

**“First day of school in the new class” | role play**

<b>Short description</b>	The participants experience through role play the influence that shared values can have on people's thoughts and behaviour. On the other hand they are able to experience what a clash of values can lead to, what it means to belong to a minority that is subject to the strong influence of the thinking and behaviour of the majority, on which it is also dependent.
<b>Topics</b>	Personal values, constructive and destructive dynamics in groups
<b>Learning objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of the constructive potential of shared values and viewpoints</li> <li>• Recognition of conflict potential of clashing values</li> </ul>
<b>Setting</b>	Unlimited, whole group
<b>Time frame</b>	90 - 100 min.
<b>Materials</b>	Flip chart paper and marker, personal project diary
<b>Instructions</b>	<p><i>The starting point for the role play:</i></p> <p>It is the first day of school after the summer holidays. Three new girls and/or boys are waiting in front of the school for their new teacher. The rest of the class is already waiting for the teacher in the classroom to arrive soon and begin the lesson. The three new students do not know each other. The class on the other hand is already an established group after two years together. They know each other well, or even extremely well, having experiences in common. Shortly before the holidays the teacher mentioned that three new individuals would be “joining” in the class and need to be “integrated” in the group.</p> <p><i>Exercise leadership:</i></p> <p>The role of the class teacher can be taken by the teaching assistant in person or entrusted to a volunteer. The role is entirely passive, there being no planned interventions by the class teacher in the role play. He/she is rather a passive, detached observer.</p> <p><i>How are the groups formed and instructed?</i></p> <p>Three volunteers form the little group of new students. Only when they have been moved to a different room are they informed of the starting situation and assigned their task, which is integrate in the class as quickly as possible. They would then after about 10 minutes be brought into the class, which would be busy discussing a task assigned before the holidays. This is a good opportunity, says the teacher, to join in and contribute to the discussion. If they (the new students) find it difficult they should give each other a little support. And if it doesn't go well straight away they must persevere nonetheless. It is perfectly normal at the beginning, and is a challenge also for the class to accept new members. The class teacher will soon join them to bring them to their new class.</p>

The existing class must have significantly more participants than the new group. At least four times as many participants in the class (at least 12 in the case of three new students). Task: the class is to discuss an agreed topic (e.g. planning a school trip), with a code substituted for three constantly recurring words: e.g. class=cheese sandwich, train=nail, school trip=TV. A consequence of the consistent use of these three codes is that the new students have no chance to join in the discussion. But what can the “old” class members do when the new ones begin to ask questions or to change the subject in an effort to find another way to gain access? In such a case they should adopt a disinterested and dismissive behaviour, but in a subtle rather than an extreme manner. Now and then they should accept a question or take note of a reference, welcoming the new participants but with a basic attitude that remains dismissive, disinterested and unfriendly.

There will also be observers. At least two persons are to observe the “old” class and its behaviour and at least two others are to observe the three new members and their behaviour. The observers remain as far as possible from the scene and take notes (key words). The task for the observers of both groups: Note what behaviour leads to what reaction, in particular, who is dominant in both groups, how this is manifested, who “just lets it happen”, who is really passive, how the discussion proceeds in the class, and how, how long and how persistent the new students are in seeking access to the class. It is also incumbent on the observers after the role play to put their notes regarding these questions into some order and to present them briefly to the plenum.

*Instruction for the exercise leader:*

The main purpose of this role play is on the one hand to enable the participants to experience the potential of shared values, but also to experience values that at some point in time are irreconcilable. In a final reflection it should be a matter of finding answers to the following questions: What were the shared values on both sides (in the “old” class as well as the new group)? Were there indeed any? Were there perhaps differences within the two interest groups? How were these expressed in the behaviour of the individuals? How did the “old” feel in their assigned role? How did the new ones feel in theirs? In this exposure to value differences did the new students try to integrate the success factors identified in the previous exercise in their behavior? If yes, what was the effect? If no, does it make sense even so to maintain these with regard to future challenges.

*Reflection:*

Reflecting together is indispensable following this role play, since it can lead to ambivalent and perhaps quite diffuse emotions. The intensity of the effect is difficult to evaluate as it depends above all on the readiness of the participants to enter into the role play and how closely they followed the instructions as to the roles. The setting however is per se designed for emotional learning, which is why plenty of room must be provided for reflection. The participants must have the opportunity to express themselves and it must be possible to “peel away” the

roles. There are many ways in which the teacher can support this process, allowing plenty of time for reflection and ensuring that all participants are able to express themselves. Openly receive feedback from all participants so that they can say they are being taken seriously. Point out that this has been an exercise and that both sides were acting on the basis of clear instructions. It would make sense at the end of the period of reflection for all concerned to leave the exercise room together, rounding off this intensive sequence with a brief and enjoyable group activity.

*Outlook:*

Reference can be made to the insights gained from this exercise in the subsequent modules in various contexts.