partner close to your own size. We're going to experiment with using our weight to build different shapes and structures with each other. First, put your hands against your partner's as though you were going to push. Let your bodies begin to lean toward each other, bending from the ankle, until you make an A shape. Notice that each of you needs to cooperate to make it work. Now slowly come back to standing upright, supporting your own weight. Try that once more. Now stand beside your partner and find a way of leaning shoulders against each other so that you are both supporting each

Exploring weight

other. And gently come back up. Now take some time to experiment with taking turns holding most or all of each other's weight. Feel free to try something interesting you see another pair doing.

Let your partner know what you want if you need more support or a different shape. Take a few minutes to talk to your partner. What felt easy and comfortable? Was any position scary? Did you feel you could hold your partner's weight? What did you like and not like?

VARIATIONS Try some other positions . . . back leaning; one partner in horseback position, the other astride; both sitting down leaning on their elbows with their feet touching, legs up in air.

BACKING

TO THE LEADER I'll back you up. Who's backing this deal? Do you have a back-up? These are some common phrases we use to talk about the experience of supporting each other. We tend to be so goal oriented, forward rushing, that our backs are largely unfamiliar territory. Self-support and support from others can flow from the back as well.

You'll need an open space in the room for this experiment.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Begin to walk backwards through the room, no peeking over your shoulders. Move slowly enough that you can begin to put eyes on the back

Exploring weight

of your head *and* on your back. Spread your back and arms out wide as you back through the room, seeing in a new way. Find the open path in the room. Notice how differently your body feels moving this way, whether your legs are sure or trembly, your breath full or fluttery.

Now look through your back for another person. Hook up with the back of a partner. Play with breathing through your back into your partner's back. Shift your weight and feel your partner's response. Does all of your back touch your partner's? What happens if you bend and stretch your back? Now say goodbye through your back and move to another partner. Explore backing with your new partner.

(Decide how many partner changes you want.)

Now see if you can back to your seats in the room.

POWER SHARING

TO THE LEADER Experiencing our weight in different ways affects our sense of power or powerlessness, our ability to have impact, to be seen *and* heard. This experiment is a kind of movement brainstorming designed to give everyone a feeling of inner power and well-being. It is most suitable in an open space, although after first being introduced it can be adapted to the seating arrangements in which students spend most of their time.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Let's form a standing circle. Let your arms be rotating airplane props for a moment and

Exploring weight

check to see if you have enough clean air space. Step back a step or so if you need more room.

Sometimes when we explore a theme, we get together and share ideas "off the top of our heads," what we call brainstorming. We're going to brainstorm in movement, shape our bodies into sculptures.

Close your eyes a moment, and scan back to the last time something happened and you felt helpless to do anything about it . . . something didn't go right. How did you feel inside and what did you want to say? Now open your eyes and let your body take on the shape that matches that feeling. Let's look around the circle and notice how many different ways our bodies can show powerlessness. Find someone else's way of expressing and try it on with your body. Notice if you feel differently holding your body another way. And try on one more person's stance. Are there any sounds that go with your way of standing? . . . sighs . . . squeaks . . . groans? Make a sound that goes with your position. Good, now bounce up and down just a moment and shake off that feeling and experience, clear your body. Ahh . . . good.

Close your eyes again and remember the last time you felt really big and strong and important, a time when you made an important decision. With your eyes closed let your body remember your way of standing, your sense of how much space you took up, your feeling of your feet against the floor. Take on that position of feeling powerful.

Then open your eyes and notice the difference in how everyone is standing. After a moment, again try on another person's sculpture . . . and one more person's position. What do these powerful positions have in common? Are

Exploring weight

they all different or was there something you noticed that was present in all the positions you tried on?

(Take a few minutes to share, and have the whole group try on someone's powerful stance if possible.)

Great, now close your eyes once more and imagine into the future. You have a *delicious* warm feeling of well-being because you have everything you need inside to feel just right. Notice what you need to have that sense of well-being, and notice how good it feels. When you are ready gently open your eyes and move through the room letting your sense of well-being carry you.

(Continue for 1–2 minutes.)

Great! Now let your steps take you back to your seat.

VARIATIONS For remembering experiences of empowerment: remember a time when

- you had a big problem to solve and finally got it
- you first rode your bike, or learned to do something really hard physically
- the whole day was so easy and fun and filled with adventure.