

4.2 Point the way with language

Goal

A clear and effective communication is central to living and working together in a multicultural context. Exercise 4.3 furthers the students' competence in communicating clearly and effectively. At the same time, the students learn to describe problems which may arise from vague communication, and to consider and develop solution strategies.

1st–9th grade

40 minutes



Materials:
objects that are available
in the classroom.

Hints:

Source for 4.2, 4.3 and 4.7: Schilling, Dianne (1993): Miteinander klarkommen. Toleranz, Respekt und Kooperation trainieren. Mülheim an der Ruhr: Verlag an der Ruhr.

Procedure:

- Without further explanations, the instructor asks the students for help with building an airplane landing strip. By using chairs, benches, etc., a runway of 6–8 meters in length and 1.5–2 meters width is constructed. Subsequently, 6–10 objects (books, paper, pencils, etc.) are distributed on the runway.
- The instructor then asks for a volunteer pilot who must land his/her plane on the runway, and an air traffic controller who has to issue instructions to the pilot from his imaginary air traffic control tower at the airport.
- The pilot and the air traffic controller are placed at the opposite ends of the flight path. The instructor blindfolds the pilot and declares that there is a severe thunderstorm in the area. Lightning strikes have interrupted two-way radio contact between plane and tower: the pilot can still hear the controller, but s/he is unable to issue any radio signals. Additionally, the storm has devastated the runway, and debris is everywhere. The pilot must try to land the plane safely in zero visibility, relying completely on the instructions from the tower. If an object on the runway is hit by the aircraft while trying to land, the plane is considered lost.
- Several teams of aircraft controllers and pilots attempt to land the plane safely. After each attempt, the difficulties that emerged are briefly discussed.
- Inputs for the final class discussion: How did the pilots feel? How did they try to compensate for their "blindness"? How did the controllers feel? What did they do in order to guide the pilots as precisely as possible?
Transfer: have you ever encountered a situation, which depended on highly precise formulations and instructions? What kinds of situations of this kind could arise in terms of different cultures and languages?
Generalization: how can we issue clear and exact messages? How important is the language aspect in communication? Which other elements play a role in communication and can help to improve it?