

Each Snowflake is Different

A running argument among CASAA provincial reps is assigning the right name to the structure by a lake that people will go to on weekends during the summer. The proper name has ranged from cottage, to cabin, to camp, to summer house. What the friendly argument does is demonstrate that even within our own country different regions use different words to describe the same thing.

This situation can be exacerbated in a system of communication that does not allow the listeners to question or respond to the information being presented. Student leaders must learn some of the drawbacks of the types of communication that they use everyday. The PA system is one of the most popular ways to communicate within a school, but as a method of one-way communication it has definite drawbacks.

Communication Exercise

Concept: One of the most common observations amongst student leaders is: Nobody listens to announcements at our school. Yet, all across Canada schools have daily announcements which nobody listens to. One of the things that students must learn is that the words that they hear on these announcements often can mean different things to different listeners.

Time needed: five minutes and discussion time

Materials needed: one piece of letter-sized paper for each participant.

Activity: The participants sit in a circle with their backs to the centre. They are handed a sheet of paper and asked to refrain from looking at what the person on either side of them is doing with their paper. Standing in the centre of the circle, the leader gives directions to fold the paper twice and make specific rips and tears in the paper to design a snowflake. The participants are not allowed to question the directions and for each question asked, the leader simply repeats the direction that was given previously word for word. The leader designs a snowflake according to the directions that they are giving without letting the participants see the progress. When the leader's snowflake is complete, the group compares the results.

Discussion:

1. Why are all the snowflakes not the same as the leader's?
2. What has caused the differences?
3. How could this process be improved so that everyone gets the same message?
4. Where do we experience the same problems in our daily communications?

A complimentary exercise would be to list words that have different meanings in different regions or countries that speak the same language.