

Communication in teaching | reflection



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Given what you have experienced during the first 21 hours of this study unit, reflect on an experience which involved communication, listening, group building or teamwork or conflict management skills (or any other skills covered in this part of the course) which occurred either during your personal secondary schooling or during your school observations throughout this year. Analyse and reflect upon this experience as explained in your course information sheets.

The Value of Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal skills are important for human relationships to initiate, maintain and terminate one`s relationships. According to Johnson & Johnson as cited in Johnson (2006) emphasis is made on the fact that “ relationships are the key to your humanness, psychological health, personal identity, social, cognitive, and moral development, ability to cope with stress and adversity, self-actualization, educational and career productivity, and physical health.” On the other hand Johnson (2006) states that “ it is only within constructive relationships that you may improve your interpersonal effectiveness and self-actualization.” (p. 25)

Experiences are the most effective situations in life that help the individual to mature, learn and develop his/her personality. Every experience serves as a guideline so as not to repeat the same wrong encounters or methodologies that happened in the past. We must therefore work hard to acquire strong interpersonal skills which enable us to communicate and interact well with each other.

Concrete Experience

I will be discussing my personal experience with my pupils during secondary school in form three. I used to make part of a group of students in a church school who used to participate and help the school to organise fund raising activities. In the beginning of form three I was encouraged by my friends to be nominated for the students` council elections. Elections for the Council used to be held at the beginning of every scholastic year. Each class was asked to elect one representative for a two-year term. These elections were class-based and overseen by the Class Tutor. I was elected as one of the student council representative.

My main tasks included promoting a greater environmental awareness. I was also responsible for the publication of leaflets regarding topics of interest in the school community, organising activities such as casual dress day in aid of charity and Christmas class decoration competition. We also used to organise fund raising activities to complement the school`s main annual fund raising event. The Council used to meet regularly once every month and this helped us to feel part of the school environment. Being members of the school council, together with the school administration we had the opportunity to set up the exams timetable for the half Yearly and Annual examinations. The teacher that used to monitor the students` council was very caring, helpful, understanding and down to earth. She used to encourage us to organise different activities for the benefit of the school. I was one of ten students from the secondary area.

Our relationship was friendly and team oriented. We worked hard to reach targets and our criticism towards each other was always of a constructive

nature. In fact we could freely discuss work related matters and find solutions to the difficult situations that arose from time to time. We were all hard workers, responsible for our actions and were capable to work well without supervision. As a team, we used to give feedback to the teacher who was responsible who helped us finalise our ideas about any particular activity. Before implementing a school activity every representative from each class used to discuss the matter with her classmates so as to ensure fairness with everyone. Furthermore, working with such a great team and with an understanding teacher was of utmost pleasure and satisfaction. We organised many other activities such as hot dog day, yogurt day and car wash day where parents contributed by bringing their cars to school on a Saturday morning and the students had to wash the cars. These activities were very instrumental in raising funds for the school. We also organised a play for Prize Day and decorated the school hall for that particular occasion. I also had to give a helping hand in the layout of the invites. I remember, Prize Day was held in March and we were awarded a prize for loyalty, teamwork and sense of responsibility. This was the result of the hard work and sense of commitment. We provided a good overall performance in our team and we built a good rapport with our teachers, assistant heads and the head of school.

The school theatre needed continuous maintenance to be more welcoming for the students and the staff. So we tried our best to organise lots of activities to gain funds for this purpose. Unfortunately, this came to an end when the teacher responsible for our students` council was pregnant and she had to go on maternity leave. She was replaced by another teacher but

things began to change very rapidly. The group started to disagree about lots of things being discussed as the teacher responsible was not doing her utmost to help us work for the school. I tried my best to get on well with everyone, however, difficult people tend to pose more challenging situations. The new teacher had difficult methods and ideas and her approach towards the school administration and staff was also different. Scheduled meetings used to be cancelled by the teacher in charge on a regular basis, due to other commitments, making it more difficult for us to communicate with each other.

The fact that the entire group was bothered and cooperation was lacked it made me feel uneager to work and participate. I tried to do my very best to adapt to the situation. I decided to take action about the situation because the group was split due to disagreements. So I discussed the issue with the group and we agreed to talk to the new teacher about the problem. She tried to understand our concerns and provide a solution to our dilemma but it seemed that her ineffective management skills showed poor results. The school theatre remained in the same state as the school did not have enough funds to cover the costs for refurbishment.

Reflection

My own experience within the teams I worked for tended to have both positive and difficult times. These may be the result of the diversity of characters as well as the different approaches which one implements in order to tackle the various situations. In everyday life one comes across all types of circumstances and this also applied to me nonetheless. Looking at a glance at the beginning of my experience, when I was elected as a student

council representative, I can tell that working with students and the teacher was a remarkable experience. This was because I could deal openly with all of them. Moreover, I was trained how to work within a group and to share ideas all for one aim.

Later on, I was asked to organise and help out with the play for Prize Day. This was indeed a challenge for me because I had never organised anything of the sort that was so important for the school. It was my first experience. However, everyone was helpful and reliable and I learnt a lot of skills from different tasks. This was not an easy job and since I had to deal with other students and the school administration, it was difficult at times to handle their needs. Being part of a students` council made me feel responsible for the other students and one has to try his/her best to meet others` request in the best possible way. One could understand certain complaints raised by students whenever an activity was not very well met by the others. At the end, our group together with the teacher who was responsible for the Council tried to adapt according to the needs and priorities of the school.

But as Council representatives we all worked hard to gain trust from students and the school administration and this made it possible for us to work hand in hand with them. We managed to build a good relationship. It is worth mentioning that we had strict rules to follow especially with regards to finance and we were very careful to choose certain activities that were educational and appealed to the school. We used to deal with these delicate situations in a calm atmosphere and we often tried to find out a win-win situation. The time spent working together was an amazing experience and our mutual support gave us a strong sense of unity. This helped us create a

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tranquil environment making it possible to increase productivity. Our effort was noted by the school administration and we were shown gratitude by being awarded a prize during the prize day. The goals we achieved and the positive feedback made us feel beneficial to the school and this gave us a great sense of satisfaction.

However, this attitude changed completely when the teacher responsible for the students` council had to resign due to pregnancy. Another teacher came to replace her and since then things changed for the worse. Our work became more difficult since the new teacher was unfamiliar to our routine and we had to start from scratch explaining the whole process to her. We were encountering various arguments and although I never took sides certain unwanted behaviour left a negative impact on me. I was not used to working in such an environment and I could not concentrate in carrying out my tasks due to certain conflicts. The new teacher was not taking the council seriously. We met for a very few times and planned fewer activities than before. She created a sense of lack of collaboration and indifference within the group and the students used to spend more time arguing rather than working. The team was changing and I was not feeling part of them. I am quite a hard worker and I wanted to do my utmost to overcome such a demotivating situation. I did not want to hinder my sense of commitment as if I knew that I was capable of offering a better service. Our teacher was authoritarian and she did not accept suggestions from members of the team. In fact I was very surprised when she tried to understand our queries and was trying to do her best. However, nothing happened and our plans to modernise the school theatre remained unchanged as the school did not

have enough funds for that type of refurbishment. The group split up and everyone ended working alone without any agreement.

Skills Needed and Skills Reflected Upon

The above description shows my first experience when being part of an effective group which came to an end. We had outstanding communication skills both verbally and non-verbally. Besides, our first teacher used to listen to our views and suggestions and this encouraged the participation of all concerned whilst the second teacher was indifferent to our ideas and lacked responsibility. The school administration seemed to have a sense of leadership yet it was always open to our suggestions each time a difficulty arose. The group was created with the aim of working for a common goal and we all managed to develop a positive attitude towards each other. This was accomplished since our main objective was to give our utmost.

Participation, determination and enthusiasm were the ingredients that made the group functioning well. Bearing in mind the content level, the procedural level and the socio-affective level as priorities of our agenda, helped us to keep strong. Every day was a new challenge for us and we never took each other for granted. The latter fostered respect among us.

At first it was an effective group since goals were clarified and changed for the best of the group and everyone worked in a cooperative way.

Communication was two - way, open and accurate expression of both ideas and feelings were empathised. Self-actualisation, innovation and interpersonal effectiveness were encouraged. (Comparison of Effective and Ineffective Groups-Lecture notes.) The strong sense of leadership skills could be felt as we worked and participated together to reach one goal and lots of

activities were accomplished. It was important for us to establish clear goals and discuss with our superiors the issues related to our tasks. The relationships between us, the teacher and the school administration were a positive one. We were always welcome to bring forward our opinions, and our suggestions were respected even though they were not always applied. Furthermore, we really felt part of a team since our synergy was used wisely to enhance the smooth running of our student council group. Thinking back, I now realise that although we used to negotiate well with the school administration, it would have been very relevant if we were offered some training during PSD lessons. Such sessions could have been targeted to tackle assertiveness as this would have been very helpful in the future and also to know how to deal with problems and with various characters where assertiveness was the order of the day. Therefore the skill to take unpopular decisions when these were really needed in order to be fair with the rest of the group members was of utmost importance.

Unlike the beginning of the first group, when the first teacher in charge resigned and another teacher took over, the group communication became one-way and ideas were only expressed; feelings were suppressed or ignored (lecture notes.) In other words, I consider the group as ineffective. First and foremost our teacher was not open for discussions and she rarely held any meetings. This was a result of lack of communication. Personally I think that I have adequate verbal and non-verbal communication skills, although I still believe that there is always room for improvement especially in stressful situations. However, it was very difficult to reach a compromise within this team. Assertiveness was far away from reality. Our teacher's

leadership skills were very unproductive. As a result the team members were either passive or aggressive. She needed to organise herself and integrate us within one group since her system was drifting us apart each and every day, and eventually the group was split in two.

An effective leader should possess the skill to inspire. Our teacher needed to be the person who should have encouraged us by sharing with us her enthusiasm towards a positive attitude. Unfortunately, synergy failed since she adopted a two ways and two measures attitude with regards to managing her students. It was her responsibility to support every member and create an honest and trustworthy environment. This would have improved our relationship, which would have in turn been possible to exchange ideas in order to identify and reach goals.

Hard to admit, this change de-motivated me. The entire group was frustrated and adopted a different approach. Before it was more challenging and satisfying and I tried to do my best to adapt to the new situation. I decided to act on the new situation because the group was split due to disagreements. So I discussed the issue with the group and we had agreed to talk to the new teacher about the problem. In spite of these difficulties and apathy among the members I still tried to take action to re-unite the group. With regards to the unproductive attitude which was adapted by the new teacher and which led to unwanted circumstances, I feel that I still need to improve my self confidence when facing an unfair situation. Furthermore, our supervisor did not have the right skills to manage a group and to acknowledge our problems. She lacked assertiveness and she was not capable of addressing individuals. She could not delegate the right tasks to the right members and

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maintain collaboration to raise funds for the school. At this point she should have held a meeting every month instead of cancelling meetings every time. It was essential to discuss and work on the positive issues and to improve negative ones as well as finding possible solutions to reach a consensus. Active listening which includes a psychological level by listening attentively to both verbal and non verbal content of another speaker and physical level were lacking in the approach adopted by the new teacher towards us. The physical level entails the word ' SOLER' (lecturer notes)

S- Face the person SQUARELY,

O- Adopt an OPEN position,

L- Remember that it is possible at times to LEAN toward the other person,

E- Maintaining good EYE-CONTACT,

R- Try to be relatively RELAXED while engaging in these behaviours. (Lecture notes - Listening and Non-verbal attending: SOLER).

Despite all the encounters with many people who may have different opinions and characters, I believe that one should still do his/her best in order to create a positive approach. Every individual should feel the need of contributing towards the creation of an enjoyable life within a community. This helps us reveal our identity and makes it much more possible to integrate healthily. Last but not least, although one may come across difficult people in life who restrain cooperation s/he should also keep in mind that these people are a minority. Mandela (2012) states that " If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him

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in his language, that goes to his heart.” On the other hand Johnson (2006) emphasises that “ to live is to communicate! All life communicates in some way. Communication is the foundation for all interpersonal relationships, and our daily lives are filled with one communication experience after another.”

References

Johnson, D. W. (2006). *Reaching Out* (ninth edition ed.). USA: Pearson International Edition.

- Sarah Bonello