

CLASS INTEGRATION, SENSE OF BELONGING

Piotr Plichta

I. DEFINITION ASPECTS

Is the following statement true or false?

Taking good care of peer relationships is sufficient to foster a sense of belonging to the class group.

This statement is **false**. A sense of belonging only partly results from good relationships with one's peers. Just as important is the active care of teachers for their own relationships with the young people. An experience of security, appreciation and support (which are the constituent parts of the sense of belonging) must also be founded upon teacher/student relationships.

Our needs are among the most important factors affecting our lives. If unsatisfied, they prevent us from achieving or maintaining balance in a specific area of functioning, such as interpersonal relationships. Social needs, including those related to belonging, are considered in some of the best known theories, e.g. in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy. Also in the Self-Determination Theory, belongingness is one of the three key needs – beside autonomy and competence (Ryan, Deci 2017). According to these authors, when those are fulfilled, intrinsic motivation emerges, which is conducive to achieving intentions and goals.

The sense of belonging is conditioned upon fulfilling the need of belongingness, which is manifested in a person being willing to enter relationships with others, fit in and be appreciated. The frustration of children and young people related to lack of satisfaction of this need leads to reduced engagement in school activities and learning, as well as to deteriorated health and social dysfunction (Wilczyńska 2019). Consequences for young people may be dire, as belonging to a group is the "basic substance of development, and defence and coping mechanisms are still under development" (Jaskulska, Poleszak 2015, p. 166).

In school form conditions, the issue discussed here is related both to relationships between adults and the young people, and to peer relationships. Thus, one of the important conditions for realisation of the need of belongingness are the teacher's competences, enabling integration of the class (as well as different classes in school).

Fulfilment of the need of belongingness results in a conviction that we belong to a group which is ready to help, that we mean something to others, that they care about us, we have relationships with them, feel kinship and closeness with them. Lack of realisation of the need, on the other hand, leads to a sense of exclusion and loneliness, and as a result to a life of tension, elevated sensitivity to worrying signals, and to subordination to the group, so as to avoid being rejected again. Even if such school experiences are incidental, they can be a source of uncomfortable memories for many years:

Gossip, readiness to succumb to the group, a sense of isolation. These are very unpleasant associations, which stuck in my memory the most, even though they did not prevail throughout my school career.

Materials from pedagogical training (Plichta 2022)

School is a place like no other. We spend a significant part of our lives and meet a lot of people there, which breeds a multitude of varied experiences. From the 4th to 8th grade (over a period of just 5 years), we come to school around 1000 times. If we assume that, on average, we spend 6 hours a day there, the resulting number is quite staggering. What is far more important, however, is the quality of the time: what our experiences are and what we learn (not just in terms of knowledge, but also about life, relationships, our own selves). It is in school that we experience the joy of meeting others, but we may also face being ignored or resented. Fear is commonplace, as well. **The school is a major lesson in life**, the environment in which we define and negotiate who we are. In it, we find out what is declared and what gets actually done, who wins and who loses, what is the place in group of weaker persons, who can be counted on in times of trouble, how conflicts are resolved etc. All these things make up the culture and climate of the school.

Metaphorically (but also very truly), one might say that **growth requires a suitable climate**. In the case of educational institutions, we are dealing with the social climate. In a school, this notion includes, among other things, the entirety of social relationships in it, the rules and requirements which apply, as well as physical and emotional safety of students. Studies confirm the significance of a school's climate in preventing aggressive and violent behaviours and its favourable impact on the effectiveness of preventive measures (Przewłocka 2015; Ostaszewski 2012). The climate in a school class (e.g. support from an educator) also affects the motivation of the children and youth, as well as their school performance (Jakubowski et al. 2017). It stimulates, builds up and strengthens. In such an atmosphere, even people with major issues may develop well and realise their potential. If the climate is detrimental, it can make growing up difficult or even prevent it. If it is relatively neutral – it neither supports nor interferes with development.

It is said that education is much more than just learning and teaching school subjects. It is worth quoting the words of Alexander Neill (2000) here, who mentions that the **quality of education is represented not only by the learning performance, but also the smiles on**

children's faces. To a large extent, those result from fulfilment of the need to belong to a group. Cliché as it may seem, the role of the peer group in the lives of young people cannot be overestimated. During adolescence, peers are the main source of references and social experiences, they become the significant others. Each and every one of us has a sizeable baggage of experiences gathered over the school years. Some of the experiences were positive and strengthening, others more difficult, e.g. related to rejection or indifference:

What are your associations with the collocation “peer relationships”?

Both positive and negative – friendships, groups, collaborations, support, rescuing each other in case of problems, harassment, enmity, malice, scapegoating.

Materials from pedagogical training (Plichta 2022)

The reason groups are so important is because it is there that our social and communication skills are formed, including the ability to cope with difficult situations. Groups may be conducive to fulfilling the need of belonging, being a member of a community. They also facilitate fulfilment of the need of acceptance, self-realisation and security (Michel 2002). It is worth noting that the sense of belonging to the class not only matters for the overall wellbeing of the young people, but it also favourably affects their school performance (e.g. Fong Lam et al. 2015). Providing conditions for fulfilment of social needs is a major duty of schools. Teachers' behaviours which strengthen the sense of belonging include e.g. exhibiting warmth, care and respect towards pupils (Niemiec, Ryan 2009).

One of the most important indicators of poor group integration is isolation and rejection of some persons. It is worth noting that the notion of integration (group cohesiveness) in itself is not easy to define. It is even said that it is intuitive in nature (Janowski 2004). One way to define it is that with integration, it is the feeling that the group is important, attractive for its members, that its norms are accepted, and numerous relationships of friendship are present within it. Absence of such symptoms is evidence of lack of integration. To modify the fixed social relationships may be very difficult, therefore one should try to keep symptoms of exclusion from happening. They can be prevented by the teacher's actions fostering group integration at the stage of class formation. For more on this, see next parts of this module.

Sadly, rejection happens a lot in real life. Unsatisfied need of belongingness leads not only to lowered engagement in the life of the class and school, but also to deterioration of wellbeing and health. Isolation experiences may also lead to the phenomenon known as “social death” (Wessermann, Williams 2017). It must be strongly emphasised that **good peer relations are about more than “just” the matter of individual mental comfort. It is a matter of essential social importance**, because experiences arising from being (or not) part of the group affect relationships later in life, positive and negative ones alike. This applies to all students – those rejected, rejecting and even watching such situations. If teachers fail to undertake effective measures to support peer relationships, this becomes an important lesson in life taken from

school by the young people. Studies have shown that, out of the more than 100 social behaviours perceived by people as the most important ones, most apply to social exclusion and the risk of losing relationships, e.g. avoidance of contact, abuse, unnerving, setting oneself apart, defamation, isolation (Kerr, Levine 2008, cit. per: Wilczyńska 2019).

It is worth noting that, while belongingness is a universal need, its realisation in the conditions of a school class is made more difficult in the case of some groups of students, e.g. disabled ones or ones with special educational needs. Studies point to the difficult peer situation of such persons (Plichta 2021). Smiles, which, again, are one of indicators of quality of education, “(...) probably less often adorn the faces of disabled students than their unhandicapped peers” (Szumski, Karwowski 2012).

The quality of relationships is demonstrated not only by “big” events, such as peer violence (we devote a separate module to this phenomenon). What should also cause concern is a lack of positive signs of community (e.g. helping each other, interest in other people, talks, playing together). Good relations and a sense of belonging to the group give a sense of security and reduce the risk of conflicts. They also affect the motivation to learn and school performance. The work is easier for people teaching in an integrated class.



If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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II. EPIDEMIOLOGY

Is the following statement true or false?

A strong sense of belonging among students is one of the greatest strengths of the Polish education system.

In the light of the PISA 2018 (*The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment*) international study of students' skills assessment, this statement is **false**. In terms of the children's and youth's sense of belonging to the school, Poland presents itself rather unfavourably in comparison with other countries and the trend shows no signs of changing.

How do peer relationships look in school? The answer depends on the source of knowledge – is it based on scientific research (the way the research was conducted also matters here), or is it based on personal experience. The reality of students is very diverse. The averaged results of surveys comprise both very high and very low results. Of course, most schools and classes neither support the well-being of the students very much nor harm it. This, however, is no good news, as we strive for a class environment that is safe and providing conditions for development, rather than a mediocre one. A well integrated class is an environment in which the school stress is not very intense, and even if it is there, the young people can cope with it more easily. The atmosphere in such a group is characterised by there being no need to hide one's views or emotions and “a feeling that when I get up to go to school in the morning, I go eagerly, rather than anxious that I will feel badly that day, because something will happen” (Wójcik, Pietkiewicz 2013). An integrated class is the dream for young people. It gives them a sense of safety and acceptance which they need very much. Yet, the school reality in which students function does not always meet their expectations (Nowakowska, Przewłocka 2015).

One of the key indicators of the social climate of the school is the sense of belonging to it. The table below presents five statements to which students referred in the PISA study mentioned above. Poland's result proved low in comparison to other countries (15th lowest place out of 79 countries taking part in the study.) 3–4 persons out of 10 disagree with the positive statements about the class atmosphere (e.g. that they feel liked by their peers), and almost 20 percent have a sense of being left alone and not fitting in in the school environment.

	Agree/Definitely agree %	Disagree/Definitely disagree %
I feel that I am a part of the school	60	40
I make acquaintances in school easily	70	30
It seems to me that other students like me	71	29
I feel left alone at school	19	81
I feel awkward and a feel that I do not fit in in my school	16	84

Source: Own work based on: Bulkowski K., Sitek M. (2020).

The low level of belongingness in school is one of the weaknesses of the Polish education system. Not that it is a new problem – the phenomenon is also confirmed in other research (e.g. TIMSS, according to: Konarzewski, Bulkowski 2016), in which results lower than those of Poland were reported in 2 countries only.

A lot of important information on school relationships, wellbeing and school stress can be found in the Health Behaviour in School-age Children 2018 research, conducted by the HBSC science network.

SCHOOL STRESS

- 14% of young people (11–15 years old) feel a high level of school stress (up from the HBSC 2014, in which this applied to 10% of young people).
- Only 8% of young people do not feel stressed (significantly worse than in 2014, when the percentage was 19%).
- Girls feel major stress much more often.
- The percentage of learners who feel a high level of stress increases with age.

SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS

- 20% of pupils rate the support from teachers as poor (the percentage is higher than in 2014).
- 22% rate it as strong (compared to 28% in 2014).
- Feeling support from teachers does not depend on gender.
- With age, the percentage decreases of learners who feel strong teacher support, and the percentage of dissatisfied people increases.

SUPPORT FROM PEERS

- 19% of the young people rated peer support in class as weak (the percentage increased almost two-fold from 2014).
- 22% rated it as strong (down by 10 percentage points over 4 years).
- Boys feel a high level of peer support more often than girls.
- The perception of support decreases with age.

As shown, the percentage of persons feeling strong school stress increased between 2014 and 2018. On the other hand, the number of those who do not feel it at all decreased significantly. This results from a range of factors, both on a micro and macro scale. Probably, teachers find it more difficult to support older students and to foster good peer relationships among them. **There has been a downturn in perception of school-related social support – both from peers and from teachers. Such results are very worrying** and the “reasons should be investigated why Polish teenagers love school less and less and dislike it altogether more and more” (Małkowska-Szcutnik 2018). One of the reasons may be the excessive emphasis on competition as the source of motivation towards achievement. It turns out that Polish fifteen-year-olds (as compared with youth from other OECD countries) are less motivated by competition. For example, they declare less often that they try harder when competing with others (Bulkowski, Sitek 2020). This outcome should be taken into account and methodological and educational solutions based on **collaboration** should be implemented. We shall revisit this subject further in the module.

Peer relationships in school are a part of a broader category of peer social support (including that happening out of school), which can be seen as individual appraisal of the reliability of relationships with other people. The HBSC research of 2018 unveils some phenomena related to the sense of peer support:

- With age, the percentage of the young people who perceive it as strong decreases significantly. This is accompanied by an increase in the percentage of people declaring a low level of support.
- In each age group surveyed (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds), girls feel more support (unlike in school, where boys felt stronger support).
- In 2014–2018, the level of perceived peer support deteriorated greatly – the percentage of the young people rating it as low increased by nearly 20 percentage points (Zawadzka, Korzycka 2018).

The support becomes particularly important in case of students in difficult life situations (e.g. with health problems, disability etc.). At the same time, the sense of support has a major impact on the wellbeing of every student (Zawadzka, Korzycka 2018).

The results of research among the Polish teenagers indicate a strong link between the sense of belonging to the school with health (mental, social). Around 20% of the young people surveyed have long-term health problems – such persons perceive school worse than their peers do. At the same time, elevated school stress is one of the factors with a detrimental effect on health and conducive to risky behaviours (Mazur, Małkowska-Szcutnik 2017; Małkowska-Szcutnik, Woynarowska, Mazur 2018). One of its sources may be the lack of support, which is needed not only by persons in crises (Zawadzka, Korzycka 2018).

Students confirm that there are persons in their forms with whom they do not want to sit at the same desk. In primary schools and gimnazjums (now first grades of secondary school) in ca. 60% classes the problem of rejected persons is clear enough to be noticed by at least half of

the group. In the case of older students, this applies to around 20% of classes. Being different from others is quoted to be one of the reasons of rejection. Every fourth student agrees with the statement that others ridicule the “different kid” (Przewłocka 2015).

The experience of the pandemic (especially its early period – the time of lockdown) revealed a lot about human relationships, including those with the teachers and peers. For example, it turned out that peer relations of some people improved, as did their wellbeing (Ptaszek et al. 2020). Some of those could have been the persons who experienced unpleasant situations in class conditions (although such hypotheses certainly do not hold true for the entire group).

Even if such school phenomena are not universal, they may be harmful, and are certainly worthy of our attention. When we read in research that “only” several or more than a dozen per cent of young people experience major problems, in practice this may mean that there is one or several persons requiring special, sometimes multi-specialist support in the classroom. It is good to remain cautious and consider the situation of such persons.



If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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III. A COMMON MYTH

Is the following statement true or false?

Teambuilding activities or workshops organised for the purpose of integration are the most effective form of building a well integrated class.

This statement is **false**, because what matters most are **day-to-day, regular activities of teachers in classes** (e.g. breaking students up into diversified groups or shuffling students at desks other than as penalty for bad behaviour).

We often hear about the value of teambuilding activities and workshops. Indeed, they may be an important part of building a sense of belonging to a group (school class) and may contribute to getting to know each other, building and strengthening bonds. Students, among others, confirm this: "The greatest advantage was to get to know each other and remember the names of others" (Wójcik, Pietkiewicz 2013). The independent value of such activities can be overestimated, though. Often, they are an expression of wishful thinking that activities such as special teambuilding workshops (especially when organised in response to some events) may be cure to serious problems in class relationships. More about this can be found in the module on the subject of violence.

A teacher once reported to the psychology and pedagogy clinic the problem of a strong increase in conflict in class and asked for group activities on solving a conflict situation. We did conduct the session with a colleague of mine, but such one-off actions do not bring spectacular results. If only the students are subject to education efforts, and the rest of the child's environment believes in the magical effect of incidental group activities, the effect will be negligible.

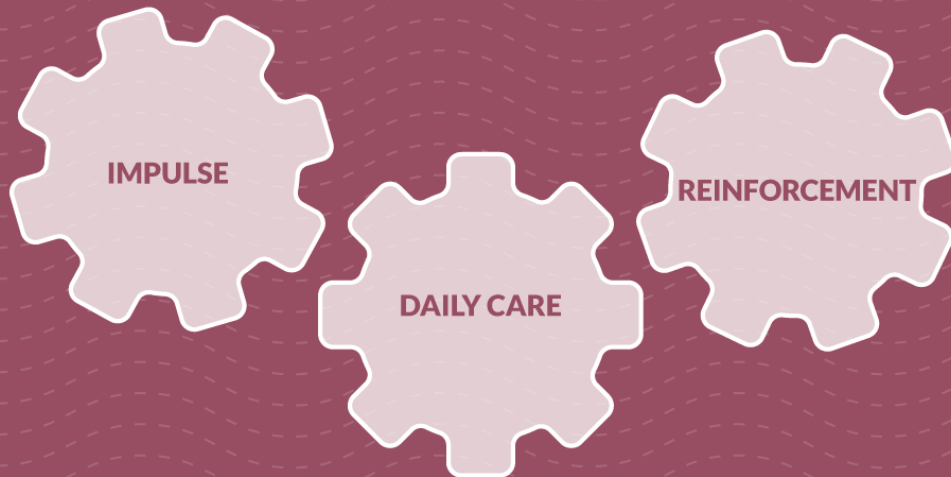
Sometimes students themselves perceive such propositions as ineffective: “There were some classes, but not much. We wrote something, talked, played Mafia. That was supposed to bind us, but things are the same as before. Certainly, there will be no love lost” (research within the IMPACT project). Unfortunately, the solutions implemented sometimes prove counter-productive – they have an effect contrary to the goals (cause embarrassment, shame): “[the pedagogue conducting the class] asked me how a lonely person feels. In front of the whole class. Oh come on! I didn’t tell her a thing (...). Some integration exercises actually have an excluding effect for some students”.

Clearly, not everyone has good memories of integration classes. According to the authors of the report titled: *Interwencja Edukacyjna Bliżej (Education Intervention at a Closeup)* (Wójcik, Pietkiewicz 2013), the main complaint was that **“the lesson was conducted in a forced way, with dragging answers from students**, who did not feel like answering the questions at all”.

An integrated class is needed for all students. It gives the young people a sense of safety and acceptance, which they desperately need (Plichta 2021). In particular, this applies to those who are more often in difficult peer situations and are less accepted (e.g. because of their disability). One needs to keep in mind the importance of their participation in day-to-day peer interactions implemented “on the go”. Jacek Pyżalski (2019) notes the educational advantages of shuffling students at desks and in different groups. Such apparently minor details provide opportunities for regular interactions in a natural context. This sounds very simple but, as usual, the devil is in the detail. More on this subject (e.g. about limitations in using such methods) is discussed further in this module.

Integration activities are an important part of work at the early stages of building/forming the group. They are a significant **impulse** – they can be compared to ignition enabling the startup of a vehicle. In order, however, for the ignition system to be able to operate properly for a long time, it requires **everyday care** and maintenance (cleaning, repairs, supply of fuel). Over time, the need to reinforce, **upgrade** or repair may arise.

IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF GROUP BUILDING/FORMATION



Source: Own work.

Same with a class, which goes through different phases in terms of the status of relationships – from an initial lack thereof, through attempts at integration, to daily maintenance of the bonds developed. Sometimes, more development impulses are needed (e.g. such as celebrations, activities, trips, projects etc.).

I mean it is in these school projects, when we organise something all of us together, that we manage to communicate – everyone does something else, and then, when we bring it all together, it somehow just clicks and we are at an advantage, because we kind of earn our trip to Spain, so this integrates us, too.

Nowakowska, Przewłocka 2015.

Integrating celebration events – special events – can also be compared to condiments. They add taste, but are not a meal, a main course in themselves (an appetiser at best). At school, the content is everyday life, which has to be seasoned to taste. If, however, the main meal is not tasty (or is actually unpalatable), no seasoning will make them right. Therefore, it is a good idea to find room in one's pedagogical thinking and acting to apply the thoughts of Philippe Meirieu (2003, p. 43), that "in education, different, apparently trivial phenomena may have serious consequence". This is exactly what the different day-to-day, "little" teacher actions are like.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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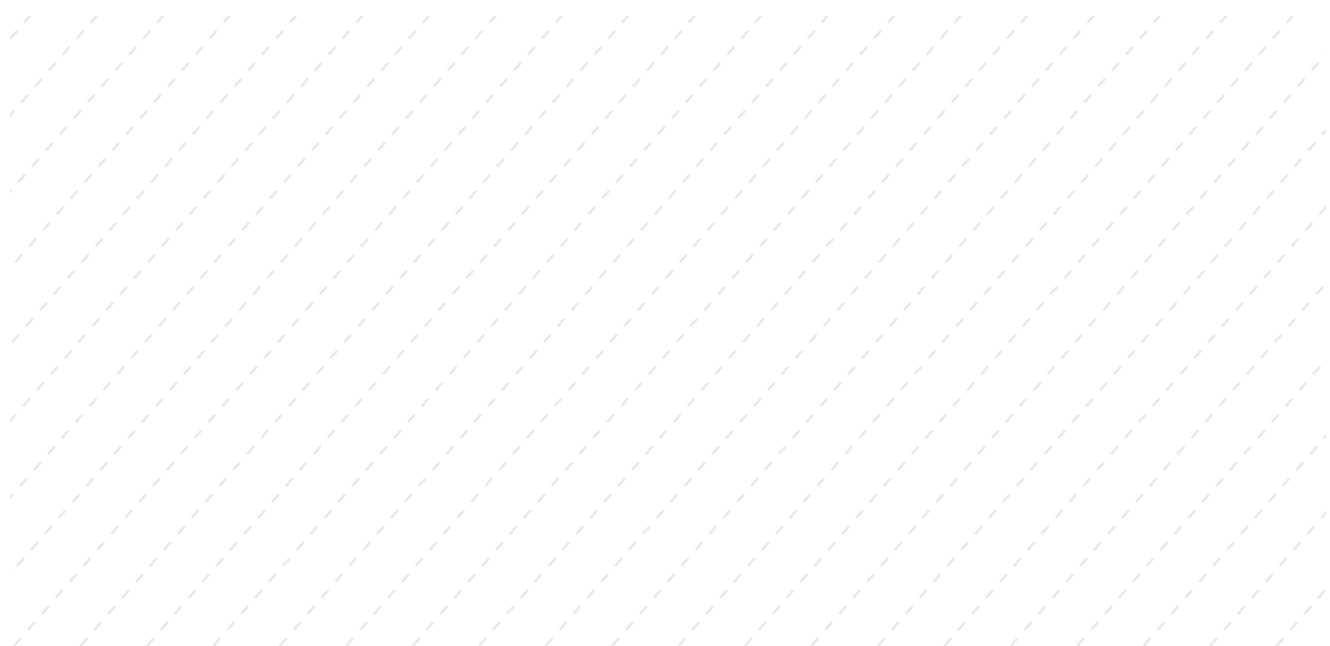
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CLASS INTEGRATION, SENSE OF BELONGING

Piotr Plichta

IV. TYPICALLY AT SCHOOL...

Is the following statement true or false?

Upbringing work with the school class is the job for the home room teacher.

This is obviously **false**. Upbringing is a process – in order for it to be effective, many different people must be involved on a daily basis. This may be a truism, but its meaning may elude us in the rush of school matters.

“It takes a village to raise a child” – this proverb became one of the main tenets of the ZERO anti-violence program (Pyżalski, Roland 2010). Violence is presented there as a component of the generality of human relations. That is why the entire school community, rather than just the home room tutor should be engaged in preventing and resolving this problem.

Important components of violence prevention include: creation of a positive social climate, fulfilling the need of belongingness and class integration, i.e. matters of upbringing in the broad sense. Let us deal with several problems in this area.

The first of those is related to **lack of appreciation or even neglecting upbringing matters in working with the class**. This area is sometimes obscured by didactics, fulfilment of curricula and focusing on achievement of measurable effects in the form of grades, credits etc. This is confirmed by international studies. They indicate that academic achievements of Polish students are no worse than average, but the sense of belonging to the school community is the weakness of our schools (see section 2 in this module). This problem is manifested in **“delegation” of upbringing matters to selected school employees**, such as pedagogues, psychologists and home room teachers. Moreover, form tutor classes are devoted to other matters (e.g. administrative ones or missed subject lessons). This is also related to the **excessive separation between upbringing and teaching**. Instead, work on school tasks can be organised in such way that it contributes to achievement of upbringing (e.g. group integration) and didactic effects.

Another problematic issue is the **reactive approach of teachers on upbringing matters**. There is often disproportion in schools between preventive and intervention measures (there are

more of the latter kind). Of course, both are necessary. One needs to note, however, that the greatest potential for upbringing (e.g. in the context of peer relationships) exists when the problems are small or not yet present. Let us quote the metaphor coined by Tomasz Witkowski: on matters of upbringing, too much of the time we become the fireman fighting fires, rather than a health and safety inspector who establishes and polices conditions (solutions, regulations) to prevent or mitigate the fire.

Another matter that is worth considering is the **“let’s do something”** approach, i.e. undertaking (often in good faith) upbringing solutions which are superficial or only apparent. Often, this involves the belief that one-off educational activities may be effective in complex situations. This may be occasionally true, but is definitely not the rule. The emergence of problems is usually a process, hence solving them must take time as well. If important upbringing matters are treated superficially (e.g. we force the persons to reconcile or apologise, but we do not explore the particulars of the situation at hand), it is difficult to expect that the results will be lasting and favourable. Attitudes are relatively permanent in nature, therefore both acquiring and getting rid of them takes time.

Upbringing measures aimed at changing attitudes (e.g. towards peers) may fail if all we do is hold conversations. Attitudes are made up of three components: emotional, cognitive and behavioural, hence we should address each of these areas. In practice, this means organising the activities in such way that they should contain components related to:

- the students acquiring knowledge (e.g. what is disability or peer violence),
- emotional engagement (e.g. by developing empathy),
- learning specific behaviours – ways of doing things (e.g. when the students see that their disabled colleague has a problem, when they witness someone being teased by others).

Another frequent aspect of superficiality is **misuse of one-way communication – from teacher to learner** (Plichta 2021). This fault is present not only in didactics, but also in prevention and upbringing. Unfortunately, teachers’ activities “are conducted exclusively in the information delivery mode, or, in other words boil down to “lecturing” (instead of teaching specific skills or inspiring deep reflection)” (Barlińska et al. 2018).

Another problem is **lack of reflection in applying methods and lack of attention to detail**. Without this, even with good intention, favourable effects are difficult to achieve. In a study conducted by Nowakowska and Przewłocka (2015), learners note that the way they are grouped for team projects deepens the existing divides or creates new ones. Class integration may also be interfered with by an imbalanced division of duties in execution of projects (e.g. some have not tasks assigned to them or perform menial tasks). “Special event”, workshop methods can be risky as well. Not as an idea in general, of course, but because of inept application, combined with overestimating their worth.

*I don't know about you, but when I hear "teambuilding games"
I get so blocked that I sure don't want to integrate, become familiar
with anyone or anything like that.*

Source: Misiarz, <https://cdw.edu.pl/jak-zbudowac-zgrana-klase/>

To end with, it is worth noting that sometimes we see a **lack of forward thinking in applying upbringing solutions**. What works in short term, may not bring the desired results in the long term, e.g. achievement of stronger sense of belonging to the class community:

*Introduction of competition between girls and boys,
e.g. who gets dressed or does a task faster, bring benefits
in the short term (mobilisation of pupils) and adverse results
in the longer perspective (entrenching existing divisions).*

Source: Nowakowska, Przewłocka 2015.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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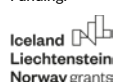
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CLASS INTEGRATION, SENSE OF BELONGING

Piotr Plichta

V. HOW CAN ONE INFLUENCE IT?

Compared to traditional teaching, the use of methods based on cooperative learning in the classroom:

- a. has a more beneficial influence on the social development and socialisation of students;
- b. improves learning performance;
- c. brings better results both in the social relationships area and in learning performance.

Scientific studies (e.g. Gillies 2016, Abramczyk, Jurkowski 2020) show that **c** is correct.

Such methods play an important role in building a sense of school belongingness, therefore we shall deal with them more extensively in this section. Cooperative learning allows social and socialisation effects to be achieved at the same time (e.g. Tolmie et al. 2010), with a favourable impact on learning results (e.g. Hattie 2009). It is, therefore, an example of a strategy which fulfils upbringing and didactic goals, both individual and social ones, **while engaging** in day-to-day school tasks and situations. It is also helpful in achieving inclusion of persons with special educational needs (Klang et al. 2020).

Cooperative learning is not only about group work. It is a concept requiring two factors: **a positive co-dependency with other persons in the group and individual responsibility** (Slavin 2008). It is about such organisation of work of students in which they depend on each other. The success of a particular person is possible if the entire group is successful and each person assumes responsibility for his or her fragment of work. Educational goals can be fully accomplished if and only if the others do their job (Żmijski 2016).

As part of cooperative work, things can happen like swapping roles, exchange of information between learners and mutual assistance – circumstances arise naturally which contribute to practicing social competencies and school achievements. This method requires teachers'

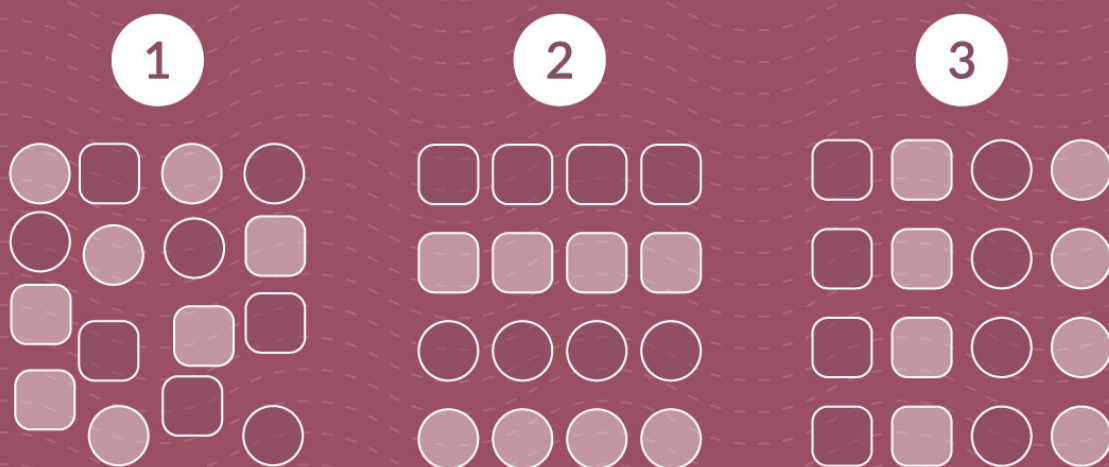
engagement, good substantive preparation and efficient organisation of classes, which has a favourable effect on relationships with students and on their engagement, while giving them a sense of meaningful participation in school activities. Cooperative learning is based on collaboration, thanks to which it fulfils the group's needs related to achievement of a goal and gives it the joy arising from belonging to a community. In the view of development theories, interactions are the main mechanism for achieving and building knowledge (Filipiak 2012). Unfortunately, despite its strong theoretical foundations and its effectiveness, which was proven in studies, this concept is not widely used in education practice (Abramczyk 2020).

The most widely known method of cooperative learning is the **jigsaw classroom**, sometimes referred to as the **expert groups method**. It was developed in 1971 by the prominent American psychologist Elliot Aronson for the purpose of a strongly ethnically conflicted school in Austin. Its aim was to build favourable relationships between the children and to satisfy their need of belongingness to the school. The method was named "jigsaw classroom", as it resembled putting together a puzzle, in which every person is an important part of the whole picture. Aronson created situations in which young people would have to collaborate to understand the content well. Working together on school assignments in small groups proved to be an effective tool for real, not just declarative desegregation (Charaktery 2015). Work using this method requires good planning and well considered assignment of tasks, as well as attentive but inobtrusive monitoring of the students' work. The jigsaw classroom is not a cure-all, but it is worth keeping in one's toolbox of ways to work with groups.

STAGES IN THE "JIGSAW CLASSROOM" METHOD

- 1** Establishment of so-called **HOME GROUPS**, preferably equal in number and diversified in terms of different characteristics of students.
- 2** Splitting the content on which the form will work during class (e.g. parts of speech, historic events, species of animals etc.) into as many parts as there are members in each group. Assigning each **HOME GROUP** member a separate section of the split content to learn in detail.
- 3** Transferring each member of the **HOME GROUP** to an **EXPERT GROUP**, gathering all who have worked on the same section of the content.
- 4** Work of each **EXPERT GROUP** on the specific content so that each of its members becomes a full-fledged "expert" on the content (e.g. by seeking the main threads, ideas together, planning on how this content can be taught when the "experts" return to their **HOME GROUPS**).
- 5** Return of the "experts" to their respective **HOME GROUPS** and communication of the information necessary for understanding the subject being worked on (teaching the others). Students in the "expert" role familiarise others with their sections of the content and learn the content delivered by other "experts".

IN OTHER WORDS, THE METHOD CONSISTS OF THREE MAIN STAGES:



1. **Familiarisation** (each person learns the content, bearing in mind that they will later have to transfer the knowledge to others).
2. **Expert** (group discussion with participants who have previously become familiar with the same section of content).
3. **Teaching others and learning from others.**

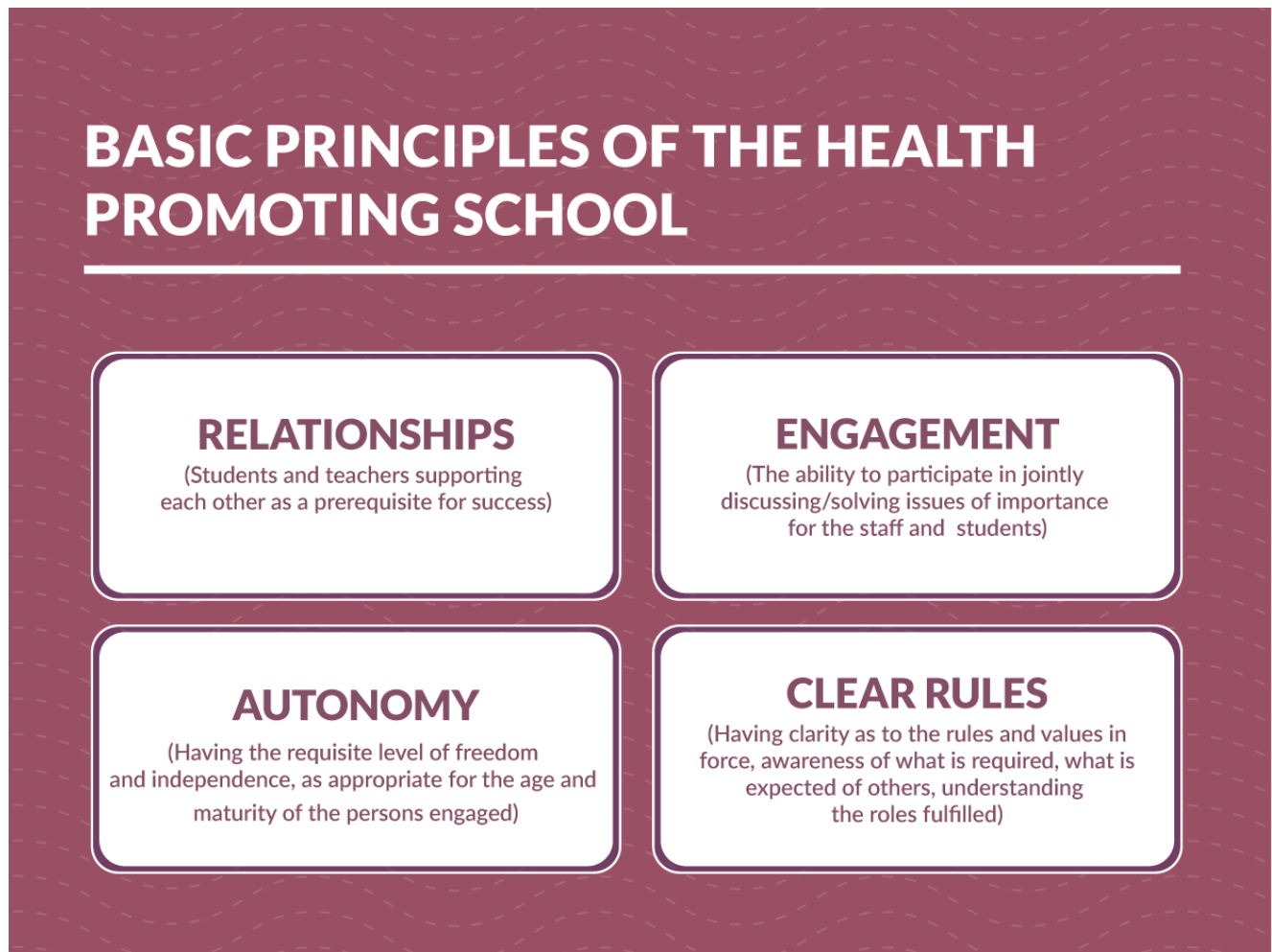
Source: Own work.

At the end of the class, it is possible to apply some form of verification of knowledge (e.g. discussion, test). This allows appraisal of individual and group work, and, if necessary, fill the gaps in the students' knowledge.

Some variants of this method allow running a discussion on some disputed issues (e.g. Round Robin). More on this can be found e.g. at <https://www.jigsaw.org/> or in materials of the Civic Education Centre (<https://www.szkolazklasa.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/grupy-eksperckie.pdf>).

Strategies for teaching/learning (e.g. cooperative techniques) should be viewed in the broader context of school culture, as expressed in a positive social climate. **Promotion of health** is a proven approach to building such culture. Its idea is implemented in practice e.g. in the Network of Health Promoting Schools (Woynarowska 2016). They establish conditions for achieving better results, because healthy people learn and work better (Poleszak 2015). The dependency between the wellbeing of the learners and teachers is expressed in the sentence "there is no mentally healthy student without a mentally healthy teacher" (WHO). In healthy schools, it is easier to experience the feeling of being in a safe and respectful environment, in which people care for each other and help each other in crises. In such circumstances, the sense of belonging to the school develops.

Implementation of promotion of health is a Whole School Approach, aimed at reinforcing mental, emotional and social health of **all participants of the school life** (i.e. students, teachers, other school staff, parents). It differs from typical health promotion activities in its **focus on potential development** (of specific persons and of the institution as a whole), not just avoiding and coping with threats.



Source: Weare, K. (2000). Promoting Mental, Emotional and Social Health, London: Routledge.

One example of mental health promotion at school is the anti-violence program named ZERO, developed by the Behavioural Studies Centre of the Stavanger University. Many other programmes are focused on individual persons (Smith, Pepler, Rugby 2004), while this one extends its impact upon the entire school organisation. This approach emphasises how important it is to involve the entire community, not just the youth perpetrating or affected by violence (Roland 1999, from: Korzeniowska et al. 2013).

There is a lot discussion these days about the need to create an inclusive environment in schools. The way these propositions are implemented is evidenced e.g. by the situation of persons with above-average problems (e.g. with special educational needs, disabilities). It happens sometimes that, despite the formal right to full participation in the life of the publicly available school, they actually remain at the fringe of the school's life.

*Inclusion of handicapped children is one of the most complex
and least understood areas of education.*

Lindsay et al. 2014, p. 102.

A tried and true principle we have mentioned in our materials several times before, is pro-activity of teachers. It is expressed not only in reacting to trouble, but, above all, in preventing it from happening in the first place. Such activities may include preparing the form for welcoming a new person (e.g. a handicapped one). Novak and Rose (2016) compare such a situation to taking care of treats for guests: “One can prepare something spontaneous when they come, but it is better to prepare for different tastes”. Nowadays, such an approach to education of diverse groups of students is referred to as **Universal Design for Learning – UDL**. It is based on the assumption that one can diversify the impacts, requirements and methods of motivation so that all students can “fit” them (Plichta 2021, p. 213). For more on the subject, see e.g. Szumski and Chrzanowska (2019).

When working with people in more difficult situations, what is particularly important are measures aimed at their self-assessment and sense of agency, based on their potential. In special pedagogics, this is referred to as work based on Archimedean points (strengths, interests etc.).

One must be able to see in each child his or her Achilles point, (...) a weakness which should be cured, while at the same time notice their Archimedean point – the point of leverage which enables bringing to the surface forces as great as they are unknown.

Maria Grzegorzewska

In building relationships with young people and supporting their potential, **school tutoring** experiences may be an good inspiration.

Tutoring is one of the individualised education methods. In a relationship based on respect and concentrated on the needs of the young person, the tutor provides support in expanding one’s knowledge and developing the ability to acquire knowledge independently. This also helps the person learn to make use of his or her own talents (Budzyński et al. 2009). Tutoring is typically a long-term process (covering at least one semester), and it is based on individual meetings (so-called tutorials), during which the teacher gets to know the young person’s potential (their strengths and weaknesses), interests, plans for the future, but also their situation out of school. The teacher supports him or her in planning his or her development (educational, professional or in life in general), aids them in establishing and deepening social relationships in and out of school. The tutor focuses in their practice on strengths, talents and passion of the student (Krzychała, Zembrzuska 2018). The tutor has knowledge and experience, he or she can also work on a one-on-one basis. Apart from the benefits for the kids and young people, some emphasise the role of tutoring in preventing burn-out among teachers (Brzezińska, Rycielska 2009). Such a relationship was exemplified by Socrates and

his disciples. Tutoring is rooted in the philosophy of dialogue, it is a proven method for supporting intellectual, social and moral development, even used nowadays, e.g. in the education of students of some of the world's best universities.

If we want to enrich the range of measures conducive to building a sense of belonging to the class, peer tutoring is also worth considering. It is one of the possibilities of active learning in contacts with other children (e.g. with senior pupils acting as teaching persons). Peers support each other in cognitive and socio-emotional development (Sławińska 2015).

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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CLASS INTEGRATION, SENSE OF BELONGING

Piotr Plichta

VI. THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHER'S COMPETENCE

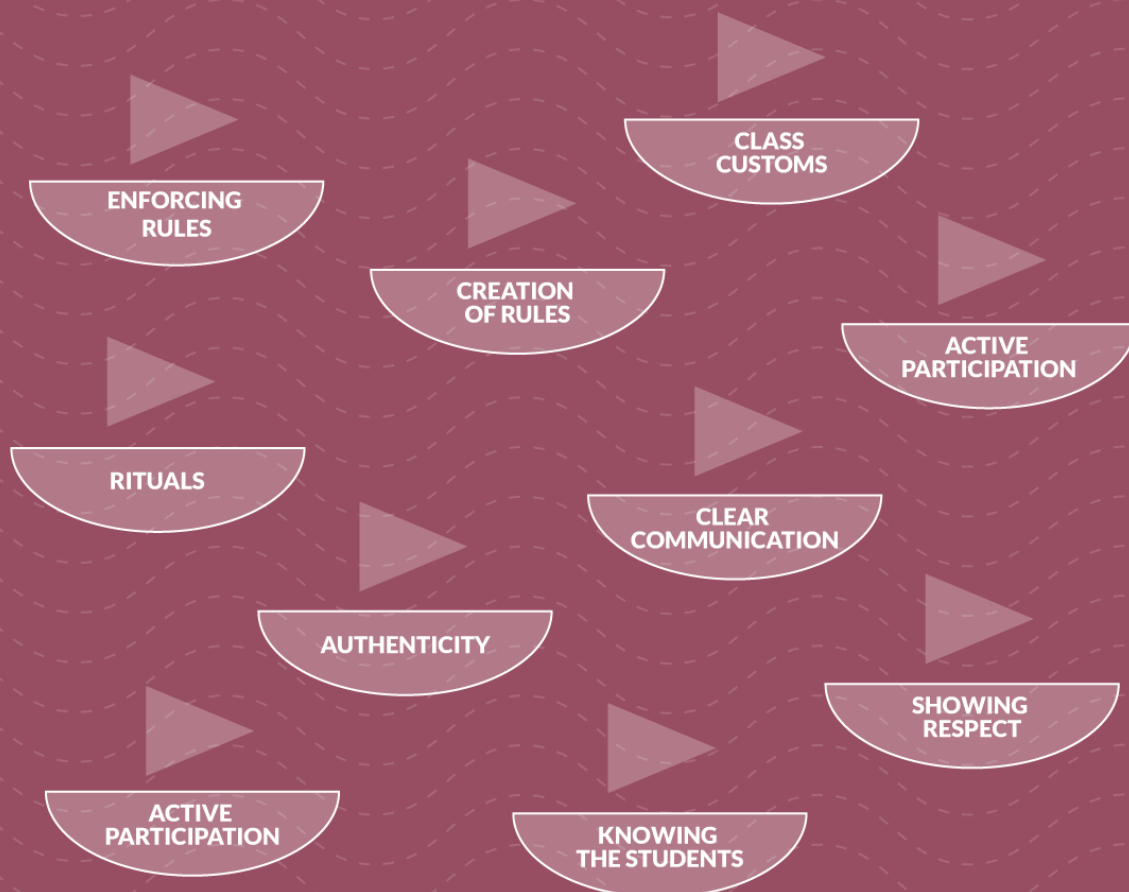
Is the following statement true or false?

The position of students in the social hierarchy of the class determines their satisfaction with peer relationships.

This statement is **false**. One important competency of a teacher, a diagnostic one in this case, is knowledge of developments affecting the functioning of the group and its members. When considering peer integration, one should bear in mind that it has two dimensions – a subjective and an objective one. The sense of integration should not be identified with the objective, structural dimension of relationships, i.e. position in class (e.g. that of a leader). Young people who have a low assessment of their own peer relationships need not be socially isolated. Studies indicate that one's position in a group is related to one's satisfaction with peer relationships, but it does not determine it. (cit. per: Grygiel 2016). What this means in practice is that in studying the social structure of a group, e.g. using sociometric methods (surveys aiming to indicate the most popular persons etc.), we can reach conclusions which are not quite correct (Chmielewska, Kołodziejczyk 2013).

There exist many papers on the subject of skills which are helpful in integrating a school form and establishing a sense of belonging – one of the most important components of the social climate of a school (e.g. Kwiatkowski, Walczak 2017). Such competencies include: establishing and enforcement of rules, creation of customs and rituals, clear communication, kindness, showing respect and interest to the young people, active participation in the process of integration, establishing relationships with everyone in the class, knowledge of strengths and weaknesses and interests of different persons, leadership.

SELECTED SKILLS HELPFUL IN SCHOOL CLASS INTEGRATION



Source: Own work.

Each of these competencies deserves separate consideration. For obvious reasons, we will only deal with selected contexts of this extremely complicated subject.

Actions of teachers influence the development of the sense of belonging of students. This is confirmed not only by practical experiences, but also by a review of the results of the international PISA study of 2015. This indicates, for example, that persons who favourably evaluate teachers' support have an elevated sense of belonging to the school about twice as often. On the other hand, students who feel they are treated unfairly, mention alienation in school twice as often (Jakubowski et al. 2017).

Diverse competencies are needed in order to perform complicated tasks – a sum of things such as knowledge, skills and experience. The area discussed here extends far beyond a broad sense of soft competencies (e.g. communication, interpersonal, moral, self-awareness and empathy-related ones), because it requires planning and realisation of intentions (i.e., diagnostic, organisational and methodological skills). In other words, understanding that the sense of belonging is important is not sufficient for building and maintaining it. What we also need are specific didactic and upbringing skills.

Young people have a lot of appreciation for different behaviours or actions which seem unrelated to school duties. One student has recently told me about a teacher who would begin lessons by having tea together with the class. This way, he took care of good relationships, therefore she attended the classes, even though they began early and were facultative. Creation of such situations is conducive to establishing rituals and customs, which strengthens the sense of belonging. Consequently, it also helps engagement in the school's life. One might think that is a little thing, but such little things go together to form something bigger. It is worth remembering that means used (in this case having tea together) are aimed at a goal – fostering an atmosphere in school. A positive atmosphere and raising curiosity among young people in the beginning of class motivates, provides conditions for engagement and prevents disturbance in lessons (e.g. problems with discipline). It also helps the students feel that the actions in which they participate have a meaning. This in turn has a favourable impact on identifying with the school and the things that happen there. We should all have a toolbox of such measures (methods) at our disposal. These “little things” are particularly important in difficult situations (e.g. those related to disability, illness or a crisis situation). Let us consider a statement of a handicapped student. He talks about the things he appreciates in his new school (a special school), which he attends after being transferred from a regular school. Conditions could not be established there for including him in the class community. This need not be a rule, of course, but this speaks a lot about the student point of view.

You attend this school. Please, tell me what you like in here. – I like it here because it is nice, nobody beats me, and I experienced such situations in the regular school. In that school, I got teased pretty much every day (...). There are good teachers who are cool in how they teach us, they spend time with us, sometimes we drink tea during a break.

We need to bear in mind that some of the teacher competencies are more universal in nature (i.e. they are useful in performing different professional tasks), others are more specific (e.g. related to integrating a class or creation of a positive climate). The former include orientation towards understanding (instead of simplifying) school phenomena, young people's behaviours and their problems. This is manifested in the so-called **attitude of understanding** (Olechnowicz 1999), which is related to a kind of professional self-awareness. Orientation towards understanding oneself in relations with the students is a very important component part of competence. It includes awareness of one's sympathies and antipathies and the reasons why we don't

get along with everyone (a “difficult person” in class may say a lot about the problems of the teacher). Self-awareness is connected to discerning our role as a tool for a job to be done – noticing the impact of personal traits, attitude and expectations on the quality of an encounter with another person. It is also about appreciation of methods which are generally considered as effective (e.g. projects) and **attention to detail** in their implementation (Pyżalski 2021). After all, sometimes group work does not require team activities, but is a collection of individual activities of different persons (more on this subject is discussed in Section 4.)

One should also consider the digital context of the modern world, e.g. by providing opportunities for work on tasks together, which require both traditional activities and using ICT. Supporting and organising such activities will require digital competencies and an ability to delegate duties, so as to enable involvement of the young people in the planning process.

A major component of teacher competence should be the knowledge of interpersonal relationships in classrooms. Hence, we need: a general knowledge of the principles of formation and functioning of groups, and diagnostic competencies. Young people are aware that some divisions and conflicts in a peer group are unavoidable, but what really matters is how deep they are (Nowakowska, Przewłocka 2015). That is why it is so important to be able to recognise the state of relationships on the basis of different signs and symptoms – sometimes ostensive (e.g. ridiculing during answering in front of the class), other times less noticeable, more subtle (e.g. not talking to someone at a break). It is about getting to know both the group (e.g. its structure) and individual persons (e.g. their needs, relationships with others). The structure can be assessed through careful observation, which helps early noticing of symptoms of exclusion. This in turn makes taking educational measures or interventions more effective than when the symptoms are already very severe. Sociometry is also a major subject of discussion here, although we need to be careful with it, especially in younger forms and with questions about negative attitudes towards a class member. Asking about the least popular persons in such a survey may strengthen animosities towards them.

As always, it is of key importance to understand the phenomenon we are dealing with, e.g. the reasons for exclusion from the peer group. It may be a dysfunctional way to satisfy the developmental needs of the young people (e.g. trying to achieve a higher social status, winning approval of significant persons). A practical conclusion in such case will be that educational situations should be arranged which could satisfy those needs in a constructive way. Exclusion is the opposite extreme from inclusion, which is manifested in spontaneous, unforced searching for and initiating peer contacts. Between inclusion and exclusion there is indifference – the group neither encourages nor discourages building relationships with it (cit. per: Jaskulska, Poleszak 2015). This state may be accepted by adults, because it does not lead to negative behaviours. From the upbringing point of view, however, the absence of positive behaviours is not desirable.

A sociometric survey informs about the structure, but not about the reason of developments in a class. No less valuable results may be achieved through careful observation. It is impor-

tant to notice in a group the isolated persons, but also those with a strong position. They can aid the teacher, e.g. in helping weaker students. It is worth paying attention to whether peers are interested in each other's troubles, do they try to help out in difficult situations (e.g. talk about problems, lend something) or spend time together after school (Nowakowska, Przewłocka 2015), how is kindness and care expressed. One important area of observation should be out-of-lesson situations (e.g. breaks). Auxiliary, non-teacher staff should be involved in gathering information about the children and the class. Often, they possess valuable knowledge about the relationships (both positive and negative). In many school situations, it is necessary to work with all teachers (also in an informal way). Sharing observations on functioning of the young people in different lessons provides a lot of benefits.

One should also understand the context of social functioning of young people (know the risk factors related to acceptance and the developmental dynamics of changes). These are affected by a lot of elements (individual, developmental and social), sometimes beyond our control. One risk factor among school children is a lowered intelligence level. The relationship between cognitive abilities and social acceptance remains strong pretty much throughout primary school, and changes begin during adolescence (from ca. 13 years of age). Then, the value assigned to abilities is lowered, and persons with a higher intelligence quotient experience more difficulty in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. As a result, they may feel more isolated (Grygiel 2016). The social status is also affected by: repeating a school year, lower socioeconomical status of the family and the frequently resulting less emotional support from parents. The results of studies also confirm a general lowering of the sense of peer integration over the primary school period.

To say that people are different sounds like a platitude, but it depicts rather well the school reality, in which we encounter individual situations of the young people and their different needs, motivations, problems etc. It is worth noting that children and young people differ in terms of the intensity of the need of belongingness, sensitivity to rejection, a sense of own value and the conviction of one's effectiveness. All this may result in a different assessment of peer relationships (Grygiel 2016). It may be a major challenge to provide conditions for full inclusion if there are persons with disabilities or special educational needs in the group.

Teacher competences are also manifested in the ability to **set realistic expectations** and to focus on attainable goals. The atmosphere in the classroom need not be perfect, but good enough. **A reasonably positive and unconflicted atmosphere in the form and a student's good relationship with the teacher and with peers is optimum ground for learning and getting to know the world, both in terms of expanding knowledge and of developing social relationships** (Wilczyńska 2019). Such an attitude contributes, among other things, to maintaining mental health of the teacher, which is one of the key preconditions for the wellbeing of the students.

The climate in the school can be compared to the atmospheric climate. It is a known fact that plants need different conditions and ways of caring for them. In most cases, a warm, moderate

climate is a desired state, most beneficial to growth. We can compare the richness of nature in extreme and more moderate conditions. I think the same applies to the reality of our institutions. The school must not be a place threatening to the sense of safety (e.g. because of underestimation of the meaning of class integration or caring for relationships). We do not want it, however, to be an “overheating” institution, overly focused on protecting from challenges, one which does not pose challenges. It is worthwhile, therefore, to establish sufficiently good conditions – a climate in which there is room for our care about the young people, but where they also take care of themselves and their peers. The present, insecure, crisis situation (resulting from factors such as the results of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine) provides many occasions for helping others, both individually and as part of joint actions engaging the entire class or school community.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

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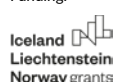
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SCHEME - PHILOSOPHY

Activities promoting student wellbeing (regardless of the area addressed in our project) should be implemented in a logical and coherent way involving the whole school community. What follows is a clear description of a strategic way of thinking about a specific area, important for young people's wellbeing and mental health. We show how it can be holistically addressed in the school. In order to make the strategy as practical as possible, its different stages are presented in blocks, together with questions that the school management and teaching staff need to answer at each respective stage.

Such an analysis should help the management to see whether the activities in a particular area carried out in the school follow a model that has a good chance of being effective. The analysis can provide basis for a decision about what to improve and how. Teachers can assess how appropriate in terms of the subject matter are the activities conducted in school and consider how to coordinate their individual work with them. Even the best teacher initiatives, in which a lot of time and energy is invested, are often not very effective if they are not coherent with the activities of others in the school and with a shared philosophy. Of course, it is clear that the quality of activities aimed at young people's wellbeing and the awareness of important issues in this area differ from one school to another. However, it is always worth starting where we are, with the potential we have at our disposal. It is useful to know the goal we are aiming for, namely system-wide action at a level of the school as a whole.

For each of the six thematic areas, we have prepared an extensive list of activities that can be carried out within it, with a brief description of each.

STRATEGIES

1. Is this area related to the wellbeing of pupils important in our school?

Baseline – the problem	Baseline – actions	Baseline – support and training
Have there been any major events that have made the given issue important in our school?	What activities in a particular area (effective and well-received by the community) are already being carried out by our school?	What is our knowledge of the issue in question? What training have we attended? What is our competence in the area concerned?
What data do we have from diagnostic studies (e.g. surveys of the problem at school)?	How are the activities in this area carried out by our school so far evaluated by: pupils, parents, teachers?	What knowledge and support do we lack?
Have learners, parents, teachers or anyone else reported that there are any problems/gaps in the area?	Which activities carried out by our school in this area are ineffective or have very little effect?	What support do we as a school use in a particular area? Which experts, professionals and institutions are helping us?
	Which activities carried out by our school have proven to be effective, producing good or very good results?	How do we evaluate the support we already use?
	Are the activities related to this area coordinated in our school?	Are there any establishments, professionals carrying out activities in this area that are worth following or implementing?
	What actions are missing in this area?	What are the costs of the measures we want to implement, and do we have or can we get the funds for them?
		Are there entities or institutions that can provide support to our school at no cost?

STRATEGIES

2. Are we acting in this area according to a common philosophy and together?

Philosophy of action	Joint actions
Do we all define an area in the school in a similar way? (This includes learners, teachers, parents as well as other school staff).	When planning activities, do we include everyone (learners and teachers, parents, other school employees) in the discussions and decision-making processes, and how?
Do we have a school-wide document that defines the area and describes what the school does within the area?	When implementing solutions in an area, do we listen to and take into account everyone's voices about the actions being implemented (both positive and critical)?
Do we define the area not only negatively (e.g. anti-violence), but also positively (e.g. fostering positive peer relationships)?	Do we constructively resolve conflicts at school when differences of opinion arise about what to do and how to run a particular programme?
What professional literature do we use to define an area?	How do we take into account the special needs of certain students (or groups of students), e.g. those with specific disabilities, in programmes in the area?

3. Are our activities in a specific area logically planned for the long term?

Activity structure – planning phase	Structure of measures – implementation phase	Structure of activities – evaluation phase
When planning activities, do we discuss the results of the diagnosis or carry out additional diagnostic activities?	Are the tasks in the area being implemented according to the agreed plan?	Do we continuously review the effects of the area's activities and the implementation process itself?
Are we using good quality methodological and scientific studies when planning solutions?	Do we document the introduction of activities in the area?	Are we using ongoing lessons learned to modify and improve operations?

STRATEGIES

3. Are our activities in a specific area logically planned for the long term?

Activity structure – planning phase	Structure of measures – implementation phase	Structure of activities – evaluation phase
Do we review and consult solutions with external experts before implementing them?	Does the team responsible for implementing the activities discuss implementation difficulties on an ongoing basis and seek ways to deal with those?	Is an evaluation conducted after each major (pre-defined) period of programme implementation?
Is there a clearly defined, leader-led team working on action planning in the area, in which – at least to some extent – all important groups in the school are represented?	Do we have good quality internal and external communication about what the school is doing in the area?	Are the results of the evaluation discussed and the conclusions used in further implementation of the solutions?
Does the team set for themselves tasks to be completed within a certain timeframe and check that they have been completed? na środku nic, a po prawej: Are the results of the evaluation communicated (at least to some extent) internally and externally? How? To whom are they communicated?		

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CLASS INTEGRATION, SENSE OF BELONGING

Piotr Plichta

As we have highlighted in the presented model, activities related to class integration and building a sense of belonging should be carried out following a shared philosophy and understanding of the problem, which assume:

- greater concern for creating and strengthening a sense of belonging to the class/school as a key factor in the perceived quality of school life;
- an approach geared to fostering good relationships – both peer and teacher-student (showing respect for each other as one of the key principles of school life);
- preventing the emergence and perpetuation of exclusionary behaviour – activities that integrate the class group (especially at the stage of its formation);
- implementing a whole-school approach in educational matters;
- cooperation of all those in contact with young people at school (not only teaching staff) – looking at peer relationships, noticing negative behaviour, but also the lack of positive expressions of togetherness (e.g. helping each other, being interested in others, talking, playing together);
- involving parents in activities fostering class integration and development of a sense of belonging;
- increased use of collaborative teaching and upbringing solutions (at the expense of fewer activities based on competition);
- focus on the development of teachers' educational competences, including those enabling classroom integration;
- increased sensitivity and attentiveness to the situation of children

STRATEGIES

from high-risk areas (developmental disorders, low socio-economic status, etc.);

- regular monitoring of the social climate, including relationship assessments;
- priority of regular activities over one-off campaigns; a critical approach to class integration solutions and to teamwork;
- concern for creating an inclusive environment in everyday interactions;
- including both group-oriented activities and individualised support in work with the young people;
- taking opportunities to involve pupils in actions for people in need;
- strengthening proactive actions of the staff (aimed at preventing problems); reducing the disparity between prevention and intervention measures.

The implementation of such a philosophy of action in the area of integrating the class and building a sense of belonging involves the following list of solutions, which should be implemented as components of the coherent school strategy discussed above:

- Formulation and dissemination of a clear message expressing concern for the sense of safety, belonging and relationships within the organisation. The message should emphasise the priority of relationships and be clear to all participants in school life.
- Incorporating such provisions in official documents (e.g. the educational and preventive programme) along with a description of activities that serve to create a healthy, inclusive school environment.
- Getting to know the functioning of the class group and its individual members (e.g. their needs, relationships with others, interests and

STRATEGIES

strengths). If necessary, conducting regular observations, e.g. in the form of notes describing educationally important moments, situations related to class life, etc.

- Identifying those who are isolated and those who are empowered and can be supportive (e.g. helping the vulnerable ones).
- Ongoing discussion within the team of emerging conflicts and problems in relationships between male and female students (but also between them and others in the school). Such activities do not need to be formalised. Persons other than teachers should also be included.
- Keeping parents informed about class life, e.g. through presentations at assemblies. Encouraging and creating opportunities for involvement in class and school life.
- Creating classroom rituals and routines, caring for a positive learning atmosphere, arousing young people's curiosity (e.g. through motivating lesson starters).
- Involving teachers in activities where they not only assign tasks to be carried out, but are themselves team members.
- Providing good quality training to teachers on understanding group processes, parenting skills, methods of integrating the classroom, building classroom community and conflict resolution.
- Evaluation of the quality of peer relationships in the classroom/school, the change in these relationships and the effectiveness of actions taken.
- Appreciating the importance of, yet critically applying, activities that are widely recognised as effective (e.g. projects). Attention to detail when using different methods (e.g. changing the seating of young people, working in diverse groups, preparing the class for the arrival of a new person).
- Knowledge and understanding of different methods aimed at working with diverse groups of students (e.g. Universal Design for Learning – UDL). Providing a forum for internal discussion on the effectiveness of creating an inclusive environment.

STRATEGIES

- Creating situations where young people can take partial responsibility for issues affecting them – make decisions, organise events, etc.
- Making a good use of situations where young people can take care of peers (as well as other people) who are more vulnerable.
- The openness of staff to problems raised by pupils (and others). Involvement in clarifying them and helping to resolve them. There is also a need to be proactive in recognising young people's needs and difficulties (e.g. expressing interest, sensitively asking about the situation and its details, creating a safe atmosphere that encourages openness).
- Conducting prevention and education activities geared towards teaching specific skills and inspiring in-depth reflection (practice shows that an overly loquacious information-providing model is often used).
- Expanding the educational offer – both with activities concerning individual support (e.g. tutoring) and cooperative learning (e.g. the jigsaw classroom method).

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CLASS INTEGRATION AND SENSE OF BELONGING

SCENARIOS AND SHORT ACTIVITIES

Katarzyna Rabęda

LET'S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Introduction

Activity conducted in groups of 2-3, the aim of which is for students to get to know each other better.

Materials

- Chart with questions (Appendix 1)
- 2 dice

Steps

The player first throws one dice – the number of dots corresponds to the vertical column. Then a second dice – the number of dots corresponds to the horizontal column. In this way, the person knows which question to answer. E.g. 3 vertically and 4 horizontally is: 'Your mum's most common saying'.

We can continue the game until the class gets bored, or reduce the number of questions depending on how much time we have.

You can display it on the board or print out and distribute it to the group.

Let's get to know each other						
	Your favourite sweets	Your favourite song	Your favourite Holiday song	Your favourite computer game	Your favourite fruit and favourite vegetable	Your favourite colour
	Your favourite place in Iceland	Your favourite fast food	Three things you'd take on a desert island	Your favourite ice cream flavour	Your favourite day of the week	Your favourite TV series
	What could you eat every day?	Your greatest dream	Your favourite app	Your favourite leisure activity	What do you like to do on weekends?	Your favourite children's story
	Your favourite month	Your favourite school subject	The thing your mom says most often	Your favourite book	Your favourite place in Poland	People colonise Mars. Would you go? Why?
	What do you think you will be interested in in twenty years?	Your favourite physical activity	What three dreams would you ask a goldfish to fulfil if you found one?	Tomorrow is the end of the world. What five things would you still like to do?	What film have you seen recently?	What does your mom say when your room is messy?
	Your favourite soda	What country would you like to visit?	Your way of coping with sadness or anger	Your favourite animal	Your favourite Holiday dish	Your favourite athlete

PASS THE PHONE

Introduction

You can involve the whole class in this game. The task is to make a video together, in which you notice each other's strengths.

Steps

You can start the game by yourself. Turn on the recording on your phone and say to the camera: "I'll pass the phone to someone who..." (e.g. "sings nicely" or "draws nicely"). Then hand the device to that person. It is important that she or he does not hear what you say about them. The pupil or student continues the game by passing the phone to the next person. It is important to point out at the outset that we speak well and positively about each other.

BINGO!

Each person in the class is handed out a game board. On the board, instead of numbers, are statements you have prepared. They can be very general, e.g. "likes vegetables", "skates", as well as specific – fitting a particular group or individual, e.g. "was a volunteer in an animal shelter".

Pupils are asked to find people who agree with the sentences written on the sheet. They approach each other and talk about trivial, everyday topics, which provoke further exchanges of information. You can ask the children to ask the speaker or interlocutor for details related to the statements, for example what language he or she studies or the name of his or her sister.

The person who completes all the boxes shouts "Bingo!"

Once all pupils have completed the table, they read out the individual pieces of information and names together and tell what else they have found out about their fellow pupils and interlocutors.

Example table:

Has two sisters	Likes pistachio ice cream	Can play the guitar	Learning a foreign language
Has a hamster	She has lived abroad	She has never been on the seaside	Is allergic to fur
She has eaten a snail	He lives on the top floor	Likes to dance	Does not like computer games
She was on television	Loves broccoli	Has a cactus	Doesn't like crisps

DIFFERENT ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

1. Giving pupils positive nicknames based on their strengths, unique skills, talents.
2. Joint involvement in charity events – e.g. for an animal shelter, an orphanage, a retirement home.
3. Organising a campaign in the region – cleaning up, supporting someone or something. We took part in the local “Christmas in a shoebox” campaign – the class prepared and packed presents in boxes together and then handed them over to the organisation responsible for the campaign. Maybe you can take part in a local Christmas assistance program as a class?
4. Students prepare a quiz about themselves on the Kahoot app (e.g. on their birthday).
5. Prepare a quiz on the Kahoot app about the class – e.g. “Whose sister’s name is Dominica?”, “Who has a Persian cat at home?”, “Who likes strawberries?” etc.
6. Organise a community bonfire or barbecue.
7. Weaving short team-building games into lessons – charades, hangman, horror stories etc.
8. Making personalised tests. Instead of the person’s name, naming the tests with a phrase, i.e. “A simple test for Lena”, “What Oskar remembers”, etc.

dr Wiesław Poleszak

HOT SEATS

Objective

The pupil has basic information about her/his peers in the class – this makes it easier for her/him to maintain relationships with classmates and colleagues.

Materials

- Classroom without desks
- Chairs arranged in a circle, one less than the number of people in attendance

Duration

10-15 minutes

Introduction

The following exercise can also be an activity to raise energy levels in a group. You can think of it as an activity to do during a lesson. You can take part in it yourself, too.

Steps

1. Tell the group what the exercise will look like and communicate the rules that apply:
 - We are fair and honest – the aim of the game is to get to know each other.
 - We do not sit down in the seat from which we stood up.

- We try to ask things we don't know about each other.
2. The person standing in the middle gives a command, such as: "All those who like pizza get up and change seats", "All those who like dogs get up and change seats".
 3. People who agree with the statement given get up and change places. The person who stays in the middle comes up with another statement.
 4. If there is a shy person in the middle, hint at what they might ask.
 5. End the game when you notice boredom.

INTERVIEW – YOUR 5 MINUTES

Objective

The pupil has basic information about his or her peers in the class – this makes it easier for him or her to maintain relationships with classmates and colleagues; is able to converse.

Materials

- Notepad or sheet of paper
- Pen or pencil

Duration

30-45 minutes

Introduction

Encourage participants to record information from the interview.

Steps

People in the class form pairs. Try to pair up pupils who do not know each other, or who know each other very little. You can ask people to count up to the number equal to half the number of pupils and then pair up according to the rule: one with one, two with two, three with three, and so on. If the number is odd, join the person who is without a pair, or make one group of three.

Ask the pairs to sit together. Give the instructions: you are now in the role of journalists who are interviewing a special person. Your task is to gather as much information as possible about them. You have 5 minutes to do this. Then switch roles in pairs.

After the interviews have been completed (about 10 minutes), the pupils present the people they interviewed to the class.

FLOWER

Objective

The pupil can identify elements that link her/him to her/his peers; accepts what makes her/him different from others

Materials

- Large sheets of paper (from the flipchart)
- Paper markers

Duration

30-45 minutes

Steps

Instruct pupils to get into teams of 4-5 (preferably counting up, e.g. to 6 if the class has 30 pupils, and then grouping together according to the rule: one with one, two with two, three with three, etc.). Groups may be unequal.

Each group is given a sheet of paper and a marker. It draws a flower with a circle in the middle and as many petals as there are people in the team. The flower should take up the whole sheet of paper so that as much information as possible can be written inside.

Ask that each petal be signed with the name of a person in the group.

Pupils then write in the middle those characteristics that are common to all of them, e.g. interests, favourite films or games they play. In turn, they write in each petal only those characteristics that are unique of that person.

Once finished, each team presents the results to the forum.

Commentary from the moderator

Notice how much you have in common. On the other hand, each person has something that is peculiar only to him or her, that makes him or her unique, with their own, distinct identity.

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