

RULE OF SUMMARY



MAIN FEATURES

Strengthened skills	LEADERSHIP - SUPPORT
Suitable for	Teachers, students
Difficulty level	Medium
Setting	Group
Minimum number of participants	2
Average duration	40 minutes
Special equipment/materials	Yes
Online version	Yes

1. DESCRIPTION

The practice was developed by De Jong & Berg (2012) and aims to develop non-evaluative listening skills. The activity, to be done in pairs, consists of choosing a controversial topic (strongly felt by the member of the couple who begins to speak) and conducting a discussion using the rule of synthesis: the first person starts and exposes his opinion while the other listens without interrupting or saying anything. When the first person finishes speaking, the second person must briefly summarize this person's ideas and feelings and then go on and present his point of view, while the first person listens and then summarizes the ideas and feelings of the second. The debate lasts about 10 minutes and strictly follows the rule of synthesis.

2. PURPOSE / BENEFITS

The activity aims to help participants (e.g., teachers) to experience a "non-knowing posture", i.e. an attitude to conversation that aims to communicate a fluid (non-fixed) relational posture and to show respect and openness towards the other person (Andersen, 1995).

Applied to classroom climate management, this approach involves being curious about everyone's contributions to conversation. It supports a point of view that rejects the idea that teachers have a "special" knowledge of students and their lives.

3. RELATED SKILLS CLUSTERS

- LEADERSHIP (cluster n.2)
- SUPPORT (cluster n.4)

Because

1. LEADERSHIP dimension, which in this case refers to the idea that participants show openness to letting others express their ideas, feelings and opinions (even in relation to controversial topics) simply by listening, even if they do not agree with those opinions. The skill training in this group is "**driving one step behind**" because, for example, in a school setting, teachers can show students that they are willing to let them be an active part of the relationship, giving them space to speak without interruption and/or comment;
2. SUPPORT size, which in this case refers to the idea of adopting a "non-knowing posture" in which the participant (e.g., the teacher) knows nothing about the opinions of the other (e.g., the student) and wants to gather as much information as possible about them. The skills aroused in this cluster are **the suspension of judgment and curiosity**:
 - **The suspension of judgment** is trained because following the rule of synthesis obliges the individual to minimise the focus on judging the other and/or his opinions and to make an effort to summarise his ideas and feelings.
 - **Curiosity** is trained because the participant needs to let the other person speak and listen carefully to his narration in order to give him a practical and useful summary of what he said.

4. HOW TO DO THE PRACTICE

Step 1 - Preparation

The activity facilitator invites participants (e.g., teachers) to find a partner and discuss a controversial topic, i.e. something strongly felt.

The discussion must be conducted using the "rule of synthesis": the first person starts and affirms his opinion while the other listens without interrupting or saying anything. The listener can only take notes on what the first person says or thinks are important.

When the first person finishes speaking, the second person- before going ahead and stating his opinions - must briefly and comprehensively summarise the ideas and feelings of the first person. They then swap roles: the person who first expresses his opinions listens to the opinions of the other and then summarises his ideas and feelings.

The facilitator explains that each shift should last 10 minutes, a valuable time to let each partner talk in sufficient detail about the topic and listen carefully without getting bored or tired.

Step 2 - Applying the summary rule

Each couple starts the discussion.

The facilitator pays attention that each partner in the role of "listener" strictly follows the rule of synthesis.

Step 3 - Conclusion

After the allotted time (about 20 minutes), each couple takes about 10 minutes to reflect on the experience just lived. Some questions the facilitator may ask at this stage to help participants reflect on the experience could and should be:

- *How did you listen without making any comments and saying nothing?*
- *What was it like for you to have the opportunity to talk about a controversial topic without being interrupted?*

5. FINAL REFLECTION

This stage is a group discussion about the activity.

The goal is to help participants (e.g., teachers) reflect on how they might apply the "rule of synthesis" while working with individual students or the whole class.

Here are some examples of questions the facilitator might ask to conduct the conversation:

- *Imagine that this experience has changed the way you approach the classroom. How would you define this change?*
- *Can you think of some situations in your daily work with the class where you could apply the "rule of synthesis"?*
- *Do you think it might be possible to propose to your student a situation where you are talking about a controversial and/or complex topic or the climate of the class and your class applies the "rule of synthesis"? If so, what could be the conditions for doing so?*



The facilitator can invite participants to share their answers to the questions with the group, or you can invite them to write the answers and reflect for themselves after the end of the group session.

6. SPECIAL MATERIALS

Pens and sheets of paper.

7. TIPS

Nobody.

8. ONLINE VERSION

The activity can also be carried out online. For example, a platform like MIRO (www.miro.com) allows you to create conversation rooms where participants can work in couples and access them to monitor activities.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY - SITOGRAPHY

- Anderson H. (1995). *Collaborative language systems: Toward a postmodern therapy*. In R. Mikesell, D. D. Lusteran & S. McDaniel (Eds.), *Integrating family therapy: Family psychology and systems theory* (pp. 27-44). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- De Jong P. & Berg I.K. (2012). *Interviewing for Solutions (4th ed.)*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

