

Rede Cidadã's Biocentric Education

Sample activities for communities

REDE CIDADÃ

Rede Cidadã (The Citizen Network) is a non-profit NGO based in Brazil that seeks social transformation through the integration of life and work as a single value. The organization is grounded in the belief that work is a necessity in life and a basic condition for people achieving agency, autonomy, rights, and citizenship. Since 2002, Rede Cidadã has brought together civil society, business, government agencies, and other social organizations to find solutions that help people enter the job market and lead productive lives.

Impact:

- Since 2002, Rede Cidadã has:
 - Helped 65,539 people enter the labor market
 - Supported and trained 31,948 young people in apprenticeships
 - Assisted 2,030 homeless individuals with finding and securing jobs
- Since employing the biocentric education in methodology in 2014, participant job retention rates have increased from 73% to 94%

BIOCENTRIC EDUCATION

Rede's methodology draws upon biocentric education, among other theoretical and philosophical frameworks. Biocentric education is a system of self-development and trauma centered healing that uses music, movement, and meditation to deepen self-awareness. It seeks to promote the ability of individuals to make a holistic link to oneself and one's emotions, and to express them. Concurrently, it seeks to promote empathy with oneself and the broader community, foster healing and connection, and help youth access and remain on opportunity onramps.

Rede Cidadã has integrated biocentric education into its pathway development programs for Brazilian young people across the spectrum of vulnerability, including, but not limited to: homeless or youth at-risk of homelessness; systems-involved youth; youth with disabilities; youth facing discrimination due to gender identity and/or LGBTQ status; and youth facing fewer systemic barriers to accessing economic pathways. Since integrating this approach into their pathway development programs, retention rates have increased from 73% to 94%, at six and 12-month follow up.

BIOCENTRIC EDUCATION SAMPLE ACTIVITY GUIDE

The following guide provides a sample of introductory biocentric education exercises that can be incorporated into workshops, classrooms and programs for youth in employability, education, and other pathway development programs. Each of the activities herein are meant to help young people build awareness and empathy for themselves and others, connect with their community and peers, and understand how they connect with the workplace and larger world.

The guide is structured to be progressive, meaning that activities build upon one another to help a cohort build empathy with themselves and the group, establish trust, and promote healing. That said, the activities do not need to be used sequentially and can be used as individual activities to augment other program offerings. As facilitators and youth development professionals, use your judgement and understanding of your groups dynamics when selecting which activities to use.

Each activity can be structured to last 15 minutes to 60 minutes, depending on the needs of the group and time available. The activities are also meant to be accompanied by music, which should be curated to reflect local cultural and contextual nuances. If you are interested in sample music selections for a particular activity, or wish to learn more about Rede's full methodology, kindly contact the (Re)Connecting Youth Team at iyfreconnectingyouth.org.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

Objective: To become aware of your body, to awaken to the present moment.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

How to do it: Invite participants to:

- Close their eyes and breathe consciously; paying attention to the movement of air as it flows into and out of their nostrils.
- Pay attention to the sensations of their belly, as the air enters and leaves their lungs.
- Focus on the breath. Inform them that their mind will likely be overrun with thoughts. The moment they realize this, remind them to bring their attention back to breathing quietly, creating a breathing wave, and concentrating all their attention on their breath in a fluid and natural way.
- Be present and attentive to their body and the sensations they are feeling; and not worry about time. Remind them to let their thoughts pass like clouds and to continue breathing with all their attention turned to the present moment.
- Remind participants that the goal is not to control their breathing or master their thoughts, but simply to reconnect with the experience of the present moment.
- After a few minutes, invite everyone to open their eyes at their own pace, to look around the room, and reflect on the experience of being present here and now.

DEMOCRATIC OCUPATION OF SPACE

Objective: To build initiative, empower youth to lead as protagonists in their lives, create equity among participants, and build body consciousness using movement.

How to do it: Invite participants to:

- Gather in a circle and walk in an integrated way, occupy all space in the room in a democratic way, following the facilitator's instructions.
- When everyone is walking, the facilitator guides everyone to stop and take a step toward the balance of space.

Narrative:

"Are we occupying this space in a balanced way?"

"What is the best way to occupy this space in a balanced way?"

"Watch and be aware of which direction to take"

- Repeat activity 2x so that the group begins to occupy the space in a more harmonious way, stimulating the group's communication with each other.

WALKING STEROTYPE

Objective: To rehabilitate the natural walk, integrating the legs to the torso and the chest to the hip, dissolving the emotional armor that people often wear.

Over time and with practice, the restoration of physiological walking has the effect of regulating the integral motor function, restoring the appropriate tone not only of the legs but also of the hip, the chest, the pelvis, and facial muscles. In addition, it tends to restore normal curvature of the spine and induce changes in metabolism, in the genitourinary, and cardio-respiratory functions, walking with the whole body, accentuating the action of the gluteus.

How to do it: Invite participants to:

- Gather in a circle and propose the following game:
 - *Imagine that now we are going to walk through the room as if we were drawn by an invisible line. Like the spider man's web. This line now attaches to your chin and you begin to walk around the room as if pulled by the chin.*
- **Demonstration:** Invite a young person to demonstrate along with you what a chin-jerking walk would look like.
- Following the demonstrations, invite the full group to walk:
 - Ask the group to start walking around the room. The activity should be set to music, and the volume should be lowered when you propose other ways to walk.

Narrative: (as participants are walking around the room)

- *"This line now pulls you from the right side of your body ... This line pulls you from*

the left side of your body ... Now that line pulls you through the navel ..." Until all movements are de-mechanized and more systemically integrated.

TRUSTING ANGEL

Objective: To build trust, establish positive relationships, and create a safe space for participants to care for, and be cared for by, the members of the group.

How to do it: Invite the group to:

- Sit down in a circle and let participants know that they are going to engage in a trust-building activity where each participant will take turns being led around the room by someone else, with their eyes closed.
- Emphasize that the exercise will be carried out with care and confidence.
- **Demonstrate** by asking for a volunteer. Stand in front of that person and speak to them the words of agreement and trust.
 - **Leader:** "I promise to lead you through with care and love safely."
 - **Follower:** "I trust you and accept you to lead me at this time."

The leader then guides the follower through the room, safely, while the follower has his/her eyes closed.

- Following the demonstration, participants are asked to find a partner with whom to conduct the activity, going through the same ritual above of establishing agreement and trust; and leading/following.
 - If there are an odd number of participants, consider participating or having a co-facilitator join to create an even number.
- After five minutes, ask that the group return to the circle and sit down. Invite participants to reflect on their experiences as leaders and followers. Ask them what they felt, and how the experience was for them.
 - This process can be very powerful and stir up a lot of emotion. It is important to build in some reflection and processing time to close out the activity.

CEREMONY TO GIVE PRESENCE: I SEE YOU!

Objective: To build presence through sight, promote socialization, build confidence, promote citizenship and humanity; and help to develop social and personal identity. This is a pedagogical experience that promotes respect and creates presence and awareness of everyone in the room through a ceremony of eye-contact.

How to do it: Invite the group to:

- Gather in two parallel circles, facing the person in front of him/her, hand in hand.
- Establish eye contact with the person in front of him/her and give presence to them with the following words: *“I SEE YOU!”* The other person responds: *“I ALSO SEE YOU.”*
- The participants move around the room in circle, connecting with each individual and giving presence through eye-contact and verbal recognition that each person is seen.

LULLABY CIRCLE

Objective: To create a feeling of belonging. The lullaby circle resembles a collective lap. It induces deep relaxation and experience of cooperation, while stimulating the human instinct of intra-species protection.

How to do it: Invite the group to:

- Join in a circle and take step or two forward, to create a tight circle so that they are very close to each other.
- Once the circle is close, ask participants to wrap their hands loosely around the waist/back of the people next to them.
- Instruct participants to position their feet shoulder width apart, in order to achieve a very comfortable grounding position.
- Once connected, ask the group to begin to sway so that all participants oscillate at the same time and in the same direction, inducing an experience of unity and harmony.
- Encourage the group to, at their own pace, look into each other's eyes, recognizing the people in this group as partners with whom they will share many good moments and learnings. From time to time close your eyes and relax, and from time to time open your eyes and recognize the group.
- Continue this activity for 3-5 minutes.

Facilitator's Note

- This activity works best as a closing activity, after the group has begun to establish a trusting relationship with each other.

(RE)CONNECTING YOUTH INITIATIVE

Recognizing that solutions to global challenges transcend national boundaries, in 2016, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) launched (Re)Connecting Youth: Exchanging Global Lessons. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), this two-year initiative seeks to identify and share innovative global approaches for increasing youth connection with practitioners, policymakers, and funders across the United States. Ultimately, the goal is to foster learning and energize support for holistic solutions aimed at providing millions of youth in the U.S. who are not in work or school with opportunities to lead healthy, productive lives.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOUNDATION

For more than 25 years, the International Youth Foundation's (IYF®) sole focus has been to help young people succeed. A global nonprofit organization, IYF believes success in life is secured by earning a livelihood. For most youth that means choosing a career path and landing that first job, while others decide to start their own small businesses or social ventures.

Regardless of the road chosen, IYF has been by the side of more than 19.7 million youth in 105 countries, empowering them to overcome the obstacles that lie in their way to leading productive, fulfilling lives. Rooted in the belief of youth as problem-solvers, change-makers, and leaders, our initiatives are catalysts for change.

To learn more, visit: iyfreconnectingyouth.org

