

Printout of MindLadder® Advisor

Section B-5*



C-5: Overcoming Egocentric Communication

Two students, Jane and Beverly, have diligently studied their subjects and prepared their presentations. When it is time for their delivery Jane gets right into her subject matter. She tells her audience what she did, why she did it, what she found and she states her conclusions. Before getting into her topic Beverly asks her audience about their level of familiarity with her subject. Based on a show of hands she adjusts her presentation to provide more background information and explanations of technical vocabulary. Both Jane and Beverly delivered solid presentations but Beverly took an extra step to overcome egocentricity and shape her presentation in response to the needs of her audience. Teachers fashion their communication differently depending on the grade level and students they work with. Good teachers like story tellers are gifted at bringing their audiences along. They know how to make their listeners hang on to their every word.

This knowledge construction function prepares students to consider the knowledge and viewpoint of others as they communicate. Tempo, word choice, diction, emphasis, and acknowledgement of assumptions are among the aspects of communication that are affected by considering where other people, as the phrase goes, are coming from.

A lack of consideration for the perspective of others produces egocentric forms of communication that impede information flow and the development of a shared understanding. The use of egocentric communication is often the result of the student not understanding that not everyone knows what he knows and thinks as he thinks. He talks to others as though they have his knowledge and viewpoint. Because he is unaware of the need to step away from himself ('decentrate'), the student's communication may be unclear to others and lack sufficient detail and explanation for them to understand. For

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his part, the egocentric communicator often experiences frustration when others do not comprehend what appears so obvious to him.

The development of this knowledge construction function enhances students' awareness of the need to consider other people's perspective and provides the skills and practice that enable them to do so when they communicate. To mediate this knowledge construction function have students experiment with more vs. less egocentric styles of communicating. Model these styles and have students try each of them both as presenters and as members of the audience. Have fun with these activities. What are the differences between these styles when you present information to others? What are the differences between them when you receive information from others? Discuss the problems that can develop when we communicate without taking the other person's perspective into account: How can egocentric styles lead to unclear communications and misunderstandings.

Barrier activities provide good examples of the need to use non-egocentric communication. Have one student sit opposite the other where only one of the students can see a picture or object. The student who views this item must describe it so that the other student is able to draw it accurately. These types of activities help the students to quickly see how important it can be to take another person's perspective.

Train your students to see things from another's point of view. "How do you think Susan would feel if you said that to her?" or "If you showed this problem to Jose, what do you think he would say?" Arrange your students in small groups and have them explore a problem from different points of view (e.g. young/old; boy/girl). Have them share with each other the different perspectives. You can also offer role-playing tasks that allow students to begin to think about issues from another's perspective. Here are some examples of problems you can use for small group activities and discussions to draw out different points of view.

1) A water shortage in the community - Some members of the community have several ways to get water, some have a few and some have none. Imagine three families of farmers with crops to till and livestock to tender. What does the water shortage look like from the perspective of each of these families? After 1 week? After 2 weeks?

2) Going to a party when everybody knows you vs. going to a party when nobody knows you – Two students are going to the same party. One is a new student in the school and the other is popular with many

friends. What's it like to go to the party from the viewpoint of each student?

Use the daily interaction in your classroom to help your students discover what they need to communicate in order for others to understand their thinking and reasoning. Saying such things as "Could you explain that? Tell me more", "What do you mean by that?" or "How did you come to that?" are very helpful. Remember that there is a normal developmental use of egocentric communication and egocentric communication is common in young children. However everyone has a tendency to communicate in an egocentric manner. The development of this knowledge construction function enables people to counter this natural tendency in order to improve their sensitivity to others and their effectiveness as communicators.