

THE IMPACT OF FEEDBACK ON COMMUNICATION

Purpose: The objective of this activity is to allow the student to explore the impact that non-verbal feedback has on the communication process and how they can change it to accommodate for the lack of feedback to effectively communicate.

Overview: During class discussion you have developed the definition of human communication to include the component parts. The addition of feedback to the model makes human communication a process and no longer a spectator sport where communication is something that is done to a person. In this activity, the students will conclude that feedback improves the quality of the communication event, increases the accuracy of the information exchanged, and the overall communication is more enjoyable when all participants have an opportunity to contribute. The tradeoff is that feedback requires time.

In this activity a volunteer student describes similar pictures to the student audience under three distinct feedback situations: no feedback; only non-verbal, visual feedback from the audience; and full verbal and non-verbal feedback.

Time: The activity can be conducted within one class period including the activity and class discussion.

Skills Required:

- Listening skills
- Descriptive articulation
- Verbal to pictorial translation
- Empathy

Materials and Tools:

- Three pictures of similar content complexity. The pictures should be simple enough that the students could draw them from a verbal description, but with enough ambiguity to require careful word choice to describe the content of the pictures. The pictures must be able to be concealed from the student audience until the end of the activity.
- Clock or stopwatch to time the communication events.
- Individual paper and drawing instrument to draw the pictures as they are described.

Preparation: Before the activity begins, instruct the class on the rules that must be followed for the activity to be meaningful and successful.

1. Do not attempt to cheat by peaking at the pictures being described.
2. Do not look on your neighbor's drawing.

3. In the first drawing, do not speak, giggle, ask questions, or verbally react to what the speaker is saying.
4. In the second drawing, you may use your normal facial expressions as the speaker is describing the picture to you. The speaker is encouraged to look at the audience as the description continues. No verbal feedback or cues can be given as before.
5. In the third drawing, students may ask clarifying questions as needed while the speaker is describing the picture.
6. There are no set time limits.

Background:

What to do and how to do it:

1. Ask for a student volunteer to describe the drawings.
2. The speaker keeps the drawings concealed from the student audience.
3. With his/her back to the student audience, the speaker describes the picture while the audience attempts to recreate the picture being described. The audience is advised that they must remain quiet during the speaker's comments. The speaker announces when she/he is completed with describing the picture and the teacher notes the total elapsed time.
4. Next, while the speaker is facing the audience, the second picture is described. The audience is advised that they must remain quiet, but eye contact and facial expressions are allowed. Again the speaker announces when he/she have finished the descriptions.
5. Finally, the audience is encouraged to ask as many questions as they want during the last picture description. The speaker should try to answer as many questions and provide clarifying details as asked. A final notation of the time required completes the data collection for the activity.

At the end of the activity, reveal to the students the actual pictures.

Data analysis:

The analysis of the data is primarily anecdotal. Interpretation of feelings and impressions is the desired outcome.

Activity questions: The teacher leads a class discussion about the activity. First note on the board the time required for each picture descriptions. The elapsed time will most likely increase significantly from the first to the last picture.

1. Ask the students to share their drawings.
2. Ask the students which drawings that they feel they were able to complete more accurately.
3. Ask the speaker how they felt about each description, which did they find the hardest to do, which did they feel best about etc.
4. Ask the audience which description they felt more comfortable with. Which did they like the most, which they liked the least.
5. Ask the students to draw some conclusions about the time data collected.

Generally the students will feel more comfortable, and have a more positive feeling about the experience when feedback was a component. The tradeoff is in the amount of time required for the communication when feedback is present. With feedback, the completion of the communication event is the responsibility of both the speaker and the audience. This shared responsibility takes some of the stress off of the speaker and allows the audience to feel more in control and actively engaged in the communication.

Adaptations for special needs:

Hearing impaired students should be able to fully participate in this activity without major modification if the description is done with signing. The speaker would need to have her/his vision of the audience restricted for the first description while allowing their signing to be viewed by the audience.

There should be no need for modification for the visually impaired student.