

"The Group and I – My Place *in* the Group"

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

Schools have also been forced to take drastic measures to meet the new challenges facing society in the 21st century.

Effective learning, the promotion of core competences can not be achieved during the traditional classroom-style teaching and by means of cognitive learning, i.e. by learning figures, facts and data. In the meantime, everyday teaching "tools" now include innovative teaching methods, new work set-ups and new didactic trends such as pair and group work, teamwork, project teaching, learning-by-doing, differentiation (i.e. meeting the different needs, requirements and abilities of individual students) and cooperative learning. These new methods clearly show a change in the role of the individual *and* of the group, and of "my place" *in* the group. However, what group dynamic processes are at work to enable different individuals to form a group? How does an individual's behaviour change in a group? How do group structures and cohesion develop? What *gender-specific* characteristics can be determined, if any at all?



(Source: <http://www.hueppekaestchen.de/img/kindergruppe.gif>)

Similar topics:

Group dynamics; group structure; power relations within a group; drama pedagogy; the emotional side of group formation; gender-specific roles in a group

Materials:

- Worksheet 1: *The Chieftain* (questionnaire)
- Worksheet 2: *SOS! Rescue me!* (drama exercise)
- Worksheet 3: *Show, guess and tell!* (Drama exercise)

Duration:

- 1 to 2 class sessions

- Questionnaires and drama exercises can also be introduced separately from each other
- Game 3 (Worksheet 3) can be introduced in an additional teaching unit

Number of participants:

Feasible with any class size (ideal with more than 15 children)

Age:

- About 9 year olds and upwards (i.e. third grade)
- Well-suited for various classes (i.e. mother tongue or foreign language instruction, art class, multimedia classes, etc.), afternoon supervision, youth activities
- Game 2 can also be used in physical education instruction (e.g. use benches instead of newspapers)

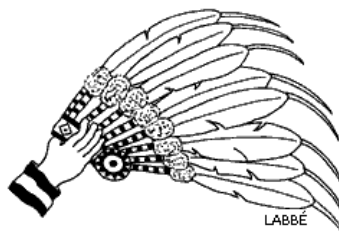
Aims:

- To reflect about different roles in a group: individual characteristics, to assess one's own strengths and weaknesses (Exercise 1 – Worksheet 1)
- To evaluate one's own capabilities (Exercise 1)
- To reduce clichés about male and female traits (Exercise 1)
- To encourage group dynamics (Exercise 2)
- To encourage cooperation in the group and a spirit of helping each other (social skills), (Exercise 2)
- To get to know each other better, by putting oneself in the others' shoes (Exercise 3)
- To strengthen group cohesion among members (Exercises 2 and 3)

(Short) Explanation 1 (Exercise 1):

Using this enjoyable questionnaire, let the children see if they are "capable" of taking on a leading role in a group.

Chieftain



Guidance for the "Chieftain" Exercise:

The children should work on their own to read through a short and enjoyable questionnaire containing 10 questions. For each question, they will need to choose one out of three alternative answers to assess their capacity to lead as a "chieftain".

Then they should read their respective personal ratings based on their total score. This will be followed by a short discussion. Feedback can either take place by the snowball procedure (in pairs, in fours ...) or in the plenary session. (see reflection).

Duration:

About 15 to 20 minutes

Reflection:

- Compare your answers and rating. What do you notice?
 - What do you think? Does the rating "fit" you or not (at all)?
 - Is there a difference between the ratings for girls and boys?
 - Do girls or boys make better "chieftains"? Give reasons for your answer.
 - Would you rather be a "chieftain" or a group member on "equal footing"? Why? List advantages for both roles!
 - What traits must a "chieftain" have?
 - How many girls and boys had more than seven A-B-C- answers?
- Are there more "female chieftains" or "male chieftains" amongst adults? Give reasons for your answer.
- Think of a woman/and a man who is in a leadership position. How would you characterize him/her? What traits would they need for this position?
- Insight: There are more men in higher or leadership positions and they are attributed "masculine" characteristics such as (strength, objectivity, resoluteness, etc. Why is that so? Are women in leadership positions "not really feminine"?

Variations (continuation):

- The pupils form two (or more) homogenous groups. The questionnaires are filled out in these groups and the differences **between males and females** are discussed with the entire class.

(Short) explanation 2 (Exercise 2):

In this physically active game, cooperation capabilities and group dynamics amongst participants are "tested".

SOS! Rescue me!

(Drama exercise)



Guidance for the game *SOS! Rescue me!* :

Duration:

About 10 to 15 minutes

Preparation:

Before this exercise is started, newspapers (representing the rescue life rafts) should be laid out on the floor. There should be just about as many newspapers out there as necessary so that the pupils have the bare minimum amount of room on the newspapers. After each round, another newspaper will be taken away.

The children should imagine that they have just been shipwrecked and that they are in the middle of the ocean. Far and wide, no other ship or island is in sight... Like in the sinking of the *Titanic* there are only a few life rafts, which however are not sufficient for everyone. The water is ice-cold and full of sharks.

The teacher or a child keeps watch and when he/she calls out "shark", they all must try to be rescued by getting onboard one of the boats. The teacher or child keeping watch counts to three. The children must also help other children, as they can only row the

boats to a distant island if they work together. If a leg/foot/hand etc. touches the floor: (i.e. the imaginary water), this person is eaten by a shark and is eliminated from the game.

What is important is that all of the participants are really taken up in the boats, otherwise they will all lose their lives...

Reflection:

- Did you like this game? If yes/no, then what exactly?
- Did you help someone during the game?
- Were the others ready to take you onto a boat?
- How did you feel, when you were not able to get onto a boat?
- Tip: This is a good opportunity for the teacher to observe pupil behaviour.

Variations (continuation):

This game can also be used in physical education classes.

(Short) explanation 3 (Exercise 3):

This game can also be regarded as a "getting-to-know-you-better game" where classmates can get to know each other better from a different side of their personality or from another perspective (using a change in perspective approach).

The pupils should bring a few objects from home that are very important to them and the other pupils should try to guess why these objects are so important to them.

Worksheet 3:

Show, guess and tell!



Guidance for the Game:

Duration:

Approx. 10 to 30 minutes

Preparation:

For this class session, the children should bring three or four objects from home, that are small, but nevertheless important to them. They can even be trinkets, that for one reason or another, they are emotionally attached to. (For example, they got this object from a person who is very special to them or on the occasion of a special event or perhaps they found it, etc.)

The objects brought to class are placed on a table and covered up. The teacher chooses one object and gives it to a pupil, who is to try to guess who it belongs to and how and under what circumstances the child-owner ended up with this object. Several children can guess, before the owner gives the "solution". The pupil who has the right "answer", can then choose the next object and show it to the other pupils.

It is important that the child who owns the object should not "give himself/herself away" during the guessing sequence. It should also be stressed, that the children should listen carefully and patiently to one another.

Finally, the child the object belongs to, should think for a second and then tell the real story behind the object.

Reflection:

- Did you enjoy showing your objects to other children?
- Did you learn something new/interesting/unexpected/surprising/funny ... about someone else?
- What was surprising?
- Formulate sentences according to the following model:
 - "I had no idea that Peter /Eva....."
 - "I was surprised to learn that....."
 - "I didn't know that....."
 - "I'm glad to hear that"
 - "I found out that Peter/Eva....."
 - "I found it strange that..."
- Tip: This game works especially well when children bring objects that are really tied to "events" that have marked them.

Variations (continuation):

The individual owner himself/herself shows his/her object and without saying anything, lets the others guess why it is so important to him/her and what were the circumstances behind how they ended up with it.

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

Socialisation and group structure

The relationship between an individual and a group is an important socio-psychological phenomenon that has been analysed and researched at great lengths. Erikson (1979, quoted by Kron 2000) referred to the shaping and development of the "individual identity" and the "group", as two decisive moments of basic human existence. From birth onwards, we are subject to our own group identity that enables us to behave culturally, socially and conduct ourselves in society. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development are particularly relevant from an educational point of view. More specifically, they include personal challenges, tasks and conflicts that individuals encounter throughout their life and that they must "work through" (Kron 2000). Likewise described here is the succession of socialization steps (i.e. for the development of social skills), in the form of conflicts that the individual must cope with at each stage.

Kurt Lewin, the father of social and Gestalt psychology, showed how the process of socialization can be understood in connection with the group. He examined teaching and leadership styles and mainly differentiated between authoritarian, laissez-faire and democratic styles. He applied this to the structure of the group, on the basis of a number of studies, and referred to "Our" group and "Your" group (Hegedűs 1997, Mérei 2006). According to Faragó (1997), a group structure itself is influenced by the following factors:

- emotional relations with others (a liking for someone, a dislike for someone, common traditions or experiences);
- communication;
- power hierarchy.

Group dynamics and gender issues

The greater the "integration" of group members, the more intensive is the so-called group cohesion. The functions and roles within a group are also systematically

"distributed". Therefore, it is possible to differentiate between the following participants and roles within a group (Faragó 1997):

- Alpha (the leader);
- Beta (the specialist);
- Gamma (the worker);
- Omega (the scapegoat);

However, the modern view of group dynamics (Forgács 2007), is based on the hypothesis that leadership is less the function of one person (i.e. a leader), but much more the function of the group itself, i.e. all members of the group share this responsibility. For this reason, there is the tendency for groups to develop internal homogeneity i.e. participants are increasingly required to conform to a kind of group behaviour– although of course, the composition of each group is unavoidably heterogeneous!



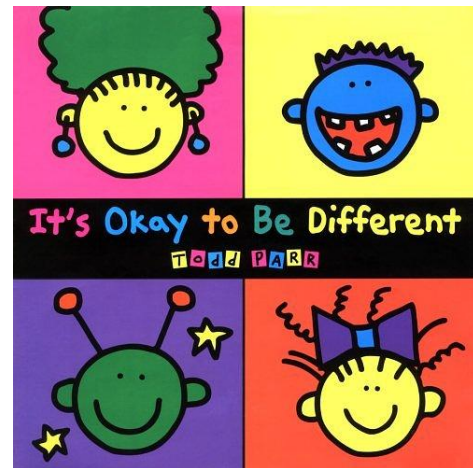
(Source: <http://szasz.uw.hu/blog/csoport.JPG>)

This means, that group values must be shared by the individual participants and that group activities should be based on these norms (Hegedűs 1997).

It is possible to measure how well and effectively a group works together, (i.e. the group structure— group relations, feelings of affinity or antipathy) by using the so-called sociometer, a method prepared by Jakob Levy Moreno and Ferenc Mérei (Mérei 2006). The resulting sociogram (also: sociomatrix) can be useful in education and other areas, for example, to analyse the class community, the role of pupils and interpersonal relations. The fact, that in many respects, groups in everyday school life are not homogeneous can negatively affect learning and moreover, restrict the activity of participants. The following criteria are especially important to determine the level of heterogeneity: age, socio-cultural background, interpersonal contacts, the environment, education, gender, etc.

It is another matter to determine whether and how *gender-oriented* education in groups can take place i.e. – encouraging the development of an identity or "ego". In another study that analyzed gender and sexual identity in children's and juvenile literature (<http://kritikusvagyok.sfblogs.net/2007/08/20/a-tarsadalmi-nem-es-a-szexualis-identitas-abrazolasanak-valtozasa-a-gyerekirodalomban>), it was emphasized that since the works of the reputable scholars of Gender Studies, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, it is clear in our culture that an individual does not adopt a general archetypal identity based on biologically determined categories of male or female. In fact, according to modern gender research, the "ego" or identity is not related to our biological gender; moreover, an identity is not a product of our biological gender, but this involves a much more complex phenomenon. As a result, does this imply that biological and gender-related aspects have hardly any consequence on group work?

All in all, biological differences (male-female) – also like in Todd Parr's book, *The Family Book, It's okay to be different* – should be handled just like any other differences such as the colour of one's skin, language, ethnic origin, physical appearance, etc. All of these kinds of heterogeneity unconditionally contribute to intercultural learning and the promotion of social skills which can lead to tolerance and an acceptance of others. (Nagy 2000).



(Source: okaydiff.jpg)

Drama pedagogy in group work



(Source: http://www.mmi.hu/szinfolt/kepek/alarc_3.gif)

Which methods and pedagogic tools can therefore be used to promote intercultural learning which develops social skills and what new methods can be used to replace the traditional classroom-style teaching which "no longer" has the capacity to "meet the challenges" of our times? In cases where pair and group work offers an alternative to traditional learning, can, for example, drama pedagogy or individual elements of drama pedagogy be used to provide insights into processes, events, conflicts and group dynamics. This method also has a broad repertoire to offer in the area of interaction between individuals and groups as well as an improvement of group dynamics.

"Drama pedagogy involves holistic learning through experience and discovery." It is a teaching method with pedagogic, socio-pedagogic and psychosocial goals and "holistic, creative and aesthetic teaching and learning methods" which also uses role plays and acting in the classroom." This method draws on a pupil's previous experiences, knowledge and values and lets them develop them further according to clearly defined objectives. They receive cues from their teachers who "prompt and encourage communicative and acting out activities as well as creative processes." Here, what is important is the process, "acting", rather than the result or the product. (<http://www.dramapaedagogik.org/wasistdrama.pdf>)

The Hungarian educational system has introduced "dance and dramatics" as a new school subject in the Hungarian national curriculum (Nemzeti Alaptanterv), "and according to a Ministry study, 11% of Hungarian schools provide instruction in drama in some form or another." (<http://www.drama.hu/mdt.pl?ID=ge&VALUE=0&GUID=0>) The Hungarian drama pedagogic company e.V. offers a series of didactic examples for teaching drama in schools. A number of these plays as well as the website *zzebraz* (*the Webmagazine for children*) offer many opportunities for the promotion of group dynamics and the cohesion of group participants. However, there are no gender-specific or gender-oriented games.

Dramatic art categories in schools

Drama instruction can be categorized into several groups depending on the type of activity and the "formal structure" as well as their use to achieve specific learning goals.

Exercises are suitable for short sequences and are self-contained activities (they always have an ending point) and do not necessarily involve intense emotions. The drama-based game "does not answer the question: When is it over? It does not strive to be a self-contained activity; its major values are continuity, flexibility and spontaneity; it is not easy an activity that can be easily repeated a second time; it does not require high levels of emotion and concentration, although these often are there, nevertheless."



(Source: <http://www.massag.hu/images/balkep.gif>)

In theatrical kinds of activities, participants can and should express their performing or acting skills and play before an audience.

This last category involves the so-called "**change in comprehension**" and combines all three categories. "The goal is for participants to experience and reappraise the theme in question, on a personal level, and at the same time, for them to become aware of meaningful contents on the latent, universal and human dimension; this activity progresses through the construction of its form aspects (conventions), but at the same time with the emotional and mental involvement of the pupils; some external elements of the processes are also clear to spectators. Nevertheless, it is not the goal of the group, nor the teacher to communicate the contents experienced to spectators." <http://www.drama.hu/mdt.pl?ID=ge&VALUE=0&GUID=0>



(Source: http://www.mosolyalapitvany.hu/_site/img/kepek/kava/kava_2.jpg)

All three types or mixed types of dramatic activities are appropriate depending on various educational situations and goals set. Drama pedagogy should always be followed by a period of reflection and a feedback session with participants.

Children in primary school – as well as older target groups – can benefit from this kind of an educational activity. They can greatly develop their skills and they can gain experiences by learning-by-doing, while having fun at the same time.

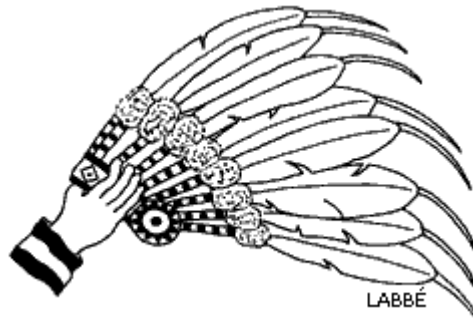
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Worksheet 1:

Chieftain



Strong and powerful people do not always make good chieftains. They have to have the right attitude, as a good chieftain needs to persuade his people that his/her ideas are good. Are *you* a good chieftain? Read the questions below, choose one of the answers and write down the corresponding letter of the alphabet. At the end, on the basis of your scores, you can see whether or not you are ready to take on a leadership role.

1. ***You are part of a group that has a difficult task to solve. How do you feel, when someone has an idea that is better than your own idea?***
 - A. Threatened.
 - B. Awkward and embarrassed.
 - C. Curious und open-minded.

2. ***You are in a group that is working on a large task. How do you see your own ideas in comparison with those of the others?***
 - A. Your ideas are not good enough.
 - B. Yours are better.
 - C. Yours are just as good as the others, however not any better.

3. ***You have finally come up with another good idea and you want to tell the others enthusiastically about it. What happens?***
 - A. Like always, they simply do not listen to you.
 - B. They listen to you, but again they do not understand you.
 - C. They listen to you and also understand what you want to say.

4. ***You have been working for a long time on a solution to a task. Unfortunately, no one has praised you nor said anything about that. What do you do?***
 - A. You are discouraged and give up.
 - B. You stop working on that task and start on a new task.
 - C. You finish the task to the end, because you want to.

5. ***You are to work in a group, but not as the chieftain. How do you feel?***
 - A. Good, because you do not have as much responsibility.
 - B. You feel like a dim-wit, because you are not the chieftain.
 - C. You are just pleased to be part of the group.

- 6. *What happens, when you want to do something and it goes wrong?***
A. You have the feeling that the situation is too much for you.
B. You drop everything, because the others wouldn't see how good you are.
C. You try to learn from your mistakes. That can help you in the future.
- 7. *You are responsible for a group and a task. What do you do?***
A. You let the others do most of the work.
B. You do everything on your own. Only then will you be sure that everything goes well.
C. You give each person in the group a job to do (even yourself). In this way, everyone can make a contribution.
- 8. *How do you feel, when you work with people who come from a completely different ethnic origin than your own?***
A. Uneasy, because they are different in all respects.
B. Superior or inferior.
C. Broad-minded and considerate of others.
- 9. *How do you react when someone gives you honest criticism?***
A. You also feel disappointed with yourself.
B. It annoys you.
C. You think about how things could go better.
- 10. *Things do not go as planned. What do you do?***
A. You are still depressed about the errors even later.
B. You look for a scapegoat for the errors and you think that you did everything right.
C. You look for new ways of doing things and think about next time.

Scoring:

If you have 7 or more answers with A's. You need more self-confidence, if you want to be a good chieftain.

If you have 7 or more answers with B's: Think about whether, it wouldn't be better to trust others more often, because they are actually not all that dumb.

If you have 7 or more answers with C's: You get along well with most people. And you have an idea about what is important and not so important. That is the right attitude to have for a good chieftain.

(Source: <http://www.labbe.de/zzebra/index.asp?themaId=665&titelId=4477>)

Worksheet 2:

SOS! Rescue me!

(Drama exercise)



Preparation: Before this exercise is started, newspapers (representing the rescue life rafts) should be laid out on the floor. There should be just about as many newspapers out there as necessary so that the pupils have the bare minimum amount of room on the newspapers. After each round, another newspaper will be taken away.

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(**Source:** Kaposi, László (szerk.) (1992/1999): Játékok a Drámapedagógiai Magazinból. {Game from the Drama Pedagogy Magazine.} 1999/különszám, 1999/2. szám. In: <http://www.drama.hu/DATA/1/elet.pdf>)

Worksheet 3:

Show, guess and tell!



Preparation: For this class session, the children should bring three or four objects from home, that are small, but nevertheless important to them. They can even be trinkets, that for one reason or another, they are emotionally attached to. (For example, they got this object from a person who is very special to them or on the occasion of a special event or perhaps they found it, etc.)

The objects brought to class are placed on a table and covered up. The teacher chooses one object and gives it to a pupil, who is to try to guess who it belongs to and how and under what circumstances the child-owner ended up with this object. Several children can guess, before the owner gives the "solution". The pupil who has the right "answer", can then choose the next object and show it to the other pupils.

It is important that the child who owns the object should not "give himself/herself away" during the guessing sequence. It should also be stressed, that the children should listen carefully and patiently to one another.

Finally, the child the object belongs to, should think for a second and then tell the real story behind the object.

Variations: the individual owner himself/herself show his/her object and without saying anything, lets the others guess why it is so important to him/her and under what circumstances they ended up with that particular object.

(Source: Kaposi, László (szerk.) (1992/1999): Játékok a Drámapedagógiai Magazinból. {Spiele aus dem dramapädagogischen Magazin.} 1999/különszám, 1999/2. szám. In: <http://www.drama.hu/DATA/ja1/hogyker.pdf>)