

"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)

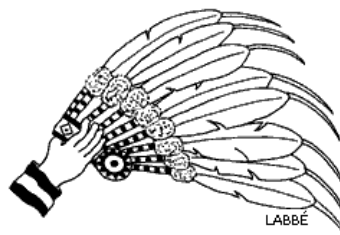
Aims:

- 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.