



**Ministry of Education and Sports Republic of Serbia
Vocational Education and Training Reform Programme**

Programme Implementation Unit
Otona Zupancica 30, 11000 Belgrade
Tel.: + 381 11 260 8181
E-mail: office@vetserbia.edu.yu
www.vetserbia.edu.yu



**“TEAMS AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEAM BASED
ORGANISATION”**

**A Training Programme for the new pilot school
principals in the VET Reform Programme – Phase II**

Belgrade, April 2007

Team Organisation

One specific Organisation Development initiative recommended to be considered by VET Schools is the introduction of Team Organisation.

The purpose of Team Organisation is to organise a part of the operational processes of the school in dedicated teams of staff members, who are assigned with some degree of freedom to decide how to undertake and organise the process in question.

The potential benefits of Team Organisation lie in releasing the creative energy of Staff Members and creating a “safe” working environment for staff to express their skills. In addition, Team Organisation can give staff a greater feeling of influence on their own work situation and increase work motivation.

Team Organisation can be implemented in many varieties: from the “careful” first step of setting up teams to handle a few selected non-essential functions of the school (like organising events or developing projects) to a full delegation of organisation of the training process to teams of teachers.

It is very important to underline that the benefits of Team Organisation do not happen automatically, and that establishment of teams without the proper preparation and/or back-up from both the prospective team members and the school management can lead to negative results.

In general, establishment of Teams require the following considerations by the VET School Management:

1. A clear reason

- **Why do we establish Teams?**



- **The Organisation must have clear reasons for choosing To set up a team-based organisation.**



- **The Organisation must also define clear goals it wants to achieve by establishing teams – and how to measure if they are really achieved.**

2. For which functions?

The School Management must consider which functions are realistic and desirable to establish as organised in Teams.

In this consideration, it is important to decide whether the school and the staff in question would be ready to organise part of its main activities in Teams, or whether to experiment with team organisation in less essential (less risky) areas within secondary activities of the school.

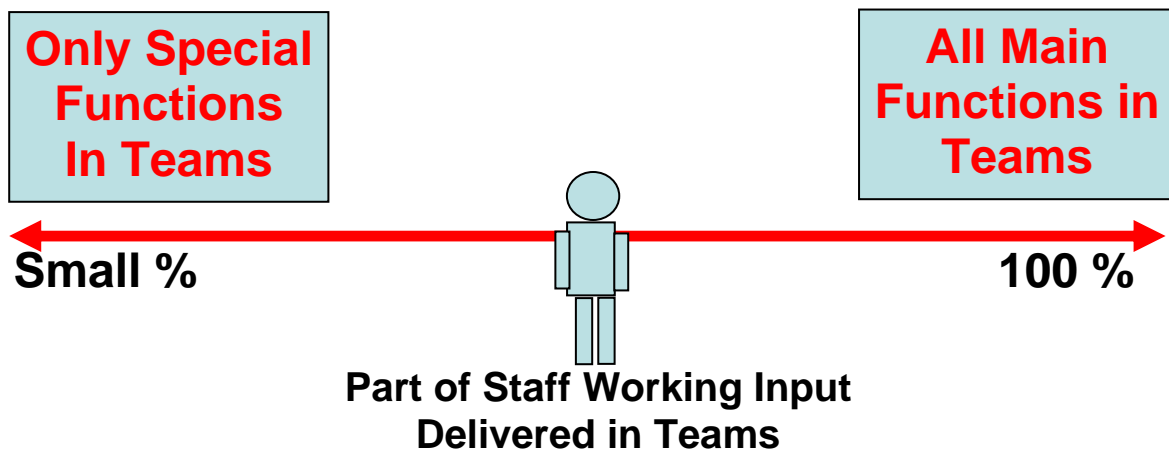
Experience from the VET School Management Training Programme suggests that most schools, who have adopted the team organisation model, have chosen to generate experience with this model in areas that are not essential to their main operations.

Typical team organisation examples have included:

- Teams for maintenance and physical improvements in the school
- Teams for organisation of special events in the school
- Teams for marketing, public relations, or other external activities in the school
- Teams for development of projects in the school

How do we establish teams?

Key Question: Which Extent of Team Organisation will We aim at achieving?



When choosing the Extent of Team Organisation, the School Management must consider which extent is:

- Realistic?
- Desirable?
- Necessary to achieve the stated goals?

And also the readiness of the

- Staff to accept Team responsibility
- Management to delegate decision power

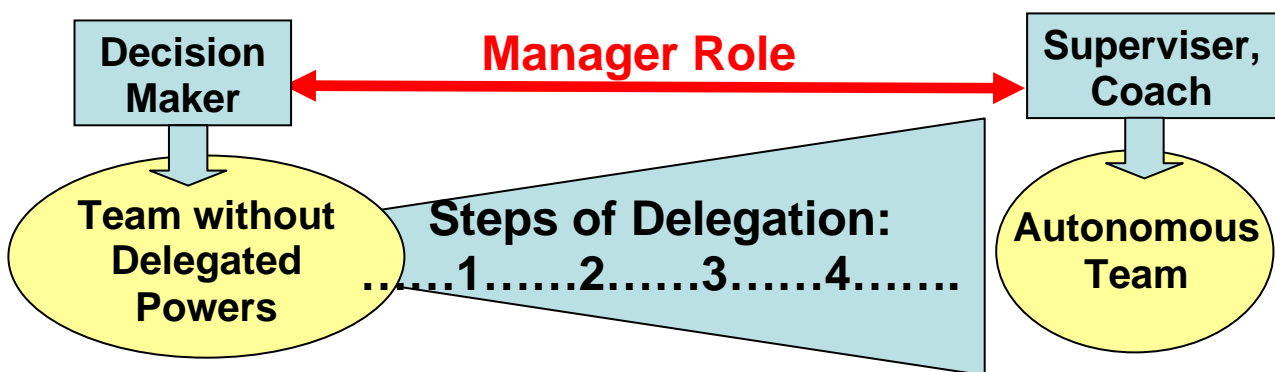
3. How much power do we delegate to the teams?

The essential consideration of the School Management is to consider which level of delegation is the team ready to absorb. The more the team is expected to rely on self-determination and independent operation, the higher are the demands on the team's ability to organise itself and to sort out internal conflicts.

In addition, the higher the degree of self-determination given to the team, the more its requirement for support from the Management changes from traditional managerial inputs towards coaching. This raises the equally important question of the management readiness and capacity to carry out this function.

Experience from the VET School Management Training Programme shows that most teams set up by participating schools have been granted some extent of planning autonomy and some teams have been given the rights for self-organisation of roles within the team. However, no examples were noted of teams, which had obtained managerial autonomy or financial competence. A cautious approach was recommended during the training programme and has been adopted by the schools monitored.

The Degree of Delegation to Teams:



- **Administrative powers/responsibility delegated**
- **Development powers/responsibility delegated**
- **Self-Management powers/responsibility delegated**
- **Financial/Staff Issue powers/responsibility delegated**

The most important action to be taken by the School Management to facilitate the successful integration of teams in the organisation is to secure the proper preparation of the teams.

The tool to achieve this aim is Team Building, i.e. training to make the Team Members aware of the requirements for functioning well as a team. These include establishment of good Communication Skills in the team and the ability to solve internal conflicts in a positive manner.

Teamwork exercises (optimally in an informal and “friendly” setting) help train the co-operation in the team in an informal way and allows for discussion of team roles and co-operation. Team Members’ personal profiles and preferences in teamwork can be tested by using one of many acknowledged self-tests, e.g. the Belbin test (see www.belbin.com for a free trial version)

Team Building

Why?

- To Make the Team Feel like a Team
- To Train and Develop Good and Open Communication in the Team
- To give the Team a Positive Experience

How?

- Discuss + Test Team Roles (Belbin)
- Use Team Exercises to discuss teamwork
- Train Communication and Conflict Solving

Communication – the foundation for everything

All teamwork begins with a common foundation. The foundation is created by communication.

Without knowledge about your own communication it is impossible to analyse others' communication, and thereby it will be difficult to be diplomatic and build bridges between different opinions.

If you are a good communicator you can discuss problems with other people instead of arguing with them.

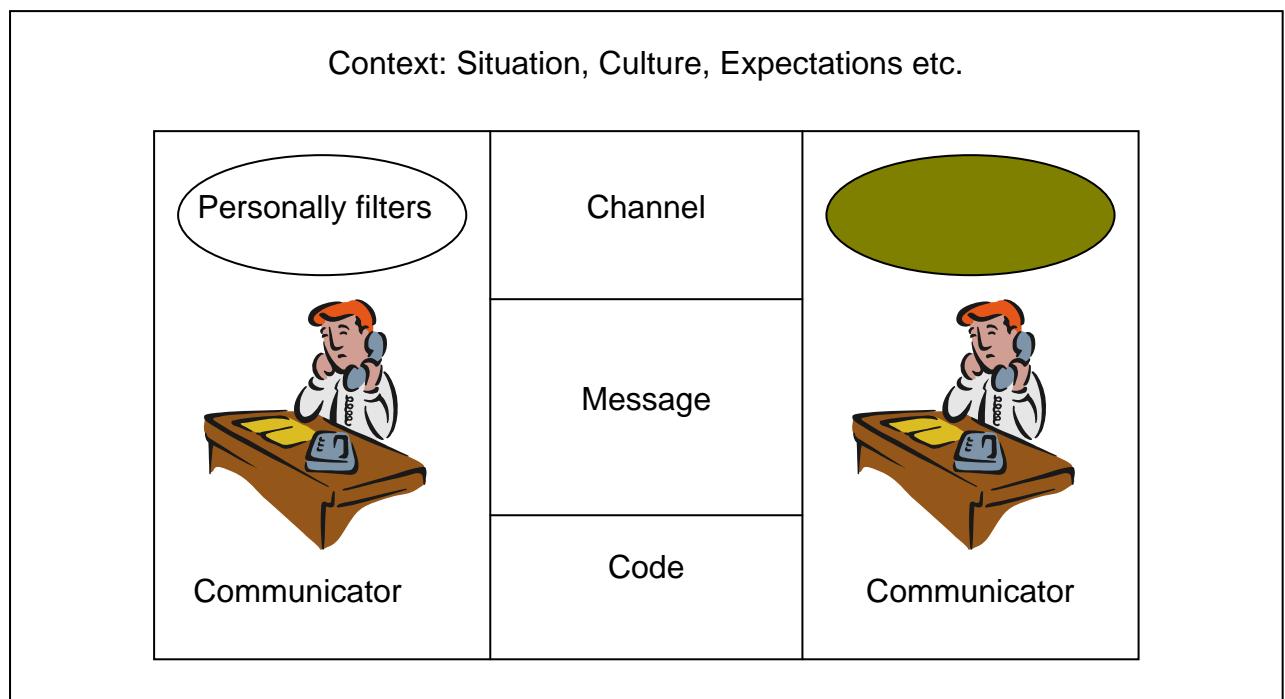
This chapter covers the following topics:

- What is communication
- Joharry's window
- Body language
- Language
- Active listening

What is communication

The most fantastic by communication is that we can't stop doing it. We are always communicating, even when we are not talking to each other or looking at each other. In such situation we will often communicate that we don't want to talk with others. Think about a trip in a train, sitting opposite unknown people, or standing in the line in a supermarket.

The model underneath is developed to explain what happens when we communicate and what influences conversation.



Context is the connection that the communication is a part of. It can be a conversation about competences or a conversation between a supervisor and an operator.

The communication is depending of the persons who are communicating. It is especially the relations between the **communicators** that have importance, e.g. Smith/smith, parents/child.

The code is the language. It can be English, Danish or Arabic, but it can also be technical language or slang.

The message is what you want to tell. In this context you can talk about direct or indirect messages. The indirect is the message you can read or hear “between the lines” and often these messages are more important than the direct messages.

The channel is the way you deliver the message. It can be by the language, body language, touch for e.g.

What can make communication difficult is that we, as communicators, use a lot of personally filters. We use these filters to choose what we want to say and to understand.

The filters that we understand through, and choose what and how we want to communicate, are closely connected to our background and our personality. They can consist of our experience with:

- The person
- Similar situations
- Our needs to assert ourselves or our fear to be too high and mighty
- Our upbringing, education

All this illustrates that there are a lot of elements in communication. But there is only one “golden rule” for those who communicate:

Always put your self in your interlocutor's place

Do all you can to form an understanding of your interlocutor's filters, and thereby his intensions and his message, both the direct and the indirect. Only in this way can you fit your own communication to your interlocutor. In that way you more than double your possibilities for an effective and constructive communication.

Johary's window

The better you know yourself, i.e. the better you know your strengths and weaknesses, the better you will be able to fit and work with your communication.

The first step is to be conscious about why you react as you do to your fellow creatures, and why they react as they do to you. In that way it is necessary to know your own prejudices and your blind spots.

Joe Luft and Harry Ingham make a schematic model of the man compared with others. The model is called the Johari window.

The official I Attitude, behavior, and motives known by yourself and other persons	The blind I The part of your personality, which is hidden for you , but is experienced by others.
The hidden I Some personal feelings, problems and insecurities are consciously kept hidden for others	The unknown I Some resources and capacities are not yet known - Unknown for everybody.

The message in the Joharry window is to work towards making the “official I” bigger and especially the “blind I” smaller.

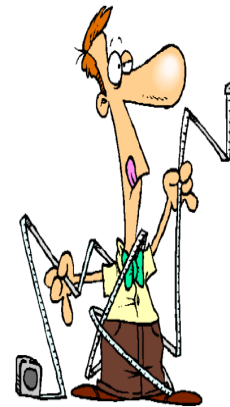
When you are working to make your “windows” more open, it demands a great knowledge about yourself, and a great will to open the windows for yourself and for others. In the following I will describe some of the language and body language elements that you seldom will be conscious about. When you read the pages, think about how you use to do. May be it will open a window a little.

Body language

The body has its own language. The body language can be in accordance with the words – the verbal language, but there can also be a discrepancy. Problems in communication are often caused by the difference between the words and the body language. As the matter of fact we often believe body more than we believe the words.

The model shows how important your body language and your way to express the words is, for your colleague’s way to understand what you are saying.

How does your co-worker
perceive what you say?
55% body language.
38% the way it’s said.
7% the actual words spoken



Your body language shows:

- How you understand yourself
- How you think your interlocutor understands you
- Your own belief in what you are saying

For e.g. when you are talking to a colleague your body language will show your opinion about him or her, what you think what he or she means about you and something about your feelings to yourself.

Therefore you have to be aware of your body language. Some of the elements of your body language you can observe are mentioned below.

Distance zones

We behave in different ways to colleagues we know very well and colleagues we don't know. One of the situations where you obviously recognize that is how close you go to your interlocutor. This is called territorial behaviour. We all have some limits for how close we want other people to come to us, and where we wish – and not wish other people to touch our body.

You probably know some situations where you don't take a seat closest to another person, for e.g. in a bus or in the cinema or even in a classroom, if there are enough seats to sit alone. Obviously the territorial behaviour is linked to the person's culture and upbringing. Our behaviour is therefore highly definite by unwritten rules and conventions we have in the society we live in.

In general you divided the human territory into four zones, which is called distance zones.

In the **intimate** zone we fight and make love.

In the **personal zone** we speak together in confidence.

The **social zone** is normally used in a working context.

The official zone is used e.g. when you are making a speech or when you are teaching in a bigger forum. The limits for the different distance zones are different. Somebody don't care when you go close to them and even touch them, but other people will be nervous and ill at ease.

It is important that you think about how close you go to people, because you can be sure that nobody will listen to you or remember your message, if you come too close.

ZONES OF DISTANCE

The human territory is divided into four zones:

0- 50 cm

0, 5 – 1, 3 m

1, 3 – 3, 75 m

3, 75 – ca. 8 m

The intimate zone. Here we fight and love.

The personal zone. Here we talk in confidence.

The social zone. Your social life: Work, friends etc.

The public zone. Here we are making lectures, theatre or the like.



Autonomous signals

The autonomous signals are the signals we can't handle immediately, for example to blush, to sweat or shake. There is nothing you can do about these signals immediately, but the more secure you are in your role, the less other people will recognize the autonomous signals when they occur. In addition, other people don't see the signals the way you think they do.

Displacement activities

A displacement activity is a movement that is not immediately connected to the subject you are talking about. An example could be that you are rocking with your legs under the table or you are staying in front of people clicking a pen while you are giving an instruction. These activities are activities that now make sense.

Displacement activities are a kind of models that you have more or less incorporated in your communication. These activities calm you and relax you when you feel nervous or need time to think. Many displacement activities are characterized by touching yourself or a thing e.g. a pen, and that touch gives security. Displacement activities can also be a way to use extra energy.

A displacement activity you are doing again and again can distract your audience's attention. They will pay more attention to your activity than to your message.

The language of your hands

It can be very difficult to keep your hands and your arms at rest when you are communicating with other people. The reason for that is that the movement – the gesture – often supports the words you say:

- We repeat what we have just said
- We underline what we say
- We draw pictures of what we say
- We conduct the conversation
- We use sounds which have no meaning

Many people are aware and train to keep their hands at rest. But if you make yourself free and let your hands speak their own language, it will automatically support your words and your audience will be more interested in your message. You increase your power.

Eye contact

An important part of the body language is eye contact. If we can't get eye contact with other people, we suspect it is because they don't like us or because they are dishonest. When you read this, think about colleagues in your group, is there someone who has more influence or who is more popular than others? Is he or her good at keeping the eye contact?

The connection between eyes and sympathy:

- We are looking more in a person we like.
- We are looking more at others, when we expect a positive result.
- We interpret missing eye contact as expression for anti-sympathy or missing interest.

The connection between eyes and status:

- We are looking more at the most important persons
- The most important persons are looking more at others, when they are speaking.
- Different cultures have different rules for eyes and status.

The perfect body language

It is no surprise that perfect body language does not exist, but in the same way - just like in the spoken language - the more you experiment with your body language, the better it becomes. When I say this, I don't mean that you will try to change yourself.

What matters is that you try to be conscious about the signals you are sending and how these signals affect other people. In this way you will gradually open Johary's window.

Language

You have the body language and the spoken language. Also in the spoken language there is something you have to pay attention to, if you want to be a better communicator and if you want to increase your arguments. While the body language shows something about you, the spoken language and your choice of words will show:

- How you understand yourself.
- How you think your interlocutor understands you.
- Your own belief in what you say

Words

Up graders and down graders

Up graders and down graders are words that show how much we believe in ourselves and the things we are talking about. Therefore, they are important for us and for the power of our message.

"I'm in such a hurry, so I'll take off now".

"I'm running a little late, so I think I'll leave soon".

The meaning of the two sentences is the same: "I must be off now". In the first sentence it is said by using up graders that increase the message. In the second sentence it is said by using down graders that makes the message weaker. Some word can be both up graders and down graders e.g. "Naturally", "Just" and some swearwords.

MARKERS OF ATTITUDE

These words show your attitude towards the subject. Markers of attitude can be changed to other words that give the sentence another meaning:

“There’s a chance that my mother in law will stop by”

“There’s a risk that my mother in law will stop by”

WORDING OF THE SENTENCES

There are also some sentence structures that one should be aware of:

Yes but and no but sentences

Yes but... sentences are treacherous. First you agree with your opposite party, but in the next second you say the reverse:

“You can’t mean that”

“No, but I don’t think...”

“Would you help me to book the meeting room?”

“Yes, but I really have no time so...”

I-sentence has more effect if you use the form “One could” about your self. An I-sentence underlines that you take responsibility in the situation and for what you are saying.

“I definitely think it will work!”

“One could say it will work”

Another important point is to use the I-sentence in front of the sentence; it will give your message more power and give you better possibilities to reach your colleagues.

“This is a good suggestion I suppose”

“I mean that this is a good suggestion”

GENERELL SENTENCES – CLICHÉS

It is important that you are only talking for yourself, if you are not directly asked for something else. If you don’t use that way of talking it will be easy to judge other people with your words or will talk in general – clichés.

“You always forget our appointments”

“You always say that...”

“When you don’t carry back the training plan to the employee, I will be irritated because you don’t keep a promise and because it causes more work”

Beware of words like: Never, always, 100% guaranteed etc.

Listen actively

A great part of being a person is to listen and it is one of the things that are difficult for most people. To listen demands an active effort, to search and understand the meaning of what is said. It means that you must try and understand what your colleagues are saying and not what you want to hear.

Active listening is a conscious act that you can train.

Good advices to listen active

- Don't be prejudiced against the speaker and what is spoken.
- Don't make conclusions too fast.
- Don't plan your answer while you are listening.
- Keep distance to your own meaning and problems.
- Be concentrated and listen to the essential points.
- Be aware of the speaker's tone of voice and the body language.
- Be aware of your own body language.
- Use reflection, nod, and "I understand you – sounds"
- Ask to what is said if you are not sure.
- Tell if you have no time.

Typical blockage for active listening

- You don't finish listening because you think you already understood
- You interrupt with a "but"
- You tell parallel stories – "it is like when..."
- Deliver the solution – "you just do..."
- Inattentive to body language, mime and tone of voice – don't feel the difference between the surface and the depth in the message.
- You don't ask quality questions – divert attention from the essential.
- You don't avoid emotional reactions – "Why the hell is it always me?"

Remember!

It is no use that you know the solution of a problem if your colleagues don't mean that it is the right solution.

It is no use that you think that you know what is good for your colleague, if she does not agree herself.

Therefore: Listen, ask, listen, ask and let your colleagues speak and come to the solution themselves. This will motivate and support them.

Cooperation

To cooperate in a team, it is important that everyone knows where the others are, that means that we know the expectations of each member of the group. It is essential for the cooperation that you feel a mutual responsibility for the teamwork.

- You have not finished your work before the team has finished their work.
- The team hasn't finished their work before you have finished your work.

Some things have a specific meaning:

1. Everyone must know the whole problem, not only your own part.
2. You must be able to understand how you can contribute to solutions.
3. You must be open to others ideas.
4. You must show your understanding of other people's problems.

If you have realized these points and accepted them, there are some things concerning preparation and personally background that must be present.

Preparation

- You must have a common plan and understand each other.
- You must have a division of labour and understand your part of the work.
- It must be possible to talk together.

Personal conditions

- You must have the will to co-operate
- You must be on speaking terms.
- You must understand essence of a conversation, which means that you can give your opinion to the others in the team, but you can also listen to them.
- You must really work together, not only care about own interests.
- You must understand how to give and get help without feeling triumph or defeat.

Both conditions for preparation and personal conditions must be o.k. to get well functioning teamwork.

It's not good when you plan a team meeting and you prepare a good introduction, if some of the participants decide before the meeting, that they only participate because they have to and not because of their own interest.

Communication in colours

We all know that conversation or a discussion is sometimes better than other times. Try to think about when a discussion or a conversation with a colleague is really good! What makes it a good discussion or conversation?

Our guess is that a discussion or conversation is good when there is room for both communicators and when both parties are listening too each other. We call it: “to communicate blue and green”.

The opposite is bad communication. It is the conversation or discussion where one of the communicators tries to take over all the time. The power-hungry, in this case, is vocal which doesn't listen to others' arguments. He is self-asserting and dominant. One part flattens the other. Such reaction can affect people in the way that they will be shy, get the sense of guilt and lose their self-confidence. They almost apologize for having an opinion. This way of communication destroys a good conversation or dialogue. We call it “to communicate red and yellow”.

One's communication can change vary in colour. Probably no one can deny being self-asserting or despondent sometimes. How you behave and in which colour you communicate depends on:

- Situation – at home or at work etc.
- The persons you are with. (Conditions and earlier conversations with the persons influence your behaviour)
- The way you feel (the mood influence you)

Communication in blue and green

The good and constructive conversations are influenced of BLUE and GREEN. It is therefore important that you communicate with your colleagues or other persons in these ways; even when the people you communicate with communicate red and yellow. You must avoid “taking the bait”.

You can never force anyone to communicate blue and green, but you can try to “pull them up” by communicating blue and green.

Characteristics of the four colours

Characteristics of blue and green

Both blue and green communication is responsible communication, because you provide a constructive dialogue and not a power struggle. The characteristic of blue and green is that you are honest, sincere and direct. You know what outcome you want to achieve in conversation – you have a goal and you are calm.

Characteristics of red and yellow

Red and yellow communication is the opposite of blue and green. It is not responsible communication when you communicate red and yellow, because you take no responsibility to create a good conversation. You only try to get your own arguments through.

The characteristics of red and yellow are that you are unreliable, indirect, nervous and have a shifty glance.

How is the colour expressed in communication?

How can you recognize the colours in communication? What can you actually do to make the communication blue and green? Knowledge about that you can use in situations where you have a dialogue or conversation with other people. You will discover that when you communicate blue and green, your interlocutor will find you more positive and honest. He or she will be ready to be open to you because you show confidence.

Red

When you are red, you are self-assertive, dominating, aggressive, intolerant, condescending, sarcastic, insulting, threatening, aggressive and not listening. You are closed too.

Verbal language

You use many judging words as: always, never, should, must do, just and easy. Up graders: Reinforcement of the words (also much used in the Para-language).

Para-language

Speaking loud and stressing the words; talking too much. Person is authoritative and snarling tone of voice.

Body language

You use a judging look, and your posture is perhaps over-straight and tense. You use your pen as a sword and use a lot of gesticulation; maybe you frown as well.

Methods

When you communicate red you cause difficulties and have negative attitude which is the result of the previously received impressions. You come with threats and “speak down” to other persons. You interrupt and ignore what other person says, and you “follow the person instead of the ball”.

Apart from being directly red, you can also be indirectly red.

When you are indirect you use sarcasm and you get rid of your indignation by talking “between the lines”. When a person is indirectly red you don’t know where he/she is. They practice the method: “Guess why I am surly”. You know that the person is offended, but you do not know why.

Yellow

When you are yellow you are giving up, you give excuses, you are uncertain, evasive, you submit. You are adjusting yourself to the situation and you are soothing and whimpering. You are flattening and oppress yourself.

Verbal language

Verbal language is characterised by wariness markers such as: if you say so, in a way, well, in one way or another. Verbal language is also marked by other statements, such as: may I, can I, I will do that, I am sorry, what do you mean?

You *downgrade* your statement, "*Maybe* it could be a little *better*".

Para-language

You use low-voiced tone and you don't stress your words.

Body language

You look down when you talk and you have a stooping posture. When you are yellow you have a worried look and you touch yourself or a pen or a ring much.

Methods

You don't say a lot. You explain a lot and post rationalize. You keep back your aggression and you don't set your boundaries. You don't want to come to a decision and miss the point. You use expressions such as: "It's all the same to me; "It's not my job", "Why are you never telling me anything".

Blue and green

Both blue and green are influenced by direct communication and therefore by "I-messages".

I-messages

I-messages are the opposite of you-messages. An example of a You-message: If a colleague comes too late - "You are simply irresponsible". Here you focus on the person and not on the person's behaviour. You put responsibility for your feelings on the one you are talking to and not on yourself. You-messages get others communicate red and yellow. The opposite way is to use an I-message to express your irritation to the colleague: "I am being irritated and I feel trampled on when you do not respect our appointment for the meeting". Here you take responsibility for your own feelings and you avoid being objective and you overreact.

Direct communication

Direct communication is known by the philosophy "I am O.K. you are O.K.". You respect both yourself and the one you talk too. You show respect to the others' attitude to speak about the case or the problem and not about the person.

You see discussions and criticism as a possibility and a challenge to learn something and to come to solutions instead of seeing a threat to yourself.

When you use direct communication the conversation becomes energetic, instead of draining all your energy.

Blue

When you communicate blue, you take space, you analyse, explain, manage, set goals, make decisions, take responsibility, show enthusiasm and you are independent.

Verbal language

The verbal language is influenced by I-messages: I think, I mean, I would like to say; it is my opinion and from my point of view. Your message is precise, unequivocal and concrete. You are, in general, very objective; describe the concrete effect; don't exaggerate and do not use interpretation as judgement and labelling. When you are blue you speak a lot.

Para-language

You are calm and your tone of voice is clear.

Body language

In accordance with the situation; naturally; using a lot of gesticulation.

Methods

Your words, body and your tone of voice are concordant. You are listening actively and you let your interlocutor finish the talk. You only interrupt when it is necessary to manage the conversation. You pick up and round off the discussion and you try to understand your interlocutor's perspective. You only take decisions based on concrete information. You express your own thoughts.

Green

When you communicate green you give space to your interlocutor. You ask questions and you listen actively. You show your understanding, support, you cheer up and you are attentive, open and honest.

Verbal language

The green verbal language is influenced of I-messages. You use many questions, both extension (open) questions and more thoroughly questions: "*How do you inspire co-operation in the team?*", "*What makes the co-operation good?*", "*Tell me a little more about it*", "*What would you like to talk about?*". The green communicator also repeats what the interlocutor says in order to help him think deeper and to be active in the communication. You don't speak much yourself.

Para-language

Calm and clear tone of voice

Body language

In accordance with the situation. You are natural and calm.

Methods

Your words, body and your tone of voice are concordant and you are listening actively. You try to imagine your interlocutor's perspective and you are interested and curious to know more about what the person thinks and why the person thinks that way. You let your interlocutor have his own opinion and you don't try to convince him that your opinion should be his. You don't come with good advices and solutions, you let the interlocutor reach his own.

APPROACH TO INFORMATION

The time that we live in and especially the time ahead of us, requires that school prepare children for critical approach to information. Therefore, in any possible learning situation you should use a chance to teach children some important skills. In some of the exercises, which will be carried out during this seminar, you can find situations in which the participants are required to:

- Search for the sources of information and observe the specific features of each «type» of information
- Select information
- Develop strategies for structuring information
- Identify and understand information relations
- Evaluate their complexity and reliability
- Judge and base their judgment on information
- Observe the characteristics of opinion based on the context which information provide
- Build up knowledge based on information
- Have a critical approach to information, i.e. to develop strategies for avoiding information manipulations.

Learning how to handle information is a complex skill. What will later become routine, i.e. means for intellectual work, is completely unknown at the beginning. Therefore, when the students find themselves in the situation to explore information sources for the first time, the teacher should first find out whether they understand the action plan and the procedures which should be undertaken, and then, based on this, help them as much as needed. In any situation in the future the teacher may intervene less until the students become completely independent.

It is very important to make students aware that one can have a good knowledge on anything only when this knowledge is based on diverse information. In a word, *it is better to read and learn about certain issue from a number of sources which discuss it from various aspects and in different ways, than to read the same text discussing this issue many times*. The knowledge which comes from one source is often stiff and less applicable. This kind of knowledge provides one-sided view and is susceptible to stereotypes, prejudice and all kinds of manipulation. On the other hand, the knowledge based on various information sources makes it easier for us to understand the problem since it has been shown from various aspects and, at the same time, we become more open to the possibility of its application in many different situations.

Sometimes it might seem discouraging when we face a great number of opposite and incoherent information on the same issue. However, with this kind of mental effort to arrange a kind of «information jam», to compare data, to check them, integrate and organize them is a multiple gain. This enables better understanding and memorizing learning materials. These complex intellectual operations will also bring about a system of knowledge structured, organized and therefore integrated, connected and networked with other knowledge.

CLASS AS A GROUP PROCESS

Given that the classes normally have thirty or more students and very strict organization, the best way to activate students seems to be group work.

Group work is good for encouraging critical thinking and for the development of communication skills because – in the course of a task accomplishment - the students are required to give their own opinion on a current topic/issue and to listen to, consider and appreciate opinions of others.

Work in small groups is usually associated with cooperative learning. In the most situations these notions are interchangeable – the accent is either on the process (cooperative learning) or on the organization of work (group work). This type of work has the following characteristics:

- The students work together on the mutual task. The main idea on which the group work is based is that the problem-solving potential of the group is larger than the problem-solving potential of each member.
- Organisation of the students' work in small groups where they cooperate in the process of problem-solving enables engagement of the majority of students. For e.g. in a small group, each student has chance to participate in the discussion more frequently than in the discussion at the class level. Small groups are also a good way to overcome shyness; communication and the exchange of opinions and knowledge among the students are more direct.
- Team work is one of the possible activities in small groups. What is specific for team work is the division of roles. Each student is given a role and performs a certain type of activity related to the role. Solving the common task depends on the cooperativeness and the compatibility of different roles.
- In order to function well, i.e. in order to have all the students in the team participate equally, the working groups need to be small enough. It is believed that the optimum size of the group is 4 to 5 members. The size of the group should be determined in regard to time available, given that the time for the presentation and exchange of results is an important part of group work as well and requires a lot of time. The less time we have, the smaller number of groups there will be and v.v.
- There is a specific type of interaction among the students in the group work. Since the task is to solve the problem by joint efforts, the students need to work on it together and they necessarily rely on one another, i.e. they are in an interdependent relationship. In order to solve the problem successfully as a group, the students need to use various social skills, such as cooperativeness, leadership skills, conflict solving, constructive criticism, courage, compromise, negotiation. The students will not, however, demonstrate all these skills in the first group task. The skills will be acquired through practice and experience. At the beginning, the teacher will have to describe how a successful group interaction looks like or to give the students different roles in order to ensure certain behaviour.

As it has been already said, effective group work is not possible without the various social skills which you acquire gradually. Here we shall pay special attention to some cooperation development procedures which are perhaps the most important precondition for the group work.

- The stimulation of cooperation is a long-lasting process and it is impossible to realize it during only one class. It is sometimes good to let the students organize group work and then talk about problems and the possible ways of improving cooperation. On the other hand, the teacher should insist that the group work class is a joint creation of all the students and the teacher himself. The success is not only to solve the problem (reach some goal), but also the process of solving, speaking and listening – in order

to reach the goal. Other people's failure and other groups' failure is, in a way, everyone's failure. If the conclusions and arguments of one party are weak or the students do not bother to make them carefully, this automatically diminishes the other party's success.

- The teacher should always insist on the assessment of ideas (not the persons), develop students' tolerance and direct them to listen to one another. The students should not blindly stick to their own ideas but they should try to realize the weaknesses of these ideas and be prepared to accept other's suggestions as well as to suggest something themselves. The teacher should have in mind that group work has many obstacles to be overcome, such as the harmonization of attitudes, the possibility of students' relationship crisis. The teacher should always point out the advantages of work in which there is abundance of various opinions and the good results of such work, as mentioned earlier in the text.
- Mutual listening can be developed at the beginning by various « game like » activities. For example, this game consists of the students' statements which follow from one another: The first student should express an idea, the next one should express the idea which is opposite of the first one, the next one points out the positive sides of both ideas, the next one all the negative sides etc.
- The evaluation of class or students can include cooperation as one aspect of the mark/grade.

Group work is not the means of solving educational problems, but it is a good way to achieve specific educational goals. The use of group work depends on what we want to achieve with this type of lesson design. On the other hand, the decision to introduce the group work in the class must be followed by awareness of the potential problems which can even annihilate all the positive effects:

- One student dominates the group (accomplishes the task given to the group, imposes his opinion)
- A certain number of students in the group is passive
- Problems in communication in the small group (the students do not listen to one another, there is the lack of tolerance and constructive problem-solving)
- There is no exchange and integration (when the groups are busy solving their task they do not follow other groups' presentation)

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

In the teaching process in which interactive methods are dominant special attention should be paid to communication which is thus created. This special kind of interaction - pedagogical communication - is an incentive, but also formative instrument in the learning process.

Pedagogical communication is a link that all teaching problems are connected with: making students motivated, teaching them how to ask the right questions, successfulness of different types of activities, efficient feedback to students concerning their results, making the work atmosphere stimulating etc.

Here we will mention the basic characteristics of a good pedagogical communication. These should provide some sort of basis to teachers and enable them to evaluate critically their communication patterns. On the other hand, they can rely on these to help them teach the students good-quality, knowledge-gaining and stimulating communication.

This complex and multilayer story about communication is here grouped around several subtitles for practical reasons:

- Teacher aspect: all those aspects of pedagogical communication which are entirely controlled by the teacher (the way of teaching, how and to what extent he uses «language of thinking», the way he asks questions, the way he stimulates students to ask questions, the way he provides feedback etc.).
- Student aspect: all those aspects of teachers' communication where he intervenes i.e. regulates communication among the students (the way he enables exchange, listening, tolerance, the way he leads discussion etc.).

The essence of pedagogical interaction is the fact that it is asymmetrical, the teacher being superior, leading and directing the process in the class. Since the teacher is responsible for initiating and leading pedagogical interaction, it is very important that the aim of such interaction is clear to him. In relation to this aim, the teacher should constantly evaluate and model his pedagogical interventions in order to model students' cognitive behaviour. Good-quality open communication is a precondition for creating atmosphere which stimulates thinking, but this does not mean that «laissez faire» atmosphere with no rules should be supported. Stimulative communication is the one in which you can observe teacher's directivity, if this is in the interest of cognitive process.

Questions are integral part of teaching and communication. The experience shows that the most frequent questions are those that the teacher uses to check whether the students have learnt their lessons. But there are other kinds of questions, broadly determined as the questions which stimulate and mentally engage students, their intellectual processes and thinking.

Therefore, the subject is open to discussion: what is a good question? The characteristics of a good question are preciseness and clarity. Also, this is the question essentially linked to the content, not the details. A good question may have different forms: an inquiry, a demand for providing arguments, a request for graphical representation of a problem, a request for answering a multiple-choice question etc. It is clear that a good question is not necessarily limited to reproduction but it can go even further to associating ideas or idea application.

Therefore, a good question is an invitation to thinking. Such a question is open, contains possibilities and problems. It is productive, requires reply and opens new questions.

When we talk about open questions or the questions opening communication, we usually use certain formulation. These are the questions beginning with *why* and *how*. However, certain formulation does not guarantee that the student will be prompted to think. For example, question: «Why did the great economic crisis happen in 1929?» may be the question activating student's memory, if he/she is expected to provide the answer that is in the textbook or the teacher's previous lecture. So, good questions cannot be formulated in only one way. The "quality" of question depends, above all, on what the teacher wants to achieve,

the context, whether the answer is covered in the textbook or whether the answer is explicitly given, how is it formulated etc.

Let's start with the most common situation in which the teacher asks a question: these are the lessons of systematization when the teacher wants to check how much the students have learnt. The questions in this situation will be different, not so much because of their formulation or nature but because of the context, meaning that these questions can also be stimulating. It is important that the teacher knows exactly what he wants to check, or which type of student's opinion he wants to stimulate.

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives for cognitive domain can offer basis for planning these questions. Questions which will activate and guide students' thinking can be derived for each level of the objective. This is how we get to questions taxonomy. The teacher who has mastered questions taxonomy can use the questions in many ways to improve intellectual climate in his class.

The teacher who makes it possible for his students to understand, apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate what they have heard will create conditions for teaching which cherishes and develops critical thinking and critical approach to information.

Objectives	Expected opinion type	Examples
Knowledge (recognition, memory)	Recollecting or recognizing the information acquired	Define What is the capital of...? What is this text about...?
Understanding	Demonstrating understanding, transforming, reorganizing or interpreting of the material	Explain in your own words... Compare.... What is the main idea in...? Describe what you have seen...
Application	Using information in solving problems with one correct solution	Which principle is demonstrated in...? Apply the rule...to solve...
Analysis	Critical thinking, identifying reasons and motives, deriving conclusions based on certain data, analyzing conclusions to determine whether they are based on evidence	What has influenced writing about...? Why is the French Bourgeois Revolution important? Based on your experiment which chemical reaction brings about...?
Synthesis	Divergent, original thought, plan, suggestion, draft or story	What is the good name for...? How can we raise funds for...? How would the USA look like if the South had won?
Evaluation	Assessing value of an idea, expressing opinion, applying standards	Who is the best basketball player according to you? Why? Who is better painter? Why? Why do you prefer (appreciate)...?

The questions which the teacher asks when a new topic is presented, i.e. in those situations in which he wants to support cognitive process, are similar to those from taxonomy according to the way of thinking which is supposed to be stimulated. The context in which they appear makes the most difference. It is also important what the teacher has on his mind, what he really wants to achieve; whether he wants the student to notice something, memorize or apply some principle or to judge or draw conclusions. Apart from this, the «meta-plan» of the lesson is equally important, i.e. mental scheme of the cognitive process which is supposed to take place in the class. This mental plan provides the basis for the teacher when it comes to the sequence of questions, for example: first, the teacher will show the similarities and differences with some other issue by asking certain questions and then ask the students to explain the differences and, finally, he will draw conclusions/define rules.

The list of questions which might be useful in these situations:

- Questions for focusing students' attention. These questions can be very productive. They open the field of investigation and help drawing attention to certain details.
- Questions which stimulate comparison. These questions help paying attention more precisely. Such questions encourage judgment and identification of similarities and differences, their precise classification and make order in the diversity of personal experience etc.
- Questions which require explanation. The teacher draws students' attention to the subject and enables the words and ideas used to be explained.
- Questions stimulating research and investigation.
- Questions about assumptions.
- Questions searching for the causes, proofs and explanations.
- Questions concerning the point of view or perspective.
- Questions investigating implications and consequences
- Question concerning the question itself.

The necessity of using questions as a form of opinion making in the process of encouraging the development of critical thinking can be seen from Robert Enis's approach (Fisher, 1995). Robert Enis gives 12 aspects, each one connected with the question which might be helpful in the critical analysis of an idea which is discussed in the class or when it is related to the critical analysis of a text (individually or in groups).

These aspects can be summed up in the form of the following questions:

1. Does it make sense? – comprehending some expression.
2. Is it clear? – judging whether there is some ambiguity in reasoning.
3. Is it consistent? – judging whether the expressions are contradictory.
4. Is it logical? – judging whether the conclusion necessarily follows.
5. Is it precise? – judging whether the understanding is specific enough.
6. Is it in accordance with rule? – judging whether the statement is based on a principle.
7. Is it correct? – judging whether the statement based on observation is reliable.
8. Is it justified? – judging whether the inductive conclusion is justified.
9. Is it relevant? – judging whether the problem is identified.
10. Is it «taken for granted»? – judging whether it is an assumption.
11. Is it well defined? – – judging whether the definition is adequate.
12. Is it true, acceptable? – – judging whether the statement based on the authority is acceptable.

FEEDBACK

Feedback on the achievements in learning is very important and useful in teaching as an interactive process. Good feedback (detailed information on the achievement, provided in a socially acceptable way) is a significant regulator of the teaching process. In one way, these information influence further activities of individual student or a group of students, since they provide guidelines to what is expected, or an insight in what has been achieved – what is good and to what extent, and what is wrong and why. Feedback provides significant support to student in his further planning of activities, but also in setting up the objectives of further activities. On the other hand, the feedback also serves the teacher himself for the process evaluation and thus direct teaching in a certain direction. For example, if the students learn something successfully, the teacher can direct them to some other, more complex matter (perhaps even skip some less important unit) or if the students do not acquire some concept, the teacher can easily detect the problem and give it more time.

Feedback has regulatory and formative effect not only by its content (what has been learnt, how much and what is the quality of the knowledge achieved) but also by the way it is provided (the way of communicating and emotional tone). Consequently, both the content and the way of providing feedback influence the atmosphere in the class so that it stimulates students to think, or else, demotivates them and is full of unpleasant emotions.

Feedback is usually provided by the teacher to a student or a group of students. Stimulating students to require feedback is very important, as well as pointing out why the feedback is so valuable. The teacher can demonstrate this by giving examples of bad, none and good feedback to some of students' answers. Also, feedback is provided by students among themselves during discussion in class or within the group. The teacher also gets feedback from students related to the answers and comments the teacher provides or to the similar ways of participation in discussions about certain issues (problems) in the class, but also wider a feedback on the general behaviour related to students.

To provide a complete, clear and useful feedback is not simple and easy. Providing feedback is much harder with the increased number of the participants in a certain action or accepting the results of the small groups' work and their integration in a discussion at the level of the class. Therefore, it is useful to bear on mind the following when devising and providing feedback:

- The aim of providing feedback
- When providing feedback it is good to be precise and concrete
- Provide full feedback to student: what is good and why, and vice versa, stimulate him to take the further steps
- Usually it is not enough to provide only feedback, but student's understanding should also be checked: how they accepted it, is it necessary to rephrase it.
- It is necessary to focus on student's answer, his participation, rather than on his character. Instead of saying: "*You are so rash! That's why you make mistakes!*", it is better to say: "*Try to think carefully about all the data that you've been given in the assignment and then write the answer*".
- In order to choose the best form of feedback about your student's behaviour during the lesson, this information should be objective and precise, not rough and general, and it should describe the behaviour and its influence on learning process in the class.
- One should always have in mind that the teacher is a role model to students when it comes to their mastering the skill of providing feedback.

A very important form of feedback, often found in practice, is the correction of written exams. Some researches show that written feedback is more effective for senior students when it is

personalized and given in the form of constructive criticism. This means that the teacher controls positive aspects of work, points out to mistakes or wrong strategies, and suggests how to overcome them. On the other hand, detailed written comments are not adequate for younger students.

Efficient written feedback is based on the following questions:

- What has the student done well and what else could have been mentioned?
- What is the main mistake?
- What is the likely reason for this mistake?
- How to direct him in order to avoid the same mistake in the future?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Group discussion is the conversation in which the teacher encourages students to express their opinion, to listen to other students' opinions, clarify and evaluate their opinions about an issue, to ask and answer questions. During the group discussion, students consider a subject together, intellectually challenge one another, suggest and evaluate possible explanations and solutions.

What are the benefits of group discussion in the teaching process?

- Students have the opportunity to participate directly and equally in the discussion about the given subject matter
- To build-up their knowledge together
- Interest for certain subjects and issues is thereby supported
- Challenging one another during the discussion the students have chance to grasp the meaning and better understand the topic of the group discussion
- Group discussion is useful when the students try to understand more complex and abstract concepts and problems
- To explore their own thoughts, evaluate their own ideas, synthesize their personal opinions
- Group discussion helps the students learn how to express themselves clearly
- To take responsibility for their opinions and attitudes
- Group discussion give students chance to ask for explanation
- To evaluate the opinions of others
- To develop tolerance for other opinions and views

During group discussion the teacher should have in mind the final objective of the discussion and direct it this way, provide feedback and assistance to the students when they need it without threatening their attitudes and independence.

The role of the teacher:

- Sets up the structure of group discussion
- Directs student's answers, comments and questions to other students
- Asks for additional information and the explanations of answers or opinions; in this way the discussion develops further
- Stimulates discussion by introducing alternatives (concerning attitudes, solving problems...)
- **Encourages:** exchange and confrontation of opinions, argumentation, listening to other people, accepting the critique of you own idea, correcting own attitudes, giving suggestions and objections, asking questions, expressing ideas
- **Discourages:** repetition, interruption, valuing persons instead of ideas, importunacy, losing track, digressions, going into details, supporting only your own ideas
- Accepts eventual mistakes in the students' consideration of problem and supports the effort of students to solve the problem
- Reminds the students occasionally of the subject of the discussion

- Sums up occasionally what has been said
- The teacher ensures that the students listen to one another during the discussion
- Creates conditions for the participation of each student by supporting the shy ones and controlling the intrusive students
- Takes care about the time available

In order to lead discussion more successfully, the teacher has to use various techniques of successful communication which also require practice and improvement:

1. **Active listening** – Active listening means that all potentially disturbing content (negative attitude, prejudices, stereotypes, strong emotions) is put aside and that you are “open” to hear and understand the interlocutor’s opinion.
2. **Asking open questions** – These are the questions which cannot be answered with yes or no, or by stating a common fact.
3. **Paraphrasing** – Means repeating what the interlocutor has said in your own words, while the content and the main idea expressed is preserved. The aim of this is to check whether we have understood the message correctly. Also, we give the interlocutor a chance to hear how his statement sounds from the viewpoint of someone who has carefully listened to him.
4. **Summarizing** – Focused and brief stating of the basic facts, ideas or points that the interlocutor has made. The aim of summarizing is to single out the important content and to give the conversation a certain direction and make it easier to follow the discussion.
5. **“Reframing”** – is a procedure in which we reformulate the interlocutor’s statement in the way that the entire negative connotation is avoided. When a statement is put in a different context (i.e. given a different frame) – the meaning of the statement is changed. In this case, the aim is to “reframe” an offensive or negative statement so as to make it a constructive criticism instead.