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32. GROUP MANAGEMENT

How should a group leader/mediator tackle turn-taking problems in distance communication

CONTEXT

In distance communication, like in face-to-face communication, one person might be dominating the conversation, and people might talk over each other or interrupt impolitely, both examples of unsuccessful turn-taking.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Despite cultural differences, taking a turn or keeping your turn and getting other people to speak are basic skills that must be acquired, including for distance communication. A fluid, polite, and appropriate turn change can be achieved through different types of signals, such as gestures, intonation, and body language, but mainly by using specific phrases. Each group leader should find a way that best suits them, but the most important part is that the group leader makes these turn-taking rules clear to all participants. This creates a safer environment for participants who lack the confidence to shout out the answers and gives everyone an equal chance of participating.

ACTIVITY IN A NUTSHELL

A good interaction, both face-to-face and online, should allow an effective exchange of information, ideas, and opinions. Knowing how to intervene is a skill that can be learned with specific exercises, e.g. intervening to point out errors or deficiencies in a text: "Have you noticed something false/have you noticed something missing? Politely ask and take your turn."

Activity/Solutions

CONTACT TYPE

Online/contact/hybrid

TIME NEEDED

25-30 minutes

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

5-15

ACTIVITY TYPE

Group work

TARGET GROUP

- Adult learners
- Senior learners

VARIATION OF THE ACTIVITY

The activity is easily adaptable by changing the type of text to any type of lesson and target group.

Goal

- To achieve smooth, polite, and appropriate turn-taking.

How to prepare

- Prepare a text (to be read within about 10 minutes) on the topic of the session which must contain some errors and omissions.
- Prepare a table containing the instructions: conventional signs and “standard phrases,” for example:
 - raised-hand emoticon = ask for a turn
 - sentences such as: “May I interrupt?”
 - thumbs-up emoticon = agree sentences such as: “Before you reply...”, “Good point, anyhow...”

Activity step by step

1. Inform the participants that you will proceed to read a text on the topic under discussion (e.g. a topic relating to local traditions or the cultural heritage of the region). Warn them that there might be errors or deficiencies in the text.
2. Inform them that the exercise will be recorded, and watched, and discussed together after reading.
3. Explain to them that to get a turn during the reading, they will have to use conventional signs and special sentences and that they should wait for the conductor to give them the signal to interrupt.
4. Show the participants a summary table containing a list of conventional signs and “standard phrases” that they can use. Go through the list with them and make sure that it is always available to them (e.g. in group chat).
5. Remind them that the interventions must be short and carried out at the right time.
6. Start reading, and remember to pay attention to requests for a turn; give the floor or invite the participant to wait.
7. When the participant has finished, resume reading and continue the activity until the end of the text.
8. At the end of the activity, review the recording/videorecording: invite all the participants to write, and send brief comments and feedback in the chat about the activity and how it was carried out (e.g. I would have liked to add that... but the conductor/but the other participants...).
9. Read and comment on the messages in the chat if necessary, and initiate further discussion by reminding everyone to intervene following the shared rules.