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A graduate of pedagogics at the University of Wrocław. Her Master's thesis is based on the *@ktywny Senior* project. Socio-cultural animation, social communication, and gerontology are among her scholarly interests. She has also gained experience conducting group communication workshops with youth during vocational training as well as with seniors. Her interests and hobbies are music, graphic art and design, hiking, and bicycling.

Constructing group communication among seniors. Research analysis

Summary: The contemporary tendency for people to expect fast achievement of long-term results of their undertakings makes creative activities useful. Creative methods of group work allow the participants to get to know each quickly, to create a bond within a team, to shape the information transfer, and to acquire knowledge through active and creative work. The most important conclusion, however, is related to the thesis proposing that constructing group communication through creative methods of work is appropriate for seniors, as well. It allows for a full integration, promotes being active and learning and, as a result, encourages development to fulfil the role of an active senior. It may be suggested that creativity and being active as stimulated during group communication workshops constitutes a form of social experience for the seniors, which might be new to most, but is not necessarily denied or rejected. As a result of the organised workshops it may be concluded that seniors are aware of and are open to the need to change; they merely require understanding and support. The contemporary methods of education and adaption to various changes by the seniors need not be different from the standards of teaching young people. It is certain that some seniors require some more time and understanding throughout the learning process. However, intelligent and vigorous individuals as well

as those quiet or shy may be found among the seniors, just like in all the other age groups. Still, there are no actual reasons to deny them a participation in effective education and learning new things.

Key words: seniors, group communication, project, creativity, being active, workshops, activity, initiative, needs, education.

*Autumn is wise! It unveils the passing beauty (...)
Thank you for autumn! In autumn nothing is immature, rapid, unstable.
All is quiet, fulfilled, mature, reconciled, coherent
[Pino Pellegrino, I love autumn]*

Introduction

Communication among people with all possible means, has always constituted the basis of not only the processes of socialisation and acquiring of knowledge, but also of fulfilling primary needs. According to psychologists, the participants of all group meetings have three basic needs: to belong, to be influential and to feel valuable (important)¹⁾. This further emphasises that fact that group communication must reach a certain level in order to allow for the fulfilling of the aforementioned needs. The contemporary world is developing rapidly and it is constantly changing, which makes the use of innovative methods of educating the society necessary. Contemporarily, the way of starting a conversation is important and organising workshops teaching proper personal relationships is crucial. Of the numerous current transformations, the proper attitude towards seniors and their further development is necessary. People of the „60+” age constitute a group that is, without sufficient preparation for the many changes, most highly vulnerable to being lost in the modern world. That is why nowadays the emphasis is put on seniors. The increasing lifespan presents humanity with new challenges. I believe that the education of seniors and promotion of their active participation in social life are the most important of them. It can be posited that the more interpersonal contacts one makes, the better his communication with the environment is. According to J. Kargul, there are many means of transferring information that are used during interpersonal interaction and if they are to be perceived as an area of education then – to put it simply – it is through interaction that one learns to communicate with others²⁾. E. Trafiałek, in turn, emphasises the fact that in contemporary civilised world there exists a new rule of experiencing old age and a new lifestyle of the retired. They involve sport, recreation, trips, socialising, culture, interests and hobbies, and, furthermore,

¹⁾ E. Wójcik, *Metody aktywizujące w pedagogice grup*, Kraków 2000, p. 62.

²⁾ J. Kargul, *Obszary pozaformalnej i nieformalnej edukacji dorosłych. Przesłanki do budowania teorii edukacji całościowej*, Wrocław 2001, p. 93.

the growing need for education and updating the knowledge of the world around us. The new lifestyle essentially consists of being active and optimally mobile³⁾.

Therefore, the participation in the *@ktywny Senior* project consisted of constructing interpersonal contacts within the groups of seniors. I attempted to demonstrate the creative teaching methods through organising the group communication workshops with seniors. It was important for me to verify if it is possible for the education process of seniors to be conducted actively and to constitute a means of adapting the group to the pace of contemporary life and establishing contacts with other age groups. Interpersonal communication is, therefore, a process that shapes culture and the individual, with a specific role in education⁴⁾. Putting emphasis on the group of research subjects, i.e. the seniors, and their adaptation to the active forms of taking part in the workshops and learning was the aim of the educational activities organized. The purpose of the workshops was also to present the constructing of interpersonal contacts among seniors through various creative methods of conducting activities and the assumption that group communication augments the development of people of all ages. Presenting the need to educate seniors, promoting projects tailored especially for them – projects such as *@ktywny Senior*, with communication groups organised as a part of it – turned out to be essential, as well.

I conducted the research in Wrocławskie Centrum Wspierania Organizacji Pozarządowych (NGOs support centre in Wrocław) – Sektor 3 – located in Wrocław at 65 Legnicka street. The group that participated in the research by attending group communication construction workshops was made up of seniors – inhabitants of the Popowice district of Wrocław. They took part in *@ktywny Senior*, having been chosen and having gone through the recruitment process. As a result, 57 people – 41 women and 16 men – participated in the project and my research. Most of them were aged 61–70; there were, however, a few people aged 50–60 and several over 70. The participants were retired or benefitted from social aid, since the activities of the project were tailored especially for them. The people taking part in the workshops were divided into 6 groups. The aim of the *@ktywny Senior* was first and foremost to increase the quality of seniors' lives. The head of the project was the author of the implemented plan connected with computer skills training for seniors, supplemented with further activities connected with, among others, physical exercise and the aforementioned group communication workshops. The project was carried out between March 3 and April 28 2009. My research took 6 weeks and I conducted six training classes for each group – one meeting a week. The classes lasted 45 minutes, with a 15-minute break afterwards. The research started with a greeting, introducing oneself and providing an outline of the methods to be used at each of the classes, the number and frequency of the classes during the first meetings

³⁾ E. Trafiałek, *Starzenie się i starość. Wybór tekstów z gerontologii społecznej*, Kielce 2006, p. 43.

⁴⁾ E. Wołodźko, *Komunikacja interpersonalna jako istota procesu edukacyjnego*, „Edukacja” 1999, Issue 1, p. 43.

of the groups. Informing the members of the project of their participation in the research long with presenting the aim of the examination and introducing myself as a researcher and a instructor was of utter importance. During the first meeting the questionnaire that constituted the basis of my research was also discussed and distributed. Out of the 57 distributed copies of the questionnaire 54 were returned to me. Analysis of the answers to the questionnaire along with the observations made during the classes constitute the fundamental source of reflection on the research and its results.

Analysis of the research material

The gathered research material and the conclusions based thereon constitute an attempt at answering the question: How is group communication constructed among seniors? On the basis of the analysis of the material – observation notes and questionnaire answers – I have outlined the areas that condition group communication workshops and that are suitable for seniors. I believe that the following areas of research, related to methods of information transfer, relationships between seniors, and creative methods in the education of seniors are of crucial importance.

Information transfer may occur in various ways. As it is proposed in the publications of T. Warner, the choice of the method of information transfer is not only influenced by the goal and the curriculum, but by the knowledge and skills forming the subject matter of the classes, as well⁵⁾. The workshops that I have conducted allowed me to draw a conclusion that it is important for the method of group work to be accepted by all the participants. That is because interpersonal

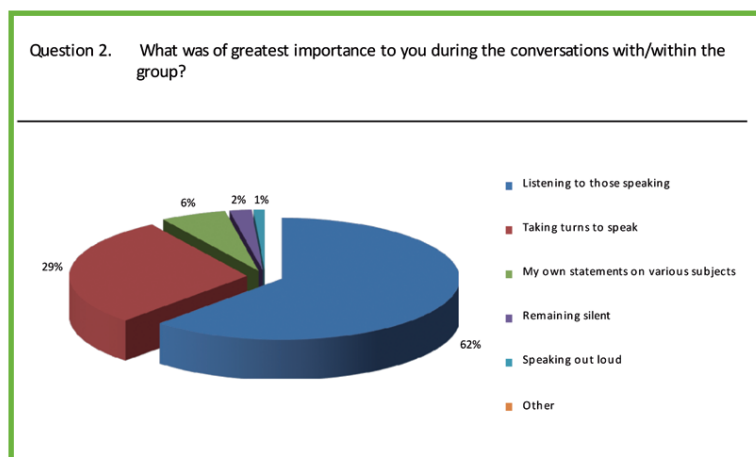


Chart 1. The most important situations during the conversations with/within the group

Source: The questionnaire answers.

⁵⁾ T. Warner, *Umiejętności w komunikowaniu się*, Wrocław 1999, p. 296.

relationships are influenced by means of information transfer. The set of questions presented below is related to that particular area of research.

The answers to question 2 – What was of greatest importance to you during the conversations with/within the group? – contain information relevant to the problems discussed in this part.

Question 4 – How can you interest the interlocutors in what you have to say? – was aimed at finding out which forms of expressing oneself are favoured by seniors. The data is presented in chart 2.

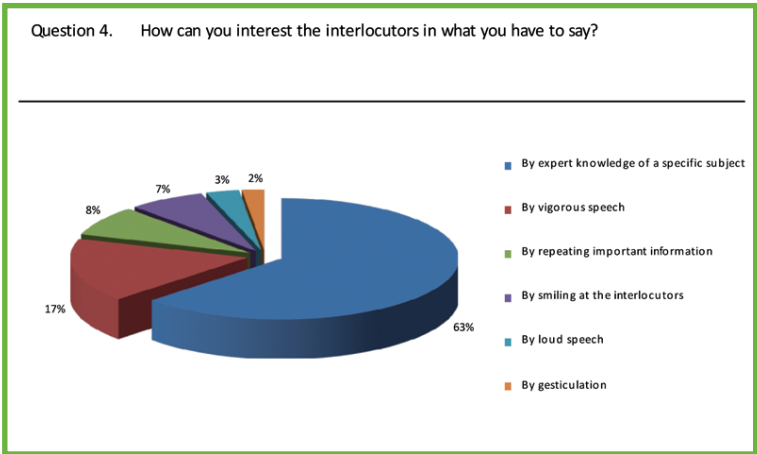


Chart 2. Information transfer means aimed at attracting the attention of interlocutors

Source: The questionnaire answers

Question 5 was opposite to question 4, for it was related to finding the situations interfering with the communication process, thus disorganising the group's interest in the subject of the conversation. The question was: Do you know any obstacles interfering with group conversations? If so, please select the most common ones. If not, please move on to the next question. The answers to the question are presented in chart 3.

In question 7 the surveyed were to pinpoint the factors that, in their opinion, influence the reception of the people speaking. To find the answer to this issue the following question was formulated: What do you pay attention to while listening to others? The results, related to the answers of the surveyed, are presented in chart 4.

The last issue related to this part of problem analysis is question 13, of the following content: Which of the following situations allow you to remember the information presented by a speaker best? The data collected is presented in chart 5.

A conclusion that the choice of the means of information transfer among the surveyed is related to, first of all, listening to the speakers and taking turns

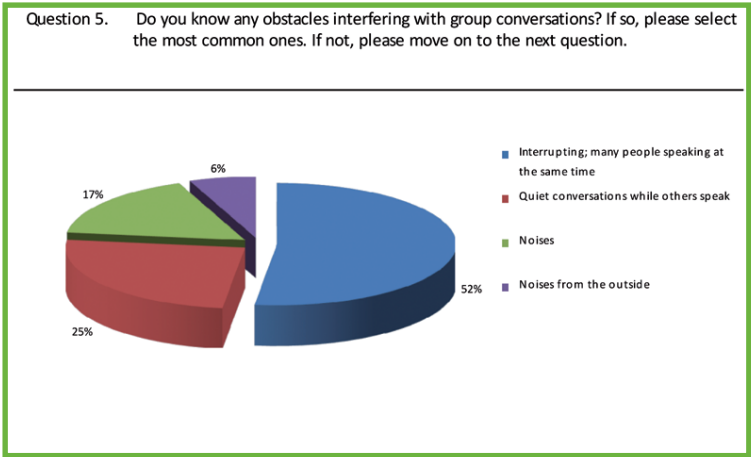


Chart 3. Types of obstacles in group communication

Source: The questionnaire answers.

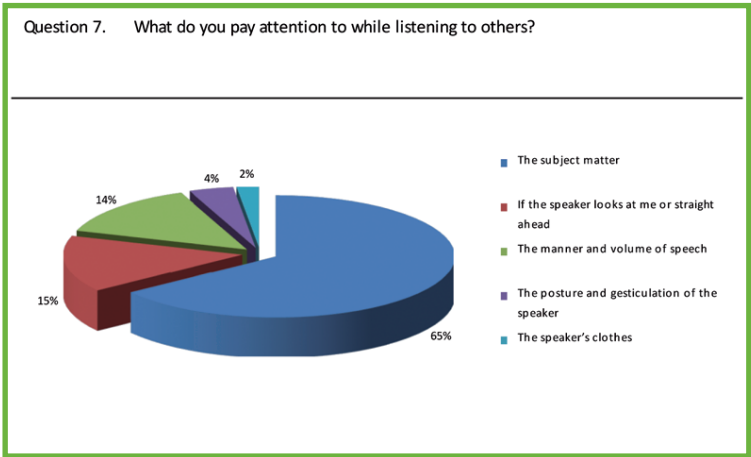


Chart 4. Factors related to listening to others

Source: The questionnaire answers.

to participate in the conversation by all members of the group can be drawn from the analysis of the questionnaire answers presented above. Majority of the participants declare that making eye contact during the conversation – i.e. looking at the interlocutors and speaking directly to them – is important. Competences such as expert knowledge of the subject matter, energetic speech and repeating the most important information are also considered by the surveyed to be essential to making interpersonal contacts. On the other hand, gesticulation and loud speech were mentioned by only a few. Interrupting and quiet conversations while others speak were regarded as obstacles interfering with communication and conversations within

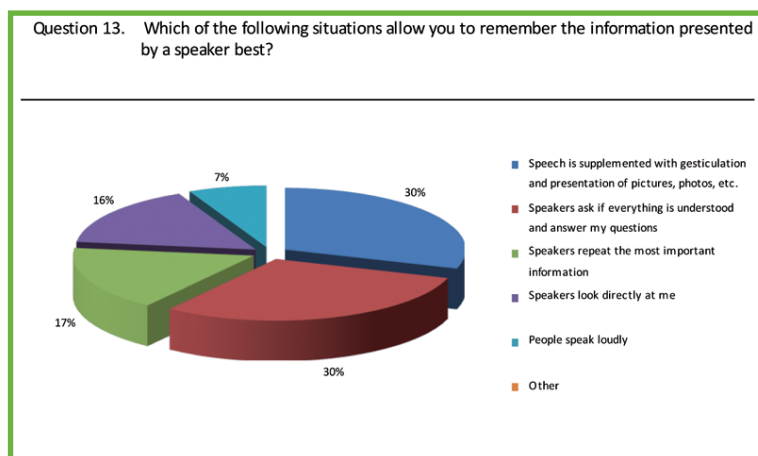


Chart 5. Factors determining the remembering of the information presented during conversations

Source: The questionnaire answers.

the group. Various noises, including those from the outside, were considered the least annoying. Such interpersonal relationships stimuli as visual presentations, asking if everything is understood and making eye contact are appreciated by most of the surveyed. It may, therefore, be proposed that the ways of transferring information during group communication are related to numerous situations essential and clearly defined by seniors. The observations made during the workshops provide the reasons and the continuation of the answers of the surveyed.

The observed progress of those participating in the research was accomplished thanks to active forms of carrying out the tasks, group work, and mutual support among the participants and the instructor. It must be mentioned that the active character of the classes turned out to be a pleasant surprise to the seniors. Integration games proved to be an important development stimulus to group communication during and after the classes. Lively conversation within groups during breaks and improving relationships may serve as examples. An important conclusion is related to the general atmosphere of the classes. According to J. Rojewska, the predisposition to solve riddles, crosswords, charades and to be willing to watch others carry out tasks is natural to all of us⁶⁾. Observation of the participants of the classes leads to the conclusion that the use of exercise involving the nonverbal aspect of information transfer stimulates the group to be active and encourages each of its members to take active part. During the classes I was also able to notice that the seniors have certain problems remembering information and immediate reaction to demonstration.

⁶⁾ J. Rojewska, *Grupa bawi się i pracuje. Zbiór grupowych gier i ćwiczeń psychologicznych*, p. II, Wrocław 2000, p. 58.

That is, however, a perfectly normal phenomenon, discussed in numerous medical publications. It has also been suggested by A. Chabior that in the realm of mental changes of seniors, motor skills, memory, concentration, and learning abilities are impaired with age; however, as proposed by contemporary experts on the subject, the changes are minute. To address the issue A. Chabior mentions a statement of J. Birren, claiming that the learning differences between the young and the old lie in perception, concentration, motivation, and physical health rather than the very learning abilities⁷⁾. One may also notice that fact that certain indispositions of some people had no negative influence on their movement and gestures. It was observed that these people were even able to overcome pain in order to exercise and prove their worth. Being physically active has important functions in the social and personal lives of seniors. A. Chabior emphasises that thanks to physical activity seniors fulfil their basic emotional needs of being accepted and praised, self-realisation, love, belonging and contact with others⁸⁾. It must be mentioned that whereas the answers to the questionnaire indicate that the surveyed did not consider gesticulation a practical information transfer means it was possible to use exercise to encourage many participants to use gestures. It can also be proposed that the character of all *@ktywny Senior* workshops and the place where they were organised stimulated development of the aforementioned physical activity, which, among seniors, is considered a very important criterion.

The situations that I had a chance to observe during the workshops allow me to draw the conclusion that the means of transferring information while constructing group communication is decisive in regard to the effectiveness of classes. The fact that for the seniors – the research subjects – energetic and engaging exercises and their creative realisation had a positive influence and created an atmosphere of mutual understanding between them and the person conducting the workshops becomes essential. In relation to the observations and majority of the analysed questionnaire answers it may be concluded that seniors are aware of communicational needs and they do not avoid them. They can properly define the competences of the sender and the receiver, although they do not trust their own communication skills and the means of their realisation. That is why they require support. What is essential is that they do not shut themselves off and, contrary to the stereotypes, they are not obstinate and stubborn – they are, in fact, willing to be open and to learn.

During the group communication workshops I also conducted a few exercises, which allowed me to observe the forming and evolution of relationships between the participants, as well as between them and me – the instructor taking part in the exercises. To gather information about the second area of research that I

⁷⁾ A. Chabior, *Rola aktywności kulturalno-oświatowej w adaptacji do starości*, Radom – Kielce 2000, pp.30–31.

⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

determined I used, apart from the proper group activities, a few questions connected with the proposed hypothesis.

The first question was related to establishing the partners that the participants preferred as co-authors of the acts of communication. The content of the question was the following – Who do you most enjoy talking to in a group? The answers are presented in chart 6.

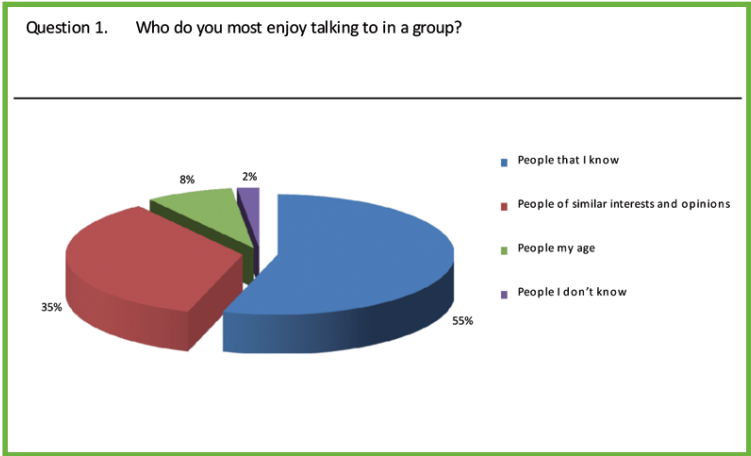


Chart 6. The choice of conversation partners

Source: The questionnaire answers.

To determine seniors’ attitude towards public speaking I formulated question 3 – Do you enjoy speaking publically in front of a group? The data gathered from the answers of the surveyed indicates that 28% of the seniors enjoy public speaking and 57% do not. 15% chose the answer “I don’t know”.

In turn, question 9 is related to investigating the opinions of the surveyed as to their awareness of how they are perceived by others during conversations. I contained the subject matter in a multiple choice question: Do you pay attention to how you are perceived by others during conversations? It turns out that that as many as 69% chose the affirmative answer, with 21% choosing the “sometimes” option, and only 4% preferring the negative one. The remaining 6% of the surveyed could not answer the question.

In order to determine the frequency of making interpersonal contacts in public by seniors, question 10 was constructed – How often do talk to others in public places? The detailed data related to the answers of the surveyed is presented in chart 7.

Question 11 was related to the making and maintaining of social contacts by seniors. Its content was as follows – Do you like making and maintaining social

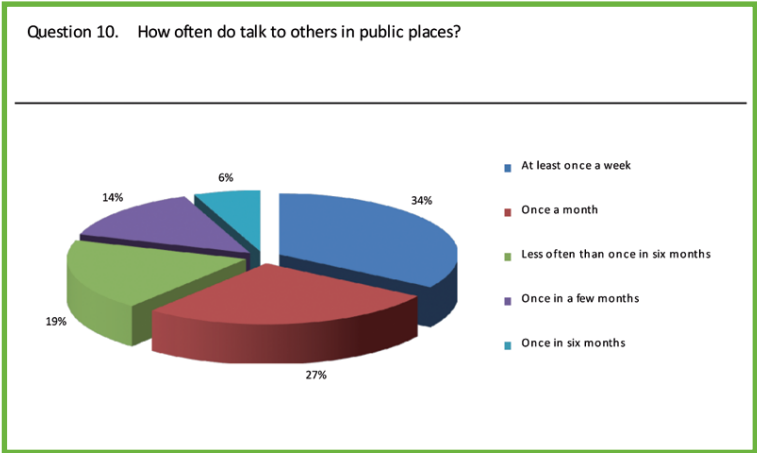


Chart 7. Frequency of making interpersonal contacts

Source: The questionnaire answers.

contacts? There were 80% affirmative answers and 13% negative ones. 7% did not choose an option.

To establish the reasons for making interpersonal contacts of the researched group question 16 was asked – Why do you most often start conversations with others? The data gathered thanks to this question is shown in chart 8.

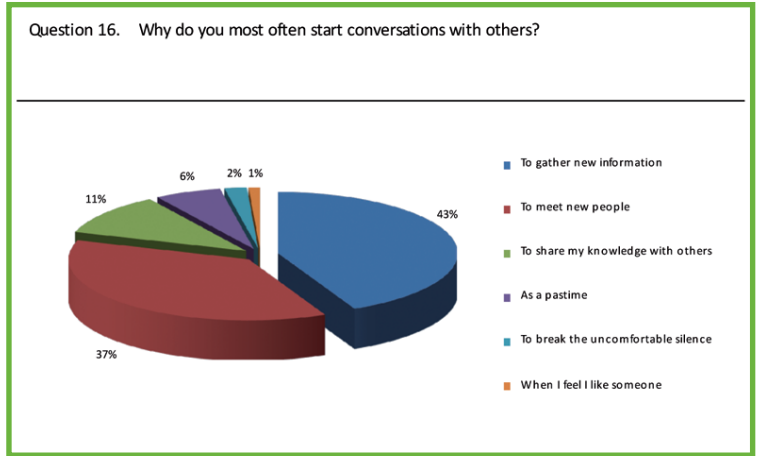


Chart 8. Reasons for making interpersonal contacts

Source: The questionnaire answers.

Among the questions discussed in relation to these particular problems there was the question 17, connected with the construction of self-awareness through conversations. The question was constructed as follows – Is it possible to learn something new about yourself by talking with others? The vast majority – 72% of the surveyed – gave an affirmative answer, with only 10% giving a negative one. The remaining 18% of seniors have no opinion on the matter.

Yet another question, assigned as number 18, is related to seniors indicating the attitudes that they take in interpersonal relationships. The issue was addressed in the question – If you happen to hear some criticism about yourself (uttered by your friends) what attitude do you take, or – in the case of a hypothetical situation – what attitude would you take? Detailed data is shown in chart 9.

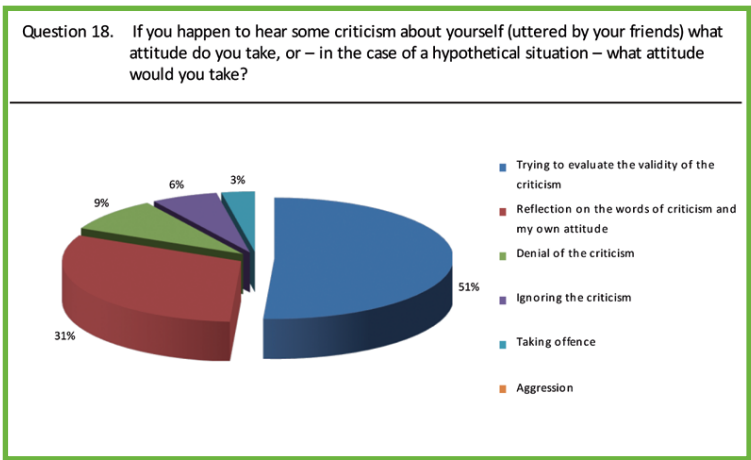


Chart 9. Attitudes towards criticism in interpersonal contacts

Source: The questionnaire answers.

Question 19 is an attempt at establishing seniors' tendency to interrupt. A multiple choice question was used – Do you ever happen to interrupt when others speak? 64% of the surveyed admitted to occasional interrupting, 10% confirmed definitely, while 26% denied ever doing so.

Determining age, gender, education, and profession of the research subjects was essential in outlining the interpersonal relationships between them. As I have mentioned before in the introduction to the article, most of the research subjects were aged 61–70, and the group consisted of 41 women (74%) and 16 men (26%). Most of the seniors had university (54%) or secondary school (42%) education. Representatives of numerous professions were to be found among the research subjects, with the group of teachers (14%) as the largest.

On the basis of the analysis of the answers to the questions presented in this section it may be stated that the surveyed prefer talking to people they know and

those of similar interests. Most of the seniors make social contacts quite often, usually in order to receive information or to get to know other people. Only a third of the surveyed enjoys public speaking. A majority of the surveyed pay attention to what others think of them and how others perceive them during conversations. At the same time, the conclusion drawn from the question related to methods of coping with criticism is of crucial importance because of the age of the research subjects. There is a popular stereotype of seniors being overly sensitive and unable to cope with negative opinions about themselves. Analysis of the answers allows for a refutation of this opinion. That is because it indicates that when the surveyed are faced with criticism over a half of them concentrates on evaluating the opinions, and a third reflects on the validity of the criticism. The majority of the surveyed are aware that having conversations with other people may allow them to learn more about themselves.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the answers to the questions related to age, gender, education, profession, and place of residence. The influence of the last factor cannot be determined due to the fact that all the surveyed live in Wrocław. Age-related differences also cannot be indicated, since all of the participants were of a similar age; that is, between 60 and 70. There was a diversity as to the declared professions and received education; however, it was only possible to describe it on the basis of the observations made during the classes.

Analysis of the observation notes made during the workshops leads to the conclusion that in relation to the gender distribution the greater number of women had an influence on the relationships between the research subjects. The women were more active and more willing to make interpersonal contacts. The differences in education, declared in the questionnaire and ranging from primary school to university level, were not made evident during the classes. The factor had no influence on group communication. The conversations between the participants of the research were related to everyday life matters rather than professional ones. Thus, the educational differences caused neither disturbance nor improvement of the relationships.

The conclusions based on the diversity of professions declared by the surveyed appear to be distinct. This criterion had an enormous influence on the level of relationships between the participants. The integration of those of similar professional interests was greatly affected by this factor, and all the participants were able to learn more about the jobs that were not numerously represented in the groups. On the basis of observation of the research subjects made mainly during the breaks between classes I noticed that they tend to share their professional knowledge. Similar conversations took place during the classes a number of times, as well. Perhaps the significance of sharing professional experience with others of seniors is related to a lack of ongoing contact with their occupations. That is because these conversations had a character of a certain affectionate return to the past. During the workshops there was a number of cases when the seniors

admitted to having had a hard time adjusting to retirement. Such problems are confirmed in reference books. L. Dyczewski, among others, mentions that reaching retirement or having to quit work due to health problems are certainly moments of possible crisis. Such situations are connected with limiting of social contacts and lowering of the living standard. Social status is often depleted and health may worsen. The situation is new and different and hence a cause of crisis to many⁹⁾. In summary, it turned out that the exchange of information about the past and present professions improved interpersonal relationships and created an opportunity to learn more about various subjects.

Drawing up a group contract was indispensable in order to conduct the workshops. Judging by the attitude of the research subjects the seniors perceived the points of contract that I have proposed and they themselves had a chance to develop as necessary rules. It is a proof that the participants were highly disciplined and cultured. It is important to notice the importance that seniors attach to good manners as a result of the rules and conventions that were inculcated in them in the past. As to the idea of the group contract – it turned out to be successful. It allowed the participants to feel that they had an actual influence on an important aspect of all consecutive classes.

The relationships between those participating in an act of communication are also shaped by the issue of self-awareness, i.e. the knowledge of oneself. During the group discussion organized after an exercise conducted to strengthen that factor among seniors the participants acknowledged the importance of the issue and the necessity to improve it by getting to know how one is perceived by others and shaping the knowledge of oneself accordingly. The research subjects' reception of the opinions of others corresponded with the previously discussed analysis of the answers to one of the survey questions. No one felt offended or sad; people smiled and felt pleasantly surprised, with but a few wearing expressions that revealed their attempts at reflecting on and evaluating the information they had received about themselves. During the workshops I have noticed that thanks to the exercise conducted to strengthen self-awareness the individual self was revealed. This indicates that in order to establish proper interpersonal relationships one not only needs to get to know more about the partners in the interactions, but also – perhaps most importantly – about oneself.

Introduction games designed to allow the participants to quickly get to know each other turned out to be influential, as well. M. Łaguna states that learning in a group allows one to gain new social skills, improve emotional intelligence and relationships¹⁰⁾, and the seniors' reactions during the classes have led me to similar conclusions. A situation that took place during a meeting of one of the groups may

⁹⁾ L. Dyczewski, *Ludzie starzy i starość w społeczeństwie i kulturze*, Lublin 1994, p. 81.

¹⁰⁾ M. Łaguna, *Szkolenia*, Gdańsk 2004, p. 188.

serve as an example of the goals of short activities. After completing the "Just like I do" exercise (consisting of producing sentences such as "Who likes dogs just like I do") two female participants suddenly realized that they had met before, in their youth. They remembered a period of time in their lives that they had spent together. Their joy was great and their reaction spontaneous. Completely free integration was thus achieved. This created a positive atmosphere of group meetings. The reactions of the participants led to similar conclusions as those suggested by B. Sufa, who claims that it is essential that proper relationships within the group be established through stimulation of the development of the partners in interaction rather than through pressure¹¹⁾. It turned out that it is crucial that each participant be treated as a subject, especially in the case of interactions among adults. Respect and understanding are necessary, particularly when working with seniors. A conclusion that follows on from the aforementioned example is that thanks to fun and active learning methods an exploration and a development of a relationship outside the location of the workshops took place. It needs to be mentioned that it was owing to the place where the project was conducted and the atmosphere created by the organizers that the seniors felt encouraged to being active outside of class, as well.

The active methods of running the classes have inspired me to assume that constructing group communication by means of active methods allows seniors to integrate fully and encourages them to learn and to be active. I propose that such state may facilitate general development, even in the case of seniors. Their attitude towards the creative approach to group communication is reflected in the answers to the number of survey questions related to this problem.

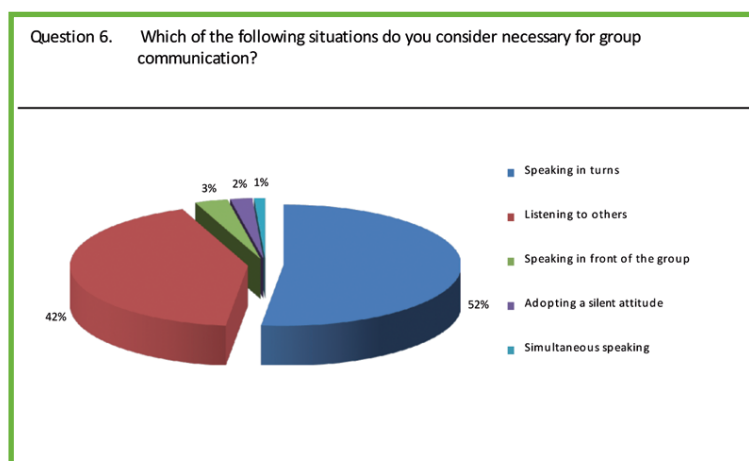


Chart 10. Necessary criteria of group communication

Source: The questionnaire answers.

¹¹⁾ B. Sufa, *Styl komunikowania się nauczyciela z uczniami a skuteczność porozumiewania się i współdziałania w klasie*, [in:] E.A. Zwolińska (ed.), *Edukacja kreatywna*, Bydgoszcz 2005, p. 142.

Question 6 was related to the necessary criteria of group communication. The content of the question was as follows: Which of the following situations do you consider necessary for group communication? The data is presented in chart 10.

The problem related to the factors facilitating group communication was addressed in question 12: In your opinion, which of the following factors makes it easier to have conversations in a group of people? The answers of the surveyed are shown on chart 11.

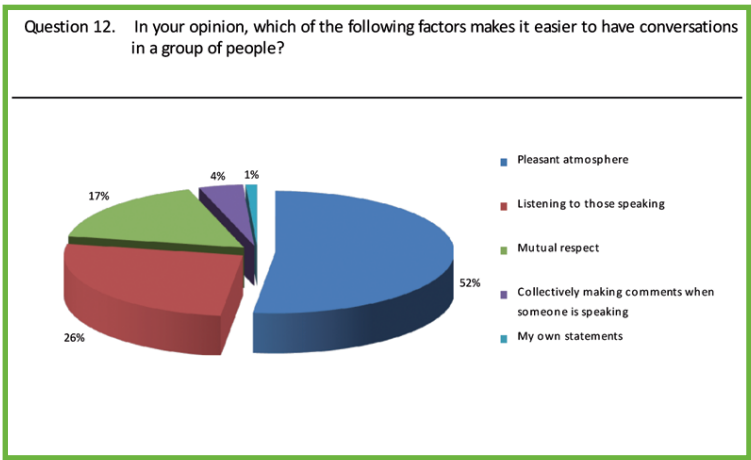


Chart 11. Factors facilitating group communication

Source: The questionnaire answers.

Yet another question related to the problem discussed in this section was question 14: Can group discussion be helpful in solving a problem? Despite providing 4 alternatives the seniors chose the extreme options, with 54% affirmative answers and 46% denying such possibility.

Question 15 was connected to polite ways of greeting each other, as used by seniors. It was formulated as follows: What polite ways of greeting do you use? With the data based on the collected answers presented in chart 12.

The last question analysed in this section is question 20: Which of the following situations do you find most suitable to have conversations with a group? It was aimed at determining which communication situations seniors prefer. The relevant data is shown in chart 13.

As suggested by the illustrations of the aforementioned questions, majority of the surveyed considers obeying certain rules of conversation necessary for group communication. Most of the participants mention speaking in turns and listening to others speak. Encouraging the participants to speak up in group discussion is considered creative. That is why a question related to the usefulness, or a lack thereof,

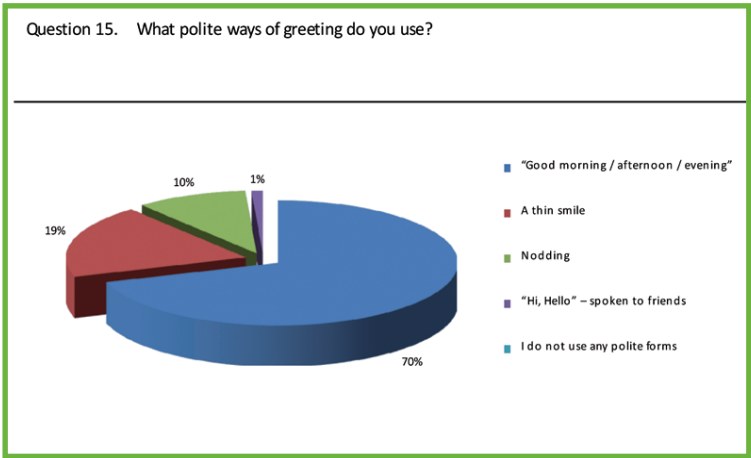


Chart 12. Polite ways of greeting

Source: The questionnaire answers.

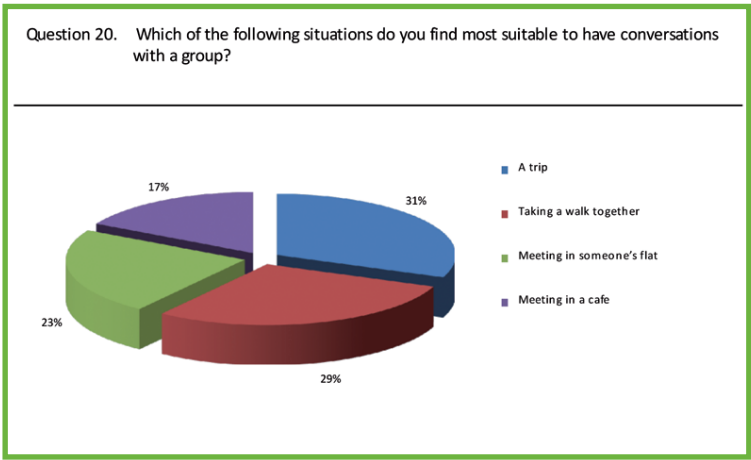


Chart 13. Preferred communication situations

Source: The questionnaire answers.

of this area of activity in solving problems was provided. The answers suggest that seniors consider such form of public speaking acceptable and proper. More than a half of the seniors indicated that group discussion can be a method of solving problems, and the rest declared that it may be suitable occasionally. No one was opposed to this practice. Analysis of the observation notes led me to a similar conclusion, because it suggests that the participants of the workshops were willing to sum up the classes and learn from them on the basis of the active group discussions taking place at the end of each meeting. The notion of creativity is connected with

the aforementioned methods of constructing group communication. The respondents' answers to the question related to the polite ways of greeting each other were a reflection of these activities. The traditional model, universally accepted in Polish society – saying "Dzień dobry" – proved to be the most popular among the surveyed. However, the seniors happened to be creative here. It was mostly related to those of the surveyed who were willing to choose the answers connected to the nonverbal side of communication connected to greeting, that is nodding or a smile. The seniors' willingness to establish interpersonal relationships during trips, walks, and meetings in cafes is yet another aspect of their creative and active attitude. There was also a group fond of communicating in someone's flat. However, active places and forms of developing group communication are generally the most common answers. It may, therefore, be suggested that the attitude of most of the research subjects allows for the refuting of the common misconception that seniors constitute a closed group and prefer to stay at home. That fact is emphasised by L. Dyczewski who presents seniors as opposites of the commonly accepted image of people outside of life's main stream¹²⁾. Seniors are not all the same and they cannot be labelled. The aforementioned author adds that social nature and the need for it to be fulfilled do not die with age; they merely alter and seek different forms of realization¹³⁾.

Thanks most of all to a series of exercises conducted during the workshops it was possible to present the role of creativity in learning. The activity where the participants were to illustrate the subject matter of the workshops through a poster entitled "Image of good communication" turned out to be the best way of presenting the creative aspect of learning. Materials such as cut-outs, glue, pieces of newspapers and magazines, crayons, and felt-tip pens were provided to make the pictures. The choice and use of the tools depended on the creativity and the ideas of the participants. That is because M. Łaguna emphasises that unconventional tools and materials influence the atmosphere of group meetings. The activity confirmed that they are a means of stimulating the improvement of communication, mainly in relation to its nonverbal and manual aspect¹⁴⁾. While the posters were being made I noticed that the participants took the task very seriously. However, not all of them took an active part. The role of the leaders who had previously emerged (usually informally) turned out to be essential at that point. Still, no one was made to actively participate in the tasks. Teamwork was important, however. The general atmosphere was that of tension and, at the same time, full cooperation. Observation of the behaviour of the research subjects during this activity as well as the analysis of the produced posters allowed me to draw the following conclusion. Teamwork based on cooperation, undisturbed information transfer, and negotiation of the form and content of the posters proved to be the decisive factors in working effectively as a group and achieving the final result.

¹²⁾ L. Dyczewski, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

¹³⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁾ M. Łaguna, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

It also turned out that a creative approach of the instructor constitutes a factor generating a lively reaction of the group. I observed that my active involvement in the realisation of the classes generated a feedback in the form of a reaction from the partners of the contract – the group. They would speak, make eye contact, smile or nod. All these areas were a stimulus to conduct the workshops further and proved to be substantially influential. It may, therefore, be proposed that an individual approach to the plans of the classes and the conditions of all of the subjects are the essence of the implementation of creative methods in information transfer. K.J. Szmidt argues that a creative approach allows people to interact and to discover and construct things together¹⁵⁾. The author also proposes that help understood as stimulation, encouragement, support, assistance, and providing conditions necessary for a development of creativity constitutes the fundamental assumption of creative effort¹⁶⁾ and my analysis of the notes that were made during the observation of all the discussed activities as well as the feedback received from the research subjects supports this idea. A. Minczanowska, in turn, states that creativity assumes the concept of education connected with making an unimpeded development of personality possible as well as respect for the needs, aspirations, wishes, and subjectivity¹⁷⁾. Such was the situation created by the organizers of the project and it lasted throughout all of the workshops.

It may be suggested, on the basis of the conducted classes with seniors, that the creative methods of group work make it possible to get to know new people quickly, to create a bond within the team, to shape the information transfer, and to learn effectively. However, the most important conclusion is related to the idea that constructing group communication with the use of creative methods is appropriate for working with seniors. It allows for complete integration and encourages learning and being active, and, as a result, being able to fulfil the role of an active senior. Therefore, it may be argued that the creativity and activity brought into being during the group communication workshops constitute a type of social experience, as proposed by O. Czerniawska. It is her belief that various social experiences cause changes in the attitudes of seniors towards their everyday lives, needs and aspirations, and in the stereotype of the role of the elderly in society. According to O. Czerniawska, social interactions are to constitute the areas of activity and interest to seniors¹⁸⁾. Creating areas for social interactions is, therefore, of crucial importance nowadays. Having completed the @ktywny Senior project it may be stated with utmost certainty that it is one of the areas of such effort.

¹⁵⁾ K.J. Szmidt, *Dydaktyka twórczości*, Kraków 2003, p. 83.

¹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁷⁾ A. Minczanowska, *Kreatywność jako wartość i cel edukacji*, [in:] E.A. Zwolińska (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁸⁾ O. Czerniawska, *Drogi i bezdroża andragogiki i gerontologii. Szkice i rozprawy*, Łódź 2007, p. 139.

Conclusion

The conducted research as well as the observations made during the meetings with the senior groups allowed me to define the area related to establishing efficient group communication aimed at improvement and continuation of the seniors' activity. The assumed criteria were successfully verified among the research subjects. To sum up, it may be suggested that the adjustment of the methods of education and adaptation of seniors to contemporary requirements need not vary from the standards of education of young people. Even though some seniors may require a little more time and understanding, that is not the case with all of them. Intelligent and vigorous individuals can be found among them as well as those shy and quiet, just like in all the other age groups. However, there are no other reasons to exclude seniors from the process of effective education and learning new things. The aforementioned irrelevance of health problems to the participation in the proposed active learning methods may serve as an example. The most important issues in relation to the education of seniors turn out to be individual approach and equal chances for everyone. It may be assumed, therefore, that, as O. Czerniawska argues, contemporary third age education appears to constitute an important phenomenon that cannot be separated and isolated from adult education¹⁹⁾. Consequently, it is necessary to aim at their development, participation in further education, and benefitting from the same options as those provided during the *@ktywny Senior* project; a project organized to allow the seniors to progress.

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¹⁹⁾ Ibid., p. 111-115.