

## Democratic Culture in Action – National Financial Economic High School

### Focus Group Teachers 27.03.2017 Sofia

1. How do the young people communicate in social media? What do you think about this?

My opinion is based on my work in three high schools. Students' communication is a function of their literacy and personality profile. Some of them could communicate verbally, some can't - in their messages there is emoticons and interjections.

I do speak about communication in a digital environment. I think that the students are captured in this environment and this doesn't contribute to their personal and social development.

We are witnessing students' withdrawal from verbal communication. Being used to communicating in the net is a hindrance and barrier to normal communication in real life.

My opinion is slightly different. The communication in social networks reflects the times we are living in. The young people nowadays have to express and are successful in this their emotions and feelings much faster. This influences their communication at school. They are reacting immediately, they are impatient, simply they could not slow down their reactions. The communication process is much more dynamic – what had been considered as a norm in communication is not here anymore. Different theories of learning of education in general do not have answer concerning the development of this process and its pedagogical dimensions.

This is the modern communication reality - for the young people this is a natural process, they are immersed in it, and we the teachers, have to adapt.

There are two forms of communication online according to me – and the one, so called chat is not accessible to us. The manifest communication is visible to all us. The young people are pressed to share. One of the problems in the beginning was due to the fact that the old phones were only in Latin and there was no Cyrillic. It seems that we put too much pressure on literacy (writing literacy) in the process of analyzing and assessing the communication between young people. For them it is more important the process and they do not care about the errors committed. They communicate fast, often in an environment which is not conducive to deeper communication and the errors are something normal. Most of the young people have a deficit of what we could define as classical literacy- that means to be skillful at expressing oneself in writing, at constructing sentences and if you like it at writing with no errors. We have writers who are writing quite reasonably but with errors. In one word, these new communications are both in the same time – useful and harmful.

It is quite clear that the communication between the young is a fast one, that it lacks density, that it is not as saturated as the face-to-face one. More important is what is said. It's natural if one has scarce resources to express oneself and when is pressed by time while using these resources to be impossible to go deeper, to use different shades of communication. This is the reality of communication in social networks.

I want to focus on something else. The communication between the students in the net is a free unlimited and that fact makes it dangerous. Even if there is a wish or a need to observe communication as an abuse preventive measure, this is practically impossible. In fact the communication between the young in the net is a process out of control or at least very difficult to be put under some control.

We have to focus more in education how to use social networks as an instrument for learning. There are few or no attempts at all to restructure communication and interaction between the young while they work on projects development in the net or participate in different initiatives or take part in online discussions and forums.

Another problem is the communication anonymity – something very different from the classic communication or from written communication. The anonymity is not only dangerous for the young people, but as well make of them participants in a virtual communication process where they do perform fake roles.

What I would like to add is that really we do not have control over the communication in the net – as pedagogues and as parents. Communication is the process which deepens the divisions between parents and children and between teachers and students. The education is a process of communication through which are transmitted knowledge, values and norms, it is a socialization process and nowadays this process doesn't run well.

This is a society problem as well. The parents occupied is one of the reasons for this. The young people are not used to listen. Very often they could not catch the sense of what they have been taught. The Alfa generation lives in a digital world. Most of them have never opened a single book in their lives. We have to ask ourselves a question whether literacy (as we do define it) is the value or the value is the information. We the adults have to change our attitude. Having all these flows of information we have to be clear that our adult analogue world is disappearing.

I would like to make a comparison in this direction. We had to read to be informed. In order to get information nowadays the young people do not have to read like us. We have to learn them how to use information, how to process information.

Please, allow me to turn your attention to a specificity of the communication between the young people. Every society is socially stratified. In real life communication there is always some kind of hierarchy. There's no such hierarchy in online communication. When I focus on young people communication I could see that they lack words, their resource is rather limited. This makes them difficult to express themselves, their means of expression are rather scarce. We have read a lot and that's way we have to express ourselves much better. Even one who have been grown in the countryside among illiterate people getting in touch with

reading have been able to express oneself. Nowadays the young people do not enrich themselves through reading.

I would like to put the question – what the school really gives to the young? If we are not providing enough good education to them, if we do not know how to penetrate into their inner world, if we could not exercise influence over them and if their communication is a forbidden zone for us – the school could not exist like this anymore. The teacher should become a facilitator, we have to help them in communicating better and more effectively, we have to make them to come back to the real way of communicating. The technologies, the information technology in this number, should be only a support in this process.

I beg your pardon but I do not think that one with average intelligence could be illiterate! Literacy is not only following the norms and the rules of the language, of the written language before all, but literacy is as well following the rules and the norms of communication. What I could see is very poor writing and self-expression in the real world, and online it's very much the same. We should ask ourselves who forms the young people – the reality of the school world or the virtual world reality?

I do agree, the absence of literacy is quite evident when you are a part of communication online. There also is another problem – often we do assess online communication with the criteria we had elaborated on communication in the real world. Online communication is very intensive one and that's why it's normal to commit mistakes. As well most of that communication is a written one and there the mistakes are more visible/ Otherwise, I do agree with the colleague – illiteracy from the net spreads over into communication offline.

I think that up to now the practice was as follows. Good effective communication has never been explicit educational objective. Nobody has taught communication under formal education curriculum. That's way communication quality and patterns do depend on the background, family, friends, good teachers. Nowadays the young people do invent online communication by themselves and following the online practices. They have not been taught how to do it they are

taught by online reality. They do not follow any rules because they can't see the necessity of rules.

Not at all. I do think that this lack of rules is somewhat overexaggerated. Each online group has rules of its own. Quite different is the question whether they do follow it. In most of the cases the young would like to make the things happen and not to learn rules. These rules are not general – being in some groups the young do acquire and follow the existing rules if they do not learn it, the general pattern of communication exercise its influence and the young do follow it.

I do apologize but because we do discuss literacy and language culture I think that the high or effective language culture means one to be able to change gears while participating in different groups, to be able to communicate depending on the situation. What I do observe is complete absence of reflective component in young people thinking. They do not adapt, they do not change their way of communication under changing circumstances and environment. Of course, when I'm in they do communicate differently than between themselves but as a whole their communication is quite monotonous.

2. What do you think about Human rights becoming a foundation of communication or as basic communication rules? Do they define the communication framework and are they relevant in the net – respecting others, their dignity, freedom of expression, tolerance, non-violence, taking into account the needs of the other?

I think that in the net they could say whatever but in real life it's different. Real life communication is limited by different conventions, from the environment, by the other partners. In the net one could be heard by many many people.

The young of today don't like difficult situations. That's why they do not care about their behavior online – one could break the rules violate the rights of the others – it doesn't matter, it's online!

The rules do regulate our lives and we could see that in the net the basic human rights are violated most of the time, the human dignity doesn't matter too much. The reflection is the key element of every kind of communication – and

reflection is not among the things learned at school. Why we have to have reflection in the net?

We do not know whether this virtual world , where the young people more and more communicate and interact, will develop its own way? Do we know where we go from now? It is not fair to put all the responsibility onto the school.

I think that talking only about rights is somewhat limiting the discussion. We talk about human rights, young people rights ( rights of the child), minority rights, and nowhere anything is mentioned about responsibilities and obligations!

I think that the answer is simple one – to each right corresponds the necessity one to behave in a definite way, but the true is that the focus is more on rights than on responsibilities.

I do think that we pay a lot of attention to schooling as an upbringing and not as a learning and instructive activity.

I consider that we miss something really important. In 17 century with the invention of printing the world has been changed as well as the way the information has been transmitted and shared. The same happens now with the internet environment – we are at the threshold of something new and important and we do not know what to do. In this new environment it won't be possible to communicate in the old fashioned way and the role of the books, of the written world will never be the same.

There is a generational gap - according to the students we do not understand them because we do not share their opinion. They are the most important. They have to be understood and do not have to understand and this is the way how the communication is dispossessed by one of its most important elements – the understanding.

The net puts an autocensorship on everyone. The big question nowadays is – Who am I?