

Introduction:

This lesson plan challenges participants to seek information in creative ways. They will engage in a conversation and attempt to learn more about their partner without asking them any questions. During this exercise participants will explore how and what they can learn when they do not ask questions and be encouraged to grow in the power of listening and developing relationships through authentic conversations. This activity will demonstrate the pros and cons of asking and not asking questions.

Background:

This activity was originally created by Nagesh Rao, president of the Mudra Institute of Communication, in 2011. It was used in two different presentations by Janet Bennett: one at the 2015 NAFSA: Association of International Educators Conference and another at the 2016 WISE Conference (see citations below).

Objectives:

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

1. Learn how to seek information.
2. Learn how to share about themselves.
3. Learn how to interact with others without asking questions.
4. Understand concepts such as ways of knowing, direct versus indirect communication styles, agenda-setting, and power.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Pairs.

Materials:

A bell to call time and a blackboard or flipchart to write down the answers.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

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; Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion.

Activity Instructions:

1. The purpose of this activity is to have the “Interior Designer” to gain information about the likes and dislikes of the “client” in order to re-design their room. The “client” is not allowed to disclose the type of room in the conversation, but can only explain what their favorite thing about the room is and what they want to do in the room.
2. Ask one person in the pair to play the role of an Interior Designer and the other the role of a client wanting a room to be redesigned. Once they choose, ask the client to think of all the things in the room and how they may want it changed. Tell the Interior Designer that s/he wants to re-design a room. They can talk to the client (no drawings allowed) but is not allowed to ask a single question. Let the participants talk for about five (5) minutes; walk around and observe strategies used to communicate.
3. Once you have ended that part, ask participants to switch roles. The person who played the client’s role will take the place of the Interior Designer and vice versa. The Interior Designer will talk to their client to design their home but is not allowed to ask a single question. After five minutes, ring a bell or indicate that the conversation has ended.
4. Debrief in pairs, in small groups, or in a whole group discussion.

Facilitator note: You can decide which is best for your group. Based on the size of the group, you can have participants place answers on a flip chart or have a whole group conversation.

- Using a word, describe what it felt like to talk with each other without asking questions. (For the first time and then when the roles were switched.)

Facilitator note: If there are negative, awkward, etc. responses, ask if anyone had a positive interaction without asking questions.

- Why do we ask questions?
- What are the benefits and challenges of asking questions?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of not asking questions?
- How does this activity reflect what happens in the real world?
- What impact does our asking questions have on intercultural interactions?