EVALUATING COMMUNICATION WITHIN GROUP WORK

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to evaluate attitudes, behaviours and skills that facilitate or hinder open and supportive communication within a small group.

Preparation

Material
handout for each participant

Room
group tables for 3-5 people, chairs

Duration
80-90 minutes (depending on the duration of the group session)

Option A
- Presentation of the activity (e.g., previous activity including awareness raising activities on attitudes, behaviours and skills that foster and hinder open, supportive communication): 5-15'
- Group work session: 30'
- Individual identification and reflection: 5'
- Group reflection on gained topics and collective conclusion drawing: 15'
- Plenary: 10'
- Possible addition: 10'

Option B
- Presentation of the activity (e.g., previous activity including awareness raising activities on attitudes, behaviours and skills that foster and hinder open, supportive communication): 5-15'
- Group work session and observation of communicative processes: 30'
- Group reflection on gained topics and collective conclusion drawing: 15'
- Plenary: 10'
- Possible addition: 10-15'

Target group
student teachers, student teachers in internship, students

Setting
seminar at university

Application
beginning of the S-PLC work

Description of the Activity

The students evaluate their communication at the end of a group work session and derive conclusions for improving communication within the group in subsequent sessions (Option A).
1. Focus of the activity: conditions that facilitate and hinder communication within small groups. The lecturer draws on the awareness raising activity on attitudes, behaviours and skills that foster and hinder open, supportive communication.
2. The lecturer explains the purpose of the activity with a handout / screen. The students evaluate and reflect on how communication takes place within a group by identifying the conditions / factors that have facilitated or hindered open, supportive communication among its members with the help of the handout.
3. The lecturer distributes the handouts to the students, who individually fill in the handout and draw conclusions for subsequent group work meetings.
4. Group members share and discuss their observations, collectively draw conclusions and decide on how to improve for open, supportive communication in future meetings.
5. In plenary, students comment on their experience and on the individual as well as group conclusions.

Additional Information

Alternative

Alternatively, one student per group observes communication during a group session (Option B).
Follow step 1 + 2.
Step 3: One member of each group does the observation and data collection by using the fishbowl technique. They fill in the handout while the group work is in progress.
Step 4: The "observers" analyse the data collected and draw conclusions for subsequent group work meetings based on that information.
Step 5: The groups reflect, based on the information collected by one of its members, and take decisions collectively to improve on open, supportive communication within the group in subsequent group meetings.
Step 6: In plenary, students comment on their experience and on the individual and group conclusions.

Learn more

DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2013). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work TM. Solution Tree Press*.

https://www.edutopia.org/blog/effective-team-communication-first-step-getting-along-elena-aguilar

Note to the lecturer

In order to work successfully in a small group, members need to be able to communicate openly on intellectual and emotional levels and provide support to each other. The following information can assist in coming up with a list of "facilitating and supporting conditions for open, supportive communication":

Note: Some of the following aspects can be formulated in positive or negative terms and, therefore, be included as either facilitating or hindering conditions.

Facilitators of communication
- Listen actively: listen to what other members say and how they say it, be alert and interested in other people's comments.
- Pay attention to nonverbal communication: people send messages nonverbally; examples of nonverbal signals include tone of voice, volume, facial expressions, eye contact, silence, arm and leg posture.
- Ask questions: asking members questions during group work shows interest in them, their contributions, comments, etc.
- Check, clarify and paraphrase / summarise, in order to ensure that you are understanding correctly, that your interpretations are accurate: check that you have understood the message the others are trying to get across.
- Invite others' point of view: respect for others encompasses openness to and interest in their views.
- Provide constructive feedback: providing constructive feedback requires focusing on ideas and behaviours rather than on individuals. You need to be as positive as you can. Both giving and providing feedback requires checking and asking for clarification if comments are unclear, listing attentively and being open to accept other members' ideas.

Barriers to communication
- Judging the other person
- Not paying attention to what other people are saying (e.g., if looking at the computer screen, the smartphone etc.)
- Avoiding dealing with the concerns of a member of the group
- Attitudes such as anger, nervousness, having the need to win an argument etc.
- Somebody talking too much / long

Template 1   *Handout (Option A)*
Template 2   *Handout (Option B)*

TEMPLATE 1: HANDOUT (OPTION A)

Tick √ if observed	Attitude / Behaviour / Skill	Comments
Barriers of communication		
☐	Someone has been judged.	
☐	Someone didn't pay attention to what other people said (e.g., looking at the computer screen, the smartphone etc.).	
☐	Someone's concerns have been avoided / not addressed.	
☐	Someone talked too much / too long.	
☐	Add one of your own.	
☐	Add one of your own.	
Facilitators of communication		
☐	Active listening has taken place.	
☐	Nonverbal communication has been paid attention to.	
☐	Questions have been asked to show interest in group members' ideas, contributions, etc.	
☐	Checking, clarifying and paraphrasing / summarizing have been used to ensure accurate understanding and interpretations.	
☐	Group members, particularly the quieter ones, have been invited to share their points of view.	
☐	Constructive feedback has been provided.	
☐	Others' ideas have been accepted.	
☐	Add one of your own.	
☐	Add one of your own.	

What conclusions can you draw from the above information to improve open, supportive communication within the group in subsequent group meetings?

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TEMPLATE 2: HANDOUT (OPTION B)

Tick √ if observed	Attitude / Behaviour / Skill	Comments
Barriers of communication		
☐	Someone has been judged.	
☐	Someone didn't pay attention to what other people said (e.g., looking at the computer screen, the smartphone etc.).	
☐	Someone's concerns have been avoided / not addressed.	
☐	Someone talked too much / too long.	
☐	Add one of your own.	
☐	Add one of your own.	
Facilitators of communication		
☐	Active listening has taken place.	
☐	Nonverbal communication has been paid attention to.	
☐	Questions have been asked to show interest in group members' ideas, contributions, etc.	
☐	Checking, clarifying and paraphrasing / summarizing have been used to ensure accurate understanding and interpretations.	
☐	Group members, particularly the quieter ones, have been invited to share their points of view.	
☐	Constructive feedback has been provided.	
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