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This article was downloaded by: [Mary Ann Muller]

On: 31 January 2014, At: 12:07

Publisher: Routledge

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Health Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ujhe18>

About Yourself

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Published online: 12 Mar 2013.

To cite this article: Ruth C. Engs (1976) About Yourself, Health Education, 7:6, 39-39

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00970050.1976.10612763>

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About Yourself

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A "mentally healthy" person is often characterized as having an accurate perception of reality, able to maintain close interpersonal relationships, able to communicate openly and honestly with others, and aware of personal goals, values, abilities, and behavior.¹ Because of the variety of environmental stresses and our individual backgrounds, we all have different problems of living. The extent to which we learn to successfully cope with these stresses often determines how mentally healthy we are.

One of the primary objectives of mental health education in the classroom is to help the student become aware of himself, his communication techniques, and his behavior as an aid in learning to cope successfully with life. The following warm up can help the student become acquainted with himself, with others, and with the class as a whole. It can help to create an atmosphere for fostering open communication and self-knowledge leading to better mental health.

These instructions should be related to the class by the instructor:

We are now going to do some get acquainted exercises. We first will do a relaxation exercise to tune in to ourselves. Then we will do several exercises to get to know others in the class. This may be a new experience for some of you, however, most people find it fun. If for some reason you find you do not wish to continue, you can stop at any time. However, I'm sure you will find it enjoyable.

Relaxation (10 minutes)

1. First put your head on your desk and get comfortable in your chair or lie down on the floor and get comfortable.
2. Close your eyes, relax, and become aware of the sounds in the room.
3. Next, I want you to pay attention to your breathing. Feel the air go in and out.
4. Now I want you to take a deep breath, feel the air going in your lips, down into your lungs; feel air go out. (Repeat this two times.)
5. You should feel relaxed; in fact, it is probably the first time you have relaxed today.
6. Now become aware of your feet, feel them against the floor, in your shoes. Now tighten your feet as long as you can. Now relax.
7. Become aware of your calf, (continue with thighs, whole leg, shoulder

and buttocks, chest, fist, neck, face, whole body).

8. You will feel relaxed; become aware of parts of your body, touching the chair (floor).

9. Now relax. And take a deep breath.

Body Trip²—The Magic Golden Ball (10 minutes)

To be used after people are in a relaxed state.

Imagine that you see a warm golden ball in front of you.

As you watch it, it slowly begins to shrink becoming smaller and smaller.

When it is the size of a dime it moves toward you.

It gets closer and closer and finally attaches to your forehead.



Then it turns into a magic warm golden paint.

It flows over your forehead, nose. Smell it, taste it.

As it flows it feels warm and glowing.

When it reaches your neck the magical paint takes on different colors and still flows over your body—shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, fingers, chest, stomach, genitalia, thighs, legs, feet, toes.

You are now surrounded in a warm bath of colors and feel good. I will count backward from 10 to 1. While I am counting, start opening your eyes. At the count of 1 you will be wide awake and feel good.

I now want you to turn to the person next to you and discuss what you experienced.

Getting Acquainted³

1. Go up to someone you do not know but think you might have something in common with and would like to know better. One person talks for two minutes while the other just listens. Then reverse the role. Now, the two of you find another pair you do not know. Introduce your partner to the other pair.

2. Go up to someone you think you have nothing in common with. Sit back to back and talk. Join another pair and discuss things you learned about communication by sitting back to back.

3. Go up to another person you do not know. Look each other in the eyes. Do not talk. Follow each other's hands around as if you were looking in a mirror. Join another pair and discuss what you learned about yourself and the other person by doing this.

Debriefing

1. Get back into a big circle. What did you experience with the fantasy trip?

2. How does it feel to go up to a stranger and talk?

3. How much did you find you had in common with the person you thought you had nothing in common with?

4. What problems did you have in communicating back to back?

5. What did you learn about nonverbal communication or about your own communication skills from sitting back to back?

6. Who led in the hand mirroring? Why? What did you learn about yourself in this exercise, about the other person?

¹Maslow, Abraham H., *Toward A Psychology of Being*, 2nd edition, Van Nostrand-Reinhold Co., Toronto, 1968.

²Adopted from Dick Price's "Gestalt Workshop," Esalen Institute, Big Sur, California.

³Pfeiffer, J., and Jones, J., *A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training*, Vol. I-IV, University Associates, Iowa City, Iowa.