

## **SELF EVALUATION AND ACTION RESEARCH – THE PATH TOWARDS GREATER QUALITY**

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### **I. Quality in schools – self-evaluation, not external monitoring**

Contemporary school is under a great deal of pressure from the fast changing world. Economic and social transformation is inflicting dramatic change upon the traditional educational culture. Some are of the opinion we are witnessing the greatest changes, related to globalisation and the forming of new alliances. The connectedness of Slovenia to the European area, the changes in the workforce market, the increasing influence of clients and taxpayers, alongside the demographic change, are compelling schools to rethink their mission statements. The school environment cannot escape the changes occurring in the society. The public applies ever stricter standards to the quality of schools. Thus the new Law on Vocational and Professional Education sets down as an obligation for schools to develop professional quality and regularly report to the public the results of their activities. Even though schools do not function in a genuine market environment, they feel a great pressure from the competition. The staff of many schools is thinking of strategies for keeping their school afloat. Schools must prove they are better than others. The need to meet the needs of the users and create a positive public image is no longer the choice of greatest visionaries. It is a necessity. To establish a reason for one's own existence means to take part in changing the society.

Schools in Slovenia are increasing in quality. The slogan “For a better school” has been behind many efforts to improve (Velikonja, 1996). The concept of quality has been the research topic of many sciences. The movement for the management of education quality is relatively new. The beginnings of the movement go fifteen years back. The practice of quality implementation in several countries has shown that the differences between various concepts and models blend somehow. The model has never been applied in exactly the same form in different countries, nor does it exclude, as such, any other model (Trnavčević, 2000). When speaking of quality, we cannot ignore the fact that there is no single all-encompassing model. There are many specific definitions of quality. The slight differences between definitions show we have different concepts of quality. When establishing the quality of a specific service we must take into account the following:

1. the product or a service of the same quality is viewed differently by people of different experience, age, or education, within the same country;
2. the same level of quality is judged differently by the same people, depending on timing and situation;
3. the same product or service may satisfy different needs;
4. different people apply different quality standards;
5. the quality people expect of others depends on who those others are;
6. the level of quality we expect of others is higher than the standard we apply to ourselves (Bahčič, 1999).

From the definitions of several authors, such as Crosby, Juran, Groocook, Clark, Smith and Deming (Bahčič, 1999), Sallis and Winch (Trnavčević, 2000) we can observe the differences in the concept of quality. We may divide the definitions in two groups: those which measure

quality according to specification, and those which compare the product with the demands and expectations of clients. The third group defines quality as the strategic choice of the management and the employees. The first ensure safety, the second improvement, and the third development. The needs and expectations of the users need not only be met, but also surpassed. Quality therefore cannot be pinned down into a single definition, for it depends largely on the goals the staff set for themselves.

The quality has appeared relatively late in the area of education. The demand for quality in the state school system became prevailing in the second half of previous century. The question of how to achieve quality in educational institutions has arisen. In some countries, for example in Scotland, this brought about the establishment of school inspection (Nolimal, 1999). Time showed that indirect control and self-evaluation are much more suitable than school inspection. Self-evaluation can be interpreted as a mechanism which enables self-improvement and gives schools the opportunity to monitor their work. (Maes, 2005) The word *quality* has been present in the Slovenian educational institutions in the recent years. The opinion argued in this paper is, that the quality educational work is brought about by the method of self-evaluation, combined by external control, already reflected in the consensus-based demands or indicators.

## **I. 1. Quality development through three projects**

### **I. 1. a. The Mirror Project (*Ogledalo*)**

In 1997, we decided to start a project focused on the quality at our school. We wished to bring about some changes and improve ourselves. The Mirror Project, led by the National Education Institute of Slovenia, enabled us to use the self-evaluation method. Self-evaluation did not consist solely of the expression of views, opinions and feelings of the employees. We appraised quality, based on more or less objective evaluations. “Whenever the objective of self-evaluation is to persuade the surroundings as to the certain quality level, the self-evaluation process may easily transform into self-justification or even fraud.” (Kump, 1995:17) We wished for an objective portrayal of our work instead of the ideal image. We wanted to take a look in the mirror and see how the users perceived us. Co-workers held the mirror to the leadership, parents to the school as a whole, and final-year students to the teachers.

We carried self-evaluation out on many levels: leadership, the organisation of work and ensuring working conditions, co-operation with parents and the educational process. The purpose of self-evaluation was not to rank the teachers. It was not meant as help to the principal when putting together an evaluation of a staff member. The guaranteed anonymity was a means of building the trust in the project and the feeling of safety. Our wish for anonymity and data security, however, caused that some information was simply not available, for example the comparison between different subject fields and between teachers with varied years of teaching experience. Since we had focused onto our own picture in the mirror we could not spread the examples of good practice, as it remained hidden – as did examples of bad one. What we had gained, however, was a culture of self-evaluation, reflection on one's work, dialogue on quality and the sense of belonging to the school. Our goal was progress, development and professional growth of both teachers and students. We wished to improve our work and bring it closer to the expectations and wishers of users. We but partly realised that goal. But the path we had walked was perhaps more important than the goal itself. The means of data collection were surveys, the already gathered data (Lakerveld, Bauer, Williams and Christ call it *non-disruptive means*), reports and minutes. Quantitative data was analysed according to the criteria and established discrepancies. When establishing criteria,

we determined some indicators of good service, drawing upon the knowledge of our teachers from the fields of pedagogy, didactics, sociology, psychology, management...

The survey results were interpreted jointly by the staff. This was followed by discussion as to the activities which would improve some of the results. Sometimes it appeared we were at a loss regarding the data. Schools, involved in the project, started exchanging the results and comparing them. The discussions led to an entire new culture of dialogue.

Most of the teachers compared their results and achievements with the expectations and results of their users. It was not simple to embrace the philosophy of change and convergence. For this step, we needed mature, autonomous, critical and professionally confident teachers.

When interpreting answers, it was at times easier to establish that the students had not understood the questions, that they had not taken the survey seriously, and that their opinions were based on inexperience. There were high points and low points to the project. With time, a critical mass of teachers emerged, who were anxious to work on improving themselves.

The project went on for almost three years. More and more teachers took part in it as it grew, and all teachers were involved in the self-evaluation phase on the level of the school as a whole.

### **I. 1. b. The Learning School Network Project (*Projekt Mreža učerih se šol*)**

In 2002 we got involved with the Learning School Network Project I, and later on II. The project was led by the counsellors of the National School for Leadership in Education. It was based on the theory and practice of continuous improvement. Its purpose was to connect the teachers' professional and personal development with the development of the school. The schools, involved in the network, introduced examples of good practice to other schools. The staff of these schools continually educated themselves in fields where we wished for changes. The ones who encouraged change were the members of the Quality Team. In debates we organised we located the problems and found the ways of dealing with them. We gradually implemented changes. Finally, we evaluated the course of the project, the ongoing processes and our achievements.

We found we had grown professionally and personally, and accepted new initiatives. We began to discuss the methods and forms of work within the groups of teachers of field areas. The majority of staff embarked on careful planning of more contemporary work methods. We monitor the achieved competences of teachers in that area still.

### **I. 1. c. The project of quality assessment and assurance**

In Slovenia, many project have been established within the *National Commission for the Quality Assessment and Assurance in Pre-school, Primary and Secondary and Adult Education*. Representatives of all educational institutions were members of this commission. Our school took part in the project with great expectations. The project of quality assessment and assurance offered a handbook with instructions regarding self-evaluation. The latter process was based on subjective assessment of all target publics as well as objective quantifiable data. The assessment, contained in surveys and other means of data collection, had to be compared with the data which we are obliged to collect, as an educational institution, in any case. In this way, we were able to put side by side the opinions and views of users and the already collected data. The latter were for instance: the number of school library books per student, students' reading habits, attendance records, achievements in competitions, final grades, school-leaving grades, drop-out, teacher's promotions... Along with the project's handbook, came also the help of an expert advisor. Our expectations were: to establish objective discrepancies as to the user, partner and public expectations, to accentuate our achievements in a transparent manner, to hold on to the good and to systematically improve the areas in which we as yet fall short of expectations. We interpreted the data on several

levels. Debates and workshops enriched the culture of evaluation and dialogue. In analysis, we searched for causes and produced strategies to dispose of shortcomings. We included the parents' representative in the Quality Team, whose members were teachers of different subjects. The principal was a member as well. We informed the parents about the results of the evaluation process.

As long as the school exists, we have been gathering information and monitoring the fields of parent communication, leadership, staff development, social climate, class climate and communication.

Therefore we had decided to develop, within the aforementioned project, the area of actual class work. 416 students, 29 teachers of theoretical and 14 teachers of practical subjects were involved in the project.

We collected our findings in a self-evaluation report. The next stage was quality assurance, in which we were to agree on activities which would improve the shortcomings and the students' grades.

It was found the following areas needed improvement:

- work methods (from lecture approach to more contemporary methods, from teacher-oriented to learner-oriented),
- interdisciplinary approach to the learning processes,
- motivation.

Next, there was the phase of development planning. A long-period, systematic and consistent follow-through of the activities is necessary to achieve improvements.

In all previous projects that had to do with quality, we had missed the systematic and consistent approach. Some staff acted as if the evaluation phase was all that had been needed to achieve the project goals. Others, when faced with enormous efforts required to change their own mode of teaching, gradually began to lose the necessary energy. The most dangerous state of affairs was when seemingly everything was going according to plan.

## **I. 2. Analysis of quality project effectiveness**

The transfer of the Deming Cycle (Velikonja, 1996, Praprotnik, 1999, Cencič, 2000, Dodič, 2006) and Shewhart PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) Cycle to our continuous improvement practice, showed us the shortcomings of our quality assurance. It became clear that we often had not controlled or evaluated the processes based on goals, and that our achievements had not been permanent or transparent. It had occurred that some of the staff had not been acquainted with quality assurance activities at the school, and which phase of change we had reached.

We found out our two weakest phases were verification – evaluating whether the achievements corresponded to our goals, and validation – progress assessment. The lack of the latter caused for some staff to lose the initial energy. Due to the absence of comparison to the goals some staff were satisfied by the already achieved goals and did not seek to go further.

SWOT analysis made us realise we had achieved substantial progress in many areas.

Unfortunately, we had not been systematical regarding all changes. Often we had not evaluated the result of the improvement, so we sometimes perceived the quality establishment as a one-off occurrence, or as a project which has a beginning and an end. Upon consulting literature, we see other schools and companies had encountered the same difficulties. Sallis (in Cenič, 2000) states that a complex quality control is hard work. It takes a lot of time and energy. "The majority of employees prefer the comfort of the known and the easy to grasp to on-going change." (Cenič, 2000:39).

To paraphrase Strittmatter (in Messner, 2005): self-evaluation is successful if teachers are obliged to practice it, if they are capable of it, and if they wish to practice it. So wish,

obligation and capability are the required factors on teacher's part, if self-evaluation is to be successful.

Some teachers were uncomfortable with evaluations. The number of these grew smaller and smaller with each activity. Some simply could not accept the fact that they, the assessors, were to be assessed. Some of the students found it unusual to evaluate the teacher's work. Self-evaluation provokes the feeling of professional and personal vulnerability and credibility loss.

The culture of performance evaluation needs to be implemented as a long-term process. Improvements need to be discussed often and with all students, parents and other publics. Our research had shown that the Parents' Council's members were well-informed of our activities. Much less – almost none information is in the hands of the parents who only occasionally attend the class teacher's office hours. The students who are not active in the Students' Union, know even less about them. The publics with which we are not directly involved in particular projects, have no knowledge of them. The discussion of quality cannot only be the matter of school management. Quality is everybody's responsibility. Our activities, goals and achievements have not been transparent. Self-evaluation must become everyday routine of every teacher in a quality school.

### **I. 3. Action Research Performance**

We asked ourselves how to achieve a greater involvement regarding change, systematically monitoring of the processes, their transparency and action. We found the answer in action research. "Action research is a special approach when the evaluation and improvement of professional activities is done by the persons who perform these activities. It is a concept of self-evaluation and development..." (Bauer, Messner, 2005:35)

The action research method was a possibility to study and improve our work as part of a group. Good school is made by good teachers. The greatest changes are not implemented by outside institutions or educational policy or legislation. The real changes are brought about by teachers who **wish to solve the problem** or relieve the tension, **know** how and **believe** in the outcome. Action research joins all three factors. Upon reflection on our work, on how the users perceived us, we posed the following questions:

- How to develop ecological awareness and responsibility of our students?
- How to achieve that the students will treat school inventory and equipment in a responsible manner?
- How to improve learning methods and techniques of our students?
- How to ensure faster and more efficient inclusion of first-year students into the new environment?
- How to reduce the stress the students feel when they come from primary to secondary school?
- How to ensure interdisciplinary cooperation of teachers in setting tasks from realistic future working environment?

The teachers formed groups according to their interests regarding the above issues. Work in small research works enables **critical friendship** amongst colleagues. In collecting and interpreting data we obey the rule of **triangulation**. It involves self-evaluation, peer-monitoring ("critical friends") and institutional review. The focus on quality thus becomes systematic, structured and continuous. In action research, we consistently search for and form success indicators. These indicators represent certain standards. Consistent setting of standards reduces the possibility of inexact and badly argued evaluations. Due to the indicators we collect data and issue documents which testify of the progress.

Action research has six phases: 1. problem identification, 2. situation description, 3. plan of action, 4. data collection, 5. effects analysis. Comparison to Deming's PDCA Cycle shows



that these are in fact corresponding cycles. First two phases stand for P – plan, the third stands for D – do, data collection corresponds to C – check, and effects analysis is A – act. In the A-phase we pose the question what and how to improve in the next cycle. If anything had gone wrong, we take a single-loop action. This means we quickly resolve the consequences or prevent unwanted events. With the double-loop action we pause and reflect on what we had learned, what we are going to plan. Thereupon, a new circle begins. In the Deming PDCA Cycle, continuous improvement is assured. Action research, however, mostly involves three or four cycles to solve the problem by implementing the relevant change.

We are certain that teachers as professionals and researchers, take responsibility for their own development, systematically gather data, exchange it with other teachers and improve their practice. Such teachers, within the system of quality management and assurance, improve the performance of the school as a whole.

## **II.1 Why teacher's communication patterns should be changed**

In the preface we have already mentioned that economic and social transformation is inflicting dramatic change upon the traditional educational culture. The traditional transmission lesson model does not fit the demands of modern society and that is why modern lesson planning is based on the ideas of constructivism.

The transition from transmission lesson model to a more up-to-date teaching approach takes a thorough change of understanding the teacher's role. Until recently he was known as an authority that “has all the answers”. His task was “to put” all this knowledge into the heads of the students. The only responsibility this kind of a teacher had had was that students became well-educated. He had to motivate and also raise them. To manage these social demands, teachers built hierarchical relationships and direct communication patterns between them and students. They made such hierarchical communication patterns reasonable by forming specific meanings of some terms, which are crucial for the teaching practice: learning, teaching, authority, discipline, etc. In the represented mental model, the central term is the understanding of responsibility in the teacher-student relationship: the teacher's responsibility is to make the students learn – he has to be the active one, who conveys scientific thoughts, and the student's task is to be a more or less passive listener. This term connects all the others in the coherent wholeness.

According to a new constructivist learning paradigm, in which everyone constructs their own knowledge in their way, teachers should change their understanding of the term “responsibility for learning”. The teacher's task is no longer such, to make students learn, but rather to organize a teaching experience, through which the students will learn in a more effective and easy way. Such changes cannot be made just by changing the public curriculum. Teaching is not only managing the prescribed content during classes – teaching is about establishing a relationship between a teacher and a student and about managing relationship between students. A teacher can manage students' learning only by involving himself into a relationship with students.

In Slovene schools, directive communication pattern still prevails. This was proven by a research, finished in 2005 (Bizjak, 2005). The author of the research tried to find out the most common characteristics in teachers' counseling conversations with students who have learning difficulties, which are embedded in the Slovene school culture. 152 dialogues, which were written by primary and secondary school teachers, had been analyzed. We found out that counseling model which prevails in Slovene schools has all the characteristic of the instructive accession to problem solving. Teacher has a dominating position in it. His dominating position reflects in allocation of power between a teacher and a student and in the fact that the teacher assumes the leading position in all phases of the conversation. The

analysis of teacher's messages about responsibility to the student shows a big difference between his public and hidden personal theory about allocation of responsibility. The consequences of that difference are double messages about allocating of responsibility for solving their learning difficulties which are sent from the teacher to students all the time. Teachers tell them all the time that if they don't do anything about their learning problem, it will not be solved. But on the other side teachers take initiative during conversation and by taking initiative they send a message to the student that the teacher is responsible for finding and carrying out the solution. This pattern is shaped in the very beginning, because the teacher is the one who starts the conversation about student's problem; it continues, because the teacher can't stimulate student's reflective thinking and because he persistently ignores important topics which are offered by a student (such as messages about student's feelings, etc.). The pattern is finished when the teacher offers a solution and his help before the student realizes that he needs it. The teacher ends the conversation as soon as the student accepts the offered solution – making a plan about fulfilling a solution is not a characteristic of the typical counseling pattern.

Characteristics of students' responses to teachers' talking strategies are the following:

- Students often, spontaneously, express negative emotions about their problems. As a rule teachers ignore these topics.
- Students talk about teachers' ideas four times more often than about their own. In half cases they accept teachers' ideas and in half cases they refuse them.
- When students refuse teachers' solutions they use arguments which are typical of learned helplessness. (Learned helplessness is a belief that one cannot do anything to solve his problem.)
- As a rule students accept a responsibility for their decisions only when they want to resist teachers as authorities. (“I don't want!”)
- In the phase of forming a solution students usually accept the teacher's idea, sometimes they complement it with a detail of their own. When they formulate their own solution, it is usually very general and stereotypical. (“I should learn more. I will get better grades.”)

Described analysis of teachers' communication patterns was done on the sample of counselling dialogues. Because the teacher's understanding of his responsibility for the learning outcome, his understanding of the terms authority, discipline, etc. is the same when he manages class and when he tries to help students with learning difficulties we believe that the mentioned issues are the same in the teacher- student interaction in the class. They appear as a transmission model of class managing. So in order to move from mere transmission of information to a more up-to-date teaching approach, it takes a thorough change of teacher-student interaction patterns which are a part of school culture. The following question is how to change a school culture?

## **II.2 How to talk to a student, so he will find the solution to his problem himself and will also carry it out**

We will present a project which has already been mentioned. It was carried out for two years in one of Slovene vocational schools (in Srednja Biotehniška šola Kranj). During the project teachers perceivably changed their counselling strategies and developed their capability of reflective analysis of their dialogues. That is how they became able of self-development in this area at the end of the project. Most students, which were included in the project, decreased skipping classes. The project group is mostly proud of the success which was not

planned: a member of the project group successfully helped a student with auto-aggressive symptoms.

Defining a problem was the first step in our action research. We used the technique of formulating a research question. After a deep discussion, members of the project group formulated a research question: How to talk to a student who skips classes a lot, so he will find the solution of his problem himself and will also carry it out.

In the next step the members of the project group wanted to find out their strong and weak points of their counselling skills. They decided to write down their conversations and they later analyzed them. Every teacher chose one student who skipped the class a lot and started his own case study. To meet methodological requirement about triangulation, the teachers analyzed dialogues from four perspectives. Every dialogue was analysed by a counselling expert, who wrote them feed back, every teacher did the self-evaluation, and he got the feed back from his critical friend. In the end, they showed their conversations to the students and interviewed them.

The counselling expert's feed back was identical to the research findings about typical issues of teacher's counselling strategies in Slovenian school culture, which was mentioned previously. In reviewing statements from teachers' self-analysis and feed backs of critical friends they found out that they had difficulties with process analysing. Most of feed backs didn't refer to a process of counselling but to a content of dialogues. On the basis of these findings the group members decided about further course of action research:

1. "We will formulate the criteria of good (professional) counselling, which will be a basis for our conversation analyses.
2. In counselling training we will concentrate on developing our capability to analyse process (self-analysing and critical friendship)."

In the next step the project group prepared a half-structured interview in which students analysed one of the conversations. The results are very interesting.

<b>A. HOW DOES THE STUDENT FEEL DURING THE CONVERSATION?</b>	FREQUENCY	%
1. NEGATIVE FEELINGS	73/86	84,9%
2. POSITIVE FEELINGS	6/86	7%
<b>B. HOW DOES THE STUDENT UNDERSTAND TEACHER'S INTENTIONS?</b>		
1. A CHANGE IN THE STUDENT'S BEHAVIOUR WHICH LEADS TO TE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM	38/82	46,3%
2. TAKING CARE OF THE STUDENT	24/80	30%
3. REDJECTION OF THE TEACHER'S	19/80	23,7%
<b>C. WHAT DOES THE STUDENT WANT TO ACHIEVE DURING THIS CONVERSATION?</b>		
1. INDULGENCE	24/82	29,3%
2. TO ESCAPE FROM THIS CONVERSATION	22/82	26,8%
3. WISHING THE TEACHER'S EMPHATY	17/82	20,7%
4. WISHING TO CHANGE HIS OWN BEHAVIOUR	11/82	13,4%
5. TO TRANSFER THE RESPOSIBILITY TO SOMEONE ELSE	5/82	6,1%
<b>D. WHAT MAKES THE STUDENT TO FULFILL THE ARRANGEMENT?</b>		
<b>a. ISSUES WHICH INCREASE PROBABILITY</b>		



1. STUDENT'S DECISION	21/72	29,2%
2. IMPORTANCE OF THE GOALS CONCERNING SCHOOL, STUDENT'S POINT OF VIEW	13/72	18%
3. TEACHER'S POSITIVE ATTITUDE	8/72	11,1%
4. CLEAR LIMITS, PUNISHMENTS	7/72	9,7%
<b>b. ISSUES WHICH DECREASE PROBABILITY</b>		
1. NEGATIVE CUSTOMS	12/72	16,7%
2. LACK OF GOALS CONCERNING SCHOOL	9/72	12,5%
3. LOSING CONNECTION WITH LEARNING CONTENT	6/72	8,3%
4. POOR RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS IN THE CLASS	4/72	5,5%
5. BORING LECTURES	2/72	2,8%
<b>E. HOW SHOULD THE CONVERSATION BE DIFFERENT, SO IT WOULD MAKE THE STUDENT FULFILL THE AGREEMENT?</b>		
1. CLEAR, CONSISTENT LIMITS	31/85	36,5%
2. STUDENT'S DECISION	11/35	31,4%
3. REWARDING PROGRESS	15/85	17,6%
4. TEACHER'S EMPATHY	14/85	16,5%
5. PARENTS' INCLUSION	8/85	9,4%
6. GOOD CONVERSATION	6/85	7%

On the basis of all mentioned feed backs, the teachers were discussing what should they change to make their counselling more efficient. Besides developing their capability to reflect the process of counselling, they set themselves the following tasks:

1. forming clear criteria of professional conversation,
2. developing listening skills,
3. dealing with feelings,
4. setting limits,
5. developing skills for stimulating student's thinking about the solution.

That is how teachers formed their future tasks in their action research. They started with a counselling training which was combined with problem solving techniques. The project group met once a month. Before every meeting two members put down their dialogues with a student from their case studies. First they analyzed them by themselves with a special tool for self-reflection. Then they got a feedback from their critical friends. During the meeting we analysed every case in the group. By group analysing we tried to deepen our understanding of the problem. Then the author of the dialogue presented his analysis and in role playing he tried to improve the stated deficiencies in their counselling strategies. After five meetings we could see progress in teachers' capabilities of reflecting communication process and their counselling skills.

#### AN EXAMPLE OF DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHERS' COUNSELLING STRATEGIES

##### a. An example of the first conversation:

T: Why have you skipped classes again?

S: But I've already told you I would bring a note!

T: And I've already told you that you should visit your gym classes all the same.

S: But I do go to them.

T: And why did the teacher write down that you were missing?

S: But I will bring a note.

T: I don't like how you're avoiding this. You know very well that you should attend classes if you want to finish school.

S: Here we go again...

b. An example of the last conversation:

T: Tim, I would like to speak with you. You've missed the last two classes three times in the last two weeks.

S: I had to go home once, and the other time I had a dentist's appointment... My Mom will write you a note. I keep track of the new lessons in class.

T: You always miss the math. Your grades are getting worse.

S: I will improve them.

T: You've said that the last time already. Couldn't you tell me, what the problem is? If something troubles you, you should tell that to someone.

S: ... I don't like math.

T: But if you go home, the problem doesn't go away.

S: I know. I had the chance to improve my grades three time already, but I can't study. I am afraid of math...

AN EXAMPLE OF DEVELOPING A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONVERSATION

a. An example of the first reflex ion:

"I don't have much luck with such students. In my experience they know very well, how many classes they can skip. I would therefore suggest greater actions. It would help, if the class teachers or other teachers, whom the student trusts, spent more time with him/her, go for a coffee and talk to him/her..."

b. An example of the last reflex ion:

"I'VE MANAGED to earn the student's trust.

I DIDN'T MANAGE to avoid the monologue at the end of conversation. I gave too much advice.

NEXT TIME I WILL CHANGE: I will ask the student many questions and thus encourage his/her thinking. Instead of giving advice, I will ask the student to suggest his/her own solution."

High order changes often occur unexpectedly and sometimes they are even paradoxical. Something like that happened during our project, too. Somewhere in the last third of the project one of the members of the project team wrote this reflection: »Yesterday I noticed a student in my class who had strange scratches on her wrists. I had already noticed such scratches last year. Last year, when I asked her what had happened, she answered that her cat had scratched her. And I decided to believe her. Yesterday I noticed scratches again. I asked her again and I got the same answer. But I decided not to believe her. I invited her into my room and talked to her. She admitted that she had cut herself because she was very nervous. She did that often, because this is the only way to calm her down when she is angry or frightened. It was a huge shock for me and now a feel alone with this tremendous problem. I don' know what to do. «

We started discussion about this problem in our group. The first aim of discussion was to help the teacher to define the limits of her responsibility in this situation. The group found out that the teacher should help the student to get professional treatment. It is not her duty to treat her herself. Then the group talked about which institutions and other individuals could help the student. Because of the group's support, the teacher became more confident and started a

second conversation with the student. She didn't manage to persuade the student to accept professional treatment yet, but the girl told her mother about the problem. The teacher didn't expect the mother's support, but she was wrong. The mother reacted with a huge empathy. After a week, the teacher noticed a tremendous change in the student's mood. The girl became more cheerful, she started to wear dresses in bright colours, at home she painted walls in her room, etc. At the end of the project the project group estimated that helping this girl was their greatest success.

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