Simbols

Strengthen Group and Teamworking Skills

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

Using Simbols to strengthen group and teamworking skills.

'Simbols' supports the development of group and teamworking skills. These skills have been highlighted by employers as being important in organisational life. They are especially valuable when working in functional teams or as specialists assigned to projects. The skills developed in Simbols also help in learning to contribute to group discussion and manage the interventions required in the context of meetings or group decision-making.

Our suggestion is that you run the team version of Simbols rather than the original whole group version. In the team version, your group or class is divided into three sub-teams who work remotely before coming together for a final challenge.

The reasons for this recommendation are:

1. The whole group exercise tends to take longer and has more potential for learners 'switching off'

2. The team version actively engages more learners at one time

3. Quieter or more reserved learners are more likely to contribute in a smaller group

4. The team version is easier for a single team leader to manage and control and also offers the potential to appoint sub-team leaders

5. The relationship between working teams (inter-team working) is an added dimension to explore when thinking about teamwork

Follow the instructions and run the activity exactly as described in the manual for adult use. Select the briefing documents and diagrams that relate to the team version of Simbols.

Simbols raises awareness of some vital aspects of successful teamwork and offers an opportunity to practise and refine these within a process of collaborative problem-solving. The exercise requires the learners to:

1. Identify exactly how and where their own information fits into the overall picture (just as they might need to find out their own role within a team)

2. Use logical thinking to identify and clarify how the activity works

3. Establish an agreed way of working and maintain the discipline of following this, unless a change is agreed

4. Make sure they develop a language that everyone understands in the same way, to avoid misunderstandings within and between teams

5. Share information across teams and build relationships based upon trust

6. Create an operational plan and test it, refining it when necessary

7. Implement the plan successfully under time pressure, ensuring everyone knows how and when to contribute

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These are the key learning points to draw out from the exercise. These can be used when supporting students in any team project, in group work in any of their academic subjects and in beginning to explore their leadership potential.

1. Teamwork requires a contribution from everyone: teams cannot afford to 'carry' non-contributing members

2. There are different ways of contributing to the team – everyone can find a valuable role

3. Teams need to develop a working strategy, agree how it will be implemented and then develop the discipline to see it through

4. Teams need to find ways of reaching agreement about how new ideas and proposals will be adopted and implemented

5. Teams develop their own culture and ways of working – learning to understand this supports individuals in becoming accepted as team members

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REVIEW

Suggested questions to use when reviewing Simbols: a focus on teamwork skills

1. What did you do at the beginning of the exercise to try to organise your team? How easy was this to do and what problems did you encounter?

2. Did you feel confident enough to share your information and ideas during the exercise? If so, what helped you to do this? If not, what might help in future?

3. Did the team have anyone who took on a leadership role? Was this the same person all the time or did it change?

4. Did you agree a particular way of working (eg. giving information in a particular order) and if so, did people stick to this? What happened if someone had a better idea or wanted to change what you were doing?

5. What happened when you approached other teams to share your information with them? Were you welcomed or was it difficult to break into their team?

6. Did everyone contribute to the exercise in the same way? If not, what different things did you notice people doing? Can you give some examples of things people did that helped the team to make progress?

7. How did you plan, and organise yourselves, to put the cards onto the board? Did you rehearse this? How did you improve your performance?

8. What have you learned from this exercise about being in a team? What might you, personally, do differently if you were to do a similar team exercise in future?

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RSVP EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING DESIGN

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

1. If you are working in a team, there are different ways in which you can help. Some of these are about the task (eg. keeping time, suggesting different solutions, organizing materials) and others are about the group (eg. checking if people understand, asking if people have better ideas, encouraging quiet people to take part).

2. It does not help a team to withhold questions or ideas because you think they might be stupid. Your idea may help other people to develop their own understanding or may spark a new idea.

3. Teams need to agree how they are going to work together. You need to find a way of reaching agreement (eg voting or agreeing that the team leader will have the final say after discussions) and then accept the team decision and move on.

4. If a team establishes a set of rules or procedures it is important to follow them. If the rules are no longer appropriate, suggest changes and ensure everyone agrees to implement them

5. Teamwork is about helping other team members to be successful. It is important to think about how you offer support and encouragement to each other, avoiding negative criticism and blame.

Depending upon your context, you might wish to relate these learning points to specific situations (eg. in a group presentation or a team-based assignment) with specific examples.