



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## "Push Hands" : The Quintessential Hands-on Learning Opportunity

This activity is good for warming up a group and for introduction or debriefing a session on conflict. The activity has two phases: cooperative and competitive. Some lazy, sedentary types may need prodding. Do not rush. This activity requires at least 45 minutes.

**The Game:** "Push Hands" is a game used as a training technique for practitioners of Tai Chi Chuan, a Chinese martial art. "Push Hands" players learn balance, anticipation, and coordination. They learn to relax while in physical contact with other people. They become more aware of posture, areas of bodily tension, and concentration. The best players yield to force, as the supple tree bends with the storm winds.

**Begin:** Two people face each other, step forward with their right feet, place the feet side by side about six inches apart, with their insteps facing each other. They stand in a relaxed manner, with straight backs and bent knees. From this point on, all players will attempt to avoid moving their feet. The feet stick to the ground, psychologically rooted and immobile. The players place the backs of their right wrists together and imagine themselves glued together; so when A moves, B must move with A, in any direction, at exactly the same speed.

**Phase one:** Initially, the two players simply shift their weight back and forth slowly. After becoming comfortable with this, it is time to begin trying to move the hands in a horizontal circle. Again shifting the weight back and forth slowly, the players should turn their hips and shoulders in unison. A relaxed, pleasant, and cooperative experience usually follows. The players should continue for five or ten minutes. Players may switch to the left hands and feet, as well. This is a good time for several partner changes. Players will learn how other people move, whether they can both relax, and how to maintain balance when pushed. They will learn about yielding and attacking.

**Phase two:** Now, some competition enters the game. Without using the unglued hand, players can attempt to cause their opponent to move a foot, while trying to

keep their own feet fixed to the ground. This can become quite strenuous and competitive. The most relaxed people—the ones who yield to force, neutralizing the force by turning to the side and sinking into the ground, and do not resist—will be most successful. Various strategies will emerge.

It is certainly worth repeating that the secret to success at this game is the ability to relax and sink the weight into the ground, while neutralizing the force of the attacker by turning to the side exactly as the attacker applies force. Remain glued at the wrist, and you win.

**Discussion:** Take a break and discuss what is going on. Who is winning and who is losing? How do the players feel? What have they learned about conflict? Which strategies and styles were the most and least successful? How do conflict and cooperation differ?

**Conflict management styles:** Now ask players for their observations on some conflict management styles: (1) Wimping Out, (2) Fighting Back, and (3) Neutralizing Force. Give examples from social situations. Discuss conflicts which have escalated into wars. Discuss the stratification and cultural implications of different styles of managing conflict.

If you are familiar with Taoist philosophy, discuss the difference between Yin (yielding, soft) and Yang (attacking, hard). Discuss the Taoist philosopher Lao Tse's concepts from the classic *Tao Teh Ching*, such as soft overcoming hard, and virtues of patience and humility.

**Switch partners:** Again, with new partners (switch partners often so the players will get to experience considerable diversity) start from the beginning. This time reinforce the idea that relaxation and softness win. Prompt players to try to entice the forceful attackers into losing their balance, then gently guide them off their clumsy feet. A skilled player can frustrate a forceful attacker almost every time. Many women will excel at this.

After everyone is exhausted, have players discuss or write about conflicts they have experienced or they



know about. Have them express how these conflicts would have turned out using each of the three strategies. Discuss the Oriental versus Western Philosophies. Explore the differences between conflict management and conflict resolution.

**Follow up:** Play the game again later in the semester. See if anyone learned anything new about conflict.

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## *"Since Dark Is What Brings Out Your Light..."*

The amazing thing about our changing technology is not the technology itself, but the impact it makes on our lives and the irreversible things that it does to our culture. Automated teller machines have not only made banking easier, but they have changed the way that we do banking. Home computers have not only changed the way we do our income taxes and improved the legibility of our written correspondence, but they have changed the after-school habits of adolescents and tied up our telephone lines with their endless hunger for modem communication. The gasoline engine made it possible for Henry Ford to make millions; it also allowed the kind of mobility that enabled American mothers to enter the workforce in large numbers. And, the impact is not always what we think it will be. Who would have guessed that the introduction of microwave technology would lead to the break-up of AT&T? This is all by way of saying that I should not have been surprised when my attempt at applying some new technology to my teaching methodology had some unexpected results.

My academic department decided to reintroduce a course not recently offered, "Introduction to Business." This was a course aimed at non-business majors and primarily taken by developmental students who were not ready to choose a major or not yet academically prepared for their chosen field. Being the least senior faculty member in my department, I was assigned the course and set out to make it as interesting for myself and my students as possible.

Knowing in advance that the majority of my students would also be taking developmental English and reading courses, one of my first objectives was to supplement reading material with clear, concise representations of the important concepts. Standard audiovisual techniques did not seem to be adequate; however, I was lucky enough to be involved with the IBM CIM program and had access to a laboratory with an overhead projection system connected to the CIM AS/400, a PS2, and an inexpensive VCR. I chose a text which came with a library of video case studies (which could be shown on the large screen through the overhead system) and decided to do my lectures through the PS2, preparing "slides" with the help of Harvard Graphics, a large library of clip art, all projected in color through the overhead projection system. It worked well; the frequent changes from discussion to computer-illustrated lecture to large screen video case studies kept everyone's attention. In all of this, there was one surprise!

I encourage discussion and keep track of participation levels. Therefore, I am aware when students are involved. I began to notice that every time I turned out the lights to use the projection system, faceless voices came to me out of the blackness of the rows and columns. These voices floated up asking questions, stating opinions, contributing miscellaneous facts or examples relating to the subject at hand. The lack of light seemed to bring with it a lack of self-consciousness and a kind of openness. I do not know if there is a way to simulate this without the darkness, but I am getting more thought and communication from developmental students on a regular basis than I thought possible.

What is the lesson here? We academics tend to minimize the effect that a classroom has on those who do not find it easy, those who have not been in a classroom for many years, or those for whom it was never a good experience. I am reminded of Robert Frost's ponderings on the subject of illumination coming out of the dark (hence, my title). My own experiences in the dark have taught me to at least think about the way my students feel in class and encouraged me to try ways other than turning out the lights to free my students from fear of ridicule or failure.

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