

Communicating:
ideas from the key skills classroom

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This booklet contains some tips and ideas for teaching some of the skills related to communication. The booklet in itself is not intended to be a comprehensive course in the elements and learning outcomes of this skill. Please consult the Key Skills Framework for many other aspects of Communication.

Communicating

Introduction

The key skill of communicating helps learners to appreciate how central communication is to human relationships of all kinds. As well as communicating their learning more effectively using a variety of media (including games and ICT) they will also gain a deeper understanding of the value of communication in the modern world. In the world in which we live, learners need to be aware of and skilled in different modes of communicating and to make appropriate choices about what medium to use for different purposes.

Communication is crucial to the learning process and so talking, listening and discussing are central to learning in every area of the curriculum. When teachers structure learning in a way that aims to develop communication skills then students are encouraged to explore and express their ideas, opinions and emotions in a variety of ways. They also come to recognise the value of different perspectives, viewpoints and ways of approaching problems. The ideas in this booklet will help teachers develop some of the elements of the skill of communicating with learners.

As with the other key skills, you will find lots of ways of linking this skill to the other skills. So check out the other booklets in this series, learning activities and other resources related to this skill at <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills>.

The key elements of communicating are: set out below:

Communicating
Analysing and interpreting texts and other forms of communication
Expressing opinions, speculating, discussing and engaging in debate and argument
Engaging in dialogue, listening attentively and eliciting opinions, views and emotions
Composing and performing in a variety of different ways
Presenting using a variety of media

This booklet is a work in progress and will be expanded to include information on developing learners' reading and writing skills. In addition, the skill of communicating is very closely linked to the skill of information processing. As learners develop skills in information processing they must also develop skills in communicating that information in clear and concise ways. In critical and creative thinking students learn how to construct good arguments and they develop skills in communicating their viewpoint whether in pictures, words or actions. And so it is evident that the skill of communicating is linked to all five key skills.

Many of the classroom strategies included in other booklets in this series are also useful in developing skills of communicating.

For example, see *Working with Others* booklet for

- Think, Pair Share
- The snowball
- Summarizing pairs
- Jigsaw

Check out the booklet on *Critical and Creative Thinking* for

- Brainstorming
- The Power of Persuasion
- Academic Controversy
- In the Hot Seat

Check out the booklet on *Information Processing* for

- criteria for assessing websites
- using Webquests

Check out the booklet on *Being Personally Effective* for further suggestions on how you can provide better feedback to your students.

Student – Peer Communication

There is a body of research now available telling us how students learn and what conditions best facilitate effective learning. According to Johnson and Johnson, the single biggest influence on student achievement is positive peer relationships. Hundreds of studies in 11 countries have shown that the quality of students' relationships account for over 30% of their achievement. So, if a teacher wants to improve achievement then it is worth investing time in getting students talking to each other and building positive interpersonal relationships. When students work 'knee to knee and eye to eye' discussing, explaining, negotiating, agreeing, helping, and encouraging each other this promotes better learning and also builds self-esteem and motivation for learning (according to research gathered by Johnson and Johnson).

Teaching the skills needed for communicating

Of course, we cannot take it for granted that students have the necessary skills to be able to communicate positively and effectively with each other. Skills of listening, summarising, turn-taking, and negotiating differences of opinion need to be taught. They also need to be reflected upon through group processing. This means making time at the end of class to ask questions such as

- How involved were you in today's discussion (on a scale of 1-10)? Why/ Why not?
- How well did you listen to each other?
- What could you do better next time you are working as a group?

The following strategies are useful in developing the listening skills needed for good communicating:

Summarising: Students working in pairs practice the skill of summarising. Each student has a handout with a series of short paragraphs. Their task is to take turns summarising each paragraph for each other. This is how it works.

- Both students read the first paragraph quietly, trying to get the gist of it. It might help some students to highlight or underline key points.

- Then student A turns the page upside down and attempts to summarise the key points while student B listens. Student B can support student A by prompts or questions to help them in their summary.
- When they have finished summarising the first paragraph they repeat the same process for the next paragraphs, swapping roles each time—one person listening and one person summarising.

Paraphrasing: One simple strategy which can help develop listening skills is for one student to paraphrase what another student has said before allowing them to contribute a new idea. Use **paraphrasing** to: avoid confusion (Let me see if I heard you right...), confirm understanding (Are you saying that...?) or to try to understand something from another's perspective (In other words, what you mean is...)

Listening for facts, listening for feelings

Adapted from *Partners' Companion to Training for Transformation*, compiled and written by Maureen Sheehy, Dublin, 2001.

The aim of this exercise is to practice the art of listening and create awareness that there are many different kinds of listening. For example, we listen for facts, we can 'skim' listen for information, or we can listen for emotions. This exercise helps students to see that listening is not only about listening to facts but also to the feelings of a person.

- Divide the class into groups of 3. Each group member letters themselves A, B or C.
- A is asked to speak for 2-3 minutes on a topic that they have strong feelings about, e.g. something they feel angry or excited about. While A is speaking, B listens to the facts of what A is saying and C listens to the feelings A is expressing.
- B gives feedback to A on the facts heard. C gives feedback on the feelings heard. A responds saying whether or not the feedback is accurate.
- The exercise is then repeated with each person in the group assuming a different role.
- When each person has had a turn being A, B and C then the whole group comes together to share their thoughts on the exercise. The teacher might

ask, 'Which did you find easier to listen to, facts or feelings?' 'What did you notice about the body language of each speaker?' 'Did it match the feelings being expressed?' 'Are there times when we speak and try to conceal our true feelings?' 'Why is it important to listen to both facts being spoken and the feelings behind them?'

Helping students to recognise what good listening looks like

Other ways of teaching the social skills needed for successful group work include building a **T Chart** and keeping it on view in the classroom. To do this, write the name of the skill to be practised at the top of a chart. Label the left side 'Looks like' and the right side 'Sounds like'. Then under each column ask the students to brainstorm examples for each side and write them down. See below.

Listening	
<u>Looks like</u>	<u>Sounds like</u>
<i>paying attention</i> <i>making eye contact</i> <i>nodding</i> <i>etc.</i>	<i>one voice at a time</i> <i>not much noise or distractions</i>

(Source: *Cooperation in the Classroom*, Johnson, Johnson and Holobec, page 5:7)

Helpful phrases

I think.... because (i.e. whenever someone makes a statement, they must justify it.)

I agree/disagree because...

How can we back-up this idea with evidence?

I'm not sure what you mean.

Would you like me to go over that again?

Do I understand you correctly, are you saying....?

Here's a way to remember this...

I think that's an interesting point.

Let's look at the other side of the argument for a minute

Let's summarise our main ideas so far

Let's hear from someone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet?

Has everyone had a chance to give their ideas?

Can everyone explain what we've agreed?

A checklist to see if **you** are a good listening role model

- Do I speak respectfully to each individual?
- Do I let students finish what they are trying to say, and if they hesitate do I encourage them to go on?
- Do I withhold judgment until the person has finished speaking?
- Do I sometimes finish their sentences for them?
- Am I able to avoid confrontation?
- Do I express understanding and empathy, as appropriate?
- Do I regularly give positive feedback to each student?
- Am I able to apologise when I treat a student unfairly?
- Is my body language consistent with my words? For example, do I ask them how they are getting on and look poised to rush off?
- Do I really care about each student in my class?
- Can I find something good to say about each student?

Adapted from *Quality Circle Time in the Secondary School: A Handbook of Good Practice* by Jenny Mosley and Marilyn Tew, London, 1999.

Some practical strategies for the classroom

1. Turn to your partner discussions (Adapted from Johnson and Johnson)

Divide your class content into 7-10 minute segments. After each segment, ask students to turn to a partner and work cooperatively in answering a question (specific enough that they can do it in about three minutes). The question should require students to use or apply the material that has just been presented. In their pairs

- each student formulates his or her answer
- students share their answer with their partner
- students listen carefully to their partner's answer
- the pairs often create a new answer that is better than each one's initial answer by integrating the two answers, building on each other's thoughts.

Then randomly choose two or three students to give 30 second summaries of their pair discussions. Repeat this process again after another segment of material has been presented.

2. Inside outside circles

(Adapted from Barrie Bennett's *Beyond Monet* handbook)

This approach can be helpful in facilitating dialogue and interaction on a series of quick questions or problems. You will need to arrange the chairs in 2 circles.

- Place the whole class in two circles (like a donut), with students seated in the outside circle looking in and the inner circle looking out. In this way, students face each other between circles.
- Put a question or a problem on the board.
- Ask the students to think about it; allow a reasonable wait time.
- Then say 'Person on the inside, tell the person on the outside how you would attempt to solve it. When you are speaking the other person must listen carefully and not butt in until you have finished. Then when you have finished sharing, say pass, and the outside person will add to or extend the thinking.
- When the first question has been answered then put another question on the board and tell the outside people to move to the right.
- Now each person is facing a different partner and they are ready for the next question.

3. Numbered heads

Students are numbered off by the teacher, e.g. 1-6 or different types of card are handed around the room and students are grouped according to the colour of the card.

The teacher poses a question, usually factual in nature, but requiring some higher order thinking skills. Students discuss the question, making certain that every group member knows the agreed upon answer. The teacher calls a specific number and the team members originally designated that number during the count off respond as group spokespersons. Because no one knows which number the teacher will call, all team members have a vested interest in being ready to give the correct response. All students benefit from this and the peer coaching helps both the high and the low achievers. Class time is usually better spent because less time is wasted on inappropriate responses and because all students become actively involved with the material.

4. Three Step Interview

(Adapted from Barrie Bennett's *Beyond Monet* handbook)

This encourages students to share their thinking, listen carefully, ask questions and take notes. It works best with 3 students per group. It assumes a knowledge base on a topic which becomes the focus for the interview. It works best if students are told in advance which topics they must prepare before coming to class.

Steps

- Assign a letter to each student: A = Interviewer, B =Interviewee, C= Reporter.
- Assign a topic on which A will interview B. C's role is to listen, take notes during the interview and then be able to summarise the key information.
- Set a time limit for each interview.
- Rotate the roles, giving a different topic for each interview.

(See worksheet on next page)

Student Worksheet (Three step interview)

Interview 1 TOPIC:

Name

Key points

[illegible]

Interview 2 TOPICS:

Name

Key points

[illegible]

Interview 3 TOPICS:

Name

Key points

Signatures of all group members:

Teacher – student communication

Two aspects of teacher – student communication are outlined below: **Mentoring for Learning** and **Feedback**.

Mentoring for learning

We use ‘mentoring for learning’ to refer to a conversation about learning that takes place between a teacher and student. The aims of this conversation are to

- develop students’ awareness about their own learning style, habits and preferences
- explore the factors that enable learning and the factors that cause learning “blocks” or barriers to learning
- help students to reflect on their learning using a reflective journal
- foster a greater sense of confidence in and responsibility for their learning
- help students achieve their potential.

Mentoring for learning can take place on a one-to-one basis between teacher and student or with a whole class. A combination of both often works best.

Some questions that can be helpful in a learning conversation

What’s going well? And not so well?

Are you noticing any patterns in your learning?

Have you noticed what helps your learning and what blocks it?

What will your next steps be?

What do you need to help you?

What would a teacher need to know about you to help you learn better?

Other techniques

Three sentence reflection ...What was good about this class, what didn’t go well, what are my own thoughts on how I’m learning?

One minute paper...something I learnt, a question I still have, something I am not sure about.

One sentence summary... the key thing I learned is...

Additional resources are available in *Mentoring for Learning: Guidelines and Tools*. NCCA

Sample student worksheet

My Learning

One thing I learned today ...	One thing that went well for me...
I found it difficult to ...	I might have learned better if ...
In my next class I would like to...	

Signed:

Date:

Feedback

The simplest prescription for improving education must be 'dollops of feedback' – providing information how and why the student understands and misunderstands, and what directions the student must take to improve.

John Hattie, *Influences on Student Learning*

In order for feedback to be supportive it must

- highlight and praise the aspects of the student's work that have been successful
- highlight the aspects that might need to be worked upon
- provide constructive advice on how the student can go about making improvements
- communicate confidence that every student can improve.

Another way of putting this is to say feedback should include

A Medal. This tells what s/he has done well e.g. 'Your use of paragraphs and punctuation is good.' 'You provided good evidence to back up all your arguments.'

A Mission. This tells what a student needs to do to improve, e.g. 'Try to give more evidence for your views.' 'Make sure your conclusion relates to the question you set out to discuss.'

A Goal. This must be set in advance so that students know what they are aiming to achieve before setting about a task.

Problems arise with feedback when

- teachers give too little feedback (e.g. just a grade at the end of an assignment)
- teachers give too much feedback (e.g. when everything is marked – grammar, spelling, content, ideas) and students feel overwhelmed
- teachers give feedback that is not related to the original goal and the criteria for success. The criteria for success should be agreed so that everyone knows what they are aiming for.

Providing feedback to students

- To help them in the process of assessing their own learning, first of all focus on two questions: Can they remember the learning goal? Can they remember the criteria for success?
- Focus on the task in hand, point out the steps that students need to take in order to improve their work and close the gap between where they are now and where they need to go.
- In your comments, praise what has been done well first, then point out the areas that need to be improved upon, rather than just list the errors that students have made.
- When pointing out errors, rather than correcting it ask a question that can lead the students to correct them themselves. This helps them learn from their mistakes.

Students can provide feedback too

And don't forget that students too can give positive feedback to each other. In a given day, it is difficult for a teacher to give personal feedback to each student. So why not try encouraging students to do this for each other.

Some ways of doing this might include

- at the end of class turn to your partner and say one thing you learned from each other in class today
- at the end of group work ask each person in the group to say one thing they learned from someone else in the group.

Further guidance on giving feedback to your students along with a selection of templates and handouts can be found in another booklet in this series *Being Personally Effective*.

Teaching Presentation Skills

The internet is a useful source of good debates and speeches which can be used to study the art of speechmaking and debating. For example you can do searches for

- World Debate Championship
 - Great speeches in World History
 - Martin Luther King, “I have a dream” speech
 - John F. Kennedy, “Ich Bin Ein Berliner”
 - Barack Obama speeches
 - Sir Bob Geldof, Speech at the Antwerp Diamond Banquet
 - Nelson Mandela’s inaugural presidential speech
- and lots more.

Some useful websites

www.americanrhetoric.com for copies of speeches from movies

www.teachit.co.uk provided resources and ideas for teaching communication skills

www.teachers.tv has video demonstrations of a variety of communication methodologies

www.toastmasters.ie for tips for public speaking

www.filmeducation.org has resources for film/speeches in movies.

In observing others speaking and debating ask students to look out for

- their ability to persuade their audience to their point of view
- the structure of their argument
- their choice of words and use of imagery
- their use of quotes and anecdotes
- the tone of voice used
- the use of repetition
- the use of gesture and humour
- their ability to counter the argument of the opposition
- their use of visual aids (e.g. a poster, cartoon, PowerPoint presentation, etc).

Peer Assessment of an Oral Presentation

Name of student presenting:

Topic.....

5 excellent

4 very good

3 good

2 fair

1 weak

	Rating	Comment Be sure to give helpful and constructive feedback
Content		
Structure		
Ideas and logic		
Originality and entertainment		
Delivery		
Body language and eye contact		
Voice – pace, volume, clarity		
Enthusiasm		
Use of visual aids or ICT		
Language		
Good choice of words, quotes, imagery		
Use of rhetorical questions, repetition, and dramatic statements		

Signed:

Using games and ICT to help students communicate their learning

Teachers employ classroom games to revise coursework, to stimulate interest, and to promote teamwork. Games can provide an active alternative to traditional revision sessions, which are often passive, teacher-centered events that require minimal student involvement. Revision classes that simply tell students what will be on the exam, present information in a repetitive manner, or require little student involvement are largely ineffective and should be replaced by activities that get students thinking and working. All games are more interesting when teams are of mixed ability. It is important that the team's performance is based on the dedication and skills of all players and members encourage one another to excel for the collective good.

Jeopardy

In this game, the students have to come up with the correct question to match an answer. Because Jeopardy requires students to generate questions in response to answers rather than answers in response to questions, it assesses comprehension in addition to knowledge. There is often more than one correct question to each answer.



To set up Jeopardy for your students search for 'jeopardy template' and you will find lots available on-line. For science, examples go to sciencesourcebook.com. See example <http://www.jmu.edu/madison/teacher/jeopardy/jeopardy.htm>

Rules for Jeopardy

Teacher selects the teams and they select a captain. As stated above the more evenly matched the teams the better, mixed ability groupings are best. The categories and answers are chosen to relate to current class content.

- Opening: the team captain selects an answer. The team is given 30 seconds to generate a question.
- Response: One member of the team reads out the question drafted. If the question is incorrect, the other teams can answer in turn.
- Scoring: The team gets the points for a well-phrased question that has a specific answer. No points are taken off for incorrect answers.
- Next answer: The team with the correct question chooses the next answer. A team can only answer two in a row, and then the game passes to the lowest scoring team.
- Ending the game: The game ends at the discretion of the teacher or when all answers have been chosen.

Pictionary

Pictionary is a game that helps students to develop the skills of communicating concepts through images. Students with a good understanding of a concept can draw it in a way that others can recognise without the use of the spoken or written word. Go to www.action.ncca.ie/ to see a video of students using games in Biology class.

Rules for Pictionary

Teams should be mixed ability.

Lineup: The team captain determines the sequence in which students from the team will draw.

Drawing: The drawer is given a science term or concept that must represent on the flip chart/whiteboard or poster paper. They cannot use any letters or common symbols.

Team response: As drawer draws the team tries to guess the term or concept. Some teachers let each team compete against each other. However, this can get very noisy. If necessary each team can take turns.

Scoring: The team that gets the term or concept first gets a point if teams are competing. If teams are taking turns allow 60 second for a correct answer. Note the length of time it takes and this is the score.

Quizzes

The *Hot Potatoes* suite includes six applications, enabling you to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the World Wide Web. Hot Potatoes is freeware, and you may use it for any purpose or project you like. It is not open-source. It can be downloaded from this website. <http://hotpot.uvic.ca/>

BINGO

Played like regular BINGO, BINGO requires students to find terms on their cards that correspond with the definitions read by the teacher. For younger students, pictures may be placed in the squares on the BINGO cards.

<http://www.bingocardcreator.com/printable-bingo-cards.htm>

Using music to communicate learning

Music and rhyme is a great way for students to remember things and for them to communicate their learning using programmes such as PhotoJam available to download at <http://www.brothersoft.com/photojam-82511.html>. With music, pupils can really enjoy the process of revision. They can make multimedia presentations to 'teach' a part of any topic. For example, pupils write lyrics in a 'rap' style to communicate about key events in history or to describe a character in a novel or play, etc. Accompanying the rap will be an up-beat sound and image presentation, easily put together using the free trial software PhotoJam, it offers a range of exciting presentation styles. Combining words, music and rhythm, and images is a particularly memorable way to learn, and the activity can be adapted to revise any topic. For lesson ideas in science go to http://www.sycd.co.uk/only_connect/front-page/music.htm#WHAT .

Useful web links

Using interactive websites such as those listed below can help students understand difficult concepts. They can use the sites to learn and to interact with information in real time. These sites provide clear simulations that can help teachers to explain topics in a fun and active way. The sites work particularly well using interactive white boards. Students can access these sites when at home or in the library and this can help develop skills of independent learning and provide opportunities for the teacher to direct learning out of normal lesson time is also increased.

Check out some of the sites listed below. These sites were accessed April 2010.

<http://www.crosswordkit.com> — crossword puzzle maker

<http://www.brainpop.co.uk> — quizzes in a variety of subjects

<http://classtools.net/education-games-php/jigsaw> — a jigsaw template designed to allow students to make connections between various factors in an engaging manner

www.bbc.co.uk/learning — general learning resource

<http://daily-english-activities.blogspot.com> — Nik's Daily English Activities offers lots of ideas on how to combine teaching English with developing digital literacy skills

www.easatment.com — useful site for English language teachers

www.teneasyways.com — click on Chapter Resources for ideas on using technology in the English classroom

www.frenchinaclick.com — play French grammar and vocabulary games

<http://www.ehc.com/VBody.asp> — includes a virtual body.

<http://www.thetech.org/genetics/zoomIn/index.html> — resources for genetics

<http://sites.google.com/site/smartsharecenter/smart-downloads/smart-notebook> — Smart share centre with lots of ideas on how to integrate ICT into teaching and learning

<http://phet.colorado.edu/index.php> — simulations for teaching science and maths

<http://www.planet-science.com/home.html> — look for games in science

<http://www.upd8.org.uk> — science site with lots of activities.

Reflection sheets

Teacher reflection sheet

Select one approach, try it out and then answer the questions below.

Class:

Topic:

Date:

Teaching approach tried:

1. Give a brief description of the task you set for the students
2. What was the impact on the students?/How did they respond?
3. What key skills were evident?
4. How might you improve this approach or do it differently again?

Student's reflection sheet

Class

Topic

Date

Give a brief description of how you participated in class today

The main thing I learned is...

I liked/didn't like this way of learning because.....

References and websites

A range of additional ideas on teaching key skills can be found on the NCCA website at <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills>. There you will find videos, slide presentations, sample learning activities, and much more on this and all five key skills.

Teachers' Pocketbooks (a series of booklets to help teachers make teaching and learning more dynamic, challenging and effective.) www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk

Geoff Petty website <http://www.geoffpetty.com>

Assessment for Learning – Putting it into practice, Paul Black et al, Open University Press, 2004

Beyond Monet – The Artful Science of Instructional Integration, Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser, Toronto, 2001

Cooperation in the Classroom, Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, Interaction Book Company, Minnesota, revised 1991

Making Feedback Count, Ian Smith, published by Learning Unlimited

Mentoring for Learning: Guidelines and Tools. NCCA (available on website)

The Teacher's Toolkit, Paul Ginnis, Crown House Publishing Ltd. 2002

Supporting Active Teaching and Learning: Oral Presentations, Transition Year Curriculum Support Service, 2000