

4.7 What inhibits communication

Goal

The students experience and describe how communication can be impaired and how to deal with difficult communication situations. They develop strategies and expand their communicative action competence.

7th–9th grade

45–60 minutes



Materials:

previously prepared material on the board; possibly copies of the worksheet "communication inhibitors" (master copy see next page).

Procedure:

- Prior to the lesson, the instructor has compiled a list of communication inhibitors on the board (c.f. the terms in bold print on the worksheet that follows).
- The list is reviewed and discussed in class. The students should find a title for it, otherwise the instructor proposes the term "communication inhibitors". The individual points are reviewed once more under these aspects and how each one can block a conversation or another communication situation. The students should surely be able to contribute examples from their own experiences.
- In a role play, the students should experience and identify the effects which the referenced behaviors can have. It requires two roles: (role A), someone who would like to conduct a normal conversation (e. g. about the school or about hobbies), and someone who constantly interferes with communication inhibitors, such as interruptions, inappropriate questions, etc. The instructor can model this role in the first round to ensure that the students fully understand the process.
- The role play is limited to 5 minutes. Role B will dominate the conversation and make the conversation collapse, although role A will try again and again to continue the conversation in a collaborative manner.
- Short discussion, reflection, and analysis; then 2–3 additional rounds with other students.
- Final reflection: what did the students feel like in role B? Like those in role A? In your opinion, are there communication patterns or inhibitors that are typical for a culture, for a gender or an age group? Which strategies do you personally implement in situations where someone tries to torpedo the communication?
- For deeper analysis, review and reading, distribute the worksheet "communication inhibitors".

| Communication inhibitors | This is how it's (better not!) done |
|---|--|
| <p>Interrupting:</p> <p>Interruptions are probably the most frequent reason for disrupting a conversation. They convey the frustrating feeling to the speaker that the counterpart does not listen at all and does not take him/her seriously.</p> | <p>Always interrupt when your counterpart speaks – e. g. with commentaries about yourself and things which you have experienced.</p> |
| <p>Providing unsolicited advice:</p> <p>No one welcomes unsolicited advice, such as: "If I were you..." or "If you ask me..." is often a red flag. They communicate: "I am superior". Unsolicited advice can lead to a counterpart's feeling helpless and foolish.</p> | <p>Provide much unsolicited advice. It is great to use phrases like: "If I were you...", "I think you should...", "It is better if you do it this way...", "If you ask me..." etc.</p> |
| <p>Assessing:</p> <p>If you explain to your counterpart that his/her ideas and feelings are wrong, you convey the impression that you know better. This often leads to defensiveness and hurt feelings. It would be ok, if you formulated your assessment as your own personal view.</p> | <p>Evaluate your counterpart and everything s/he says with such statements as: "it would be much better if...", "objectively speaking, this is nonsense...", "it surely won't work this way..." etc.</p> |
| <p>Interpreting:</p> <p>Those who constantly interpret or analyze the statements of their counterparts convey the impression they know better and do not take them seriously.</p> | <p>Analyze everything your counterpart says (e. g.: "You may think it is so and so, but you are wrong...", "That's because you don't know how to deal with it" etc..</p> |
| <p>Dominating:</p> <p>To engage in a conversation with someone who always comes up with something better or more interesting is demotivating. The counterpart will either soon withdraw in frustration or react aggressively.</p> | <p>Take control of the conversation and make it clear that you know everything better. "No, it is this way...", "Well, I have experienced something even far more exciting".</p> |
| <p>Asking inappropriate questions:</p> <p>Those who constantly ask questions instead of first listening, force their counterpart into the defensive. If you ask a lot of questions, you distract your counterpart and convey the impression of distrust and control.</p> | <p>Ask question after question in a challenging manner: "Why did you go there?", "Whom did you meet?", "In any event, what does that mean?" etc.</p> |
| <p>Questioning, accusing, contradicting:</p> <p>Those who question everything their counterparts say and who always belittle their ideas, render a partnership-based, equivalent communication impossible.</p> | <p>Contradict constantly and tell you counterpart how wrong s/he is: "You are wrong", "This cannot possibly be so", etc.</p> |
| <p>Criticizing, insulting, humbling:</p> <p>Negative, ironic, cynical or sarcastic comments have a smart aleck and demotivating effect. Few people would want to continue a conversation in which they are insulted and belittled.</p> | <p>Make sarcastic, negative comments, such as: "you probably think you are a genius", "you have never had a good sense for how people are" etc.</p> |