

"What you say matters". How to discuss about bioethical questions

A two day workshop with rhetoric course. Graduate School Life Science

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"I don't believe in the benefits of genetically engineered crops" somebody could say, or: "We should not play God". Discussing about bioethics is a complex matter. It is not simply about right or wrong, but much more about dealing carefully with different points of view.

In this workshop, you will look into your very own point of view about your research. You will learn from presentations and in interactive exercises how to deal with controversial, complex debate and how to "survive" personal attacks during discussion. You will also experience how to communicate with different audiences, e. g. politicians, citizens, journalists, farmers etc.

Outline

Day 1

This day is about finding the own position and to understanding different attitudes.

Introduction: Communicating a controversial topics

- Collecting personal experiences of the participants
- Introducing complexity: Bioethics is not simply about right or wrong but much more complex

Role play "Good crop and bad crop"

- For allowing you not only to *talk* about different points of view but to *experience* it personally, we will run a three hour role play. Participants will take different roles, e. g. of a politician, a farmer, a scientist, a priest, an indigenous person, a company's CEO etc. There will be a certain conflict, and each person has to try to solve it according to one's own (played) conviction. For succeeding with this everybody has to interact with other players, needs to convince other people and will by this learn much about the true complexity of the subject, about own arguments and about how to discuss controversy.

Finding the very own position

- After having finished the role play, participants will come back together. We will share our experiences and the understanding of other persons' points of view.
- We will take our time to find each person's very own position towards one's field of research: What are you convinced of? What are your doubts? What should other people know and understand? What are attacks you are afraid to be confronted with?

Day 2

This day is about how to communicate controversial, complex topics to non-experts and how to protect oneself against personal attacks.

Make yourself understood: Exercising language

- Explaining a complex topic comprehensibly, is much more than saying or writing things just more simple. We will discuss and exercise different ways to increase comprehensibility. Our postulate: Even the most difficult issue can be communicated in a more comprehensible way without distorting the facts.

Getting familiar with the audience

- Communicating life sciences outside the expert circles effectually, requires a basic understand of those who should listen and understand. This part of our workshop is about how to understand different audiences more profoundly. We will exercise how to make the own message heard by journalists, by politicians, by citizens, and by other stakeholders.

Shaping one's message

- Based on what was discussed during the previous day, each of you will write messages you want to convey to different audiences. What are the questions people could ask during a talk, a conversation, or an interview? Where are the traps that should be avoided?

Rhetorics workshop

- When giving an interview, talking with citizens or with politicians, sometimes their questions and comments may be very personal, even attacking. We will discuss and exercise how to "survive" this and how to even use such attacks.
- First-aid kit to keep one's countenance
- What to do when having stage fright
- How to show self-confidence and authenticity with posture, gestures and facial expressions

Interview training

- All of what we discussed and exercised will be rehearsed again in a final interview session. Each participant will be interviewed by the trainer, each interview has its own difficulties and challenges.
- Final questions and remarks. End of the workshop.

The trainer: Diane Scherzler is editor and project manager in a major German Public Broadcasting Company, SWR, where she regularly writes about scientific topics. For more than 15 years Diane has been concerned with science communication. She works as lecturer at the universities of Tübingen and Freiburg, she regularly gives media trainings for academics, and she is convenor of the Euroscience workgroup "Science Communication". Her publications appear in learned journals and books. For further information: www.diane-scherzler.de