

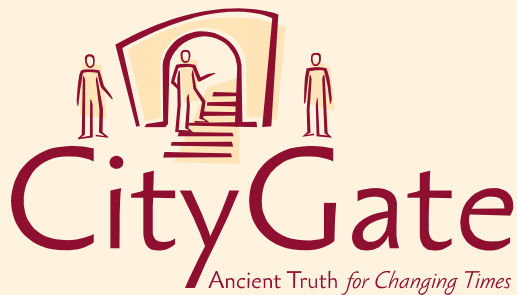
Apologetics With Open Ears

Training Manual

Discussion weekends, held in co-operation with local churches, which bring young Christians and non-believers from the same communities together for a time of listening, encouraging open and honest dialogue between peers and presenting the message of the Gospel in a way that communicates rather than alienates.

A CityGate Field Study

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**CITYGATE EXISTS TO STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH BY HELPING PEOPLE
TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE REALITY OF CHRIST AND EVERYDAY LIFE**

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This is the first edition of this paper. We would like to thank all who shared their experiences and helped us with their insight. We would appreciate all your comments and critique. They might help us to fill the gaps we left out and correct our unintended mistakes.

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Principles of creative evangelism

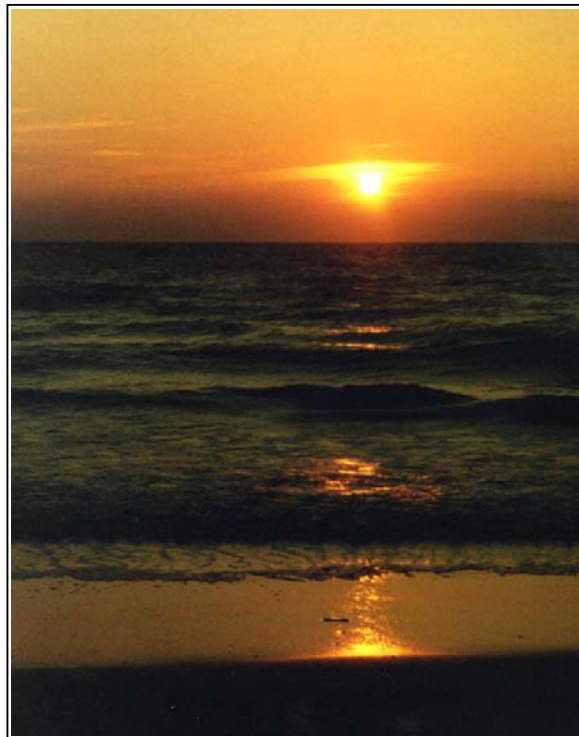
Notice the sunrise...

Have you ever noticed how the sun rises? A thin line of light separates the darkness above from the darkness below, it comes like a yawn, stretching in the morning. It comes slowly, a large ball on the red horizon and slowly, it starts to focus and to pierce with its intensity. It does not rush, its pace is steady, its coming is inevitable. It eases us into the day. It allows us time to get use to it. It doesn't blind us with light.

Imagine leaving a dark room to walk in to the Mediterranean sunlight. You would raise your hand to protect your eyes from the very thing that allows sight. Our evangelism can be like that. We may blind people with the amount of light we give them. We may shine the light too deeply or too quickly. We must find ways to be like the sure and steady light that arises. There is no question but the light shines and the darkness must either turn away or be lightened up.

The physical creation is a metaphor made by God. Is this the way He intended all light to come? Does the way we spread the light reflect this? And is this the reason I instinctively draw back when suddenly confronted with aggressive Gospel activity that thrusts light into my open eye and causes it to shut tightly?

God is hotter than the sun. He is a consuming fire. His glory is the sum of his attributes and we are in real danger of going blind unless we are covered, shielded by the presence of Christ. Jesus the Christ came into the world gradually; He graced a mother's womb; He learned obedience. I suppose He could have come in flame and fire, He could have made the whole world bow and see Him, but that was not His way. At least not yet.



Models of evangelism:

If you take a mixed group of non-Christians and Christians away for weekends and talk with them about life issues, what happens?

- They benefit from a course in communication and relationships, which leads very often to discussion about deep personal questions and God.
- We benefit by learning to understand their fears, desires and struggles.
- Local churches benefit through building trust with non-believers in a natural setting.

In our Creative Evangelism we are developing models of evangelism. Many churches have a significant desire to communicate Christianity but there is some uncertainty about how to do this effectively. Non-believers are often strongly resistant and prejudiced against religion, especially in its institutional form.

The "Apologetics With Open Ears" project was started in order to create an open space, which would be an environment for communication and the real meeting of people. Such a meeting can happen only if we listen to others with "open ears". Our aim is to communicate the values of the Gospel in discussions and informal meetings. We are not ashamed of the message of Christ and speak directly about the beliefs of Christianity in a natural and appropriate way. However, questions about life and our place in it stream out of issues that are common for all participants and so they are not a priori "Christian".

The "Open Ears" project includes three two-day meetings with the same group spread over a year in an environment separate from everyday responsibilities, duties and stereotypes. We start with a very personal and transparent approach, taking care not to divide the group into two mental camps of "us" and "them". We work hard to be non-religious. Experience over the past four years validates this. Of course, non-religious doesn't mean non-spiritual. Non-believers start to lower their prejudice against Christianity and recognize that the Gospel addresses their questions (especially during informal talks late into the night). At least one youth pastor or youth worker accompanies the group.



"One thing I got from these three weekends is that if you want to talk seriously with someone about an issue, don't immediately give your opinion, first get to know them."

- Our first meeting focuses on "building trust". Young Christians begin to learn how to be natural and open. To be "a witness" is not separated from ordinary life. We lay foundations of trust, which continue in their schools and towns.
- Our second weekend is very interactive. The main topics are practical issues: partnership, sexual ethics, communication - where the teaching and values of

the Bible are presented through discussions. These talks often lead to important issues of trust, forgiveness, sin, etc.

- The third weekend focuses on Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and its interpretation into our situation. We present the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ and talk about it with the students.

This programme is not about numbers and statistics. Jesus Christ didn't play "power games" with people and wasn't an ideologist. He was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners".

Background to the project

Situation of the Church in new democracies

When Dušan, project leader for the Open Ears weekends, studied theology in Germany he met a Baptist community of believers. They came in the early nineties as immigrants to Germany from Dusanbe (a city in the southeast of the former Russian empire). As believers, they lived many decades under the oppression of a totalitarian atheistic regime and were strong in their faith: many of them were imprisoned, marginalized or tested in other ways. In contact with them, he realized that they were in transition. During their stay in a democratic home they experienced how inadequate their old theology was. Theology is always partially reactive, it responds to the issues asked by the society in which we are living. The "footprint" of totalitarianism in their case was clear: an escape from a very difficult present into a heavenly future. The focus of their theology had two points: **1**, perceiving Christ as personal Saviour, then a huge gap and—secondly and finally—**2**, waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ. In Germany—a country with a long democratic tradition—those Russian Baptists realised that between those two points there was still a whole life to be lived. They needed to learn how to reflect on the new situation from a Christian perspective and how to "rewrite" their theology.

Needs

An analogy of the church might be described as a "clenched fist". Pressure was applied by Communist governments to keep it closed and separate. Now, when the pressure is gone and the hand is opening sometimes there is a "spasm" as the untrained muscles stretch and uncurl. Knowing the biblical calling to go into all nations ¹, many Christians realise the necessity to change their approaches. Old models resulting from theology that reflected the former social environments are inadequate in the new situation. It takes courage and persistent exercise to flex and retrain the muscles which permit the hand to function at its full capability and flexibility. We are convinced that we, as Christians, have a lot to offer, but the stiffness which remains from the former "clenched fist" is one reason that many of our attempts are timid and forced. We are out of practice in inviting open dialogue with non-Christians, and we do not have much experience with creating an environment that encourages real communication.

- 1. *New ecclesiology.*** We need to reconsider our thinking about the Church and actively seek to create local churches which are no longer religious ghettos. We invite people who are passing by the church to step inside, during evangelistic outreaches or other similar events. They are active and integrated into society and the culture in which they live. Old forms and approaches that are based on a theology typical in the old situation, where "the world" is kept strictly separated from the church, stand in contrast with the new reality, problems, questions and challenges.

In our traditional cultures and as a result of the violent 40 year-long Bolshevisation which created a culture highly suspicious of any ideology, open-air events in main city squares are not very successful.

¹ Matthew 28:20

“The influence of ideology is more harmful than drugs, prostitution ...”

Advertisement for a mass evangelistic campaign topped the list of advertising that would be forbidden in choices given at a Slovak seminar on ethics and morals. A friend, who works for another foundation in Slovakia, related this story from one of their role-play exercises about ethical dilemmas in the non-profit sector.

Participants were told they were the head of some type of major media office (newspaper, TV or radio station, magazine). They were given a list of several types of companies that wanted to run an advertisement in their publication or on their station.

This list consisted of products such as alcohol, massage parlours, guns, pornography, an abortion clinic and an upcoming mass evangelism campaign. Their 'job' was to choose three of these advertisements that they would not accept, and explain why. An abortion clinic ranked second—as an advertisement for murder; next was alcohol, reflecting the country's huge problem with the effects of rampant alcoholism. The leading one, by far, was to say no to an advertisement for the evangelist. Their reason—evangelism has to do with ideas and ideology that is far more profound in its influence. Massage parlours and pornography ranked far below on the level of 'dangerous ads', saying that it would be a mere drop of water in the sea. Our cultures are so saturated with sex and pornography that one more advertisement wouldn't make a difference.



- 2. *New missiology.*** The need for renewal and reconstruction is also felt in our missiological efforts. The totalitarian suppression of the church into the sphere of private piety is often visible in our approach towards non-believers. The loss of context, insufficient understanding of current questions and problems, together with poorly developed skills to present our faith in a non-threatening way are all reasons why believers might think and act in a conspiratorial way. The absence of an environment open for dialogue is a key reason why the Gospel is presented in a one-sided manor—we preach it without listening to others.

Young people in Central and Eastern Europe are unfamiliar with the important experience of genuine community. For example, the environment created by a closed group that demands conformity can lead to a situation where young people are being prepared for evangelism without learning the skills necessary to meet a person from “the other side”. We suggest in projects called something like “How to present the Gospel” that relationship is necessary to bilateral communication, but real relationships with non-believers are absent. We are “trained” in our own groups, where one Christian plays a non-believer and another one plays an evangelist, but the dialog is artificial. We lack a common platform. These weekends encourage them to try to understand those outside their own small group of friends in order to foster open communication on significant issues such as: knowing ourselves and knowing God as the ultimate meaning, resolving conflicts, sexual education, and other questions of identity.

3. *New responsibility towards society.* We should all, together, take responsibility for the "world" because it is a subject of God's deep interest and extravagant love. Despite progressive secularisation and the crisis of institutionalised religion, we as the Church must learn how to communicate with fellow citizens in our world. David Lyon, the author of the book "Jesus in Disneyland—Religion in Post-modern Times" formulated a question about what future expressions of Christianity will resemble. He is convinced that we must develop the ability to communicate the message and symbols in a way that can do well in new and changing environments. Remembering, of course, that there is the real danger that we might lose or distort their true meaning in our efforts to be flexible. Those who choose to hide in their own trenches seem not to risk much, and while they may stay safely in their comfortable, "old world", they lose the ability to discourse with the very ones to whom they were sent. Other Christians may experience anxiety in their involvement with others because they meet non-believers, not from the indisputable position of "ex cathedra" (authority derived from position), but just as "*one voice in competition with many other voices*" in the modern marketplace of ideas.

Comment from an 'Open Ears' participant:

You handled concrete issues and problems, in which I am interested. On the theme of fear, I resolved one of my own problems for which I'm grateful.

Roots of the project

The "Apologetics With Open Ears" project drew several aspects of its structure from a project led by Dušan Jaura called "Peers", organised by the Open Society Foundation. Its main goal was to help teenagers to communicate their questions or problems and discuss possible solutions in the environment of a short-term community. All of that happened within lectures, discussions and interactive games. One of the main aims was to involve students with different social and ideological backgrounds in the project. Approximately half of the participants were students who were believers, the rest were students from the same locality, town, or sometimes even from the same school.

The high level of positive interest and response was surprising. During informal discussions outside the official programme, believers asked questions about faith and Christianity in the same way as non-believers. They were able to ask personal questions in the safe space of the community. Being confronted with different approaches prompted people to reflect upon what they believed and why.

At the time when the Open Society Fund ceased funding for the "Peers" project, we adapted the content and format to create a model of creative evangelism to better understand the questions and issues facing today's young people in Central and Eastern Europe. We are thankful to the Harry Lloyd Charitable Trust and the Mustard Seed Foundation for their support of this two-year project.

Four main components of 'Apologetics With Open Ears' weekends:

1) **Research** to clarify the context by developing a compassionate understanding of the need and to promote change by helping the Church reflect on itself. The purpose of this is to understand the deep-rooted beliefs of young people and address real issues and questions.

The following main areas are where our research is focused:

- **Meaning and Significance:** Basic assumptions regarding God/god and ultimate reality.
- **Epistemology and authority:** perceptions of authority; reasons for confidence in things believed.
- **Connecting and relationships:** assumptions regarding love, family, community and society; perceived obligations within relationships; fears in relationship and whether the boundaries in relationship are individualistic or communal.
- **Hope and Horizons:** questions and dreams regarding calling, goals, personal vision, direction and purpose; issues of life and death.
- **Idols and Heroes:** influences in people's lives, attitudes, discernment and issues of guidance and example; things which generate respect and admiration. Substitutions for God and palliative cures for meeting legitimate needs.
- **Morality and Ethics:** assumptions regarding morality, right and wrong, moral responsibility; the possibility of objective authority and behavioural obligations.



One method of getting people to think about their 'gut level' views involves picture association and verbal articulation. The exercise incorporates some principles from Michael Sack at Cultural Insights.

2) **Evangelism:** A clear presentation of the Gospel in a way that listens before speaking; that answers honest questions with serious answers; that is respectful, thoughtful and creative. Non-believers have often never before heard a clear and relevant presentation of the message of the Kingdom of God. Very often believers have a poor understanding of what the Gospel really is.

One of the youth pastors wrote:

"On the trip back by train, I clearly witnessed that this type of meeting has meaning. In other words, this was more than just a nice weekend with appealing people in a beautiful surrounding and interesting intellectual debates. I understand better how to build bridges with postmodern people and witnessed some of their judgments and barriers falling, at least in realising that mutual communication is possible. It is important to demonstrate that to the students. However, I have to ask, "If the bridge is made, how can we cross over it?" When people have realised and accepted that Christians are not totally ignorant, how should we confront them with the Gospel?"

3) Training for young believers. They gain confidence—not in themselves but in the Triune God and in the Bible as His revelation.

Often churches have the reputation of being very closed and are regarded somewhat with suspicion by others in the town. This is partly due to historic reasons since under communism church members were not always in a position to reach out publicly. It also includes natural suspicion of the unknown, and other reasons. When the project leader went to a school to introduce the programme, around 30 kids said, "Yes, I'd like to join you". Their parents were suspicious and 12 of them were told it would probably be "brainwashing" because it is with a religious sect. After the first session some of the participants explained what the weekend was like and what it meant to them: open, friendly, interesting and safe. After this, a number of parents relented and also gave permission for their children to join this programme.

Church groups often have little experience with this type of interaction between their youth group members and non-Christians. There was also some scepticism from the church workers' side about presenting this project in area high schools. Dušan needed to travel to the centre of the country in order to meet personally with school counsellors and teachers. One goal of these weekends is to help foster improved communication between churches and schools.

4) Training of youth workers. This is accomplished through training by experience for the others who participate in the weekends (youth leaders and observers from other Christian organisations who want to begin similar projects in their areas). Our desire is that this publication will expand the impact of these weekends and help youth workers from other countries in the region to implement the principles and values of this project and to formulate programmes that are relevant in their context and situation.

Benefits to local churches:

- authentic contact with young non-believers in their town/city
- a better idea of the questions of young people from non-church backgrounds
- increased understanding of how to present the Gospel in the context of our time
- bringing Christian values into different areas of society
- opportunity to present the faith and activities of the local church in the town/city

These meetings are important for non-believers as well. In a time of relativism and distrust, they are rediscovering values as "truth, love, morality", etc... In the context of community and safe space, they learn what it means to be created in God's image, what the Gospel message is, how to communicate, and biblical principles of conflict resolution.

How does the interaction between believers and non-believers go?

Here are some examples:

Non-believers often expect us to make an effort to "ideologically influence" them. But when they see that the session is based on equal friendly relationships and that we, as people, have a lot in common, their concerns diminish. For example : A student wrote that he was happy that there was not a "lynching of non-Christians", that it was a good and meaningful time and that he will also come to the next session. Communication of faith happens in a natural, friendly environment in which participants do not feel manipulated. On the other hand, Christians learn that we have a lot of questions in common. And in confronting their non-believing peers' questions, very often their faith is strengthened.

One group with whom we co-operated was the IFES student movement. Before we started they wondered, "What could we do, for TWO days, which would be worthwhile, with non-believers? Do you really think that somebody will come?" Reality outstripped all expectations: in the first meeting the number of interested students was more than double the available places. After the first weekend of lectures and informal discussions new friendships were created. The IFES students continued their contacts with the non-Christian participants back at the university through parties, hikes, etc. Our project helped to remove a little bit the minority complex many young Christians face and encouraged more of an attitude of "holy normality"—faith related to all areas of life.

Students evaluated highly the level of the sessions (new experiences and knowledge, new stimuli) and the informal, thoughtful presentation of the Gospel.

Comments from participants:

A group of "rebels" was pleasantly surprised: "We were warned that we would pray there all the time and that you will evangelise us aggressively. We decided to go to the session only to avoid a test in school. But it was very intense and interesting, we will be happy to come to the next one as well."

The only thing I missed was a guitar and guitarist, but otherwise it was super. The people here are nice, even if many are Christians, which leaves me a little out of balance.

I got to know myself and my values better here. I appreciated that anyone could express their own opinion and nobody shouts at them.

Values of the “Open ears project”

We learn from our own experience that none of us is an island and that to be a human being means existence in relationships. They prove the strength of our words and our thoughts. Ideas are “tested” in real relationships and they are reflected in interaction with others. We are convinced that our ideas need space and time to be “incarnated”. These two-day sessions are one opportunity for this to happen.

How we communicate with one another depends on our values.

- **Non-judgemental.** It is obvious that people need trust to be able to fully develop their skills and potential. An atmosphere of prejudice and suspicion or a static approach based on external or perceived differences does not contribute to this kind of growth. One thing we emphasise is that we should not be quick in making judgments about others. First, we should try to understand what the person is actually saying and upon what experiences their claims are based. We often experienced that the first impression (based on looks, vocabulary, gestures) was very unlike what we learned about the person after discussion and unbiased observation.

Comment from a participant:

Good, open atmosphere, no pressure, personal. The kids got to know each other without judging, better than I’ve observed in meetings at home. It was not a way just to “kill time”, it was worth it.

- **Active listening.** People often give answers to questions that were never asked, such discussions or talks are not a real dialogue. Our own idea of “what the other person said” and “what he/she wants to say” hinder the true meeting. Psychologists say that up to the age of nine we “record” in our mind the main characteristics of people we meet. Later, we put others into those patterns that were created early on. We do not say, “He/she is such and such, but “He/she reminds me of such and such.” We have to test our first impressions during real interaction in order to really understand one another.

Comment from an ‘Open Ears’ participant:

Excellent group. I liked the discussion about God and the church in small groups (mixed believers and non-believers). It helped me to understand non-believers better. The good discussion after the game “fellow travellers” helped us know one another better and identify reasons for some of our prejudices and, perhaps, that they don’t have much foundation.



- **Avoiding clichés.** Most people open up only gradually in strange environments and new groups of people. Impersonal clichés can be a protection from (real or perceived) danger. Observing this, we came to the conclusion that safe space is—besides other things—connected to the conviction that others are not “playing games.” Transparency of motives, authenticity, emphasis on the value of words and efforts to take other people seriously lead to direct, open communication that replaces empty clichés. Young

Christians can test the contents of beliefs and practices that they took over from their parents. As a result of that their faith can be strengthened and their evangelism can become more authentic.

Comment from a participant:

It was good that you didn't use Christian slang but normal, common language which is much better and more understandable.

- **All questions are allowed.** "Pseudo-communities" maintain a good atmosphere by observing rituals and the reduction of questions to those safe and allowed. In contrast to that, true community, which exists as a safe space, doesn't know inappropriate questions. Any question, if it is personal and touches the real problem, is allowed. Students appreciate being taken seriously; they appreciate the moderator's transparency—which also includes the possibility of admitting that he/she doesn't know the answer. It is then that, often, young people reveal their problems or questions in an open forum for the first time in their life. There is complete silence in such moments and participants truly learn.

Comment from a participant:

This weekend was very good, but I arrived with a hole in my personal relationship and communication with my girlfriend... I was shocked in the discussion by what she said [I didn't realise her position against abortion before.] Evaluation of the meeting is positive because we started to create, as a group, a good community.

- **Speaking the truth in love.** We cannot avoid conflicts in daily life. While open community tries to resolve conflicts, the pseudo-community pedantically pushes them out. If safe space has been created, there is a necessary balance between truth and love. Then we are able to express our respect and sympathy towards the person, together with our disagreement about the view that they present. Otherwise, insensitively presented truth hurts and, because of the form in which it is presented, the person is not able to accept it. On the other hand, uncritical love that glosses over disagreement or conflict in the name of "maintaining an appropriate atmosphere" creates an illusion. People can grow into spiritual maturity only where love is connected with truth.
- **Respect.** We see all individuals as uniquely created by God with their own story, mystery and dignity. Lacking complete information in order to know them perfectly, we want to avoid premature evaluations and conclusions. Each person is God's possession and has boundaries that we have no right to overstep. We are not responsible for them, but to them, which means that we respect them.

Comment from an 'Open Ears' participant:

I was interested in the session about common attitudes of Christians being "the hunters" and [non-Christians are] "the hunted", because a few of my relationships have begun to shift towards that.

- **Freedom, creativity and form.** We welcome diversity in our groups. We are multi-faceted persons who reflect our beliefs by how we look, our vocabulary and lifestyle. We do not see this as a threat to discipline but, on the contrary, see creativity and uniqueness as something that expands our perceptions of the world. We do not seek

uniformity (external or internal) because the story for each person—which includes calling, skills and life's path—is specific and unique. There is no pattern that applies to everyone or in all circumstances. We live in a world that reflects God's creativity. Creativity needs a form, but like every freedom has its limits (for example, not violating the freedom of others). The form focuses creativity in directions that make it more effective. Form without content would be empty; content without form would wander all over and miss the point.

- **Ancient truth for changing times.** G. K. Chesterton used an example that reflects well the paradoxical relationship between old and new. He said that conservatism is based on the conviction that if we leave things just so, they stay motionless and unchanging. But in fact, they are exposed to the process of constant change. He illustrates that with the image of a recently painted, white pillar. If we leave it alone, it will become gradually black. So, if we want "the old pillar", we have to paint it again and again, to "reform" it and re-create a new pillar from it. Our work and thoughts are a continuation of the history of Church of which we are a part. In this aspect, we are orthodox and conservative. Ancient truths, which are unchanging, need to be reinterpreted into the current situation—so different from the environments in which former generations have lived.
- **Deep and relevant theology.** Theology shouldn't withdraw from real problems, because its source is God's story, the story of the incarnated Word. When we think about God and our theology, we touch questions and problems connected with our daily lives. The Swiss reformer, John Calvin, introduced his work "Institutions" by reflecting that truth and wisdom are composed of two parts: of knowing God and knowing ourselves. They are so connected with each other that it is difficult to decide which comes first. So real theology is not meaningless speculation, on the contrary, it is a perfectly practical issue because the way we think influences how we act. All people have the same basic needs, longings, and questions because they stream out of beings created in the image of God. There can be differences in vocabulary, education and social background, and our theology should sensitively reflect these differences.

Building trust

It is essential to build trust between participants of the project. Most Open Ears weekends are made up of people who haven't previously known one another. They are from different classes and schools; Christians, but also atheists or people without religion. With this in mind, we model transparency and respect and include activities that help to remove artificial barriers, internal isolation and potential prejudices.

Trust is crucial to acceptance of the project. It is necessary to put all of our efforts into being sufficiently understandable and transparent as an organisation, in order to address any doubt about us, or the project. It is easiest to work in locations in which we have already had some experience. Our reputation and positive references from others or from previous participants are the best possible promotion.

When we started a project in a new location it was often helpful for it to be introduced by CityGate, as an association rather than through a local church, because an association might suggest a safer or neutral platform. We also found it helpful to invite a teacher to attend or participate in the project. The teacher can be helpful both with keeping discipline as well as reporting to other school officials about what happened. It is helpful, of course, if the teacher is a trusted person whose presence won't be overly disturbing or curb honest communication.

We appeared suspicious, for example, in one location where the local coordinator was a person from a smaller evangelical church, which already raised some suspicion in their small community (in a strongly Catholic environment and culture). Despite the fact that the person fulfilled all of the criteria (open, communicative, experienced in working with Christians and non-Christians, etc.), his church membership was sufficient enough to be threatening to several parents who prohibited their children from taking part in the project. At the same time, they recommended that their children ask classmates what the initial session was like so that they could decide according to their references. Instead of the thirty applicants just twenty people arrived for the first weekend. After they got back, the high school students who had attended highly recommended the session as a safe place for open interaction and without any manipulation on the part of the organisers. As a result, the initial mistrust disappeared and the number of those interested doubled for the second weekend. The project also indirectly helped the position of the local church in the town, as an official partner in an educational project together with the school and an association.

In another instance, both Christian & non-Christian students—in discussion late into the night, said this meeting was different than they are used to. Non-believers said they were interested to know more from their Christian peers about what they believe, and why, and how it helps them in the day-to-day. One believer remarked that the biggest surprise was to observe, in the non-Christians, "lots of talent and wisdom."

One activity modelling the necessity of trust in achieving mutual goals, involves teams of two, one blindfolded and the other with hands tied together, navigating an obstacle course through the woods...

Exercise on Trust: The lame leading the blind

They stumble along blindly. Their hands grope at the air before them as they falter on haphazard footing. Without the surety of a confident guide, they've only confusion, fear, uncertainty and doubt to mark their way



No, this isn't a description of post-moderns, nor is it any kind of statement on Generation X. Rather, it's a CityGate activity designed to initiate discussion on fear and confidence, authority and trust.

Set in the stunning alpine forests of the High Tatras, we form our Open Ears weekend participants into pairs - of which one member is blindfolded and the other bound at the wrists. They thread their way a kilometre or more between trees, across shallow creeks, over fences, through small tunnels and against any other obstacles we can find.

The method beyond the madness lies in our desire to create an experience, encouraging participants to deal with fear, to communicate information effectively, to be patient and to work as a team. At a practical level, these things are useful to keeping them on the dry side of the flowing streams and away from variant patches of mire and muck. At a deeper level, these activities help facilitate an encounter with our depravity. We are all, of course, quite fallen. Ours is a broken world. In a small way, stumbling through an obstacle-laden wood, either temporarily blind or shackled, helps to remind us of this. Participants come face to face with their limitations. In a moment in which, all of a sudden, a silly walk in the woods becomes a thing of great difficulty, our confidence is replaced by frustration, we learn we are near-useless on our own, we encounter our imperfection. We struggle for guidance. We call out for hope.

See Appendix 3 for details on how to set-up this activity.

Comments from participants:

The most interesting was the activity [on trust] in the forest because I realised that I am very comfortable. For the past 8-9 years I haven't challenged the boundaries of [my comfort].

This was much better [than the first weekend]. Perhaps because the first time people didn't know each other very well and this time they were much more open. The lectures were completely excellent, as was the 'forest activity', even though it was not necessary to 'play' at being blind and paralysed: look at my scarred legs, the [marks] on my forehead, dirty backside, stretched muscles, ... but it was fun.

It was super, especially the 'extra' activity on trust that was in the woods. ... I have the feeling that I want to return again and again for these weekends, with these people, as long as possible. It was worthwhile.

Attributes of Open Ears “space” in comparison to the common environment of participants (school, church)

There are obvious differences between the constraints for activities in a shorter, structured environment as compared with having an entire weekend where the structure can be as flexible as the activities allow. Time in school is strictly limited and during a 45-minute lesson it is difficult to put aside school responsibilities and duties. A short-term, two-day community brings the opportunity to leave behind one's normal 'stresses' and reflect on deeply personal questions; to learn about God and oneself in interaction with others.

Students appreciate the community environment, so different from conditions in school. They express this in directly as well as in written, anonymous responses.

Feedback from participants:

I was fascinated by the various life stories. I also liked the friendly approach and I think, you [Dušan] understand very well contemporary young people.

It was totally super! Even for such a short time. The lectures were broken up with fun activities so nothing was boring or oppressive.

I appreciated the daily regime and the contents of the session. We were busy all the time. I am happy that we were not treated as small children.

The activities were super, brought us closer together. They helped [to do this] better than listening to lectures. The people already partially know one another, but relationships were deepened. I am unable to write down, or express in words my feelings about the entire weekend...they are deeply internal, positive; they play with my thoughts and change my outlook on various things.

The activities were well-planned and executed, even when there was a bit of 'grumbling' as people came up against the unknown edges of their comfort zone.

The students and youth group leaders participated in discussions and activities at a good level of openness. Only one girl was completely silent throughout the entire weekend.

Setting up the project

Meetings with directors, teachers and students at schools

Since the project teamed with churches and schools from across Slovakia it was necessary to introduce it in each of the chosen regions. Personal meetings proved to be the best way.

Churches and youth organisations were approached with the idea first, since each "Open Ears" group depended on a local partnership. CityGate facilitated the weekends, but was not the sole administrator for them. Long-term success needs the committed involvement of at least one (preferably two) youth leaders who not only attend each weekend, but also organise participation from their area and follow-up in-between and after the series of three weekends.

Contact with the schools started with "the person in charge". Agreement was needed from both school administrators and teachers for participants to miss a day of school (three times over the course of 12 months). Only after gaining their trust and interest was the project presented to students in classrooms.

Most common teachers' questions:

- 1. Transparency.* People were understandably curious about who we are as an organisation and what are our aims. Since the project was partially sponsored it was also logical for them to ask, "What do you expect us to give back to you?"² Pure altruism is often looked upon suspiciously. Many people, from experience, have come to expect that anyone who is willing to give something "for free" also wants to use, abuse or manipulate the recipients for their own ends. Well-known, for example, are the intensive activities of political parties before elections or attempts by religious cults to spread their ideology in schools... When introducing the project, it is important to say what we really mean and be transparent without any hidden agenda. Any elements designed to misrepresent the content or purpose of the weekends must be absent in our thinking and actions. This kind of approach would, sooner or later, be disclosed as unfair and the project would fail because of the bad reputation. We introduce ourselves as a Christian organisation whose aim is more than evangelisation in the traditional understanding of the term. We want to contribute to the development of the students and to create a space where they can learn about themselves and about others. We also told them, from the beginning, that a part of the project is to introduce Christianity. This happens through games and interactive discussions in which they have the possibility to hear differing opinions as well as to deepen their own beliefs. What we inherited from our parents or other authorities becomes, in these kinds of interchanges, our own convictions.

² This would be less of a problem if the students paid all, or most, of their own costs.

2. **Compatibility with the educational system.** The project can be integrated into the general educational system. Lessons of ethics and philosophy are key topics that participants go through, of course, with different dynamics and intensity than in a normal classroom. It can be interesting for teachers (especially of ethics, philosophy or religion) to participate in the sessions.



After the group completes all three two-day sessions the students are given certificates.

3. **Discipline and safety.** Teachers often mention parents' concerns about discipline and the safety of their children. Since most of the students are younger than 18 we request the written agreement of their parents plus the name of the person who is responsible for the students on their journey to the session and back. Most often this is a teacher, pastor or local coordinator of the project. In our experience we found that if the basic rules of conduct we expect are communicated at the very beginning of our time together, there are few problems during the sessions. Any policies should be clear, the same for everyone and age appropriate. These should not be a long list of rules and policies, but should include the principles we want to be held accountable to: respect for one another, rules about smoking or alcohol, attendance and punctuality at activities, etc.

4. **Daily regime and punctuality.** We learned that the best thing is "to take the middle way", which means, on the one hand, not to insist on strict adherence to meaningless rules and, on the other hand, to pursue consistently those attitudes which can help improve quality of the time spent together. For example: A compromise with the compulsory time when they have to go to the bed. The first night we recommend (and check) that they go to bed early, explaining that the next day is hard and they need to be there not just physically but also mentally. The second night is less controlled and people are free to spend more time together. We try to be available during this time as well. Those wanting to spend a longer time in discussion can stay in the lounge, so as not to disturb those who want to sleep in their rooms.

5. **Alcohol.** It is well known in Central and Eastern Europe that students drink on school trips. There are several possibilities to deal with this. One is to keep a strict "police regime", but it is often proven that the stricter the regime is the stronger the reaction against it becomes. We decided to emphasise common sense at our sessions. We explain that we want real interaction and if they want to get drunk, they should go somewhere else to do it. We appeal to the fact that the number of students interested in the project is usually higher than the capacity of the project. They realise this as well and because they do not want to be replaced by someone else they do not cause trouble. We tell them we are not willing to play "cat and mouse" with them by stating rules that are not kept and we do not expect that there will be a division between "official life" (what we have communicated and they have agreed to) during the sessions and "real life" in their rooms. If someone

breaks the agreement and oversteps the limits there is punishment, which means exclusion from the remaining sessions. In the course of five years (about 60 sessions) this punishment was used with two people. They were very apologetic and although they expressed a desire to return, strict boundaries were set-up for their re-entry into the group that was also dependent on obtaining permission from the youth pastor of our partner church in their hometown.

All teachers', directors' and parents' questions are relevant, especially in the preparation phase before the first session. We learned that after the sessions the students themselves spread positive feedback about their experience and the programme.

The role of a local coordinator

It is impossible to manage all of the details in setting up the sessions from far away. We found that local coordinators are very helpful, even crucial to longer-term success of the project.

What should the local coordinator be like?

The person filling the role of local coordinator should be experienced in working with schools, a mature and communicative person able to present the programme in front of groups of students. This presentation should be done in a way that attracts interest and so that the purposes and aims are communicated clearly. The person should be able to mix well with both Christians and non-Christians and with young people as well as their teachers and parents.

Specific contributions:

- An open, communicative person
- Experienced in working in an ideologically heterogeneous environment
- Ability to create and develop group activities
- Academic credibility or formal involvement in school activities (for example, a teacher of ethics or religion) can also be advantageous

Students who have experienced the atmosphere of open and intensive community often want to continue meeting after the sessions are complete. And they want to continue to develop the relationships that they started to build. The coordinator (perhaps in co-operation with a teacher or a youth leader in a local church) is often the key person who can help to create and structure the character of follow-up meetings and so continue the process. Ideal places for these gatherings might be a school, club or local church.

Presentation of the project in local churches

Constrained by long-term enforced isolation, many Central European churches do not communicate well with people facing contemporary questions, issues and troubles. Real dialogue is missing and our hope is that this project can be one step towards bridging the gaps between radically differing worldviews, and between the reality of Christ and daily life.

We require that a youth pastor or youth worker must attend each of the weekends.

Many church workers feel trapped between two rocks. On one side they feel the need to step out of their own isolation and to obey the calling of the "Gospel in Society", from the other side they have various concerns.

1. ***"Do you think that someone will come?"*** They question privately if Christians could offer projects that could also be interesting to non-believers. They find it hard to imagine what the common platform of the meeting might look like. Do we have any common reference points? How will we spend time together if it isn't in Bible studies and prayer meetings? It is interesting to watch how insecure Christians can feel in an environment outside the forms and rituals of a church community.
2. ***Need for official support and practical help from the local church.*** During the preparatory phase of the project we require its official support by the leadership of a local church. We do not start cooperation without it. This means the provision of human sources—a worker or a team, that will prepare the project in the community and develop the relationships with students. We also request financial sponsorship of some sort. In most cases, student travel to the location of the weekends was covered by gifts from local churches.

Composition of the group (examples)

1. ***Size of the group, meeting room.*** An ideal size is about 25 – 30 people. It is a limit that we do not recommend exceeding. This size of the group assures a certain degree of anonymity (a student can remain unwatched) but it still enables quite good dynamics. We prefer a U-shape in communication between the lecturer and participants. The lecturer is also a mediator and facilitator, with participants sitting at tables or desks where they can take notes. Because they are facing one another in the U-formation, everyone can have eye contact with each other. In the centre there is free space for "icebreakers" or various activities. Participants are sometimes divided into smaller groups (6-8 people). Discussion in these groups can be more personal and intensive. If it is in a large room, these smaller groups can stay there, but for privacy and ease of communication, when possible it is better to utilise additional rooms.
2. ***Composition of the group.*** A main assumption of this project is that the groups are made up of Christians and non-Christians. It is ideal if these parts of the group have about the same size so that there is not a strong minority and people are less likely to feel marginalized. It also is important not to have big groups of close friends, who may feel independent from the others and remain closed to others. They tend to have a sort of impermeable barrier around them, caused by "insider language": memories of events experienced together, hints, jokes, etc. All of these create an invisible thread of relationships, which is nearly impossible to break into by people from outside the group. However, it is important to emphasise that this is a sociological feature and it applies to believers as well as to non-believers. Trying to avoid it, we compose the groups in a way to get it the most structuralized (maximum 3-4 people from one classroom) and we create activities to overcome

communication barriers right at the beginning. It is more complicated in the case of a church youth group, where several people may attend the same set of weekends. A good solution involves drawing from multiple youth groups from other local churches in the town. Additional groups could be formed in order to give each person from the various groups who wishes to participate the opportunity to do so.

The students who comprised one group, from a Lutheran High School in Bratislava, are very colourful and represented a wide mixture of worldviews. Many of the students attend the school in order to improve their English skills. One 17-year old student's parents are divorced due to the father's problem with heroin. He is a founding member of a well-known Slovak punk rock group. The students themselves said that drug availability and use is the same in Christian schools as for any other in the area. One of the teachers was uncomfortable even having a discussion about drugs (not wanting to harm the school's "good name"), highlighting a key problem that young people often feel—the church is not concerned about, or relevant to, the real issues they face.

It is possible to say that diversity enriches the group. It is important to consider the educational level of the students in composing the group. We sometimes do combine high school students with university students or vocational school students, but this kind of group is the exception rather than the general rule.

Content of the three weeks

The phrase, "Jesus is the answer" is true—often on a much deeper level than we understand. Similarly, we also are convinced that the Gospel contains good answers and reasonable, thoughtful guidelines to follow in dealing with our problems. However, answers can only be given appropriately once we have listened to the (expressed or unexpressed) questions. That is why the project is called "Apologetics With Open Ears."

Young Christians are learning how to be natural and open in their presentation of Gospel. To be "a witness" is not separated from ordinary life. We want to build foundations for trust, which local churches can then build upon in their schools and towns.

Comment from a participant:

I met many interesting questions, which I would never have thought of on my own. I liked that the discussion was voluntary. It's different from [religion class] in school where you are forced to answer. It's a pity it's only 3 days. It could be longer!

A cross-cultural event without hidden agendas

We quite often meet believers whose main motivation and aim is to communicate the Gospel, but they often don't know how to convey the key component of it, our relationship with Jesus Christ, in ways that really connect. Jesus' model of relating with others, believers and non-believers, is worthy of careful consideration and imitation. One of the barriers in forming real relationships with non-believers is the conspiratorial approach of "hunters" and "hunted" already mentioned. The pressure to reduce evangelism to a verbalised "basics of the faith" is one reason Christians are sometimes perceived as dangerous people who propagate their ideology, or, at best, who are unattractive. We desire to integrate our faith into the dynamics of everyday relationships, where the way in which we present the Gospel message is in part dependent on the situation. We give

answers to the questions being asked. If participants meet us first as interesting people, and if they know that they are in a safe ideological environment, the basics of our faith usually come up in natural ways. We pray for opportunities where this might happen, and seek to be sensitive at all times in this.

The "Open Ears" project provides numerous possibilities for cross-cultural exchange, be it between people of differing world-views or parents and children. One result of the activities, and a key goal, is to become more sensitive to those with differing opinions.

One aim of the project is to create "safe space", where young believers and non-believers speak and live together for two days. On one side, we would like to present this model and values to Protestant local churches. We see a significant desire to communicate Christianity but a lack of knowledge in how to do this sensitively and effectively. On the other side, we would like to share the message of the Gospel with non-believers, many of whom many never have heard it before. They often have a strong resistance and prejudices against religion (especially in its institutional form), but they also have deep and personal questions.

Comment from a participant:

The questions are incredibly provocative. I think I'll have to change my views after this session.

Suggested schedule of the time

Beginnings are usually uncertain; people do not know each other and they do not know what to expect from the others or the time together. Non-believers are afraid of ideological manipulation and believers are afraid of harmful secular influence. Parental attitudes and 'mistrust' also assert a certain influence. The result is a clash of different worlds.

Our project includes three sets of two-day long meetings. We begin Thursday evening with dinner and end Saturday after lunch. The schedule we initially set was too intensive for the coordinators of these weekends. Late night discussions are very good and open, but also exhausting.

The First Weekend:

Our first meeting is focused on "trust building". Because of prejudices (on both sides) we start the first weekend with a very personal and transparent approach. We don't divide the group into two "mental camps" of "us" and "them". We want to create a community, because we are all human together.

First weekend goals:

From practice, experience and careful preparation, the discussion topics in this first weekend directly touch issues many young people have questions about.

- truth and reality
- authority
- heroes and idols
- personal values
- identity
- beliefs and assumptions
- fears and doubts

We start with things that we have in common. The reference point is our humanity—biblically “created in God’s image”—which generates many commonly shared questions. We use fun activities, “ice-breakers”, to get to know one another and lead the discussion to the main topic of the first session, towards a better understanding of ourselves. We create space for personal reflection through the activities, lectures and discussions.

It is an opportunity for the lecturer to communicate Christian values in a way that is integrated into daily life. In discussions and lectures we touch various topics, for example:

- What does “understanding” mean? How do beliefs, doubts, fears and experiences influence how we understand? How can we be wise in an age of information overflow?
- What does it mean to be successful? What is my definition of success? Is “image” important? What is the difference between “to have” and “to be” and what is our understanding of our value based on?
- How do we deal with our own perfectionism?
- The themes of fear, anxiety and aggression. What are we most afraid of? What does it mean to trust and how is trust expressed in practice? How do we respond to change?
- Tensions between what we dream and reality: seeking real love and finding “our place under the sun”, the problem of pain.
- What is the foundation of grace and how is it revealed practically in the character of a mature person?
- The question of identity, how to understand who we are and how to understand the biblical mandate **“to love one another as ourselves”**. What does freedom in relationships mean, freedom that does not bind and care that does not manipulate? We talk about humbleness that understands its real motives (“I give in order to receive) and reveals itself in thankfulness.

At the first meeting of one group, a young pastor, the local coordinator for the group, started the initial dinner by singing a prayer. A few from members of her youth group hesitantly joined in. The non-believers were shocked and somewhat frightened. At breakfast the next day, the pastor sang alone, and at lunch even she didn't sing. We started to learn how to listen to others and also how to communicate our beliefs in a more sensitive way... Later, when we discussed the problems of separating ourselves into closed groups, both “sides” agreed that meetings with different people could also be very inspiring.

See Appendix 2 for possible “ice breakers” and other activities.

The Second Weekend:

The second set of meetings is very interactive. Many practical problems of teenagers stem from their lack of communication skills. The first session focused more on understanding ourselves. In the second session we focus outward, on relationships in school, family and with friends. Activities are connected with verbal and non-verbal communication. We talk about communicating on various levels and about possible misunderstandings.

Second weekend goals:

Learning to communicate

- problems in communication: verbal and nonverbal communication
- dealing with conflict
- love and responsibility in sexual relationships
- what Christianity says about relationships between men and women
- film and discussion
- open discussion about actual questions of the participants

See Appendix 2 for possible activities dealing with communication.

Another main topic is practical issues of partnership and sexual ethics, where attitudes and values of the Gospel are presented "officially" during the lectures and discussions as well as in the activities. Our talks touch important issues like trust, forgiveness, honesty, respect. This is very good and natural way of communication of the Gospel.

One discussion activity was about practical questions of partnership and sexuality. The moderator presented a statement, such as: "I do not want to have sexual intercourse before marriage". The students had to express their opinion about it. Those who responded "yes" gathered on one side of the room and those whose response was "No" on the other side. One person was chosen from both groups to defend their opinion and the discussion started. The last comment touched off a very emotional response in one participant who stated: "If my partner wasn't faithful, I would leave her." A 25-year old university graduate who is active in a local church youth group, he said that his girlfriend was unfaithful to him but he "does not want to talk about it", because "she is here, among us". A very interesting discussion about guilt and forgiveness followed.



See Appendix 2 for a description of this activity: **Chairs**

Another example is from perhaps the most mature group of participants, all students of a church high school. Most liked the second weekend even more than the first one because they got to know one another better from the group activities. Despite the fact that they were from a church school, the group was not homogenous (parents are attracted to the excellent opportunity to learn English and as result of that Christians create a minority in the school). The diversity of views was clear, especially as they expressed their opinions concerning sexual ethics. Many tensions between those who expressed strong religious views and those who did not were addressed, and partially removed, during the deeply personal discussion. In the opinion of their teachers, it was a meaningful moment for improvement in their relationships and for reconstruction of trust towards Christianity.

Life Roles: We had a very open debate about drugs and reality and also about family values. A 16 year-old student who started to attend a Baptist church during an English camp, left it after some time. Her mother is an alcoholic and she lives in a difficult family situation. She has a very extravagant personality, but self-confidence is a mask for vulnerability. The final activity of the weekend was about each of the life roles that express our identity.



Each of us had five pieces of paper with various roles written on them, which we threw away piece by piece. The last role, the one most precious, that stayed in her hand was that of "daughter". She refused to throw away that piece of paper and she also refused to explain why. It was a strongly emotional situation... and we made an appointment to talk more about her problems at a later date.

See Appendix 2 for a description of this activity: **Five Life Roles**

The Third Weekend:

A good place to start is with talks about community and safe space, in which we can experience freedom in despite our different views.

Third weekend goals:

Jesus Christ "True Man - True God"

- The "Sermon on the Mount" and its application in the context of our time
- Living together in "safe space"

We also talk about the values that we share and about the core of the Gospel: who is Jesus Christ, why did He come into this world, who He is to us and for us. What kind of questions do we ask when we are confronted with the Gospel and the church as the representative of the message? We conclude with reflections on our sessions together and of the interaction of believers and non-believers.

During one discussion on "What is more important, truth or love?" the youth heard that both are necessary. Truth alone leads to hate and anger and harsh legalism and love alone leads to permissive lawlessness. This resonated well and they discussed how some of them, as non-Christians, feel so often judged by the religious world. The believers wondered at a world without law and life lived under a lie. Bridges were made, in small ways, as the two groups, for the first time, began to really talk to one another.

Comment from a participant:

It sounds like a cliché phrase, but I really did like everything here. I could say that I discovered new skills in communicating with people. I experienced much good here and I can't remember anything bad. I think this kind of seminar is really worth it for personal development – builds skill in tolerance, empathy, perhaps because we are from two different schools and classes. On one side that is positive as we have different opinions and views of life, on the other side we didn't know each other that well and 3 weekends isn't enough time to get to know each other deeply. Perhaps that is the only negative thing.

Costs and finances

The total budget for one group is the overall cost per weekend multiplied by three (three sessions over 12-18 months).³ The overall costs are created by:

- Food and accommodation for about 30 participants for two days
- The lecturer's travel costs and resources
- Costs of organising (phone calls, fax, copies, time needed for training moderators)
- Students' travel costs
- Materials (large sheets of paper, coloured markers, props and prizes for games)

Costs will vary, depending on accommodations and sponsorship possibilities in local areas where the project is done.

What did we learn?

1. Looking for new ways and new approaches of creative evangelism are pressing issues. Change comes slowly, both in and outside the church, even after 13 years of life in freer societies. The church knows its calling and both seeks to, as well as wonders if, it will be able to communicate it appropriately.
2. Differences (either socially or in differing opinions) don't necessarily need to be connected with suspicion or perceived as a potential threat. Diversity during the sessions was mostly inspirational and strengthened our faith. In honest dialogue greater understanding was achieved, bridges were built.
3. The project reflects a real need, confirmed by the high interest by students to participate in the sessions.
4. Transparency and integrity—both of our motives and in the practical ways in which we deal with others—are crucial in creating trust.
5. The result of clearly communicated expectations at the very beginning, the show of respect towards participants, and allowing a certain degree of freedom with responsibility, results in behaviour that exceeds normal school standards.
6. Developing the project within a local environment (all of the group's participants from the same area) is meaningful especially when there are places such as a church youth group, or club, where students can continue to freely ask their questions and develop relationships with each other.
7. Authentic meeting is enhanced when people feel listened to, understood, and respected. Then they are much more willing to hear answers to their questions.

Top 10 issues/questions:

1. Why did you compose the group in this way, believers and non-believers from the same area? What did you want to achieve by that?
2. The meaning of life: What is my purpose? Why should I get up in the morning? What sense is there in growing older while doing the same, stereotypical activities of everyone around and which lead from nowhere to nowhere?

³ Despite the reasonable price of accommodation, many students, especially from economically weak regions of the country, couldn't afford to pay all the costs of the sessions. We required that everyone contribute a part of the costs of their accommodation and their own travel, either themselves or from local churches. Sponsorship by others may be an option, or fundraising activities by the group may also be explored.

3. Identity and self-worth. My own value versus conforming to those around me (image, financial situation of parents, *in what do I find my own value?* etc.)
4. How can we believe in real love and friendship, if everything around us speaks about the complete opposite?
5. Personal questions put to moderators (in the context of "anything allowed" in which anyone may write down their questions and put them into a hat anonymously). For example: *Why are you a Christian? What was the reason that you started to believe in God, in Christ? Have you always been faithful to your wife?*
6. What are we afraid of? Reasons for fear and anxiety and how to deal with them.
7. Violence, aggression, intolerance (tensions and conflicts with groups like skinheads). How to deal with the problem? Is any prevention possible?
8. Questions regarding sexuality and partnership (for example: *Why do Christians insist that it is not good to have a sexual relationship before the wedding? Why is abortion murder? How do you know who is "the right" partner, etc.*)
9. How to resolve conflict with superiors, like teachers or parents?
10. The question of perspectives in life: how and where to look for employment and apply oneself after graduation from school or university. How to be an individual in an environment that attempts to push us back to the old stereotypes?

Top 10 responses:

Our communication happened in the context of the natural relationships formed in a short-term community. Concrete discussion topics and responses were only partially planned. Dealing with the issues and questions that came up in each group was given a high priority.

1. From the beginning we were open about the aims of the session and that CityGate is a Christian organisation. God is Trinity—a model of relationship is at the very centre of reality. We believe that Christianity speaks into every time and every culture and that honest questions deserve honest answers. Diversity in the participants can be inspiring for everyone.
2. Questions about the meaning of our (sometimes seemingly trivial) activities lead to natural discussion about God. His revelation gives meaning not only to the history of the world, but also to our individual stories. We come into the world not of our own choice, but to learn and to serve others. Candles on the graves of those we remember on the first of November are a symbol of hope, a reminder of past memories and health. Like our lives, their time span on earth is limited, but they can be meaningful, if we live for the others...

3. The question of our own value is one of the most important questions for teenagers. If appropriate to the situation, we could relate our personal experiences with God. The experience of unconditional love generates a radically different view of my own value, which is no longer conditional upon environment, physical appearance or a successful career. At the same time, our perceptions of who God is, are conditional upon our surroundings and especially upon our experience within the family.
4. This leads to discussions about the nature of reality, the world and our place in it, about human beings as a mixture of grace and misery, right and wrong. Healthy realism is rooted in Bible, which is as far from naïve dreaming as cynical resignation. Jesus, true God and man, is a model for our relationships, love, sacrifice, acceptance, and true friendship worthy of being followed.
5. The transparency and personal approach of the moderators in a sufficiently protected and safe environment is highly appreciated by students. There should be no pretence, with direct answers given to the questions asked which are not simplistic.
6. We leave considerable space for dialogue about fear. A major topic is the fear of our own death or of someone close to us. Also common: life without meaning and direction; concerns about failure in our personal and professional lives; fears of being disabled and growing old... Responses include the short sightedness of the "cult of youth" (heavily promoted by the media). No plastic surgeon can prevent physical extinction. How can we meaningfully live the life given to us? The biblical exhortation "**do not be conformed to this world**" also includes our ability to rebel against the media's manipulation of our desires so that things we do not need turn into things that we cannot live without.
7. Questions of violence, aggression and intolerance are very relevant to this age group. Even at "prestigious" schools, there are students who carry weapons to defend their right to be different, for example: to have long or dyed hair. We touch on causes of aggression, fear as one stimulus for aggression, and non-confrontational approaches that can be much more effective than physical violence. Humour and showing a larger perspective can often achieve much more in modelling positive or negative attitudes than sophisticated sociological or political studies.
8. Effective ways to address topics of sexuality and partnership are interactive discussions or exercises (see Appendix 2 for the activity "Chairs") instead of lectures. Students have different opinions and they discuss them. The lecturer is moderator as well as a participant in the discussion. Specific or sensitive questions are dealt with anonymously—by writing them down and putting them into a hat.
9. A major problem is the lack of positive models of conflict resolution in the environments where students spend most of their time: in the family, school or in the media (TV, films, video games). Helping them to see the "other side" (for example, the school environment is often frustrating not only for students but also for teachers) is a key point. Conflicts may seem to be straightforward, but actually can be intensely personal. Resolution often doesn't lie in precise argumentation, but

in the ability to empathise with the position of those in authority and in understanding potential reasons for feelings of uncertainty or humiliation.

10. Many students come from localities with a high rate of unemployment; a large portion has parents who have lost their jobs. Frustration at the seeming impossibility to find work in such regions strongly influences the entire family. Some students try to cope with it; others give up and tend towards exhaustion and apathy. God, who is the source of grace and strength, can change unfavourable circumstances or, as well, provide courage to cope with them.

Conclusion

How can we “quantify” and measure the results of the project?

These are a few of the measurements to evaluate whether our methods, the content of the weekends, and the format used, are useful, especially in the longer-term.



- During the third set of meetings we set aside time for feedback and written evaluation, asking “what did you find interesting about the topics of the *Apologetics With Open Ears project?*” and “what are your ideas or questions about Christianity?”
- Longer-term friendships made and the amount of contact by participants with local churches after participation in these weekends.
- The number of other churches that are sponsoring this kind of weekend with students in their communities.
- Interest of students to continue with this project in additional meetings or future activities.
- Personal contact with CityGate representatives and participation in our activities (email, phone calls, seminars).

This short excerpt is from a letter by a 17 year-old non-believing student:

“The sessions helped me to find the way that I am ready to walk on. I feel more balanced, which looked impossible to achieve before... People around me say that they can see a radical change in me, one which is, they say, positive. I figured out that half of the conflicts at home were caused by my own doing. My mother has become completely open with me and I now lead long philosophical discussions with my father. I cannot talk to my brother because he is always on marihuana. These changes didn’t happen just to me, but also to three other people who participated in the programme. Our classmates are “shocked”... Now I just have a new “direction” and I know the way will not be easy. And because I do not have a model in my surroundings, I hope that society won’t push me back...”

Despite the originality and “mystery” of each session, created by the specific composition of participants, through their personal contributions and creativity, it is possible to extract principles, values, and approaches that can also be applied to other cultures and environments. Our desire is that this manual inspire and aid others to do so.

Comments from participants:

Do we really have to stop? These weekends were one of just a few “events“ that I’ve ever really looked forward to. I’m afraid that after these experiences, there will an empty space in our souls – we will miss them.

I can’t think of anything negative about these meetings. It is simply a super project. I especially liked – I guess everything. It’s a pity the three meetings are over; it would be good if there were more...

I liked everything, but the one thing that would make it better is if it were one day longer. I liked the lectures as well as informal evening discussions.

This entire “seminar” was very enriching and I found answers to many questions, which I have been searching for a long time. It’s great to meet people and their opinions. I learned to be less judgmental and to try not to have prejudices. I missed not having time for informal discussion on the second evening, as we had last time. But I’m really very glad that you organised this time and that I could be here.



Appendix 1 – Authority

One of the most important topics of our debates was the question of authority. We tried to listen with “open ears” and to discover in what young people really trust. Part of the programme was also an activity focused on finding out our “gut beliefs” or the things which really motivate us. We used pictures to help them express their core views about authority.

Marc, a CityGate staff member wrote:

"We were dealing with questions of authority, based around an effort to help the kids get to know themselves and one another better. We used various means, a personality-type test, a film discussion based on "The Matrix", picture selection, games and activities. One of our personal motivations is to help ourselves learn more about the gut beliefs of the young people around us in order to adapt our programmes to meet their real needs and questions. "The Matrix" is a movie concerning the testing of faith, among other things. Neo, the main character, has, as they tell him in the movie, "A problem with authority." We posit to the students that we interpret the whole world around us through three lenses: authority, experience and reason. We point out how the Apostle Paul says, that though we see, we see through the glass darkly. Our entire perspective is off, our vision is marred by cataracts.

As an exercise, they try and identify a bag full of mystery objects. We tell them they need to use their reason or experience as tools and, further, that we'll act as authorities and help them, giving them several hints. They soon discover that our hints are sometimes accurate, sometimes misleading and, at other times, entirely a lie. They'll get few, if any, of the objects right, and the exercise will, in the end, prove to be an effective one in helping them to see that their ability to interpret the world is clouded over by misinformation, poor understanding, not enough information, no experience and by a plethora of other handicaps. We see darkly, they'll learn.

Even later, "The Matrix" watched and dissected, someone will ask, "what is more important, truth or Love?" We will talk about how both are necessary, how truth, alone, will lead to hate and anger and harsh legalism and how love alone will lead to permissive lawlessness. This will resonate and they will talk about how some of them, as unbelievers, feel judged so often by the believing world. The believers will wonder at a world without law and life lived under a lie. Bridges will be made, in small ways, as the two groups will, for the first time, begin to really talk to each other, if only in minor, mostly indirect ways."

Although many young people see education as memorizing of pieces of information disconnected from life, they are educated constantly and at many fronts. Neil Postman (head of the department of Culture and Communication at New York University) asked in his book "The End of Education": "Who writes songs nowadays, songs that young girls sing?" In other words, who can be considered as "the opinion maker" in connection with teenagers? Who offers a story which will resonate with them and which can be "scanned" into them in a way that it will influence their motivation, opinions and view of the world?

According to our research we have come to the conclusion that authorities are evaluated by three criteria:

1. their behaviour,
2. how their subordinates feel around them,
3. whether they are successful in removing the misery from life.

If authority figures are arrogant, too proud, too assertive, always right and always ready to give quick answers to complex questions, they are seen as dishonest, hypocritical, and insensitive towards real needs in their surroundings. If they intimidate people and try to convince others at all cost, then they are scorned. People also do not accept authorities who do not respond with practical acts towards the suffering around them. Students respond to them with passive resistance or their subordination is mere pretence.

Young people expect *transparency* in the process of education, in which they create and adopt their views. They have to know that the person in front of them is "readable", someone who—as they wrote—"doesn't pretend anything". They learn by listening to stories which they compare with their own experience. If they accept a certain person as an authority then they try to be like that person. They have an infallible sense for *authenticity* and *naturalness*. It is necessary to gain trust through being authentic and natural because any delegated position of authority is a subject of suspicion. They claim to listen to those able to get closer to them *through the heart* and respect those people able to overcome natural differences and barriers to get close to them. They identify such a person as being like "their father or mother" and like them. This person does not lord their authority over them, and respects them. They don't misuse their position, and their aim is to benefit the students. This is crucial in determining whether students submit voluntarily or only under pressure. The most demanding requirement of an authority is *integrity*. A person of integrity lives what he preaches and is—in the poetic language of Neil Postman—"a song that many long to sing".

From responses by the students:

Authority - positive

- o Natural, competent, able to delegate
- o Driven by personal experience and beliefs
- o Strength depends on those around them
- o Doesn't desire to change/manipulate those around
- o Develops subordinates
- o Not arrogant, content
- o Peaceful, non-threatening
- o Transparent, doesn't want to "play games"
- o Listens to others, not afraid to admit mistakes
- o Doesn't need to know everything, always be "right"
- o Able to accept others' comment, feedback
- o Integrated lifestyle, ethical, moral, doesn't lie
- o Able to resolve conflicts
- o Like my father, mother
- o Shows they like me
- o Non-judgemental, doesn't belittle others

Authority - Negative

- o Makes others feel uneasy, subordinate
- o Unstable, two-faced person, hidden agenda
- o Legalistic, hypocritical, liar
- o Manipulative, violent, ruthless
- o Bureaucratic, formal, rigid for no apparent reason
- o Unqualified, non-professional
- o Narrow-minded
- o Teacher, who has knowledge, but isn't able to communicate in a way that others can grasp it, or creates an atmosphere of fear.
- o Makes others feel inferior, stupid
- o Acts as if infallible, always right
- o Impersonal
- o Pedantic, cold
- o Determined to reach personal goals no matter what or who is in the way ("over the bodies of others")

Appendix 2 - Description of Activities

Encourage everyone to participate in all of the activities, even those who may be shy, or feel reluctant to be in front of a group, or who aren't athletic. But the moderators should be very sensitive to each individual, without embarrassing anyone or forcing them to do something they really feel awkward or uncomfortable with.

Suggested materials:

- o Large sheets of paper and coloured pens for drawing on them
- o Blank paper or notebooks and pens/pencils sufficient for all of the activities and participants
- o A stop watch (or watch with a second hand) to keep time in activities where teams are competing.
- o Small 'prizes' for winners of 'events' (we held an Olympic style awards ceremony after some of the activities.)
- o Thoughtful questions or stories prepared in advance for the activities selected. Questions which provoke answers other than 'yes' / 'no' help to stimulate discussion.
- o Radio or cassette/CD player for the activities involving music as well as for use as background music during 'quiet/reflective' times in the activities.

Activity: Drawing a picture together

This is an activity of non-verbal communication. Students divide into groups of eight to ten people. Each group gets a large sheet of paper and pens. The aim is to communicate nonverbally through drawing. There cannot be more than one person drawing at a time in each group. A person cannot draw longer than 20 seconds at a time. After each person has had one turn, go around the group again, until the story is complete or time ends. Others should try to understand the purpose of previous drawers and continue their efforts to create a story. We encourage people in the groups to try together to create a story with conflict and a conclusion, without speaking a word.



After about 20 minutes we evaluate their drawings, focusing mainly on the ability to cooperate, to what extent a theme became the central topic for all of the group, whether there are strange or isolated elements in the drawing, etc.

This activity can be a mirror for students and help them judge to what extent they can exist in a team.

Activity: A trip by train around Europe

For the moderator: distribute copies of the scenario and read the instructions

1. Everyone must choose the three most and least attractive fellow travellers
2. Afterwards, everyone joins a group of four people and gives reasons for their choices and criteria of why.
3. Each group then works together to create a list of their fellow travellers (3 most attractive + 3 least)
4. Each group evaluates the criteria and common characteristics of those with whom they do not want to travel.
5. The leader should emphasise the fact that we do not have sufficient information about each person to adequately judge them (we are biased because of the influence of media) and we can gain this only through discussions with, and observation of, them.

Scenario:

We are all on the train "Nationality". We left Lisbon for Kosice and we are going to be travelling for a week. You have to share your compartment with other three passengers from the options listed below.

Instructions:

Everyone should select three passengers with whom you would most like to travel. Then choose three other people with whom you would not like to travel with in any case.

1. A Serbian soldier from Kosovo
2. A stout Swiss businessman
3. An Italian disc jockey who seems to be well off
4. An African woman who is selling leather goods
5. A young artist who is HIV positive
6. A Romany who is travelling to Slovakia
7. A Basque nationalist who periodically travels to Russia
8. A German rapper who lives an independent life-style
9. A blind musician from Austria who plays the harmonica all the time
10. An Ukrainian worker who doesn't want to go home
11. A middle-aged Romanian woman, without a visa and with a 1-year old child
12. A feminist from the Netherlands
13. A skinhead from Sweden who seems to be drunk
14. A soccer fan from Belfast who is travelling to a match
15. A Polish prostitute from Berlin
16. A French farmer with a basket full of a delicious but stinking cheese
17. A Kurdish refugee who lives in Germany and is on his way to Libya
18. Czech emigrant who's just been released from a Portuguese prison

Activity: "Chairs"

This technique can be used when to open themes to suggest different views about or on which participants are likely to hold different opinions. It was particularly effective in discussing issues of partnership and sexuality.



In the centre of an adequately large room (usually the room where lectures are held) place two chairs, facing each other. A statement or position is announced, for example:

- "Love at first sight is possible."
- "I want to wait until after the wedding to have our first sexual intercourse."
- "I would not have an abortion in any circumstance."

The group is divided according to the opinion of its participants. Those whose answer is "yes" gather on one side of the room, those whose answer is "no" occupy the opposite side of the room, with the two chairs dividing them. A virtual line runs across the room between the two chairs. Students can choose their place on it according to the strength of their conviction. Those who have no clear view of the issue can sit close to the chairs at a zero point, those who radically agree with a 'yes' or 'no' are close to the walls, which means they are furthest from the chairs in the middle (and furthest from those of the opposing view). The leader chooses representatives from both opinion groups and they try to defend their standpoint in a short discussion. Or they can put ask questions to the person sitting on the opposite chair about their opinion. In the next phase of the discussion, others on both sides are encouraged to join in with comments, questions.

We emphasise ahead of time that we do not want to "beat up" the other side with our arguments. It is important to listen to each other and to respect even those whose opinions that we do not agree with. We often quote T. G. Masaryk: "Only an ox doesn't change his opinions". If anyone changes their opinion during the discussion, they may change their place (closer to or further away from the 'zero line' or even to the "opposing side". The role of the leader is to moderate the discussion, by staying neutral. At the end of the discussion it may be appropriate to summarise the discussion or even to present his or her opinion. He leader is free to ask questions or make points during the discussion, of course.

Activity: One thing (introductions)

This is a good introductory activity for the first meeting. Each person finds someone they don't know well and introduces themselves to that person by sharing one thing they would like others to know about them that other people might not realise about them on first glance.

Come back together as a group, each person has 2 minutes to introduce the other person and shares their 'one thing'.

Activity: Mystery Objects (how do we “know”, “authority”)

Scenario:

One person from the group is chosen, blindfolded, and asked to identify a “mystery object” which has been placed inside a bag. They are told to use their reason and experience in answering questions given by the moderator, who acts as the “authority”. They take the item out of the bag, so the rest of the group can see, and respond to questions and “hints” from the moderator. Begin with something easily identified by shape (example, a banana) and move towards more difficult questions that cannot be determined by touch alone (what colour) is it.

Through the questions and by giving hints that are sometimes accurate, sometimes misleading and, at other times, entirely a lie, the moderator can “lead” them so that they get few, if any, of the objects right. Using difficult to identify objects (a jar filled with juice, a piece of paper with a picture on it), things which can normally have more than one colour (an apple), or unexpected objects (a blue baseball) are suggested.

The exercise should prove to be an effective one in helping them to see that their ability to interpret the world is clouded over by misinformation, poor understanding, not enough information, no experience and by a plethora of other handicaps. We see darkly, they'll learn.

Suggested questions:

What colour is it?

How heavy is it?

What is it used for?

What is it made from?

What is written on it?

What is inside?

How do you know?

Why can't you know?

Activity: Untangle

This is an exercise in teamwork and communication.

Everyone stands close together in a group, then reaches their hands up and grabs 2 other hands (should not both be from the same person). The group task is to 'untangle' everyone so there is one long line, without anyone letting go of either of the two people's hands they are holding. Situations may arise where this is impossible to do, after a reasonable amount of time the moderator can allow one 'break' (letting go of two people's hands) in order to get movement going again.



Activity: Five life roles (reflection of our own identity)

We understand this activity as a meditation above our own life: what creates its basis, what relationships and life roles we see as precious and all of that from the point of view of the inevitable physical decay. Well-known "memento mori" (remember death) can inspire evaluation of priorities in our lives, in our focus on really important issues and in leaving of banalities.

Participants sit in a circle and they write down on five small pieces of paper the important life roles which currently create their identity. These roles show their position in relationships (for example son/daughter, student, friend, etc.). After writing them down they put them in order from the less to the most important one. These roles they throw away to the centre of the circle and they name them. We think about the nature of life - "the cards" we are holding in our hands we throw away one after another and so we should respect everything what was given to us temporarily. Before the last, fifth circle we ask students to choose one of the two fundamental standpoints regarding their understanding of their own identity: The "identity of the nut" which is based on the Judeo-Christian understanding of a human as a being who has a diminishing shell, but the core as the centre of the personality is constant and in a certain way "eternal". The second model is the "identity of an onion", which close to a Buddhist understanding: if we peel back each of the layers, finally we are left with nothing. In other words, with the end of one's life roles, the temporary and illusive "Me" also ends.

Those who decide for the "identity of a nut" keep the last piece of paper while the others who opt for the "identity of an onion" model, throw it away. This is an emotionally strong activity and a moderator shouldn't yield to the temptation to directly or indirectly manipulate the situation. The conviction of others—even though different from one's own—shouldn't be doubted or belittled.

Activity: Spin the bottle

Everyone sits on the floor in a circle. A bottle is placed in the middle of the circle and someone spins it. The person at whom the bottle is "pointing" (open end) is requested to share a short story from a topic decided on beforehand.

Examples:

- o Story from childhood - game you played, favourite pet/toy/activity...
- o Favourite gift (or least favourite) and why
- o Embarrassing story (moderator could begin)

The person who told the story spins the bottle for the next turn. If someone has already had a turn, the person on their left or right or someone else whom they choose and who hasn't yet shared takes their turn.

The moderator should keep the pace moving, encourage people to share short stories, change topics part way through so that it doesn't become boring or predictable.

Activity: Heads or tails



Two people are needed as facilitators. Divide the group into two teams, sitting side-by-side on two rows of chairs whose backs are touching each other. A facilitator is at each end of the rows of chairs, one with a coin and the other with a small table on which there is an object that can be easily grabbed (a set of keys, small ball, pen, etc.).

The facilitator tosses the coin and it lands on either 'heads' or 'tails'. Whichever one it is will be the "go" side. The facilitator again tosses the coin and catches it on the back of his/her hand, where it can easily be seen by the first person sitting in both rows of chairs, at the same moment. The coin will have landed with either the 'head' or 'tail' side facing up. If it matches the "go" side then, without talking or moving except in the way that has been previously announced, the person in the first chair' of the row designated head or tails (whichever one is showing), must communicate to the person in the next chair that the coin landed on the "go" side. Examples: Squeeze the right hand of the person next to you, touch the right ear of your neighbour, etc.

The last person in the row must grab the object on the table (keys, ball, pen) for their team. One point for whichever side is successful first. A point is deducted for a "wrong" message communicated, if someone grabs the object but the coin did NOT land on the "go" side.

This activity emphasises the importance of teamwork and also how easy it is to miscommunicate with others when we are in a hurry or under pressure.

Activity: Stack-up (version of musical chairs)

Enough (very) sturdy chairs should be placed in a circle (facing out) or in a line (back-to-back) so that everyone, except one person, each has a chair to sit on. As music plays, people walk around the chairs. When the music stops, everyone piles onto a chair, whether or not it is empty. One of the chairs is removed, and the music begins again. If anyone is unable to make it onto one of the chairs (no part of their body may touch the floor) they are eliminated from the game. The winning group are all who are able to get onto the last chair.

For a quicker version of this activity, begin the process with fewer chairs so there are less 'rounds' needed to get as many people as possible onto the final chair.

Activity: Pass the message, please

Relating messages or stories to others is something we all do, every day. The goal of this activity is to stress how important it is to: listen closely, try to understand what the other has said and write down important details; all keys to good communication. Stories, or gossip, which have gone through multiple messengers or which we pass along without all of the facts, can easily become distorted and barely resemble what originally was communicated.

Scenario:

Five or six people are selected as 'message takers'. All but one of them leave the room (to a place where they cannot hear what is going on with the group). The first messenger listens, one time, to a 3-5 minute 'story' read by a facilitator for the exercise. This 'story' should be personal (about specific people) and contain several precise details (numbers, series or combinations of events, names, dates, etc.). The listener may not stop the reader, nor request any part of the story to be repeated, nor write down any of the facts. Immediately after the story is completed, a second person (from those outside the room) rejoins the group. The first person must repeat the story, as closely as possible, to the new 'listener', including all of the details, names, etc. When they are finished, the first person sits down. A third person joins the group as a new 'listener' and hears the story again, repeated by the one who had previously been the 'listener'. This continues until the last person has rejoined the group. By now the story should have been repeated from person to person a minimum of 5 or 6 times. The last person repeats the story to the entire group. Then the facilitator rereads the original story.

For discussion:

What were key points missed? What factors contributed to this? What dangers could this cause for future misunderstandings or judgements about the people involved?

What key points were remembered by all of the listeners? Why?

Who remembered most closely the story which they had been told? Why?

Activity: Follow the leader



Participants are divided into equal sized teams. Everyone on the team, except one person, is blindfolded. Standing in a line, each person on the team grabs hold of the shoulders of the person in front of them. The LAST person in line should be the one not blindfolded. Each team must navigate a predetermined course, or perform a set of actions, only by following the instructions of the person who is at the back of the line (turn right, go ahead 10 steps, etc.).

Repeat the exercise without giving directions through words, but through touch. The last person in the line (not blind-folded) squeezes the right arm of the person in front of them to get the group to go right, the same for the left arm to move the line to the left. Each person must, in turn, pass on this instruction silently by squeezing the appropriate arm of the person in front of them!

Activity: The lame leads the blind

We use this activity when we talk about communication and building trust.



Scenario:

This activity should be done outside (the best place is a forest, where are many natural barriers like fallen trees, small streams, rocks, etc.), but only if the weather allows. A course must be marked out ahead of time, by tying a white rag to a tree branch or with stakes along the route. These should be spaced far enough apart so that one can only see the next marker ahead. As that goal is reached, the next marker becomes visible. The total distance of the course should be long enough to allow for this (20-30 minutes to navigate the entire course) and so that teams do not interfere with the ones in front or behind unnecessarily.

Each person is requested to bring with them a scarf, towel, t-shirt, etc. which can be used to tie around their eyes so they cannot see through it or, alternately, to bind their hands behind their back.

We divide the group into pairs of a boy and a girl (by a random choice). One has his/her arms bound behind their back with the scarf/towel, etc. and the other one has a scarf on his/her eyes so that they are not able to see anything. "The blind one" with "the lame one" hand in hand walk in the route which was marked in advance. The pairs compete with one another for the one who can complete the course as quickly as possible. They leave one after another in three-minute intervals and try to get to the final goal as quickly as possible.

As each group crosses the finish line (final goal), if time permits they trade places so that the one who was 'blind' now becomes the one who is 'lame'... and they repeat the course again.

Key points are good communication to point out obstacles that the 'blind person' cannot see, as well as trust to be able to follow instructions and avoid any hazards along the way as quickly as possible.

This activity is a strong experience, it helps to develop trust and also to break barriers between people who didn't know each other before.

Appendix 3: Film Analysis & interpretation

(by Alexander Plencner, a university teacher at the Faculty for Media Communication, Trnava University)

In the beginning it is good to think about the aim of the film discussion, which will influence all of the other steps.

Think of the model communication axis 1. the director of the film - 2. the film - 3. the audience. Because (1.) the director wants to say something, (2.) the director expresses it in a certain way, (3.) and he or she will be happy if this message is understood by a certain kind of audience.



Which of these factors do we want to **EMPHASISE** and which ones are, on the contrary, **irrelevant** to our discussion?

A. Dramaturgical (theoretical) analysis: THE DIRECTOR – THE FILM – (audience)

Includes questions like:

What is the topic of the film? When and where was the film made? What are possible motivators influenced the director to make the film? What is the main theme of the film? What are the film's dynamics and rhythm? What is the genre of the film? How do we recognise the genre? What characters do we see in the film? In what ways do they differ from one another? Describe the characters. What are they dressed like? What is their behaviour like? What are their relationships with each other? Who is "good" and who is "bad"? How does the film end? Did you find any turn in the action of the film surprising?

Basic question: Why?

Aim of the discussion: to get a response to the question "What did the director want to say by the film?"

Model films (should be age appropriate): Lord of the Rings, Bonnie and Clyde, Andrej Rubelov, The Cruiser Potemkin, Mugging, Cassablanca, The Piano, etc.

B. Semiotic (symbols and interpretation) analysis: (the director) – THE FILM – THE AUDIENCE

Includes questions like:

What do we see on the screen? What objects are there on the screen? What associations do they call up? What feelings do the shots in the film provoke? Why do you feel as you feel when watching this film? How did the director provoke this feeling? What means were used to express a certain feeling or thought? What is the environment of the heroes? Describe it. What is the weather in the film like? What is the lighting like? What colours prevail? How are the shots composed?

Basic question: What (do we see)? What (do we feel)?

The aim of the discussion: to get a response to the questions "Did we like or dislike the film? What feelings and associations did it provoke in us? When viewing the film, what were we thinking about, and what came to our minds spontaneously?"

Model films (should be age appropriate): Lost Highway, Blow up, The Seventh Seal, The Ninth Gate, Blade Runner.

C. Analysis of elements of the film language: (the director) – THE FILM – (the audience)

Includes questions like:

What is the size of the shots? What is the purpose of the editing? What is the purpose of the camera? How do the sharpness, movement, focus, and distance change? What do we see in the various shots? What is the rhythm of the editing? What is the speed of the film? What is the role of music in the film? What songs do we hear in the film? How does the director use sound in the film? What is the lighting in the shots of the film? What is the story like? How does the director connect various scenes together (transition)? What is the stage design like? What is the architecture like?

Basic question: How, what like?

The aim of the discussion: to get response to the questions: Is the film good? Is it successful?

Model films (should be age appropriate): Psycho, Amelie from Montmartre, Three Colours, Last Year in Marienbad, Otesanek, Citizen Kane.

D. Cultural analysis: (the director) – (the film) – THE AUDIENCE

Includes questions like:

Was the film revolutionary? Why? or If there was nothing startling, why is it successful? How is it attractive? What elements are striking? What was the response to the film? Is it often quoted? What themes did it bring out? If it was a hit, why did it have such high attendance? Did it provoke a scandal? Was it somewhat unusual? Will it have an audience even in ten or twenty years?



Basic question: Whom (is the film for)? Who (likes - dislikes it)?

The aim of the discussion: to get response to the questions: Is the film good? Is it successful?

Model films (should be age appropriate): Titanic, Star Wars, Legend about Passion, The English Patient, Underground.

Note:

The last two approaches (C,D) can be combined with the one of the first two approaches (A, B).

We think it is necessary to choose between the first two approaches - either A, or B, or at least to focus more on one of them. A and B are the most important approaches.

The method: Encouraging the audience to not look for "a meaning" but the sense of what was shown is normally best. The author of a work of art does not want to communicate in as complicated a way as possible a simple idea that should be discovered by the audience. The artist wants to develop a process of communication, interpretation and reception that is only begun by this idea, or in which this idea is only a starting point. Some films have no meaning, instead there are many potential interpretations (*Mulholland Drive*). According to communicational aesthetics, the aim of a work of art is to provoke ideas, images, emotions, but from a point of view as to create certain ideas in the material (the film). The sense (conception) of the film is formed before it is made, but it only reaches completion and gets its final shape during the process of its creation.