

**My conclusions and reflections after the conference,
Education is a Relationship. Communication. Competence. Space.**

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Relationships at school and the development of social competence were discussed during the conference panel and workshop session, Let's Do It Together: Social Competence in Action.

Children learn effectively when they feel well at school; when they know that they are part of a team, and their affairs are important to teachers and parents. It should be kept in mind when building a class team. I like to liken a class of students to a team in which we are TOGETHER: children, parents, and teachers. We should build good relationships in the classroom and school with greater awareness. This is how we can lay foundations for good cooperation and shared problem-solving. Problems are sure to come up during day-to-day school life.

School does not prepare for life. School is life. Therefore, we should make the best of the school years to empower children to build their social competence in action, so that they can be independent and can assume responsibility for their own learning process. And this can be done when the teacher reduces their role of "knowledge vehicle" and works more on organizing a setting that is conducive to learning and supports the learners' development.

How can we make it happen?

Here is a handful of examples from my teaching practice.

When I start working with a new class, I focus on establishing the children-parents-school connection. I feel responsible for the grade-one team that is in the process of formation and will operate for the next few years. How we lay this foundation will determine our future together.

Even before summer holidays, before the first graders come to school, I meet the parents and my future students at a workshop so that we can get to know one another. My aim is to find out what their abilities are, what they like, what they do not like, what their favourite games and interests are. I listen to the parents. Everybody is given time to talk about their child for a moment. Such a meeting comes first and is one of many to come because good relations with parents are essential for good cooperation.

I do not hold teacher-parent conferences but ordinary meetings where we hold a mini-workshop devoted to any current issues in our class team. In the first grade, I always begin with a workshop on learning without grades and, which is the most important thing for parents, how the children's progress and attainment level will be reported. During the school year, I invite parents and children to at least one joint workshop session. We test various games that develop children's skills and can be easily done at home.

This is my way to meet parents' needs halfway: they will always inquire how to work with the child at home. I do not assign homework. I do not expect parents to work with children on exercises. Instead, I want them to read with their children, play games, talk, answer questions. In this way, we complement each other's efforts: I do it at school and parents at home. We join forces to stimulate the children's' development well.

A key element in building good relations with parents and children is a dialogue held at the end of the school year. We take this opportunity to talk about the child's level of attainment, show his or her development and plan the child's near future together, i.e. what to improve and develop.

Another crucial thing is to build a team of kids working together and taking care of one another. Every day we talk, forge bonds, and create rituals. This is to help the child feel safe and part of the team.

I often use the word "team" when talking to children to stress the importance of cooperation. Team members do not compete, they work together. You are part of our team, so you are not alone. I never stop looking for new team-building tools and ideas. These can be interactive games, such as those provided in Klaus Vopel's books. These games facilitate contacts with others, build trust and a sense of responsibility in the team. Even physical education classes provide an opportunity to nurture good relationships. The Sherborne Developmental Movement approach works well for this purpose.

Exercises in twos, threes, and in the entire team facilitate integration and show that together we can do more. They build a sense of security and trust that there will always be someone in the class to offer a helping hand when in trouble.

Step by step, I transfer responsibility for the team climate and good relationships to children. But to make it happen, I need to give them proper tools. We hold daily conversations in a circle at the beginning and end of the day. We pay attention to what has happened throughout the day, good or bad, and see where the root cause was. I try to teach children how to be attentive to others; that is why, we work a lot in pairs and small groups. Through this, I can watch the beginnings of peer-to-peer tutoring.

Right from the beginning of grade one, learners take part in the planning of the learning process. They work in a project-based approach; perform self-diagnosis; and reflect on their progress toward achieving educational and other goals. Having done this many times, I know (I have seen it) that they develop a very important competence: "I know how to learn." Having grasped that, they will be able to face challenges in the changing world.

Proposed read:

- Klaus W. Vopel - Gry i zabawy interakcyjne dla dzieci i młodzieży, Wydawnictwo Jedność
- Mone Welche – Ukierunkowana na relacje Pedagogika Ruchu według koncepcji Weroniki Sherborne, wydawnictwo Harmonia Universalis
- Carol Dweck – Nowa psychologia sukcesu, wydawnictwo Muza