

Activity 1:

Helium pole

A deceptively simple game that is easy to facilitate and gives the group a common experience through which to discuss issues of teamwork and leadership.

Description

- Write the following on a flipchart paper or a slide. “Task: To lower the pole to the ground as a single unit in the shortest time possible”.
- Write the following instructions on a flipchart and make sure it is visible for all students or athletes:
 - Form two lines facing each other with each person standing shoulder to shoulder
 - Raise your hands to waist height and extend only your index (pointer) fingers.
 - Each member must maintain contact with the pole at all times with the pole resting on their two index fingers.
 - You may not lock or otherwise hold onto the pole.
- Then explain the following:
 - We’re going to have some fun with a short exercise
 - Your task is to lower this pole to the ground together in the shortest time possible. And I have my stopwatch which will measure time in the 100th of a second. You are competing with groups around the world who have done this same exercise – Olympians and business executives even.
 - You are going to form two even lines facing each other, with each person standing shoulder to shoulder.
 - Demonstrate that each person will raise your hands to waist height and extend your fingers with your thumb raised (see image).
 - Each person must maintain contact with the pole at all times!
 - This is not a creativity exercise – the pole simply rests on your fingers as you lower it to the ground as quickly as possible. No locking your fingers or holding on to the pole. It rests on top of your fingers and you lower it down.
- As soon as you have completed the instructions, get the students or athletes up and into position. Do not give time for asking questions. Remember the intention is for there to be some confusion. If people have questions about what to do, simply re-state the instructions you have already given
- Once the students or athletes are in position, you as the facilitator, with the help of a co-facilitator or volunteer, need to raise the pole as high as possible and then lower the pole onto their fingers. Remind them that you will start the timer as soon as the pole touches their fingers.
- Once the pole touches the students or athletes’ fingers, start the stopwatch, and ensure that

everyone is connected to the pole. If there are any gaps between the pole and the fingers, remind them to touch the pole.

- While the students or athletes try to move the pole to the ground observe what is happening. Encourage them that are observing to also take specific mental notes of what is happening.
- Continue observing as the group works together. Continue to remind them of the rules so that all students or athletes have their fingers touching the pole at all times.
- When the pole is on the ground, stop the clock and congratulate their achievement.
- Invite all students or athletes to sit down for a discussion, using the questions below as a guide. Write the time from your stopwatch on a flipchart paper so that it is visible to all.
- Conclude the activity by thanking everyone for their contributions to the task and the discussion.

Discussion questions

Reflect

What did you notice about the communication during this activity (Listen for blaming, everyone talking, nobody listening etc.)? Allow students or athletes to blame each other, laugh at what happened and ask them to explain their frustrations. Who played a leadership role during this activity? How did the team select the leader? How did the leader act throughout the activity?

Connect

What are some tips you follow to keep positive communication with someone from a different cultural background? Who is your role model leader who is not from your country and why?

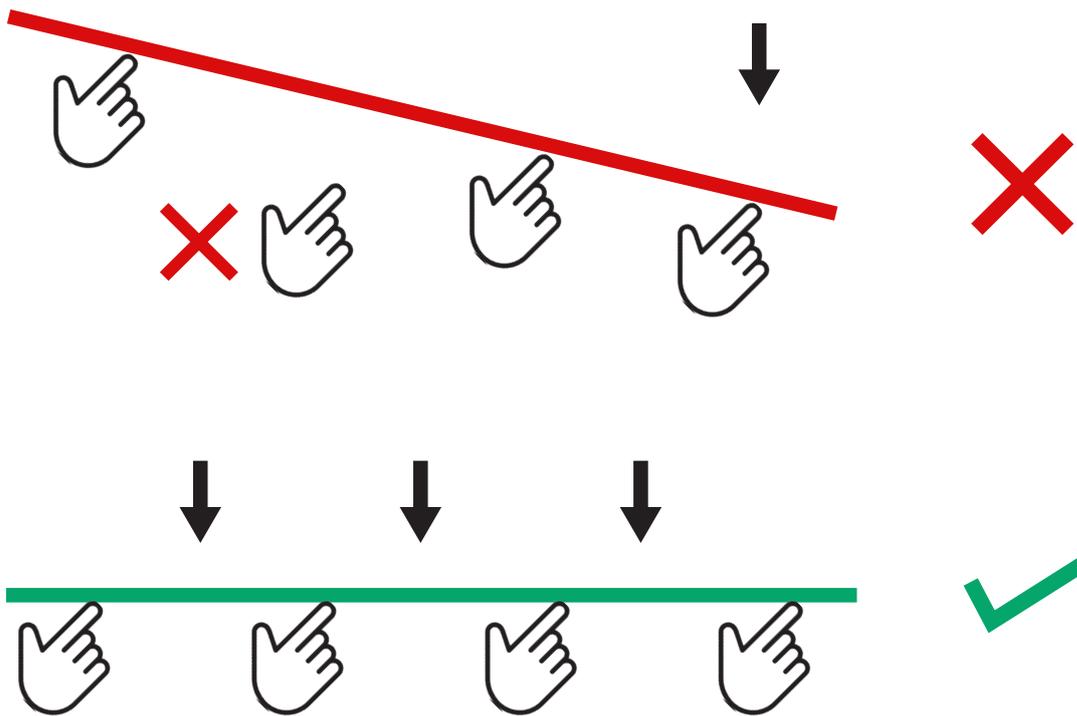
Apply

How can communication help effective leadership? Based on today's experience, what other skills will you use more while teaching or coaching intercultural learning to others?

Facilitation notes

Ideally you want about 16 to 20 people on the pole, divided evenly on both sides. If you have more than 20 people in your training group, the extra people will have to be observers. The average time for moving the helium pole to the ground is seven minutes. The longest time is 20 minutes. Teachers and coaches may need to implement this activity towards the end of their session when they can challenge students to make new records and then use the reflection part to develop the targeted competencies.

Teaching or coaching are not automatic, but a skill that is learned through practice. Ask the group if they were given another chance, would they be able to complete the activity with better results? If there is enough time and interest from the group, allow the group to try a second time.



Number of Teachers or Coaches	1-2
Number of Students or Athletes	12-16 (extras can act as observers)
Typical Age Group	12+
Time Needed	30 minutes
Space Needed	Playground
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flipchart paper • Markers • Long, slim, light pole (circa 3 metres long and 2.5 cm thick) • Stopwatch or timer on a mobile device
Activity Objective	To understand that teaching and coaching for intercultural learning is a set of competences that can be learned
Related Units	Unit 2 and Unit 3
Related Learning Competences	Leadership, communication, teamwork, active listening and problem-solving