COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN
Environmental Education Lesson Plan
Edwards Camp and Conference Center

Summary
Students will participate in a communication exercise in small teams, where each team attempts to replicate a Tinkertoy model. Each member of the team has a different role which only he/she may perform and whose actions affect the success of the team.

Usage
Grade level: 4th – 12th
This activity takes 60-90 minutes and works best with 10-40 people.

Standards
Camp Edwards provides lessons which directly meet Illinois state goals. The use of this lesson provides students the teambuilding skills and physical activity to meet several state goals. The following are benchmarks directly met by this lesson: 19.C.2b, 19.C.3b, 21.A.2a, 21.A.3a, 21.B.3.

Objectives
Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to...
- Develop individual communication skills.
- Complete a task as a team.
- Communicate effectively with their team.

Materials
- Container of Tinkertoys
- Plastic poker chips
- Name tags for each team that explains the different jobs
- Job layout chart.

Introduction
In communication breakdown, students work as a team to try and replicate a model built out of Tinkertoys. Each team member has a specific job in the process. Students will be working on being a member of a team and being held responsible for particular tasks.
**Warm-Up Activity**
A good introduction activity is the telephone game. Have the group sit in a line. The instructor thinks of a sentence or phrase and whispers it in the first person’s ear. Whatever that person hears is what he or she whispers to the next person. This continues until the last person in the group hears the sentence. Compare the end sentence to the original sentence. This activity illustrates how a message/communication can change when passed through many people. The students should think about this when they are trying to build their model.

**Activity**
The goal of communication breakdown is to make a replica model out of Tinkertoys that is an exact copy of the original. Each person will have a particular job. He or she is only allowed to do that job. Information and materials are passed between team members to build their model. Construction materials are bought from the store using kernels of corn.

Ahead of time build a model out of Tinkertoys for the looker from each team to see. Make the model with two more pieces then what grade the students are in. For example if they are in 6th grade make an eight piece model, if they are in 10th grade make a twelve piece model. Have a place to hide the original model where only the “looker” may see it. Spread the work areas out for each team, so the teams can not look at what the other teams are building. Have the store (where building pieces are bought) in a central location.

Divide the students up into teams of five people (if there are extra students some jobs can be done in pairs). The different jobs are as follows:

- **Looker**
  Look at the original model and explain to the **buying runner** what pieces are needed and how they fit together

- **Buying Runner**
  Tell the **buyer** what pieces they need to get from the store and explain to the **building runner** how the pieces go together

- **Buyer**
  Go to the store and purchase the pieces that the buying runner describes. Pass these pieces on to the **building runner**.

- **Building Runner**
  You get the pieces from the buyer and the information on how they go together from the buying runner. This is the information that you pass on to the **builder**.
**Builder**
Construct a replica model of the original model using the information and pieces from the building runner.

**Store Keeper**
It is best if one or two adults run the store. The store keeper may charge whatever "prices" seems fair. One thing to keep in mind is that at the beginning of the activity parts should be easy to buy in order to get parts to the builder quickly, that way he or she has something to work on.

As the activity runs on and the buyers run out of corn, the store keepers may ask students for other things as payment. Be creative ask for answers to question, have them tell a joke or sing a song etc. Challenge the students on their ability to communicate accurately. Encourage them to be as specific as possible. If they do not describe well enough, give them a wrong piece.

Explain to the students the different jobs and how they are allowed to communicate with each other and their specific task. At first it might be hard for students to follow all the different steps. Walk through the first piece or give an example of one. (The looker sees a round wooden wheel and tells the buying runner who goes and tells the buyer. The buyer goes to the store to get the piece the buying runner described. If the buyer does not describe the piece accurately he or she may not get the right piece, details are important. While the buyer is getting the piece, the looker tells the buying runner what to do with the piece and the buying runner passes that information to the building runner. The building runner receives the wooden wheel from the buyer and takes it to the builder telling him or her what to do with it.)
Wrap-Up/ Conclusion

When most of the groups have built most of the model or when time runs out, call an end to the building. Tell the builders to leave their beasts hidden and call everyone together. Here is a chance to “process” this activity.

A good way to begin is to direct questions to people with the same jobs, starting with the lookers. Was their job difficult? Why? What did they do to make it easier?

Example questions:
What are some specific words used that were helpful?
Did your team improve its strategy as you went along?
Who had the hardest or most important job?
Did anyone get frustrated?
How could you tell others you were frustrated?
How do you deal with frustration? Quit? Cheat?

Broader questions:
How can this activity help us in everyday life?
Name some situation in school or in the workforce where people have different jobs and depend on each other?
What are some skills which are important?
What are the greatest difficulties in this type of communication?
Who makes the decisions in such situations?
Are there any complications which occur from outside forces?

Discuss the store. Did anyone buy pieces they didn’t need? Did anyone run out of money? Was anyone asked to do something they weren’t willing to do to get a piece? How did this affect the team?

End the discussion with the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups. What skills have they learned through this activity that can help them work better in small groups.

Now let the builders bring out their models. Have someone get the original model. See how each group did.
Communication Breakdown

Looker → Buying Runner → Buyer → Building Runner → Builder

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