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BOOKLET ABOUT “PSS – PROMOTING SOCIAL SKILLS AMONGST STUDENTS”

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1. Introduction

Social skills have been introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) to define those human skills needed to promote healthy behaviours focusing on the importance of a bio-psycho-social approach. Psychosocial characteristics in everyday situations are considered significant aspects as regards the social construction of reality. They also play an important role to determinate how far young people will develop knowledge and skills in order to have better life conditions (Marmocchi, Dall'Aglio, Zannini 2004).

There is a more specific definition of social skills. We refer to those social and interpersonal skills that help young people in everyday needs, in trusting themselves, others and their community. A positive emotional experience towards one self, and the capacity to trust others. By this way, an individual will be able to make his choices in order to achieve just his own goals without considering expectations of others. A positive emotional management leads to a progressive social opening and to a healthy, balanced and enjoyable relationship with others (Cunico 2008). Emotions, synonymous of change, capture, involve, stimulate and colour reality and situations. They can give a start, or block everyday life. They change people as they change the meaning of their lives. If we do not teach children and adolescents to understand, go through and face negative feelings such as jealousy and envy, this may cause a certain tendency to avoid relationships with contemporaries or experience it in a competitive way. The risk is to transform young people into antisocial, fear to relate and angry adults.

As social skills can be multiple, and their nature can vary depending on social cultural context, an international project group has chosen some fundamental skills to promote for children and adolescents:

- *Decision making.* It consists in how to make decisions in different situations and life contexts. In order to take active proper decisions, you should consider options and possible consequences.

- *Problem solving.* It consists in how to face and solve problems in a proper way. If left unsolved, they may cause mental stress and tensions.
- *Creativity.* It helps both decision making and problem solving. It allows to consider possible alternatives and consequences of different options. It could be useful to face situations in a versatile way.
- *Critical sense.* Ability to analyze in an objective way, considering advantages and disadvantages. The aim is to take a more conscious and independent decision as regards attitudes and behaviours to adopt, without considering external factors as contemporaries or mass media influence.
- *(verbal or written) Working communication.* It consists not only in being able to express opinions and desires, needs and feelings, but also in being able to listen to others accurately and understand them. Moreover, it consists in being able to ask for help if necessary.
- *Interpersonal relationship skills.* It consists in how to create and keep significant relationships both with relatives and friends. They are considered significant for psychosocial wellness. It can also consist in being able to stop them if necessary.
- *Self-consciousness.* It consists in knowing ourselves, our character, our strengths and weaknesses, our desires and needs. To encourage self-consciousness can help to understand when we are under pressure or stressed and represent a fundamental prerequisite for a clear communication, for good relationships above all towards ethnic and cultural differences and it helps acceptance and comprehension with people who need help.
- *Emotion management.* It consists in recognizing our and others' emotions, in knowing how emotion can influence behaviours and in being able to manage and control them in a proper way.
- *Stress management.* It consists in recognizing the origin of everyday tension and stress and controlling them. Changing our environment and

lifestyle and being able to relax, can be useful to fight inevitable stress that may cause more problems.

Emotional management plays a fundamental role in personal and social wellness. It improves good relationships, prevents risky behaviours in health and helps to accept possible risks as regards our mind (Marmocchi, Dall'Aglio, Zannini 2004).

2. What is a “social skill”?

The PSS project is about social skills. But what is a social skill?

On *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, the definition says that it is “any skill facilitating interaction and communication with others. Social rules and relations are created, communicated, and changed in verbal and non-verbal ways. The process of learning such skills is called socialization. The rationale for this type of an approach to treatment is that people meet a variety of social problems and can reduce the stress and punishment from the encounter, as well as increase their reinforcement by having the correct skills”.

According to <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-social-skills.htm>, social skills are most often thought as a set of skills that allow people to communicate, relate and socialize with others. One should note that these skills may be defined differently from one culture to another. They often are the way others determine a person's status, consider people as potential friends or mates, and consider them for employment or promotions in the workplace. Social skills are both verbal and nonverbal. Verbal ones include being able to determine the appropriate thing to say at the appropriate time, being able to communicate in ways that are engaging, have a range of vocal tone and quality, and being able to speak in an educated but reasonably understandable manner. In a sense, social skills are judged by what we say, when we say it, and how we say it. The other aspect of social skills is nonverbal: body language, standing up straight, making eye contact, making appropriate gestures, are examples of good nonverbal skills. But these can be overdone. Gestures can be too dramatic.

In addition, the person with good social skills listens well. Nodding of the head, the occasional quick comment, and clearly taking in someone else's communication is valuable. People don't simply wish to be talked to; they want to be talked with.

Another definition of social skills comes from <http://specialed.about.com/cs/behaviordisorders/a/social.htm>. Teaching the importance of using appropriate social skills belongs in every classroom regardless of grade or subject. Social skills are skills that can be learned at all ages; students need to be reminded that even adults continue to learn social skills. Students need to understand the importance of using effective social skills.

What are the social skills?

- Cooperation
- Sharing
- Participation
- Being a friend
- Helping others
- Being patient
- Following directions
- Taking turns
- Remaining on task
- Accepting differences
- Listening
- Praising others and refraining from put downs
- Positive communication and interactions

- Being polite and courteous
- Using good manners
- Respecting ourselves, others and items
- Being respectful

Social skills can be defined as patterns of social behaviour, that make individuals more socially competent and able to produce the desired effects on others. Individuals can establish and develop creative relations and relationships with others, participating actively in the life of different social groups. Social skills facilitate interaction and communication between people.

According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), the social skill is the ability to establish emotional bonds with other people, understood as defining relations, establishing, developing, and maintaining relationships as well as getting social support. Such approach is called an interpersonal approach. The competence is reflected in an ability to perform tasks, within the scope of a particular social activity type, or as an ability to perform specific functions according to the adopted standards.

Social skills can be defined as the skills necessary to have good relationships with others. They include for example ability to express effectively what is felt/thought/wished; to listen to, and to demonstrate understanding of other people feelings/thoughts/requests; to negotiate effectively with others when our wishes and other people's requests differs. Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life, as they influence academic performance, behaviour, social and family relationships.

Building social skills is of great importance for the future and also one of the priorities of the European policy and legislation. Investing in young people more

and as early as possible, not only financially, but also politically and socially through the families, non-governmental organizations, teachers and their employers, nowadays is really important. The development of related youth strategies has to be a priority – both on European Union and national levels – covering a wide range of spheres like education, employment, health care, business initiatives, culture and sport.

Starting from the Lisbon European Council (2000) the importance of social skills is increasingly being recognized in Europe.

Following the EC Recommendation on key competences for Lifelong Learning (2006) many Member states have started to incorporate social skills development in their schools' curriculum.

Promotion of social skills was one of the European Union priorities for year 2010.

3. PSS – Promoting Social Skills amongst Students

The project “PSS - Promoting Social Skills” is funded by the European Union within the Lifelong Learning Programme – Subprogramme Comenius.

The project began in December 2009 and will end in November 2011.

The main partners produced a Guide on promoting social skills, containing 60 lesson plans for students of high schools.

The PSS project involves five different European countries with public and private organizations (universities, research organizations active in the field of education, training agencies) and high schools. The participation as partners of the education department of three universities and research and training organizations active in the educational field, as well as the fact that all the main partners are involved in teachers' training, has guaranteed the production of good quality materials, their excellent dissemination and exploitation (the lesson plans are part of the curriculum addressed to teachers).

The project has got 14 partners: 6 are the “main” partners, the other partners are schools.

The six main partners are the following:



Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa (Italy)

Association “Qualification and Career Development” (Bulgaria)

Canterbury Christ Church University (the U.K.)

Centro Studi “Bruno Ciari” (Italy)

Spółeczna Wyższa Szkoła Przedsiębiorczości (Poland)

VIA University College (Denmark)

The partner schools are:

Professional Technical High School “John Atanasov”, Kyustendil (Bulgaria)

Vocational School of Economics and Management “Yordan Zahariev”,
Kyustendil (Bulgaria)

Hotel school “Federigo Enriques”, Castelfiorentino (Italy)

Social pedagogic lycée “Enrico Fermi”, Empoli (Italy)

The Towers School & Sixth Form Centre, Kennington (the U.K.)

The Hundred of Hoo Comprehensive School, Rochester (the U.K.)

47th Integrational State Gymnasium, Łódź (Poland)

XXI High School of Bolesław Prus, Łódź (Poland)

Even if not partners, also Danish high schools participated in the project.

It was decided to execute a project on social skills after a need analysis carried out during a meeting in Italy, amongst five of the partners that were already cooperating together on another project. The development of social skills came out as a priority in training of teachers. In most of the partner countries there

were not good quality materials (in some of them no materials at all) to be used by teachers with their students.

The Guide produced by the partners, available in five languages, was validated thorough a pilot carried out in 18 secondary schools in the five European countries of the partners. Once validated, the Guide was directly promoted with teachers and through the project website (www.pss-comenius.eu).

The Guide is being used in other schools of partner countries plus other schools in other European countries. The universities partner of the project are also using the Guide in their courses addressed to teachers.

Moreover, in order to encourage the use of the Guide, each partner conducted workshops to train teachers how to work with the lesson plans.

The workshops were conducted in different towns and cities, so the Guide could be disseminated more widely among the interested organizations and persons. The average number of teachers who participated in each seminar was 15.

The workshops were organized as follows:

1. Introduction with explanation of the project (how it was developed)
2. Description of the pilot of the lesson plans done in the partner schools
3. Discussion about social skills
4. Explanation of the Guide, its use and its content
5. Practical examples of lesson plans

Both teachers and head teachers found the Guide a necessary assistance in the work with their students and were really interested in its use in the teaching process.

Workshops were useful and...funny!

People, teachers, head teachers... Not “just” a “cold” project. People are continually interacting. Partners, too. They meet periodically and have a close relationship. Partners' meetings are opportunities first of all, for improving the project and deciding together the work to be done. But they are also an

opportunity for knowing the way of working of other cultures. Each of the partner organizations has had the opportunity to get to know and cooperate with other European organizations active in the field of education, so enhancing a European area for Lifelong Learning and promoting a European dimension in teacher training.

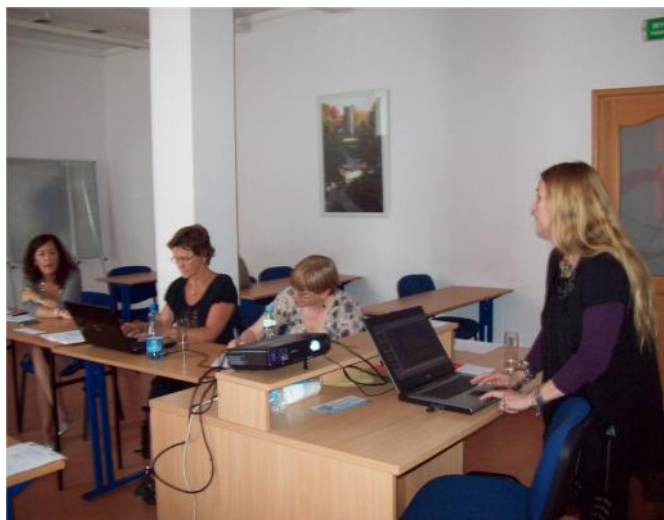
The partners have also shared the research, the expertise and the different approaches accumulated on the teaching of social skills in their own countries.



PSS partners during the meeting in Canterbury (the U.K.) in November 2010



PSS partners during the meeting in Empoli (Italy) in March 2011



PSS partners during the meeting in Lodz (Poland) in June 2011

3.1. Aims

Promotion of social skills was one of the European Union priorities for year 2010.

It is extremely important to facilitate during the adolescence interpersonal and emotional skills' development to efficiently manage interpersonal relationships. It is a personal, social and interpersonal path through raising consciousness, emotion management and personal skills.

The project wants to support this trend by producing the Guide addressed to teachers on introducing lessons in social skills, which contains 60 lesson plans to be used with students aged 14 and over. It is available in English, Danish, Bulgarian, Italian, and Polish.

Schematically, the PSS project's goals are to:

- Improve social skills among pupils 14+
- Improve teachers' competences in providing lessons in social skills
- Promote social skills development in schools.

The project has developed high quality content to be used by teachers, so contributing to improve quality of Lifelong learning in Europe.

Moreover, the project contributes to personal fulfillment because it helps to develop social skills (which are one of the main important life skills) in students. The ability to master social skills is one of the main ingredients of personal fulfillment.

3.2. PSS phases

The project's structure has been kept simple. It is organized in work packages. This division into work packages was useful to give the project a clear structure.

The first work package has produced a Guide on how to develop social skills. Partners produced the draft of the first version of the Guide and then gave feedbacks about it, in order to improve it. So the first version was produced, addressed to teachers and students participating in the pilot. Then partners worked at the version 2 of the Guide and finally the Guide on developing social skills on paper was produced and printed as a book.

The second work package is devoted to test the lesson plans in the partner schools, the so called “pilot”. Teachers and students piloted version 1 of the Guide so to improve it. A feedback was collected by teachers and students involved in the pilot and national reports and a final report on the pilot were produced, for understanding the weak points of the first version of the Guide and the points which, on the contrary, were most appreciated.

The third work package is about the project's website development and maintenance. The website is multilingual and is used for project dissemination and exploitation addressed to teachers and head teachers, organizations training teachers, students, stakeholders in the education field, other people interested in interpersonal skills.

The fourth work package is about the dissemination of the project and its results, for assuring that the Guide and project are well known by beneficiaries. Each partner is responsible for dissemination in its own country. Project website, press campaigns, printed material, congresses, journals, final conferences (in every partner country in the last phase of the project): all actions which let the PSS project be known.

The fifth work package concerns the exploitation of the Guide on developing social skills. It assures that the Guide is used by target groups and continues to be used after the end of the project. This happens thanks to the possibility of downloading the Guide from the website, the use of the Guide in some new schools (also out of the partner countries), the workshops for teachers on the use of the Guide, the use of it in the courses addressed to teachers in the partner universities. Moreover, the coordinator will continue to manage the website after the end of the project.

The sixth work package is about project management: this WP has assured the orderly development of the project and the achievement of its aims and results.

The seventh work package concerns the quality assurance and has the task of establishing procedures and collecting data, so to assure the orderly development of the project and the achievement of its aims and results. Quality assurance measures are described in the handbook for quality assurance. A project evaluator has also been appointed: this person has verified that all the project activities were carried out as planned, and in her reports has given advice on any incurred problems and solutions.

3.3. Results: the Guide and the website

3.3.1. The Guide

Main result of the project is a Guide addressed to the teachers on introducing lessons in social skills. It contains 60 lesson plans to be used with students aged 14 and over. It is available in the five languages of the project partners: Bulgarian, Danish, English, Italian, and Polish.

Thanks to the transnational cooperation, and the location of the different main partners (north, north east, south, and east Europe), they have produced lesson plans that can be used in their countries, as well as in other non partner countries.

In the first phase of the project, partners produced the draft of the first version of the Guide and then gave feedbacks about it, in order to improve it. So the first version was produced in English (then translated in the partners languages): it was addressed to teachers and students participating in the pilot. After having collected teachers' and students' opinions, partners worked at the version 2 of the Guide: initially produced in English, then translated in partners languages, addressed to teachers and organizations training teachers. After another exchange of opinions and corrections, the Guide on developing social skills on paper was produced and printed as a book.

Draft of Version 1 > Version 1 > Version2 > Guide (book)

The Guide contains two main parts.

Part one provides some outline of the European Commission context of the project and some theoretical and supportive material.

Part two contains the lesson plans.

All lesson plans, ideas and activities have been broadly classified into numbered chapters, each relating to one of the four Promoting Social Skills themes below. When there are some overlaps between the themes and some

lessons address more than one, this will be reflected in the use of a second or third classification number in brackets on some lessons. eg. 1 (3,4).

The themes are:

- Develop collaboration, assertiveness and integrity; ability to work with others in teams; negotiate, create confidence & feel empathy.
- Develop maturity as an individual: cope with stress/frustration constructively; understand and deal with the difference between personal, public and work contexts.
- Take an interest in socio-economic development; intercultural communication; develop ability to communicate constructively in a range of different environments.
- Value diversity and show tolerance; express and understand different viewpoints and learn to compromise.

The lesson plans are really different from one another, permitting to teachers to choose the one or ones, which better fits (or fit) in their class/classes.

In the Guide, a colour code has been applied to headings for theory and lesson plans from each country to assist quick referencing.

Some examples of lesson plans (one for country):

Theme 1: Lesson Plan 3

Partner country:	UK
Lesson Title:	Collaborating to produce a script for role play
Lesson no:	1.3
Social Skill:	Empathy and working with fellow pupils/students

Session goals/aims:

Students to work in pairs and develop role plays around this topic

Teaching/learning activities:

Introduction :

On the theme of isolation and inclusion - use a student generated narrative/ or an evocative picture/ or an example from shared class experience eg. film or drama recently seen as relevant to group

Use a question and answer session around the group – experienced students can conduct this themselves.

- Focus questions on the feelings of the isolated student
- Why might they be excluded? How do they and others feel? – avoid judgements – consider personal responses
- How could the individual and/or others promote dialogue and involvement?

Students produce a script customized to their own setting:

- Manage the process and record it on flip chart
- Students provide ideas for including the isolated person initially using their own experience. They discuss and share and then write up various strategies
- From this one is chosen and a script is written for a role play of how to interact with others

Provide a sample script if necessary but try to avoid stifling their ideas and ensure that there is plenty of time for rehearsal and recording (use of video can be very helpful for follow on activity if the group is well prepared)

Concluding activity:

Should allow students to gather and celebrate the positives and learn from tensions or difficulties which arose.

Students should consider how the learning will extend into their school, college or whole school activity.

Theme 1: Lesson Plan 6a

Partner country:	Italy
Lesson Title:	The Animal City
Lesson no:	1.6a
Social Skill:	Self-consciousness, empathy, stress and emotion management
Duration of lesson	50 minutes depending on the number of participants

Notes to the tutor:

Depending on the available time, instructors can organize just an activity or both. If both (1. The animal city 2. What animal are you) the draws of the first one cannot be shown before activity begins but only after all the participants end both description and draws about their mates. Discussion and final thoughts must be at the end of the activity in order to avoid influences.

Session goals/aims:

Aims:

To know ourselves: our nature, crowing glories and weak points, desires and needs. To show them to other people while learning possible emotions and stress they can take to.

Teaching/learning activities:

Resources:

A room where it's possible to comfortably sit down in a circle (also on the floor), white sheets, pens.

All participants have a pen and a white sheet. The instructor asks them to draw (or write down the name if the drawing is not clear) the animal to which they feel most identified with, both for psychological characteristics and behaviour. After writing the word “today” on the sheet the instructor asks participants to fold and keep it.

Another sheet will be given to participants and they will be asked to draw (or write the name) of the animal they would be, or become. Later the instructor will ask the participants to fold the sheet and keep it. At this point the instructor asks participants to show the first drawing and to explain the characteristic in which he recognizes himself and why, and to do the same with the second drawing. All participants will show and explain their drawings.

The free group-discussion will be about expectative, ideas and opinions of participants as regards their mates.

Suggestions to the instructor: while participants are comparing the drawings, it is important to encourage the analysis of different characteristics and similarities and also differences in perception.

Theme 1: Lesson Plan 9a

Partner country:	Denmark
Lesson Title:	Team ball - basketball
Lesson no:	1.9a (lessons 1-4)
Social Skill:	Social competence
Context	The older classes in a European country – 24 pupils, four on each team, two teams per court in all three courts. Two lessons a week over a time span of four weeks with matches against other schools.

Session goals/aims:

To develop social competence through participation in team sports

Teaching/learning activities:

Resources:

Equipment and space for basketball.

Lessons 1-4 are used for training in the fundamentals of basketball – a warm up dance, dribbling, passing, shooting, a light game.

Actions: Start from scratch – make learners familiar with dribbling drills, movement patterns, passing and shooting.

- Dribbling exercises: The teacher demonstrates a dribbling technique and the pupils repeat. Several different displays.

- Movement Patterns: pupils learn to move in different patterns, both with and without the ball.

- Passing: The pupils pass the ball between themselves and a partner. The teacher shows how. Shooting: Various shots and shooting angles are explored and tested. Again, the teacher demonstrates how it is done correctly.

Pupils are then split into small groups, they show each other their newly learned exercises, and they give and receive feedback from each other. The NBA 2-ball exercise is practiced to train pupils' collaboration in pairs. Team Ball: Passing is the name of the game - how many passes does your team need to get points? What is reasonable? Tag: Two versions - you can be caught when you have the ball. You can be caught when you do not have the ball. Tactical understanding and teamwork are central elements of this game. Which passes are accepted by the team and which are not?

Signs: Do the pupils take responsibility for the game? Are they engaged in the various exercises? How do they react to conflict? Are there signs of learning and improvement outside the basketball court?

Evaluation: We will use a formative type of evaluation. The teacher must constantly pay attention to the signs the pupils show through the various exercises – do they manage to participate actively and constructively as a team?

Theme 4: Lesson Plan 7

Partner country: Bulgaria
Lesson Title: Expressing one's ideas and fantasies
Lesson no: 4.7
Social Skill: Develop maturity as an individual; value diversity, respect others and be prepared to overcome prejudice and show tolerance
Session time: 45 minutes

Session goals/aims:

Introduction

We all have our own ideas and fantasies about one thing or another. Most of the time we feel uncomfortable saying them out loud because we fear we may look ridiculous in other people's eyes. But when that happens in a game and in the form of a joke we can break the chains of shame and let our fantasies loose

Aims:

By the end of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. express their ideas and desires openly
2. accept other people's ideas as something good and to build on them
3. work in a team

Teaching/learning activities:

Resources needed:

A flipchart sheet – A1
Markers of different colours
Pens and paper
Playing Cards 'Creation of the world'
Sticking plasters

Preparation:

Make 4 copies of the 'Creation of the world' game.

Draw a map of an unfolded model of the globe on the A1 sheet of paper - put mountains, rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, deserts, forests, ..., all sorts of natural resources from the Creation of Earth, before people appeared. Then the sheet has to be split into 4 pieces and each one has to be rolled up.

Exercise:

1. Description of the task – 5 minutes

The tutors put the students into 4 small groups and give each group a "Creation of the World" card and one of the scrolls from the map. Then explain the content of the cards briefly.

2. 'Creation of the World' – 30 minutes

The tutors start completing the tasks from the 'Creation of the World' map, while materializing all the ideas, fantasies and point of views on the corresponding piece of the map which the group has picked up.

3. Each of the small groups presents the part of 'Their world' and sticks it on the wall. The next groups do the same until the map is whole again.

4. Summary and feedback

The tutors ask the students how they felt during the execution of each task, if they had any difficulties expressing their ideas and how they felt.

Map

‘Creation of the world’

- Describe the part of the ‘world’ that you picked up; decide whether it is going to be one country or you are going to split the territory.
- Give the necessary names
- Set the special features
- State constitution
- Spheres of activity
- Economy
- Approximate population
- Employment – the most wanted occupations
- Unemployment
- Neighbourly relations – with your neighbouring countries, neighbouring countries of the other group
- Cultural traditions – a flag, standard of living, what should a foreigner know and be able to do in your country.

Theme 2: Lesson 4

Partner country:	Poland
Lesson Title:	How to deal with your own anger during conflicts
Lesson no:	2.4
Social Skill:	Coping with stress and frustration
Target group:	14-19 years
Duration of class:	1.5 hours
Session goals/aims:	

Aims:

- Boosting the level of pupils awareness in the area of experienced anger • Illustrating the negative consequences of non-constructive ways of anger communication.
- Building up the pupils motivation to use other, more constructive ways of communication of anger
- Providing the knowledge about the I- message – constructive method of anger communication
- Illustrating the advantages of the I- message as a way of anger communication
- Giving pupils opportunity to practise changing non-constructive You-messages to I-messages

Objectives:

The pupils will:

1. boost their awareness in the area of experienced anger. Thanks to it, in the real life situations they will be able to realize the experienced anger sooner which means possibility to react more adequately and more constructive
2. analyse the methods of anger communicating used by them and their effects on relations with others
3. gain the knowledge about constructive technique of anger communication – I-messages and its advantages
4. have the opportunity to practise changing You-messages to I-messages. The practice will be based on the examples derived from pupils' experiences. Thanks to it, pupils will find it easier to make use of knowledge and skills, gained during the class, in the conflict situations they face in everyday life

Teaching/learning activities:

1. Introduction (5-10min):

- 1.1 Greeting pupils, presenting the goals of the class and the programme
- 1.2 Organizational arrangements and establishing the rules that should be in force during the class (if it is needed and not have been done during the earlier classes)
- 1.3 Getting known pupils name (if it is needed)

2. The anger signs (10-15min)

Exercise aims: 1. Warming up the group

2. Boosting the awareness of the anger signs which helps to realize sooner the experienced anger

The method: working in small groups

The teacher, in reference to previous class (exercise „Casino”), reminds that one of the biggest problems in constructive conflict management is question of negative emotions (especially anger) and their influence on our behaviour. To deal with our anger effectively first, we need to realize quickly enough that we feel anger. And this is the goal of this exercise. The teacher divides pupils into subgroups (4-6 pupils each). Each subgroup is supposed to write down on the big sheets of papers the signs of anger. These signs should be divided into two groups: bodily signs (“What happens with my body when I feel anger?”) and psychological (“What kind of thoughts appears in my mind when I feel anger?”). Working in subgroups is planned for 5 minutes but the teacher should remain flexible here. Then, the teacher gets the effects of subgroups together, listing the signs of anger (divided into two groups: Bodily signs and Thoughts).

In conclusion the teacher should emphasize the fact that in order to deal with anger effectively we need to realize that we feel anger in particular situation. The sooner we realize it the better. “The List of Signs of Anger” that has just been created can be used as a „warning and detecting system” of experienced anger.

3. How do we communicate our anger? (15 min)

Exercise aims: 1. Illustrating pupils how their ways of anger communicating influence their defectiveness and relations with others

2. Building up the pupils motivation to look for other, more constructive methods of expressing our anger

The method: individual work and group discussion moderated by the teacher

The teacher asks pupils to fill in the table “My anger” (attachment 1) individually. Then he/she collect the effects of their individual work on the table and, cooperating with the whole group, circles the ineffective (non-constructive) ways of anger communicating. In this context non-constructive means the way of anger expression that negatively influences on our relations with others, ourselves (emotion costs) or handicaps finding solution process.

In conclusion the teacher should emphasise the fact that people often unconsciously and automatically use the ways of anger communicating that have negative consequences e.g. losing friends, long lasting rows or unsolved problems. One way to make this situation better is learn new ways of anger communicating, which will be the goal of the next exercise (we go to exercise 4).

4. I-message (40min)

Exercise aims: 1. Introduction of the notion of I-message and You-message

2. Illustrating the differences in reactions on I-message and You-message

3. Practising the skills of replacing You-message with I- message

The methods: individual work, working in small groups, group discussion moderated by the teacher, mini-lecture

4.1 I – message: Introduction (20 min)

The teacher begins with the following instruction: “Everyone will be given a sheet of paper with a short story described on it. Please imagine this has happened to you and think what you would feel and would do (or would instinctively like to do). Write down your reaction overleaf. Please DO NOT show your papers to the others.” Then the teacher hands out pupils the sheets of papers with the particular story (attachments 2a and 2b). Every pupil is given only one situation(attachment 2a OR 2b). The situations should be assigned randomly in such way that approximately half of the pupils get attachment 2a and the other half attachment 2b (the teacher can jumble up the papers before the class).

Then the teacher asks pupils about their reactions and writes them down on the board. Next he/she asks pupils who would react with anger/range/aggression to stand on one side of the room and pupils who would react rather with understanding and willingness to clarify everything on the other side of the room. Eventually the teacher asks everybody to reveal what situations they had on the paper. Next the teacher analyses with the whole group the difference between these two kinds of situations and introduce notion of I-message and You-message. The teacher should show what I-message is and the difference between I-message and You-message. The other teacher’s task is to emphasize that I-message, unlike You-message:

- usually doesn’t make the other person feel attacked and doesn’t lead to conflict escalation
- give the opportunity to communicate our anger without attacking other people
- give opportunity to start a real dialogue and searching for problem solution

In conclusion the teacher should emphasize that using I-message is another skill that can be learnt. And this is the goal of the next exercise.

4.2. Changing You-message to I- message (20 min)

The teacher divides group into small subgroups (3-6 people). Next he/she asks pupils to write down the You-messages they often use in conflict situation or they hear from others. The pupils’ task is to change these You-messages to I-messages. The teacher’s task is to monitor the subgroups work and help them when it is needed. Then some examples should be discussed with the whole group- you can start with these that were difficult for pupils.

Attention: Another version of this exercise includes the list of exemplary You-messages (attachment 3 – example of such list) prepared before the class instead of the one prepared by pupils. Sometimes it is better to use the prepared list, especially in the group with low safety level. But from educational point of view, it is generally more effective to use the You-messages list prepared by pupils. The ultimate decision on the exercise version belongs to the teacher.

5. Summing up and pupils questions (5-10min)

In conclusion the teacher should remind the main benefits of using I-messages and encourage pupils to try it in the real life situations (and observe the reactions of the other side).

Materials

Board or flip chart (preferred), markers, some sheets of paper for pupils, attachments 1,2a, 2b and 3

Literature

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3.3.1.1. The pilot of the Guide in schools

The youths involved in the project are students of European high schools. The teachers, since they are adults, were important interlocutors (they have a daily educational role) in effective interpersonal and growth skills.

There should be a kind of “discrete” intimacy among the “pilot person” and the group and among the participants themselves, useful to facilitate listening, comprehension and learning. There are ways to overcome moments of conflict and tension, to establish a strong collaborative agreement in order to ensure that participants come to the end of the path as more competent people, aware of their resources and potentialities, they are motivated to move their limits and to continue the development of individuals and groups (Casula 2003).

The piloting of the Guide on promoting social skills developed during the project involved 39 teachers and 1030 students in 18 schools of the partner countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Poland, the U.K.).



Pilot of the lesson plans in Bulgarian schools

In the lesson plans the main activities are games, discussions, dealing with different tasks together with peers. The main goals of the lessons are that students develop the skills to freely express their own views, understand the world around them, have accurate self-esteem, understand and accept other people, work in teams and feel joy and satisfaction from face-to-face verbal communication.

The series of experiments carried out in the partner schools were aimed at improving and promoting social skills in teenagers and improving the teachers' competences in providing lessons focused on students developing social skills.

Some of the lesson plans were used in connection with the normal curriculum for History, Mathematics, Social Studies and Foreign or National Language; others were used in special lessons as Class' lesson/"form master classes" or lessons included in the curriculum to handle the social part of education. So, generally we see two approaches to the lesson plans. One sees them as an addition to the pupils' school day and the teachers' lessons. The other sees them as an intervention in the daily classes, focusing on the fact that social skills can also be achieved through working with educational subjects.

Feedbacks from teachers and students were collected, in order to know what could be improved in the lesson plans.

Thanks to the suggestions after the pilot, partners had the opportunity to improve the Guide.

Most comments were positive, i.e. teachers appreciated that some lesson plans were about how to develop “soft skills” needed in everyday life. They found that the lesson plans are well structured, coherent and closely informed by theory. It can be liberating to use exercises in practice which illustrate the theory instead of just explaining and teaching it. Teacher and students had great fun and all of them learned a lot. The structure of the lessons – as sequence of introduction, game/activity and conclusion – has been judged as well developed and relaxing. The teachers noticed that the lesson plans put the student in the

centre of the lessons. This gives active involvement of students, group dynamics and fellowship. As examples given:

- Students experienced a sense of belonging to the group
- Students felt that they are part of social life
- Students were curious and committed, engaged in the lessons
- Students changed their minds about some schoolmates
- Students liked to have some concrete feedbacks from schoolmates
- Scenarios enabled students working in the group to reach a higher degree of knowledge, understanding and logical search for solutions
- Students' reactions were not based on formal knowledge, but on logical searching for answers or solutions.

Students developed their ability to work in a group, to cooperate with others, and the skills connected to that: to communicate adequately with open minds, listen, negotiate and produce materials obtained from their discussions. Students succeeded in managing their own feelings. Some of them tried to use their new skills in their conversation and interaction with their teachers after the lessons.

The majority of the students found that the lessons differ from their normal ones. They liked that they actually had to do something themselves rather than listening to the teacher or read a book. They felt that they were protagonists of the activities and found the lessons more relaxing, because there wasn't the one right answer to be found. They found that it was not regular school work, but work in a less restricted way and this was appreciated. Students liked that they were not judged and could express their thoughts freely, and appreciated being perceived as independent and able to work as adults. Moreover, the lesson plans succeeded in moving some peer students out of their “comfort zone” and in encouraging them towards development. The lessons were felt as more open for expressing thoughts. This gave energy to participate.

The content of the lesson plans was appreciated by pupils. They liked the content about feelings, empathy and opinions. They also liked having lessons about matters connected to real life, often having fun at the same time.

The lesson plans of the PSS Guide give young people the opportunity to cooperate with peer students, make decisions jointly, share ideas and opinions, experience confronting opinions, and the process of finding compromise. This leads to the acquisition of a more effective way of communication. Students learnt to respect others' thoughts and emotions and to understand themselves and others, and acquired a more effective way of communicating. They used and developed their social skills trying to agree with the members of a group – i.e. being honest, open-minded and focused to achieve agreement. Students learnt and experienced that they also had a responsibility in regards to good communication with others. Active listening is important for good communication.

It must be pointed out that, because people have different characters, a few of them felt uncomfortable, either because they had difficulties expressing intimate thoughts or because they felt that they were not listened to. But especially those students can gain from the lessons “help” for integration in the group, self confidence, leadership and coordinator skills, communicative skills, negotiation skills. In fact, most more silent or shy students participated – they liked getting to know their classmates better.

Most students expressed the wish to make these activities with regularity and to have more of these kinds of lessons.

The feedback from students stresses that they liked the lesson plans. The majority of students experienced a higher degree of interest and involvement in these lessons. This led to the conclusion that they experienced learning more from the lessons than from the normal lessons. The lesson plans seemed to be very appealing to the students' studying, working in teams and retaining interest in the educational process.

The pilot of the Guide helped all teenagers, who took part in it, to pass the invisible barrier of unease, scruples, isolation (the private, protected area of each youth with his/her secrets, concerns and fears) and be themselves with an accurate self-esteem, point of view and acceptance of the differences.

Teachers said that they gained ideas for future teaching or that they will use the lesson plans of the PSS Guide again in various ways. And the use of interactive teaching methods and creativity will attract the attention and interest of the new generation. This leads to the conclusion that teachers have the competence to use the lesson plans assembled in the Guide, and some have acknowledged that ideas as frames or structures in the lesson plans could inspire and improve their teaching in the future. This stresses one important aim in the project, because without the interest from the teachers nothing is going to happen in this area of education.

The lessons are easy to conduct and enjoyable for the students. They tend to be funny, educational and relaxing. They encourage creativity and students' desire for self-performance of their thoughts, views and intentions.

After piloting the full course of training lessons, the young people are expected to socialize more effectively and be aware that this is the correct way of communication also enhancing their emotional load, improving relationships with friends, and having an appropriate self-esteem.

For finding out teachers' and students' opinions, they filled in questionnaires prepared by the main partners.

Teachers answered to the following questions:

- *Which lesson plans have you used?*
- *In what way did the lesson plans give the pupils the possibility of working together and discussion?*
- *What evidence did you find that the pupils had the possibility of developing/using their social skills?*
- *If you were to mention any differences compared with your normal lessons, what would they be?*

- *Some of the lesson plans run over a period of time. If this was the case in the lesson plan you used, how did it affect the planning of your classes from first to final class?*
- *Did the lesson plans have any connection with a subject you were working on anyway, or did you use the lesson plans as separate lessons?*
- *If you were to use the same lesson plan again, what changes or additions would you make?*
- *If the lessons plans were to inspire you to have future lessons, can you describe in what way?*
- *What aspects of the lesson plan did your pupils find positive?*

Students answered to the following questions:

- *What was the subject of the lessons you attended?*
- *How did these classes differ from your usual classes?*
- *Was it necessary to work in cooperation with other pupils?*
- *Cooperating can be difficult. What was good about your class cooperation?*
- *How good were the possibilities of using your social skills (discussion, negotiation, tolerance, coming to an agreement)?*

Good - the same - not good (Put a ring round your answer)

Give reasons for your answer.

- *If you noticed any social skills used by your classmates, how would you describe them?*
- *How did you discover these social skills?*
- *Describe three good things about the lessons.*

3.3.2. The website

The life of the project is linked to its website (www.pss.comenius.eu), a very useful tool for teachers, who use or intend to use the Guide. It is in the five languages of the partners.

The website contains a description of the project, the Guide on developing social skills in electronic format to be downloaded, a virtual resource centre on social skills, a space where interested parties can insert their e-mail addresses and be informed on project initiatives, events related to the project, informative material in electronic format to be downloaded, pictures, and other information.

It is an “active” website, which – beyond containing a lot of information about the project, as well as resources on the theme of social skills – permits people to interact with the partners of the project, having a direct connection to them. This happens not only through the e-mail addresses of the contacts section; this is made possible also thanks to the “helpdesk”, which contains FAQs, i.e. “frequently asked questions” and the answers to them.

Some examples, taken from the “helpdesk” of the English partner:

Q: Are further permissions required to use whole lessons or parts of lessons?

A: As long as there is a clear acknowledgment of the PSS project as the source and copyright holder of any material, then this is not necessary.

Q: Will participating schools have the chance to share materials more widely?

A: This aspect of the project is part of sustainability and we hope that there will be continued collaboration. The project intends to encourage and support this and partner countries will provide details.

Q: Can students submit ideas and resources to share with each other?

A: Students in some countries have already been part of lesson development and contributions are valued. They should come through the partner country, so that ways can be found to share.

Q: Can there be any shared teacher events across countries?

A: This question will be discussed at project level though individual schools or groups of schools would be able to make independent arrangements to follow up on project ideas and this would be encouraged as it is part of the aims.

Q: Will students have the chance for contact or exchange?

A: This question will also be discussed at project level.

Q: How difficult has it been to arrange the sharing of approaches?

A: There have been many challenges due to the individual country differences and to practical arrangements, but these are also part of the purpose of collaborating in such projects and the learning in relation to this work will be disseminated.

Q: If a school wishes to make a link for other activities or projects can they do this?

A: Yes, through their own country link.

Q: Can younger pupils be involved in the use of this?

A: The project is focused on the secondary older phase and 14+ in particular, but institutions can certainly use the approaches and adapt them, if they choose to do so, and social skills are very relevant to all.

Q: Is there a place for non-teachers staff and parents?

A: The participation of support staff and non-professionals can be a very important feature of promoting and developing social skills, so they can of course be included as they are in some countries like the U.K. This would of course be subject to appropriate in-country arrangements and requirements.

4. Conclusions

The PSS project proves to be very useful for students and teachers.

It gives young people the opportunity of knowing each other better and of socializing. Thanks to this project, students can develop important skills useful in everyday life: the lesson plans written by the partners of the project permit active involvement of students, group dynamics and fellowship, they help in the developing of the ability to work in a group, to cooperate with others, to communicate adequately and to listen and negotiate.

Better social and interpersonal skills mean better quality of life.

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