

Adapted from work by Tom Siebold

The IB Program Gorilla Tale

Objective (s): To introduce the need to stay open to change in our schools/programs/courses

How to use this activity: The IB is always looking at ways to improve the quality of programs and services they offer. As a result, our programs/subjects continue to grow and evolve to meet the needs of our changing populations and knowledge of best practice. *Discuss the power of inevitable changes in the evolution of our schools and programs*

Activity Description: Don't neglect the power that parables, metaphors, and analogies have to make a point. In this activity, a short story entitled *The IB Program Gorilla Story* is used to emphasize how the status quo frequently keeps schools/programs from making real change or approaching things differently.

Have a volunteer to read the story out loud to the full group. Here is the story...

The Gorilla Story

This story starts with a cage containing five gorillas and a large bunch of bananas hanging above some stairs in the center of the cage. Before long, a gorilla goes to the stairs and starts to climb toward the bananas. As soon as he touches the stairs, all the gorillas are sprayed with cold water. After a while, another gorilla makes an attempt and gets the same result—all the gorillas are sprayed with cold water. Every time a gorilla attempts to retrieve the bananas, the others are sprayed. Eventually, they quit trying and leave the bananas alone.

One of the original gorillas is removed from the cage and replaced with a new one. The new gorilla sees the bananas and starts to climb the stairs. To his horror, all the other gorillas attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted. Next, the second of the original five gorillas is replaced with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm.

Next the third original gorilla is replaced with a new one. The new one goes for the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four gorillas that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why

they are participating in the beating of the newest gorilla.

After the fourth and fifth original gorillas have been replaced, all the gorillas that were sprayed with cold water are gone. Nevertheless, no gorilla will ever again approach the stairs. Why not?

“Because that’s the way it has always been done.”

After the reading, simply ask the group to discuss the lesson of the story by applying it to situations that they have encountered in their school/programs.

Here are some other questions that have generated related discussion:

Why do teachers/administrators find changes to the PYP/MYP/DP so threatening?

What do you say to the teacher that says, “just as you start to make progress on (insert appropriate - ex. unit planner), they change it all up.”

What is the power of the status quo?

How can a leader help break “gorilla” thinking?

What motivates people to move out of their comfort zones?

In schools/programs, how is the status quo perpetuated?

What role can IB Americas play in helping schools/programs to climb the stairs and retrieve the bananas?