

Using Colourblind to strengthen individual communication skills.



NOTES FOR TEACHERS

'Colourblind' supports the development of key verbal communication skills: listening and speaking. These are fundamental to success in higher education, the search for jobs and in future employment.

Follow the instructions and run the activity exactly as described in the accompanying notes for adult use. You need to make no changes to the activity process, although you may need to consider the length of time you ask the students to wear blindfolds. Judge this upon their levels of concentration and focus and build in breaks / progress reviews as required.

Colourblind raises awareness of some vital aspects of successful oral communication and offers an opportunity to practise and refine these within a process of collaborative problem-solving. If you are using Colourblind to focus specifically on students' personal communication skills, we suggest you address the most important learning points that arise from the activity. These are:

1. Effective oral communication means that messages are received and understood in the way the speaker intended.
2. To ensure accurate understanding, verbal communication must be clear, precise and specific.
3. Understanding must be confirmed, therefore there must be a means of checking the listener's understanding
4. If a speaker fails to communicate meaning, s/he is responsible for changing the communication until shared meaning is achieved
5. Effective oral communication takes into account the needs and preferences of the listener
6. If oral communication is happening in a group context, it is important to learn how to manage the 'flow' of communication and to be able to intervene and withdraw as appropriate.

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REVIEW

Suggested questions to use when reviewing Colourblind: a skill focus

1. What were the problems of communication that you found when attempting this activity?
2. What did you do if someone did not understand you at first?
3. What did you notice about the different ways in which people described the shapes?
4. How did you change or improve the descriptions of the shapes that you gave?
5. How did you make sure that other people understood exactly what you were saying?
6. What did you do if you were listening and did not understand the description or instructions you were given?
7. Some people were probably easier to understand than others. What did you notice about the way those people spoke?
8. If we were going to do the Colourblind exercise again, what would you do to improve your own communication?

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LEARNING SUMMARY

When summarising the learning from the exercise, reinforce the following learning points.

1. You are responsible for ensuring that your listeners understand what you say. If they do not, think about how you can change your words and present your message in a different way.
2. Keep your communication clear and specific – try to think through what you are going to say, to avoid hesitation and confusion.
3. Give enough detail to avoid misunderstanding (eg. in the exercise, it is not enough to say, “There is a hole in the middle”. You need to say, “There is a triangle-shaped hole in the middle” or “There is a circular hole, about 1cm across, cut out of the middle).
4. You can check understanding by asking someone to describe back to you, in their own words, what you have just told them.
5. Listen carefully to what people are telling you – pay attention and don’t just think about what you are going to say next. Try to use the same language the other person uses eg. if someone talks about the shape by describing the length of the sides or the angles (eg. “It is a straight edge about 5cm long, then there is a 45 degree angle) try to use similar language yourself to help understanding.
6. If you are not sure that you have understood something correctly, ask for confirmation. You might choose to say something such as, “I think I understand what you are saying. Can I tell you in my own words so you can confirm I’m getting this right?”

Depending upon your context, you might wish to relate these learning points to specific situations (eg. in an oral examination or in a job interview) with specific examples.

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USING COLOURBLIND IN OTHER AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

Whilst the focus in these notes is upon the use of Colourblind as a tool for improving individual and group communication skills, creative teachers will also see opportunities to use the materials and the process in other areas of the curriculum.

For example: First and foreign language teaching

The fact that Colourblind can be completed in any language makes it an ideal activity to use in practising and extending vocabulary.

Working in a first language, areas of development may include:

1. Giving written or spoken instructions in clear and concise ways – ensuring that there is no confusion about the selection and sequencing of a particular number of shapes. For example, one person selects a number of shapes and lays them out on a table in a particular pattern. A partner must follow written or spoken instructions to select the same shapes and lay them out in the correct sequence, without being able to see the original selection.
2. Extending vocabulary and descriptive language, using visual references to describe individual shapes. For example, can the learner find two or three alternative ways of describing a shape based upon simile or metaphor? Examples might be: 'The pointed church spire, breaking through the rounded cumulus cloud' or 'The crescent moon, floating horizontally above its own reflected image'

Working in a foreign language, areas of development may include:

1. Basic vocabulary: colour, shape, size
2. Practising the use of prepositions: eg. above, below, beside, under, on top of, between
3. Practising the use of comparatives: eg. bigger, smaller, sharper, flatter, taller, higher, closer, more, fewer, less
4. Number-related terminology: how many, more than, remove, add, group, set, separate, together

Think of the Colourblind materials as being a learning resource. Once you are familiar with them, feel free to experiment and consider other applications. Your creative ideas and imagination will support your students in achieving valuable learning across the curriculum and beyond it.