

A PRACTICAL TAKE ON SOCIAL COMPETENCE

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Responsibility, mindfulness, and the ability to establish relationships and start and maintain conversations are essential in society. School is a pocket-size community where students can gain and practice various social competences safely. It is therefore necessary to make every effort to enable students to grow such competences in the school setting.

Every school year we draw up an educational and preventive programme. How do we do it? Do we invite students and parents to co-create it? How much is it “ours”? Inclusion of the school community in a diagnosis and design of activities that can meet the real needs of students, teachers, and parents is a demanding task but one that is worth taking. In my school, we employ the Valuable Schools model to our drafting of the programme. Our diagnosis relied on the school profile method that involved everyone in the institution. The discussion of the results and seeking shared values behind the diagnosed needs, which drove our actions, were an amazing experience for all. The students and parents felt heard and appreciated. We were able to establish important relationships that pay back in the teaching process. The educational and preventive programme was the outcome of our Valuable Schools working model. An action plan designed with our students followed the identification (diagnosis) of target areas. We selected a few that are important for our community. The most important thing is that students should be able to make decisions, take responsibility, build relationships, and get motivated. Many of our planned projects are to be implemented by students independently under the supervision of teachers. Social projects carried out in each class several times a year prove effective. The students prepare different activities for others both at school and outside. These are happenings, performances, and workshop sessions. They help develop many social competences through action.

Another form of increasing social competences are tripartite summary meetings once in six months. Parents, students, and teachers appreciate them. Conversation is at the heart of cooperation, understanding, and defining shared educational goals.

Responsibility and sensitivity to the needs of others is yet another important competence. We took advantage of the Unique Learning Code to draw attention to everybody’s needs in the learning process. Our students took tests that demonstrated how different their learning needs are. We built on the test results to create spaces that encourage better learning. Every day we take care to offer students optimum conditions to learn new and ambitious things. They have their say in matters such as classrooms and corridor design. We set up places when students can chill out and talk. They also proposed that a school silent zone be created.

We appreciate our students talents and skills. At the end of the year, everyone receives “honours” attached to the school certificate as colourful stripes. Each colour represents a different competence or skill. In this way, we want to show appreciation to every individual student and strengthen their potential.

If we want to learn social competence effectively, we must use every school situation and give more room to students’ initiatives. We must also accept that everything will not work perfectly right away. It is worth taking advantage of various programmes and external projects that support schools in similar campaigns. They should create a real opportunity to grow social competence through students’ activity and sense of agency. We should invest in what we can do together.