

Overview:

This lesson plan challenges participants to practice their communication and teamwork skills by working in groups to build a tower with particular constraints such as limited materials or communication barriers.

Background:

This activity was created by Karen Hapgood and Helmut Fennes and is published in their 1996 book *Intercultural Learning in the Classroom: Crossing Borders* (see citation below). However, there are many different versions of this activity that can be found online. An overview and links to some of these versions can be found below.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Understand that people have different perceptions of the same thing.
2. Understand that there are different interpretations of and meanings to the same verbal or non-verbal expressions.
3. Experience misunderstanding of others and being misunderstood.
4. Learn to communicate non-verbally. 5. Learn to cooperate on a specific task across communication barriers.

Time:

2 hours

Group Size:

Small group

Materials:

For each team, four pieces of flip-chart paper, a ruler, scissors, and glue/sticky tape. Each team must have the exact same resources.

Note: These are the materials for a version created by Erasmus+. Materials may vary depending on which version you use.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Other Skills:

Teamwork

Links to Activity Instructions:

- [Build a Tower from Erasmus +](#)
 - In this version, all participants in the group (except for an appointed leader) are blindfolded. The leader must direct participants on how to build their tower.
- [To Build a Tower from Kristin Arnold and the Extraordinary Team](#)
 - In this version, participants will have seven minutes to build a free-standing tower that is 5 feet tall. They can only use paper cups, paper plates, a roll of masking tape, index cards, and coffee stirrers.
- [Tallest Tower Activity from the National Braille Press](#)
 - This version of the activity is designed for younger students. In this version, individuals or groups of students have 15 minutes to build a tower out of uncooked spaghetti noodles, marshmallows, tape, and string.
- [Build a Tower from the Chartered Institute of Building](#)
 - This version of the activity is designed for ages 14-19. In this activity, student groups aim to see who can build the tallest tower using only paper and tape.

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [Are You Listening?](#)
- [Be Specific! \(Snowflake\)](#)
- [Life Without Questions or No Questions, Please! A](#)
- [Listening Deeply for Values](#)
- [One Way-Two Way Communication](#)
- [Ostrich, The](#)