



# **“Extending Social Educators Competences” ESEC Erasmus+ Project**

**Project Number.2018-1-PL01-KA204-051126**

# **Handbook**

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## **ESEC CONSORTIUM PARTNERS**

### **JANUSZ KORCZAK PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY (PL)**

Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw was established 1993 by the Polish Association for Adult Education as a non-public University according to the Polish law. The University has been growing dynamically since then and has become already one of the largest non-public universities in Poland. It has developed, since its establishing, a very strong regional structure which is its main feature. Pedagogical University has since its establishing a very strong internationally oriented policy and co-operates with other European Universities in accordance with the membership of Poland in the European Union. The University has been Member of various networks and Projects within the Socrates Program: EUCEN, European University Continuing Education Network and EuLLearN. We contain contacts to several European Universities previous within numerous Socrates Projects in the field of University Continuing Education and currently within the Lifelong Learning Program.

### **REZEKNE ACADEMY OF TECHNOLOGIES (LV)**

Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) was established on July 1, 1993. RTA is a state funded higher education and science institution of the Republic of Latvia which implements the study programs as well as is engaged in scientific, research and artistic creative work. The aim of RTA is to provide academic and professional higher education in compliance with the science development level and cultural traditions of Latvia being competitive in the European education space; to develop culture, science and education in Latgale region and thus in the whole Latvia.

### **ECOISTITUTO (IT)**

Ecoistituto is a private research institute established in 1989. Ecoistituto activity focuses on sustainable development and on education following a multidisciplinary approach finalized to promote effective and sustainable results (people livability). Ecoistituto collaborates with schools and governmental institutions organizing courses, seminars, and workshops on sustainable development, cooperative business, environmental education, and wellness and healthy behavior. For the last 14 years, Ecoistituto organized an annual international conference in collaboration with IPSAPA (Interregional Society for Participation in Agribusiness Landscape and Environmental Management) and the University of Udine about the themes of the “landscape mosaic”. In 2005, Ecoistituto created the series of publications “Living in places”, devoted to the local cultures and until now 15 issues have been published.

### **INCLUDE (GR)**

The Interdisciplinary Network of Special and Inter-cultural Education, INCLUDE is a scientific association that was founded in 2011 to promote inclusive policy in formal and non formal education environments, in accordance with the principles of the UN Conventions against Discrimination in Education and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The ultimate goals of

INCLUDE network are i) to improve the quality of the life of children and families facing the risk of exclusion from the educational system as a result of disabilities and xenophobia, ii) to promote changes in social attitudes and perceptions towards diversity, and iii) to contribute actively and effectively to the creation of a truly "school for all". INCLUDE views inclusive policy as a holistic process where each system (social, physical, linguistic, cultural etc) is a set of interacting or interdependent components that work as a whole. Interventions in neighborhoods that are designed to include children with special needs and /or different cultural backgrounds are at the heart of Include 's activity.

## MANRA (ES)

Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta is a local organization that brings together all the municipalities in the region of Ribera Alta. It consists of 35 municipalities that group a population of more than 220,000 inhabitants, distributed over an area of 979.5 km<sup>2</sup>.

The Mancomunidad manages different services of interest for the municipalities that comprise it, constituting a body of local scope where the debate those issues affecting the peoples of the region becomes possible. The Mancomunidad is responsible for: promoting effective services seeking the improvement of the entire population's welfare, promoting actions before institutions and public and private entities aimed at the improvement of services, participating, organizing and collaborating at a regional level on events that aim to publicize our region, cooperating, participating and promoting the dissemination of study materials from our region which are written in our language. Ecostituto was created in 1989. Ecostituto activity focuses on sustainable development and on education following a multidisciplinary approach finalized to promote effective and sustainable results (people livability). Ecostituto collaborates with schools and governmental institutions organizing courses, seminars, and workshops on sustainable development, cooperative business, environmental education, and wellness and healthy behavior. The members of Ecostituto are University professors (especially from the Udine University), professionals, experts, and researchers engaged in different scopes: youth and adult education, quality evaluation, agribusiness, ecology, sociology, psychology, social anthropology, architecture, geography, social pedagogy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Psycho-cognitive and behavioral disturbance represent an alarming global issue for its implications on public health (Moeschler & Shevell, 2014), since poverty and disability are often mutually related (de Chenu, Dæhlen, & Tah, 2016; Flynn, 2019).

The importance of training parents of children with psycho-cognitive and behavioral disturbance is widely emphasized by researchers and practitioners (Wang, Lam, Kim, Singer & Dodds, 2016). Parents of children with autism or Down Syndrome have been successfully taught to improve their parent-child relationship, increase communication skills, and decrease inappropriate behaviors. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are consistently found to have elevated levels of parenting-related stress and psychological distress.

However, despite the numerous examples and various parent-training courses (see also the current multifarious social coaching offers), parent-training techniques are not included in social pedagogy and social worker study programs.

There are few handbooks on parent training. Some of them focus on parent training as a co-therapist (Briesmeister & Schaefer, 2007; McMahon, 1999) or parent education and therapy (Fine, 2014) and miss a pedagogical approach that includes the educational methodologies and techniques to support the parents' teaching-learning.

This handbook aims to fill this gap. It has been realized within the EU funded project ESEC (Extending Social Educators Competences) that pursues two main objectives: inclusive education and social educators professionalization

The ESEC project realized an innovative parent-training program for parents of children with behavioral disabilities in order to extend and develop the current competence and skills of both social educators and learning support teachers.

The ESEC project began in December 2018 and ended in November 2020. It involved partners from five European countries (Italy, Latvia, Greece, Spain, and Poland) and pursued the general objective of extending social educators' current competence. More precisely, it will design and experiment with an innovative parent-training program focusing on parents of children with behavioral disturbance.

This Handbook has been realized with the Consortium partners' contribution in the ESEC project and results from the activities carried out in the project.

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## PART I

# PARENT-TRAINING FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH PSYCHO-COGNITIVE AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

By INCLUDE

### Abstract

This chapter introduces disability concerning psycho-cognitive and behavioral disorders notions focusing on the issues of parents of children with this kind of disturbances. Parents are the central and consistent figures in the lives of children with special needs. They have to tackle problems of integration in the community life due to their children's disruptive behavior. The consequence is poor social relationships with typical people and economic problems related to the difficulty of being engaged in full-time and demanding jobs.

Parents of children with special needs are often reported to have physical and psychological distress and frustration related to caring for their children. Children with special needs manifest a wide range of problematic behaviors concerning social communication and social relationships. These problematic behaviors extend from aggressive behavior and acute psychomotor agitation to apathy and negatively impact the family quality of life (QOL).

### 1. The concept of disability

According to the ICF international classification of functioning, disability and health (ICF-CY, World Health Organization, 2007), a person's level of functioning is approached as the dynamic interaction between her or his health conditions, environmental factors, and personal factors.

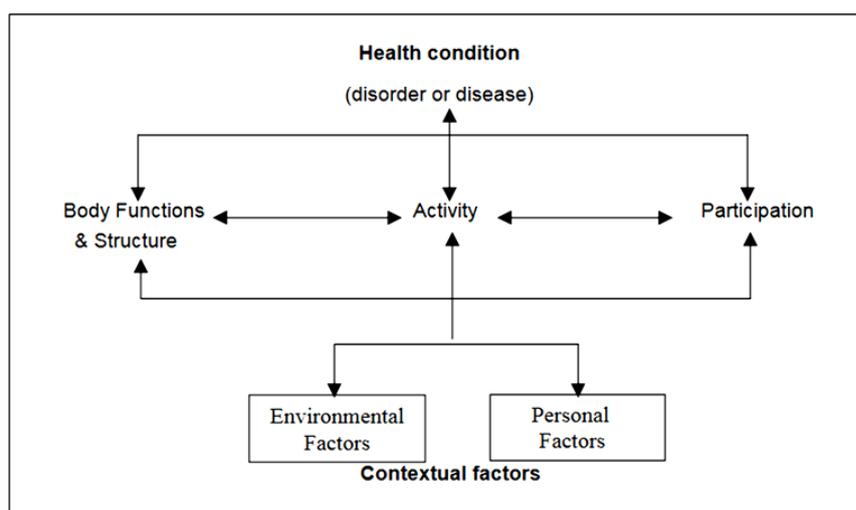
ICF provides a combined view of the individual and social dimensions of health through a bio-psychosocial model of disability which is based on the integration of medical and social factors. ICF provides a multi-perspective approach to the classification of functioning and disability as an interactive and evolutionary process. In this way, Figure 1 illustrates this model of disability by ICF.

Contextual factors include environmental and personal factors. **Environmental factors** refer to social attitudes, architectural characteristics, legal and social structures, as well as climate, terrain and so forth; and **internal personal factors**, which include gender, age, coping styles, social background, education, profession, past and current experience, overall behavior pattern, character and other factors that influence how disability is experienced by the individual.

Disabilities affect various areas related to the state of psychosomatic of a person's health: Vision, thinking, Movement, Communicating, Mental health, Hearing, Learning Remembering, Social relationships

“There is a dynamic interaction among these entities: interventions in one entity have the potential to modify one or more of the other entities. These interactions are specific and not always in a predictable one-to-one relationship. The interaction works in two directions; the presence disability may even modify the health condition itself.

To infer a limitation in capacity from one or more impairments, or a restriction of performance ICF differs substantially from the 1980 version of ICIDH in the depiction of the interrelations between functioning and disability. It should be noted that any diagram is likely to be incomplete and prone to misrepresentation because of the complexity of interactions in a multidimensional model. The model is drawn to illustrate multiple interactions. Other depictions indicating other important foci in the process are certainly possible. Interpretations of interactions between different components and constructs may also vary (for example, the impact of environmental factors on body functions certainly differs from their impact on participation) (ICF-CY, 2007 page: 16).



**Figure 1.** Interactions between the components of ICF international classification of functioning, disability and health: children & youth version (ICF-CY, 2007 page: 17) According to the biopsychosocial model, disability and functioning is the interaction between two factors, health conditions and contextual factors (i.e. environmental and personal factors).

The components of ICF are confirmed as the strong, universal nature in a wide range of human function. The overall coherence of the ICF model was confirmed, as the results describe similar profiles related to health conditions of different etiology and suggest different levels of disabilities in different national contexts ICF referred as the most comprehensive model for describing human function in relation to health and the environment that was adapted for use in children and adolescents by in 2007 (World Health Organisation, 2007, Child and Youth Edition: ICF-CY). The ICF model describes human function in terms of body structure, body function, activities and involvement. These aspects of human functioning affect and are influenced by health status, environmental factors and personal factors. The basic premise of the ICF is that it is universal, that is, it applies to all people regardless of health status or cultural background. This feature is extremely important, as it allows the comparison of equivalent health conditions of different etiology and can reveal inequality in status or inequality in health and function. (Faulks et.al 2013) .

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed an International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to classify health and wellness-related components of well-being, including physical function and structure, activity and participation, environmental and personal factors. These elements interact with each other. The ICF for Children and Young People (ICF-CY) is an extended version of the ICF. It includes the development of children as an additional ingredient for health and wellness.

## **1.2. Psycho-cognitive disorders**

Cognitive function is an important factor that contributes significantly to the functionality of the individual. Cognitive deficits are important consequences of brain injuries and diseases involving the cerebral hemispheres leading to disruption of complex mental processing skills such as attention, memory, problem solving, calculations and reasoning. In many neurological conditions, cognitive function has been considered a powerful prognostic factor of functional outcome in everyday life activities. previous experiences and other sources of information. Information processing can be hindered by the presence of cognitive impairment.

Early assessment of disorders in cognitive function is vital for individuals with neuropsychological deficits and serves to determine the factors that can improve and most positively affect a person's functionality.

Cognitive function disorders are a category of mental health disorders that primarily affect learning, memory, perception, and problem solving, and include amnesia, dementia, and delirium. People with cognitive disorders take an extraordinarily long time to complete tasks, such as homework or writing tests. Poor memory when recalling learned facts or multi-step written instructions. Weak listening skills and difficulty in remembering oral instructions. Difficulty with reading, spelling, vocabulary and comprehension.

Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day.

The more common mental disorders that can be diagnosed in childhood are:

- attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- anxiety

### **1.2.1. Down syndrome**

Down syndrome (trisomy 21) is the most common genetically determined cause of mental disability. Approximately 10,000 children are diagnosed with Down syndrome each year (one in 691 live births; prevalence 10.3 per 10,000) 1). Children with Down syndrome may have cognitive deficits that are likely to affect social inclusion, mobility and occupational integration 2)

Children with disabilities are limited in their participation in social activity as they differ significantly in relation to the typically developing population. They differ in terms of physical strength, cognitive function, psychomotor coordination, language and social function and self-management. They have only 50% of physical strength compared to their peers, limiting them to mingle with normally developing children. The degree of impairment of cognitive deficit, age, and functional areas, including self-management, mobility, and sociability, can all affect

participation in the activity of a child with Down syndrome.

Children with Down Syndrome want to improve their quality of life and perform their given social roles as children of normal development. However, a child's level of physical activity not only limits social participation and activity, but also acts as an important factor affecting their quality of life 5). In fact, their quality of life has been considered as an important area of evaluation in treatment 6).

Children with Down syndrome are retarded in all developmental areas, including knowledge, language and physical development. Not typical craniofacial system in children with Down syndrome usually affect language and auditory development. In language development, both receptive language and expressive language lag behind. They have poor ability to express language due to their ability to understand language. They also have difficulty with receptive language due to their poor listening ability. However, they generally have more difficulty with expressive language due to a muscle problem. In general, 60-75% of children with Down syndrome have such difficulties, while 25-30% of children with Down syndrome show comprehension and production of languages that correspond to their level of knowledge. However, 5% of children with Down syndrome have deficits in both comprehension and production compared to their cognitive level. In general, the communication skills of children with Down syndrome are delayed for about 2 years compared to those of typically developing children. However, they show isolated differences in initial language and performance after 11. In this study, children with Down syndrome showed an average of 0.77 for neuromusculoskeletal and movement-related function. Compared to typical developing children, children with Down syndrome may have lower functional levels due to hypotonic muscles, excessive ligament relaxation and a lack of sensory integration capacity.

In a relatively recent study, children with Down syndrome and children of normal development with specific eligibility criteria were compared with respect to functionality as determined by ICF\_CY. The two groups differed in terms of functionality and quality of life. Regarding the correlation between functionality, activity and participation in children with Down syndrome, the indicators of high functionality were correlated with higher activities and participation. The lower mental function in children with Down syndrome may be due to storage and recall problems in children with Down syndrome. Functions of operation, activity and participation were significantly correlated with quality of life. High functionality was significantly associated with high quality of life.(Jung et al, 2017)

The functional level of children with Down syndrome as this is detected by the ICF -CY is an important factor that affects the quality of life of these children. The participation and function are increased when their level of function is higher. Their activity and participation improved as their quality of life was higher. Their quality of life becomes better when their functional level is higher. Strong correlations between level of functioning and quality of life in children with down syndrome.

Research data show that a significant percentage of families with children with the syndrome (65-70%) function like most families and are not "at risk" due to the child's Down syndrome. Research shows that in terms of psychological functioning and levels of discomfort they are higher than in families with children with other forms of disability (Quine and Pahl 1989; Sloper and Turner 1993). Families were found to have a good level of relationships and resilience and had significantly higher morale than families of children with other mental disabilities. They

were found to show positive expressions of warmth and affection towards their child with Down syndrome. Therefore, the majority of families report good marital relationships. They usually felt that they were less concerned with the trivial, less materialistic and egocentric. Mink et al. (1983) speculated that the higher morale in the families of children with Down syndrome could be due to the positive effect of the child on the climate at home.

Thus, the picture, in childhood, is that the child with Down syndrome is not a burden and just a recipient of family care for most families. In fact they seem to contribute positively.

By adolescence, there was a decrease in mothers' perceived satisfaction with life. This was associated with a decrease in real and perceived satisfaction from social support. There was also a tendency for more mothers to realize the negative effects of a child with Down syndrome on the family. They seemed to feel that their teen with Down Syndrome was putting more restrictions on family life than a teenager without a disability. In the "normal" family life cycle, most parents experience more independence as their children reach adolescence and become more independent. But this is not the case with most Down Syndrome teens. Their slower development and learning difficulties force them to get out of the normal life cycle. Depending on their level of ability, skills and interests, they begin to have fewer social contacts and friends who do not have a disability. By adolescence many are relatively isolated and increasingly dependent on the family for social interaction. For example, we found that the level of behavioral problems in children is significantly associated with decreased social interactions, friendships and increased assessments of negative impact on the family (Mink et al., 1983) .

### **1.3. Behavioral disorders**

The conception of disability as a behavior allowed the application of theories of behavior and behavior change to describe, explain, and reduce the disability. The behavioral disability model uses social knowledge models, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), to understand the factors that influence behavior. Within the TPB there are two close behavioral indicators, namely intent and perceived behavioral control. In turn, behaviors, regulatory and perceptual behavioral controls predict intent. Cognitive controls in particular are stable prognostic factors of disability. In contrast, biomedicine has traditionally considered disability as a consequence of an underlying biological dysfunction or damage. This approach is explained by the WHO's International Classification of Disability, Disability and Disability (ICIDH) model (World Health Organization, 1980). The ICIDH model considered that disability was the direct result of organ or body damage and that the disadvantage was the direct result.

Behavioral disorders as they are manifested during development. Developmental disability represents an alarming global issue for its implications on public health (Moeschler & Shevell, 2014), since poverty and disability are often mutually related (de Chenu, Dæhlen, & Tah, 2016; Flynn, 2019). Children's mental health and wellbeing is shaped during childhood and adolescence.

*“Development is a dynamic process by which the child moves progressively from dependency on others for all activities in infancy towards physical, social and psychological maturity and independence in adolescence. In this dynamic*

*process, the child's functioning is dependent on continuous interactions with the family or other caregivers in a close, social environment. Therefore, the functioning of the child cannot be seen in isolation but rather in terms of the child in the context of the family system. This is an important consideration in making judgments about the child's functioning in life situations. The influence of family interactions on the child's functioning is greater in this developmental phase than at any later point in an individual's lifespan. Further, as these interactions frame the acquisition of various skills over the first two decades of life, the role of the physical and social environment is crucial". (ICF-CY, 2007 page: 16)*

The socio-cognitive and emotional skills and behaviors that are being developed at these early stages remarkably affect choices and opportunities during adulthood. The quality of the social-economic environment in which children grow up significantly affects their behavior, social interaction, learning, vital skills and social skills and determines their life during adulthood. As a consequence, negative experiences that children would face at home or at school may adversely affect cognitive and emotional skills development. The factors affecting mental health and behavior may be related with disturbed families, poor parenting practices, poor social and economic live circumstances (WHO European Region, 2020). Child's behavior affected by critical dramatic events in early childhood or adolescence or because of family low social-economic environment vary from aggressive behavior and acute psychomotor agitation to apathy.

Children with behavioral problems need high supervision from pre-school to adolescence. These behaviors may be associated with low mental abilities and low levels of self-sufficiency. The level of family cohesion in families with children with behavioral problems is low. Difficulties such as low rates of adequate housing with financial problems, low social support for parents and unemployment of fathers, mothers who use passive coping strategies and mental disorders. In such cases there is a departure from the current events of life. It is difficult to determine the cause and effect of these factors, but parental attitudes, financial problems, and recurring child health are likely to affect family management and relationships.

Mental health, behavior and wellbeing may be affected when children present intellectual, developmental or other disabilities (Horbach, 2020, Jansen, 2020, Ngashangva & Dutt, 2015).

### **1.3.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ADS) is a specific developmental disability characterized by social and communication impairments, as well as by restricted interests and repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Its median of prevalence, worldwide, is estimated at 62/10,000 (Elsabbagh et al., 2012). Over the last few decades, the number of people diagnosed with ASD has increased significantly in those countries where prevalence studies have been conducted (Hansen, Schendel, & Parner, 2015). Furthermore, from recent research it emerges that there is a high rate of clinically significant psychiatric problems among children suffering from ASD. Anxiety and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are the most frequently detected syndromes (Skokauskas & Gallagher, 2012).

Corresponding to the increasing number of individuals being diagnosed with autism, there

is a growing demand for support to be provided throughout their lifespan (Jariwala-Parikh et al., 2019). Cross-sectional US studies have shown that ASD leads to extensive use of social services and high demands on healthcare (Croteau, Mottron, Dorais, Tarride, & Perreault, 2019). In this regard, it has been observed that the need for high-cost institution-based care may be reduced by developing interventions aimed at enhancing independent living skills and identifying and implementing less costly home and community-based alternatives (Cidav, Lawer, Marcus, & Mandell, 2013). On the other hand, a child with ASD creates several issues for families owing to behavioral crises that follow from changes to routines, as well as community and recreational restrictions.

Over 90% of parents of children with ASD experience situations of stress and anxiety (Nikmat, Ahmad, Oon, & Razali, 2008), and the literature demonstrates that this stress increases according to the level of severity of the child's disturbance (Osborne & Reed, 2009). Nevertheless, parents' behavior plays a fundamental role in facilitating cognitive, adaptive, and social development and adaptation of their children. Families are socializing agents and, as such, influence children's behavior through their actions, attitudes, and practices.

How, then, can one actively involve families as an element in developing interventions directed at children with ASD?

Might parent-training programs offer a means of supporting families to sustain the daily burden and enhance the creation of community-based services?

The importance of training parents is widely emphasized by researchers and practitioners (Wang, Lam, Kim, Singer, & Dodds, 2016), and there are many studies that argue the effectiveness of parent-focused interventions, for example to improve parent wellbeing (Rutherford et al., 2019), although a research effort is needed to determine the optimal parent intervention models.

*“With a current worldwide prevalence of 1% Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of conditions that are characterized by impairments of reciprocal social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as a preference for repetitive, stereotyped activities, behaviors and interests. The age of onset is always prior to 36 months and the symptoms persist throughout the lifespan. These features are associated with alterations in cognitive and emotional functioning, high rates of psychiatric co-morbidity, relationship problems, poor adaptive skills and lower reported quality of life. To capture this complex melange of functioning experiences beyond the diagnosis, the ICF offers a tool to describe the lived experience of a person with ASD in a comprehensive and standardized way” (ICF, 2017)*

Disturbed behavior is often chronic and might present more than once in one's lifetime in every individual. These disturbances with their relative disorders have a significantly negative impact on the individual, the family and the society and affect their quality of life. The absence of a child with autism in the family affects members in different ways. Parents transfer their level of attention to the child with ASD, with significant effects on their marital relationship, their other children, work, finances and personal relationships and responsibilities. A significant portion of the resources are spent on supporting the child with autism, providing treatment and interventions for their child, limiting other priorities. Supporting a child with ASD complicates family relationships, especially with siblings. (Understanding Autism for Dummies, 2006)

## 2. Quality of life for families of children with disabilities

### Abstract

Parents who have children with disabilities are often reported to have physical and psychological distress related to caring for their children. Early research into families of children with disabilities reflected a pathological pattern in which families are supposed to automatically suffer as a result of the child - in fact the studies only looked for negative results (Byrne and Cunningham 1985).

Children with behavioral disabilities may manifest a wide range of difficulties in social adjustment and/or social communication and social relationships. These difficulties may extend from aggressive behavior and acute psychomotor agitation to apathy. Disturbed families, poor parenting practices, poor social and economic life circumstances could be blaming factors for the onset of behavioral problems. Behavioral difficulties may be the secondary effect of the manifestation of intellectual, developmental or other disabilities. Behavioral disabilities may have significantly negative impacts on the individual, the family affecting their quality of life (QOL) and all the society

This chapter presents theoretical models of the impact on Quality of life for families of children with behavioral disabilities, assessment methods understanding and assessing parent's needs and of quality of life, and suitable methods to support families in order to improve their quality of life and motivated to self-care.

Practices which better integrate family QOL research findings into practices are also demonstrated in this chapter. According to research findings: a) family support proved to be a crucial component of FQOL. There is a positive relationship between family support strategies and the families' resilience, stress reducing, and QOL of family promoting. Family support through families Networks that support each other proved to be of greater importance, b) Parenting stress is a factor that impacts QOL in family as it affects emotional well-being, parent-child communication, and child emotional, cognitive and social development. Some of the families' needs are: provision of respite care services (funding and government support), education, daily therapy programs for their children and respite and health care. Consequently, greater financial stress, more frequent disruption of family routine, and reduced social activities outside the family are basic symptoms that a family has to deal and cope with.

These theoretical and practical issues are presented in parallel with practical issues for social educators and school counselors in order to develop specific skills and learn to use specific tools and methods to effectively support families with children with behavioral disabilities. More specifically a 7 step model for the development of effective partnerships with parents and practical issues are presented in order for social educators to support parents to improve QOL and to motivate them for increased self-care.

Practical issues for self-care and improvement in the quality of life are presented also for parents of children with behavioral disabilities. Parents who pay attention to their own physical and emotional health increases well-being and quality of life.

### 2.1. About quality of life

Quality of Life (QOL) is defined as the individual's perception of their position in life in

the context of their culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. It is a broad concept incorporating an individual's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs, and relationship to the salient features of the environment" (WHO, 1997).

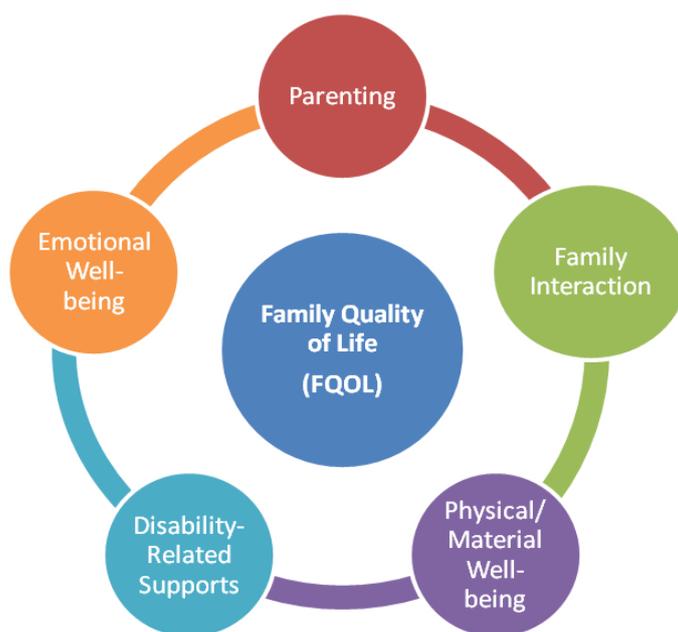
Health-related quality of life HRQOL and Family Quality of Life (FQOL) are components of the overall quality of life. HRQOL is determined primarily by health status and conceived as dynamic, subjective, and multidimensional. The dimensions often include physical, social, psychological, cognitive and spiritual factors (Bakas et al., 2012). The unique characteristic of FQOL definition emphasizes on examining the perceptions and dynamics of the family unit as a whole (Hu et al., 2012).

Family Quality of Life FQOL is defined as "a dynamic sense of well-being of the family, collectively and subjectively defined and informed by its members, in whom individual- and family- level needs interact" (Zuna, Summers, Turnbull, Hu, & Xu, 2010). FQOL has proven to be an essential indicator of living conditions of families with children with disabilities and of assessing the supportive services they receive.

Health-related quality of life (HRQOL) is generally conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing domains including psychological, mental, social, and spiritual areas of life (Graves et al 2016).

## **2.2. Theoretical models of the impact on QOL of families with children with behavioral disabilities: Five-factor construct model**

Parents who have children with disabilities are often reported to have physical and psychological distress related to caring for their children, thus affecting their QOL. Researchers, using qualitative research data, have focused on conceptualizing the model factors impacting on FQOL. Based on early empirical research, the first instruments were created to measure FQOL (Garcia-Grau, McWilliam, Martínez-Rico, & Grau-Sevilla, 2018;) As soon as the researchers started to use these instruments, they became interested in exploring factors that have an impact on FQOL. For instance, Figure 2 shows a five-factor construct model to examine the impacts on FQOL and explain FQOL outcomes (Hoffman, Marquis, Poston, Summers & Turnbull, 2006).



**Figure 2.** Five-factor construct model of examining FQOL outcomes (Hoffman, Marquis, Poston, Summers, & Turnbull, 2006)

Researchers in several countries, have focused on this five factors construct model to examine the impact of quality of life of families that have children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Bhopti, Brown, & Lentin, 2016). Evidence from empirical research has confirmed that families of children with ASD are satisfied with emotional well-being. In addition, it has been reported that differences in FQOL levels depend on the type of disability (e.g., Down syndrome, ADHD, ID, ASD). A call for future research in order to further explore factors that impact FQOL, including the cultural background of parents is put forward.

### 2.3. FQOL model of support services

A unified theory of FQOL has been put forward to better integrate FQOL research into practices and services for families with disabilities (Zuna, Turnbull, & Summers, 2009). Under this framework, it is proposed that parenting stress is negatively linked with FQOL, and family support is positively associated with FQOL given the fact that individual perceptions concerning parenting behaviors can have a direct impact on someone's life satisfaction (Hsiao et al., 2017). Caregiver is defined as the parent (either mother or father) or other family members (grandmother or grandfather, siblings, aunt or uncle and adoptive parent) of the disabled child who is responsible for parenting or caring for the disabled child. A caregiver provides practical, day-to-day unpaid support for a person unable to complete all of the tasks of daily living (Savage and Bailey, 2004).

The interactive process results in the outcome of quality of life which, in turn, influences family strengths, needs, and priorities (Zuna et al., 2010). Figure 3 illustrates the components of a unified theory of FQOL. Research findings based on this theory have demonstrated three basic issues.

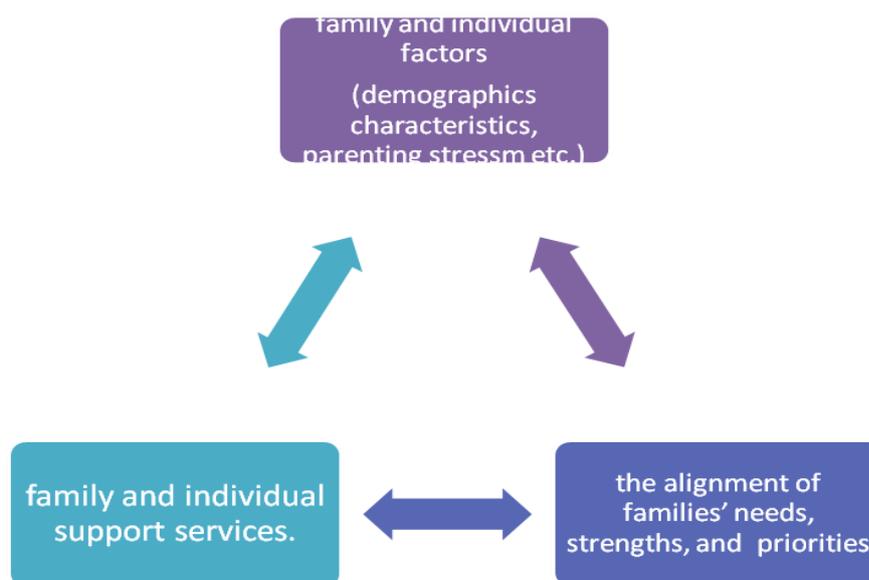
First, family support proved to be a crucial component of FQOL. "Family support is defined as a set of strategies directed to the family unit in order to ultimately benefit the family

member with disabilities. Family supports usually include formal and informal and tangible goods that allow each family member to optimize their level of participation in different life environments”. There is a positive relationship between family support strategies and the families’ resilience, stress reducing, and QOL of family promoting. Family support through families Networks that support each other proved to be of great importance.

Second, families have been least satisfied with Emotional Health. Parenting stress concerns the aversive psychological responses to the challenges and demands of parenting role. Parenting stress is a factor that impacts QOL in families since it affects emotional well being, parent-child communication, and child emotional, cognitive and social development.

Third, some of the families’ needs include the provision of respite care services (funding and government support) education, daily therapy programs for their children and respite and health care. Consequently, greater financial stress, more frequent disruption of family routine, and reduced social activities outside the family are basic symptoms that a family has to deal and cope with.

There is a strong relationship between the supports and services provided to children and their families and FQOL and the support provided can predict FQOL (Zeng et. al, 2020)



**Figure 3:** Components of unified theory of FQOL (Zeng et.al, 2020)

## 2.4. Assessment of satisfaction of FQOL

Quality of life has received much attention as it is an indicator of general well-being. Consequently, a wide range of tools now exist measuring quality of life in a variety of ways. However, family quality of life hasn’t received nearly the same level of attention, despite its crucial role in shaping our young lives. For this reason, the FQOL scale has been developed by Hu, Summers, Turnbull and una (2011).

Assessment of satisfaction of FQOL is of great importance in order to help families realize the level of support they need. This information is of great importance for government and

professionals also. For these reasons, the FQOL scale has been created. It is a 25-item inventory rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale. Its purpose is to measure several aspects of families' perceived satisfaction in terms of quality of family life. Family quality of life is measured under five domains that are determined by the five-factor construct model of examining FQOL outcomes (Hoffman, Marquis, Poston, Summers, & Turnbull, 2006). These five factors are:

- Family Interaction
- Parenting
- Emotional Well-being
- Physical / Material Well-being
- Disability-Related Support

### 3. Parents' self-care

#### 3.1. About self-care

The WHO 1998 definition of Self-care is to take care of oneself. 'Self-Care is what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health, and to prevent and deal with illness. It is a broad concept encompassing hygiene (general and personal), nutrition (type and quality of food eaten), lifestyle (sporting activities, leisure etc), environmental factors (living conditions, social habits, etc.) socio-economic factors (income level, cultural beliefs, etc.) and self-medication.'

**According to the UK Department of Health,**

"Self care is a part of daily living. It is the care taken by individuals towards their own health and well being, and includes the care extended to their children, family, friends and others in neighbourhoods and local communities. Self-Care includes the actions individuals and carers take for themselves, their children, their families and others to stay fit and maintain good physical and mental health; meet social and psychological needs; prevent illness or accidents; care for minor ailments and long-term conditions; and maintain health and wellbeing after acute illness or discharge from hospital."

#### 3.2. Self-care goals and strategies

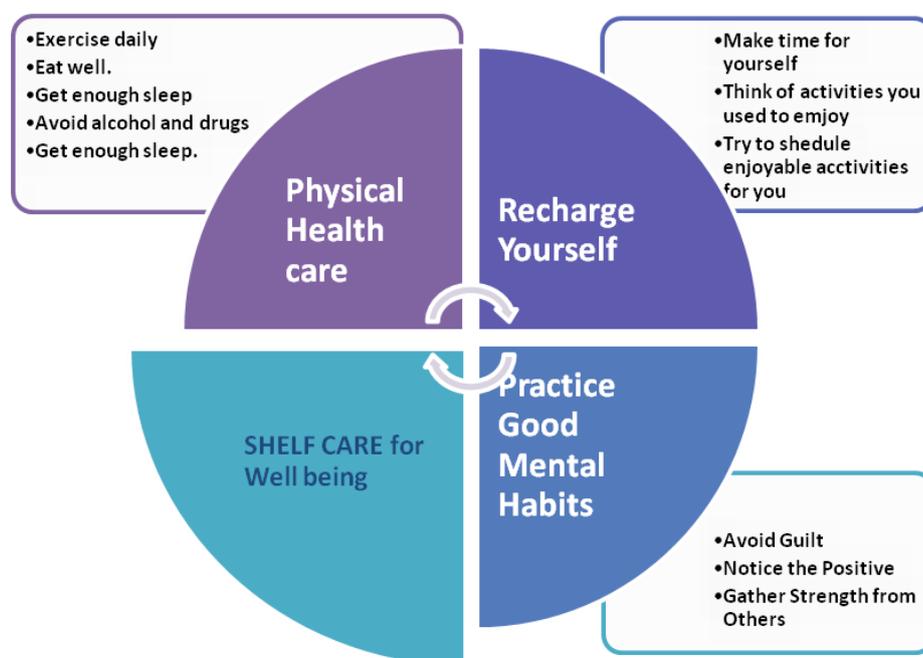
Parents who pay attention to their own physical and emotional health experience increased well-being. Self-care practices aim at supporting them to play an active and self-empowered role in their children's and family life, in their child's care to build capacities based on parents strengths in taking control of their lives and in making decisions important for their families. Some of these practices are to:

- address children's specific needs
- support the success and evolution of their own children
- crosses stressful experiences,
- crosses pressures and social barriers
- helps family to be adapted in changes
- build strong relationships with community networks
- be resilient, in hard times
- enjoy good ones
- accessing and continuing the support and specialty services.

Parents of children with different types of disabilities are motivated to prevent stress – burnout and to learn how to recognize their signs.

Stress affects parents physically as well as mentally. Some common physical signs of stress include: headaches, low energy, upset stomach including diarrhea, constipation and nausea, aches, pains, and tense muscles, and insomnia.

Stressful events could be recognized in order to be avoided. The identification of such events that stress parents is the first step of self-care. Daily events like shopping in a specific shop, relationship with specific parents, going to schools events or events with parents that have negative attitudes towards the child with disability would make parents to feel stress. Once they recognize these events and situations cause their stress, they will be prepared to avoid or cope with them. In this manner parents develop a sense of greater confidence in their possibilities that contributes to their well-being and quality of life (QOL). Self-care strategies that have been suggested are presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Self-care strategy for well being

### 3.3. Practical issues for parents' self care

General self-care ‘pillars’ or ‘domains’: Figure 7 shows the framework developed by the International Self-Care Foundation for self-care based on seven ‘pillars’ or ‘domains’:

**Pillar 1 Knowledge & Health literacy**

**Pillar 2** Mental wellbeing, Self-awareness & Agency

**Pillar 4** Healthy eating

**Pillar 5** Risk avoidance or mitigation  
**Pillar 6** Good hygiene

**Pillar 7** Rational and responsible use of products, services



**Figure 7:** Self-Care Foundation

#### More on self-care strategies

- Learn to use 7 tools for self-care <https://www.caregiver.org/Taking-care-you-self-care-family-caregivers>
- A Manifesto for Self-Care <https://isfglobal.org/a-manifesto-for-self-care/>
- Self-care voices: <https://isfglobal.org/self-care-voices/>
- Taking Care of Yourself <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Family-Members-and-Caregivers/Taking-Care-of-Yourself>

## 4. Supporting FQOL Practical issues for Social or Special Educators

### 4.1. Determining family needs : the role of schools, school chancellors and social educators

Schools are second only to families in their potential to affect children's mental health. They can contribute to young people's successful development by providing nurturance and the opportunity to develop cooperative social relations and social and psychological skills. Thus, it is natural that a considerable number of preventive interventions have been developed for delivery in schools, including preschool settings.

Most of these interventions have focused on preventing behavioral problems and externalizing disorders or promoting positive child behavior in school, although some positive results have been demonstrated on internalizing disorders, such as depression. Other programs have focused on school structural factors, such as the reward structure for prosocial behavior or school– family relations.

A number of interventions that combine multiple types of programs (e.g., parenting and schools) or multiple levels (e.g., universal and selective) have started to emerge, primarily in elementary schools.

It is well documented that social educators are really motivated to create partnerships with parents and they know the importance of school-family-community partnerships (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004) but they do not know how and it is difficult for them to start building the relationship.

The diagnosis of a disability in the family or even the manifestation of behaviors that deviate from the social model create cracks in the foundations of family life. The roles of the parents become even more demanding to such an extent that the individual's confidence that he can fulfill the parental role is threatened. How parents react will depend on many factors. Their reactions may raise issues related to their own childhood experiences.

As the way parents react to the diagnosis of disability varies, so do their needs for support. A variety of factors determine the type of intervention that parents of children with disabilities need. A parent who is confident in parenting practices and feels positive about his or her role may need simple strategies to address specific issues or behaviors. Those who experience temporary difficult behaviors in their child may need a simple intervention. Other parents who have been having difficulty with their child for a long time may need support for systematic and long-term intervention.

It is very common for parents not to really realize what their needs are, so parental support can help them recognize and understand their children's emotional, cognitive, physical and social development. Behavioral difficulties (BD) are also common among children with mental, developmental or other disabilities (Horbach, 2020; Jansen, 2020; Ngashangva, P. & Dutt, S. 2015).

Behavioral difficulties range from aggressive behavior, acute psychomotor stimulation to apathy. Behavioral difficulties are often chronic and there is often more than one difficulty in each person. These addictive difficulties in related disorders have significant adverse effects on the individual, family, and society. Parenting programs help parents develop positive interactions with their children. Healthy parent-child interactions are the most important factor in children's positive outcomes (Center for Community Child Health, 2007; Scott, O'Connor, & Futh, 2006). All parents can benefit from parental support, especially families with special needs such as substance abuse, mental health problems and learning disabilities. Parents with these difficulties are more vulnerable and may have a reduced ability to provide basic care and a stable, supportive environment for their children. This can then have a detrimental effect on children's progress. Do parents have sufficient knowledge for their children's development?

- What aspect of the child's development does the parent deal with (eg social, emotional, physical, cognitive development)?
- How do parents deal with difficulties?
- How do they talk about them?
- What language do they use (words, phrases, expressive means, similes)? The language in which they describe the situations they experience is an indication of their parental attitude.

It is very important for special educators to realize that parents who are going to participate in interventional programs in the role of students. It is well known that the ways in which people learn are different.

Others help lectures, others need a designed and customized digital learning environment. Some parents feel comfortable in group conversations with other parents, while others may feel extremely uncomfortable and need individualization.

For support to be effective, every parent must feel comfortable with the opportunity to learn and support.

The level of education of the parents is particularly important for designing an effective support program. Parents with low literacy skills, for example, can hardly benefit from a parenting program that relies heavily on written expression and uses written sources. Parents' learning experiences influence their perceptions of how they want to learn. It is important to explore the experiences gained through learning to ensure that the parent will be able to participate in services that are involved and maintain their interest and commitment.

Some of the key questions in relation to the design of intervention programs are the following:

- Is the support program appropriate and accessible to parents with low literacy rates?
- Will the parent benefit more from group or individual participation?
- The program is implemented in an environment where the parent may experience fear or anxiety (eg classroom or library).

Some parents also need an experiential process. Has the program included experiential exercise and a model that allows them to practice positive parent-child interactions?

Critical factors must be taken into account in order for the programs to truly meet the needs of parental support and especially to disadvantaged families. Parental support programs can enhance positive parent-child interactions. This can be especially helpful when parents face challenges that jeopardize their parenting ability and make them feel inadequate.

## **4.2. The seven-step partnership model with parents**

Critical questions need to be answered and specific skills and competences need to be developed. A seven step partnership with parents based on the model of seven stages to build an effective partnership was proposed by Bryan and Henry (2012).

The seven steps to partnership with parents provides the stakeholders, social educators and school counselors with critical stages in order to address important aspects of effective, sustainable, culturally congruent partnerships especially with vulnerable families from low income, social backgrounds. These steps are illustrated in Figure 5.

In detail, these seven steps are presented below.

### 1st Create a climate of cooperation

How to start with the partnership is a critical question. How I have to be prepared. At first a starting point has to be found. The first step for effective collaboration is to leave behind stereotypes and prejudices. Full acceptance is smoothing the ground in order for the relationship to grow.

Creating an environment of respect and trust from both sides is a prerequisite to initiate the

partnership . But how would the social educator be prepared and what skills have to be built? Reflection is needed on the ways to encounter equally any family and to manage gender inequalities, educational level, language, nationality, socio-economic background. More importantly, social educators should note that an attractive vision and convincing rationale for partnerships without cultural awareness and knowledge about students and their families and communities may hinder school counselors' efforts to build successful partnerships. Trust, full respect and treatment without prejudices are the basic tools that have to be developed (see fig.2)

### 2nd step: Assess family needs & strengths

Social educators should use several modes to investigate the family needs. Critical questions are how do I explore the needs and capabilities of our students and their parents. How would I record them? Am I confronting traditionally disempowered or marginalized families the same as the most privileged? Am I equally assessing all families?

Some of the methods of collecting useful data for assessment concerning family needs and strengths that a social educator can use are: face to face interviews, written or online surveys, social media, and focus groups. These methods would be used for the assessment of students, school personnel, family and community members (Bryan & Henry, 2012).

Great effort should be made so that social educators can appreciate and understand the special needs of families at risk of social exclusion, such as low-income families or children with disabilities.

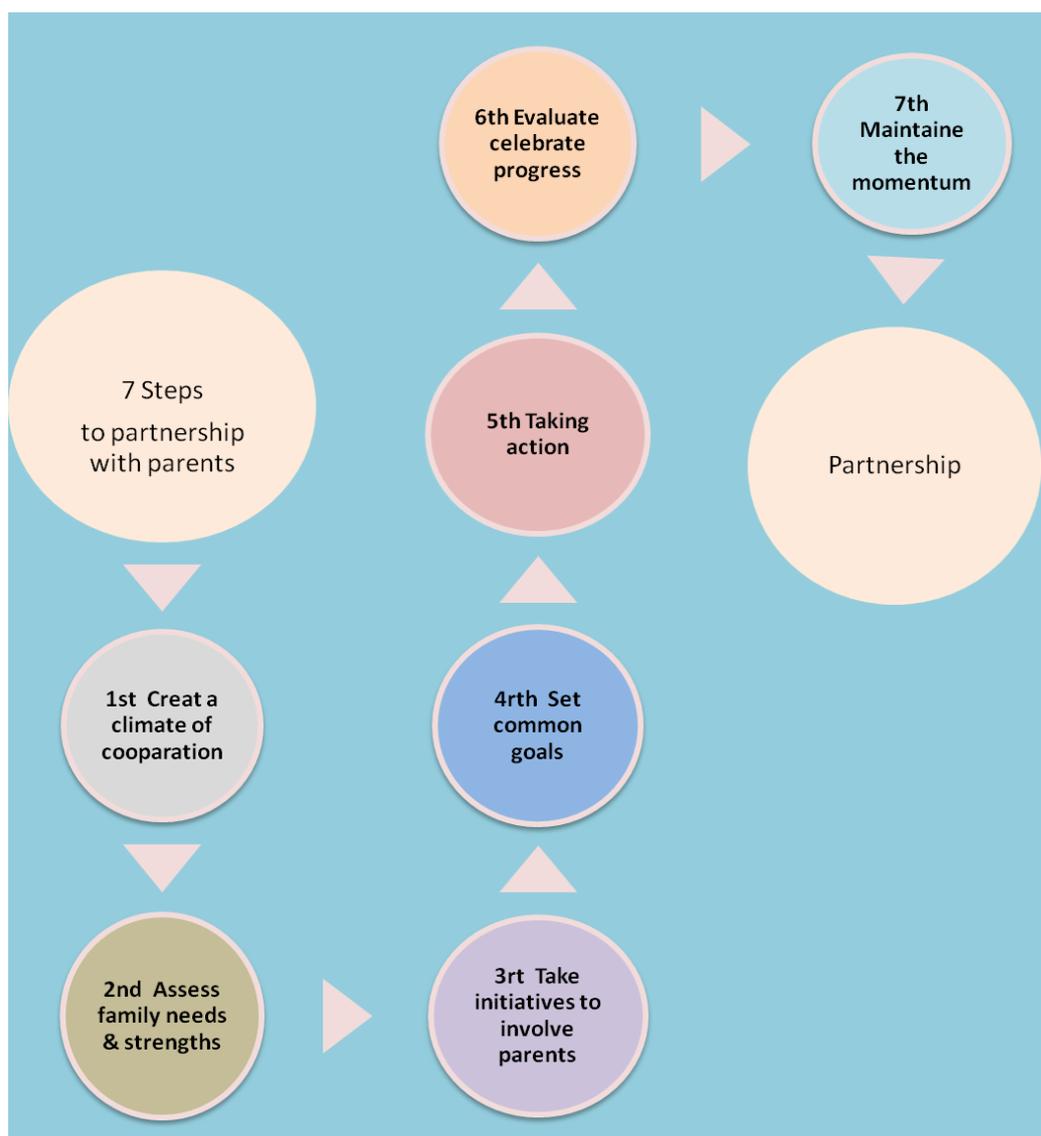
To assess the needs a social educator is important: a) to analyze, disaggregate school data, c) to hear different perspectives regarding the specific needs that the school staff recognize c) to develop a community resources map to identify the strengths of the community and the ways that these would be used e) to recognize the key persons to help social educators to become trustful so that community members can be in touch with them.

### 3rd Take initiatives to involve parents

Social educators in this step are ready to bring together parents and discuss the results of the assessment process. At this step many meetings may need to take place and key stakeholders in the wider child environment may need to be invited.

Social educators or school counselors collect data from various sources and perspectives at the assessment step to better understand the families' needs and strengths and to set goals for interventions that would lead to the improvement of the quality of life of families, especially those that are most vulnerable.

At this step School counselors should intentionally invite representatives of families typically marginalized in schools, those from low-income, immigrants, and racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds or with behavioral or other types of disabilities. These families need to be involved in goal setting in order to be motivated to participate. Social educators should enhance the feeling of belonging in school and the broader community in these families. Partnerships with broader social allies may provide interpreters, transportation, and child care at the school or community venue so that these families may be engaged in the partnership-building process and develop the awareness that they are receiving care. This feeling creates the important conditions so that parents participate in common goals.



**Figure 5.** 7 steps to partnership with parents

#### 4th Set common goals

Social educators at this step have to set common goals. The important question is how do I get all members of school and broader community to have a shared approach and goals? Social educators have to employ all their skills and competence to develop dialogue, to solve problems, to give initiatives to the most vulnerable and to members that are not in a position to stand up for themselves.

As soon as all these conditions have been met, it is time to start developing the partnership plan. This plan involves developing shared short- and long-term goals, formulated intervention programme outcomes, how and when the outcomes will be measured, and creating a timeline for partnership program events. We set short-term and long-term goals. We organize the schedule which includes goals, duration and desired results.

It is very important for the school counselors to share information in such ways that culturally diverse families be engaged in their children's education. Sometimes they may need to use nontraditional ways to foster those families' engagement in their children's education and

cooperation. Ways of sharing the plan and its outcomes have to be developed so that all members of the family and social allies are informed.

### 5th Taking action

The important question at this step is “What will we do and how will we do it?”

The implementation of the plan and its successful completion is the goal in this step. Social educators and school counselors are responsible for taking on role-playing initiatives, monitoring the implementation of the overall redesign feedback plan, and providing overall support to all stakeholders involved in the design.

Again in this step it is important to use methods that facilitate understanding and mobilize families who are vulnerable and may have children with behavioral difficulties and come from or belong to groups other than the dominant cultural groups or at a risk of exclusion. For this reason school counselors work to implement culturally sensitive programs and activities and engage culturally diverse families in non-traditional ways (i.e., holding events in the community, conducting home visits, assigning parents as workshop leaders). Programs should integrate evidence-based practices known to meet their goals. For example, if the central goal of the partnership is to increase academic achievement, then practices known to improve achievement (e.g., tutoring) should be included in the partnership pro-gram (Bryan & Henry,2012).

### 6th Evaluate celebrate progress

At this step it is important the impact of activities and initiatives on families and other involved social allies be measured. The question of how the impact would be measured is important at this step. It is common that the schools develop effective programs that manage to motivate families and improve students’ achievement and use inclusive practices effectively but fail to measure the results and to find ways to present outcomes through qualitative or quantitative indicators.

As they are really focus on solutions it is common that they forget to activate the evaluation plan and strategies for collecting data. Surveys and other forms of feedback from parents and community partners are important in the evaluation, examination and analysis of the results. It is equally important to review the evaluation results that have been collected from different perspectives to determine if and how the partnership program(s) met the needs of students, families and community members; how activities and pro-grams met the goals; and what positive or successful outcomes they produced.

Evaluations should provide a clear picture of the successes, strengths, weaknesses, obstacles and challenges that would be used as feedback for improvement of the program. Sharing the results with partners, families, educators and social allies through nontraditional formats (e.g. accessible stories, videos) bring together all partners and help them to celebrate the results. Indeed, sharing and celebrating the outcomes with family and community partners encourages them to continue as partners in the development and implementation of cooperation programs or activities and in the mobilization of new partners.

### 7th Maintain the momentum

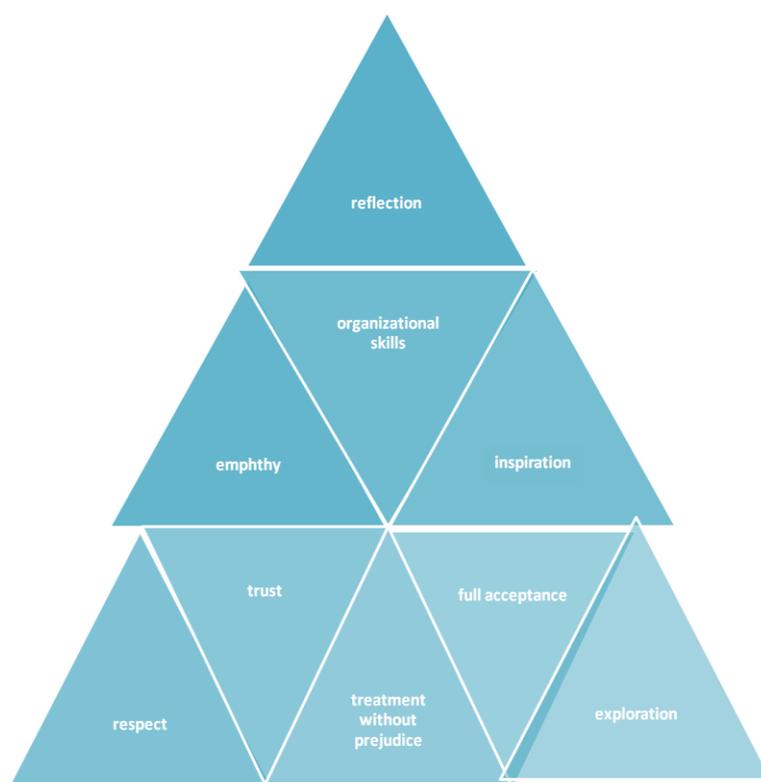
The sustainment of the results is an important factor. Enthusiasm and commitment are the motivators of the continuation of the cooperation. The sustainability of the results is the usage of a

global strategy that is important to be used during the implementation of the program. These strategies include ongoing outreach and recruiting of family and community members as partners throughout the school year, and training and involving partners as leaders.

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) has made extensive research on evidence-based partnerships using Epstein’s six types of involvement and Action Teams for Partnerships (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Chapter 26). While the NNPS model has shown positive effects on student out-comes, it differs from the equity focus of Bryan & Henry’s (2012) partnership process model. Although a few scholars have used this model to structure and evaluate their partnership programs (Cook & Hayden 2016), experimental research is needed to examine the model’s effects on students’ outcomes, in particular, the outcomes of marginalized students.

### 4.3. Social educators’ skills and tools for effective partnerships

In order establish effective cooperation with families (especially from vulnerable social groups), the social educators need to develop specific skills and use specific tools. This model calls for a collaborative approach to school counseling, which means that counselor educators must integrate collaboration and partnership-building knowledge and skills into school counselor training programs. In order for school counselors to develop the self-efficacy to build effective partnerships, they must be taught to do so during their counselor education programs (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004, 2006; Bryan & Griffin, 2010).



**Figure 6:** Basic tools and skills to enable the 7 steps to partnership with parents

These are the main qualifications for the success of their efforts. In Figure 6, specific tools suitable for every step are presented. At the bottom and middle level of the pyramid the skills and the tools of the 7 steps are presented. The last level is a prerequisite for all the others.

As school counselors play a central role in partnership-building, there is a need for a partnership model that integrates the extant approaches to partnerships, culturally congruent strategies, and equity-focused principles (i.e., democratic collaboration, strengths-focused, empowerment, social justice) to better serve culturally diverse and low-income families.

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## **PART II**

### **Parent-training theoretical concepts**

#### **Chapter 2. Theoretical concepts underlying parent-training**

By ECOISTITUTO

##### **Abstract**

This chapter presents the main theoretical concepts underlying parent-training education. Parent-training has, essentially, four components:

- Parenting problems are assessed;
- parents are taught new skills;
- they apply the skills with their children;
- they receive feedback about that application.

Some of the above interventions have broader goals and activities and include elements that transcend parent training, e.g., Multisystemic Therapy (Burchard, Bruns, & Burchard, 2002; Henggeler et al., 2003), Mindfulness Parenting (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009; Meppelink, R., de Bruin, E. I., Wanders-Mulder, FVennik, & Bögels, 2016), whereas other programs do not include all primary components.

In the last decades, in response to the large numbers of children with conduct disorders and the shortage of professional personnel, there has been an increasing emphasis on training parents as therapists for their own children.

The first parent-training programs have been based on individual therapy and have incorporated direct feedback techniques such as live modeling, role playing, and behavioral rehearsals.

However, these individualized programs are costly, time consuming, and incapable of meeting the increasing demands.

Recently, many parent-training programs are based on a participatory approach. Moreover, online technology has been applied to support parent-training interventions (Breitenstein, Gross, & Christophersen, 2014).

In the following paragraphs we will focus on the educational approaches that can be adopted for building parent-training programs.

Indeed, appropriate educational approaches are necessary to realize effective parent-training interventions.

Moreover, the RUBI program is illustrated.

#### **1. Theoretical concepts underlying parent-training education**

Although educating usually consists of teaching on one hand and learning on the other, teaching and learning are actually interrelated activities. Learners are not passive recipients of what teachers provide and teachers are not neutral repeaters (Seufert, 2003).

The modern education theories are learner-centered theories. They share two basic

assumptions. The first is that teaching-learning is grounded on the principle that learners are at the center of the educational process, while the second is that individuals are not perfectly alike and, accordingly, may need different teaching-learning approaches and techniques.

The majority of contemporary educators, regardless of whether they follow behaviorism, cognitivism, connectivism, or constructionism, contend that teaching is not only about giving and checking knowledge, but encompasses many other non-secondary activities, such as guiding, mentoring, stimulating, and motivating learners. Teachers should support and reinforce positive attitudes of learners in a triangular process that comprises teachers, learners, and the subject matter being taught/learned.

In the last two decades, the teaching-learning process has been influenced by the increasing spread of the internet. Interactive content sources, such as blogs, wikis, and social networks in general, are influencing education. Nowadays, advanced collaborative virtual learning environments are available and in the near future will be operative semantic agents able to parse the global knowledge accessible on the Web.

In the following paragraphs, the principal educational approaches that are at the basis of the most popular parent-training intervention programs will be briefly illustrated and discussed. Knowledge of the theoretical roots of these programs could suggest their better adaptation to the operative contexts and perhaps the integration of their components.

## **2. Philosophy of education**

Philosophy of education is one of the oldest disciplines. Plato devoted considerable attention to education's various aspects, such as its nature, purposes, and content.

After Plato, many philosophers treated the theoretical principles and practices underlying educational processes. Their point of view on education was influenced by their assumptions on the true nature of man and the physical world as well as moral and aesthetic values. Philosophies of education differ in how the real world, knowledge, good, purpose of teaching and learning progress are deemed and understood.

Dewey might be considered the founder of the philosophy of education since he systematically tackled educational topics and related issues, including aims and purposes and curriculum and evaluation.

To define the scope of the philosophy of education, it is useful to introduce the goal of philosophy that most philosophers agree:

The goal of philosophy as a discipline is to bring under critical review and appraisal as much as possible of what is ordinary taken for granted, assumed, or presupposed about the experience and knowledge-yielding powers of the human mind, the various sectors of the culture, and the world. (Adams, 2000).

Accordingly, the philosophy of education can be defined as the critical review and appraisal of concepts, knowledge, experience, aims, and values concerning the teaching-learning process.

There are various ways in which the philosophy of education can be approached and organized. For example, one might study how prominent philosophers argued on educational topics or issues such as the purpose of the school, what should be taught, how should one teach,

how students should be evaluated, and how to do so. These philosophers should be studied considering the societal context in which they lived and the implications of their ideas for education. However, one might also address educational problems focusing on a specific scope, e.g., moral and aesthetic concerns (ethics/axiology) or theoretical perspectives (epistemology). Finally, a reflection might be conducted to show how the various currents of thought such as Idealism, Realism and Pragmatism, Marxism, Existentialism, Postmodernism, and Postempiricism influenced the educational practices.

The study of the philosophy of education can disclose the underlying beliefs of current teaching-learning approaches. One can find that the Plato dualism between body and mind continues to be on the basis of some modern theories of education and current educational conservatism. Examples of educational conservatism may be found in the "characteristic inertia and resistance to change of formal education institutions and subject fields" (Young, 2007, 100).

## 2.1 What is pedagogy

The most common definition of pedagogy is: "the science and art of teaching" (Jolliffe, W. (2007, 1). The term comes from the Greek παιδαγωγέω, in which παῖς means "child" and ἄγω means "lead"; literally translated "to lead the child".

Psychological views influence pedagogical approaches and methodologies. Theories of learning have been developed to describe how people learn, and these theories are based on various pedagogical approaches.

In the past, pedagogy was defined as "the moral education of children," and the more traditional definitions describe pedagogy as the science, theory, art, and practice aimed at students' intellectual and social development (Dupuis, 2010). Indeed, in the traditional view, students cannot do what they please since they will often choose evil rather than good.

The progress of science more and more strongly influences modern pedagogy. Many modern pedagogical theories have argued the sequential developments of individual mental processes, such as recognize, recall, analyze, reflect, apply, create, understand, and evaluate. This is the case of Piaget's cognitivism, the social-interactionist theories of Bruner, and the social and cultural theories of Vygotsky.

The contemporary idea is that pedagogy is a discipline that includes a complex blend of theoretical knowledge and practical skills focusing on teaching-learning. In other words, nowadays, pedagogy is principally aimed at investigating strategies, models, and tools useful in learning and teaching activities and rejects that (Shulman, 1986):

1. Good teaching follows naturally from subject mastery;
2. A good teacher can teach anything at all.

Today, many pedagogues, although they agree that pedagogy sometimes appears as a nebulous concept, pragmatically argue that it is essentially a combination of knowledge and skills required for effective teaching (Chapuis, 2003) and define pedagogy as a highly complex blend of theoretical understanding and practical skill (Lovat & Mackenzie, 2003).

The history of pedagogy dates from a period relatively recent, and, generally, the study of pedagogy begins among classical peoples, the Greeks and the Romans.

## 2.2 A preliminary philosophical issue: understanding

Understanding is a human activity. Understanding begins with questions and with the idea about how things work.

However, we ought to remember the Protagoras' (485-410 BC) dictum: "Man is the measure of all things."

Following Husserl, Schutz claimed that the only way to understand social reality is through the meaning that people give to the reality. In this perspective, any wisdom source (like poetry) that generates ideas, and science that tests ideas, is mutually supportive and compatible (Feigl, 1980).

Nevertheless, the scientific approach differs from a philosophical or poetical approach. Scientific research aims to define models that explain multiple cases of the studied phenomena, attempt to draw inductive conclusions from a series of facts, prove a hypothesis, and deduct conclusions.

Often, one deems that quantification is the synonym of scientific research. It is important to keep the concepts of quantification and science separate. Quantification is important in social science, and therefore also in education, but quantification is not the absolute criterion for science:

Whereas quantification is an important methodological means in natural science research, any legitimation of synonymizing science with quantification by pointing to the natural sciences is a positivist illusion. (Kvale, 1983, 441).

Applying quantification in the social field is not a trivial issue: one needs to identify variables and indicators. It is not always easy to establish whether a variable is independent or dependent.

## 2.3 Ancient Greece education

In ancient Greece, sophists were the first who argued the principle of the educability of all men. They go over the old conception according to which *αρετή* (excellence, virtue) was a hereditary characteristic of aristocratic caste. Sophists introduced in Western culture the principle of democratic education. However, their view of educability was for rich people.

Protagoras is considered the greatest of the Sophists of ancient Greece and the first to promote subjectivism, arguing that interpretation of reality is relative to the individual. He claimed that "all things the measure is Man." In this perspective, laws were produced by men and therefore were conventional. Laws are subjected to the will of men and, accordingly, the changes in history. In this respect, Protagoras agrees with the idea of Xenophanes (c. 570-478 BCE), who emphasized the limitations of human knowledge:

No man knows or ever will know the truth about the gods and about everything I speak of; for even if one chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not but seeming is wrought over all things (Kirk & Raven, 179)

Protagoras also sustained that rhetoric was the primary instrument of culture and political life. He believed that everything could be expressed using opposed argumentations (antilogies). He taught his disciples to attack and defend, accuse and excuse, celebrate, and condemn the same viewpoint that "every discourse branches out into another one that opposes it" (Neiva, 2011, 35).

As a sophist, Protagoras claimed that rhetoric and dialectic aim to persuade people, involving them in issues. As a consequence, truth depends exclusively on a majority consensus that confers force to a speech.

## 2.4 Socrates's learning method

Socrates introduced a change in the use of dialectic. He claimed that dialectic allows individuals to awaken their partial knowledge (maieutic) and stimulates them towards moral choices.

Maieutic is Socrates' pedagogical method based on the idea that truth is latent in every human being's mind due to innate reasons and can be awakened by intelligently answering proposed questions or problems.

Socrates used to say that he knew nothing except just the fact of his ignorance. He also said having nothing to teach except the way to achieve knowledge independently.

He claimed that the only way he was wiser than other men was that he was conscious of his own ignorance.

Sophists teach students whilst Socrates helps them to learn. His pedagogical principle continues to influence education approaches, e.g., the student-centered approaches.

The Socratic method is known as the method of elenchus or Socratic debate. It is a form of discussion where participants (students and/or scholars) ask and answer questions to stimulate critical thinking and select or producing ideas (Scott, 2002).

Aristotle regarded this method as the essence of the scientific method.

In Plato's early dialogues, Socrates's method was used to investigate the nature or definition of abstract concepts, e.g., courage in Laches. In this dialogue, Laches and Nicias, two Athenian generals, were invited to define courage. Laches began by suggesting that:

Courage is willing to remain at one's post and defend oneself against the enemy without running away.

Socrates criticizes the Laches's definition, observing that there are courageous soldiers who do not stay at their posts but fight in retreat. Through this observation, Socrates demonstrates that the definition of Laches is not completely true, and it should be rejected.

Then, Laches provides a second definition:

Courage is a sort of endurance of the soul.

Socrates analyzes this definition, underlining that:

1. Courage is fine (kalon: admirable).

2. Foolish endurance is not fine.

So, 3. Courage is not a foolish endurance.

Socrates concludes that if the new Laches definition is true, courage should be a wise endurance.

However, even the definitions of courage as wise endurance cannot be true since there are cases in which an individual who possesses wise endurance is not courageous. Socrates gives the following examples:

- A man who shows endurance in spending his money wisely.
- A doctor who shows endurance in refusing to give his ill patient food or drink.
- A soldier who shows endurance based on the knowledge that reinforcements are on the way, and his battlefield position is superior to his enemy's position.

A man who shows endurance in a cavalry attack and has knowledge of Horsemanship.

The dialogue continues, and Socrates uses the same method to analyze Nicias's new definitions, the second general. But also, the definitions proposed by Nicias contains some

contradictions.

Despite their efforts, Socrates, Nicias, and Laches do not define courage, and in the end, Socrates suggests that the whole company, including himself, ought to go back to school again.

## 2.5 Plato and pedagogy

It has been handed down that Plato put an inscription at the entrance of his academy, reading: "Let no one enter who is not a geometrician."

It means that the access to his research community was only for candidates equipped with appropriate knowledge. Only those who possess specific competence and skills could enter Plato's academy.

Was it elitism or merely the application of educational orientation criteria?

In my opinion, the above sentence expresses the elitism of the Platonic concept of education that today appears as the essence of the conservative attitude towards education and school.

Nevertheless, the Platonic conception of education, at his time, was revolutionary, and Peter Sloterdijk rightly observes that "for an amazing moment, the school and the avant-garde were identical" (2011, 9).

Plato argued that human beings are split into two classes, those who remember a particular thing and those who remember something else. He also sustained that there is who has specific knowledge and who has other knowledge.

Education is the means to acquire knowledge. Learning allows for remembering knowledge.

However, the concept that education is the means to reach knowledge is present in education's modern idea.

Plato believes in the soul and its immortality of the soul. When an individual dies, his soul transmigrates into another body. Souls possess an a priori knowledge about concepts that refers to ideal, perfect objects, coming from previous lives, and rational insight. According to his Theory of Recollection, knowledge comes from the ideal truth's recollection (anamnesis). The observation of sensible objects sends back to absolute concepts (e.g., perceiving a beautiful melody, one will remember the idea of absolute Beauty).

Plato claims that science's aim cannot be the study of sensible reality (which is only a partial and distorted copy of the ideals to which it refers). Science should be the study of the absolute truth.

### 2.5.1 What is knowledge for Plato?

According to Socrates, Plato argues that the physical world is populated by the "shadows" of ideal and perfect forms. Physical objects and events are only the instances of the perfect versions of themselves. For example, perfect justice exists, but there is only an imperfect copy of it in the human world.

A definition of knowledge that is most frequently credited to Plato follows from the Justified true belief. The concept of justified true belief states that in order to know that a given proposition is true, one must not only believe the relevant true proposition, but one must also have justification for doing so. In formal terms, a subject *S* knows that a proposition *P* is true if and only if:

$P$  is true

$S$  believes that  $P$  is true, and

$S$  is justified in believing that  $P$  is true

In 1963, Edmund Gettier proposed two scenarios where the three criteria (justification, truth, and belief) do not appear to be genuine knowledge cases. Here following two examples:

Let it be assumed that Plato is next to you and you know him to be running, but you mistakenly believe that he is Socrates so that you firmly believe that Socrates is running. However, let it be so that Socrates is, in fact, running in Rome; however, you do not know this. (Boh, 1985, 95; Dreyfus & Cortés, 1997, 292).

The Gettier problem has received other responses, such as the *causal theory* proposed by Alvin Goldman (1967), or Lehrer-Paxson's *defeasibility condition*, or Fred Dretske's *conclusive reasons*, and Robert Nozick's *truth-tracking*. The experimental philosophy cross-cultural study was very interesting conducted by Jonathan Weinberg, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich. Their experiment has demonstrated that while Western participants' responses were exactly what would have been expected by reading the philosophical literature, most East Asian participants reported opposite responses.

However, in the past, the problem of knowledge was tackled by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 –1914). Peirce emphasized *fallibilism* and considered the assertion of absolute certainty a barrier to an inquiry, and in 1901 defined truth as follows:

The truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would bring scientific belief, which concordance the abstract statement may possess by the virtue of its inaccuracy and one-sidedness, and this confession is an essential ingredient of truth. (Peirce, 1901, 719).

### 2.5.2 Plato's philosophy of education

In Plato's philosophy, Reason is the highest faculty of man. It is rooted in a spiritual soul. The Body is the prison house of the soul and is responsible for man's lower functions, appetites, and emotions:

At the time, man's soul existed in the world of pure spirit and enjoyed the higher bliss, pure contemplation. But because of some contact with evil in the pure spirit world, the soul was condemned to become a part of a body, forming an organic unit. Being united to matter was considered the highest form of punishment that could be inflicted upon a spirit. Because the soul formed an organic unit with the body, it was then subject to weaknesses which it did not have in its heavenly existence. (Dupuis, 1985, 30)

Plato sustains that Ideas constitute the primary content of education. Mind or soul exercises the superior faculties whilst the inferior faculties concern the body.

Accordingly, one cannot reach true knowledge through the senses because they don't perceive the abstract universal Ideas. Only the mind can perceive the Ideas. As a consequence, education should primarily involve intellectual activities.

In the Laws, Plato claimed that education should lead youth to that principle that is pronounced right, but the law is confirmed as truly right by the oldest and most just experience.

The main goal of elementary schooling is the education of pupils in the worthy membership in the community. Dupuis observed that:

The significant aspect of Plato's goal for the elementary school, as far as conservative

education is concerned, lies in the priority given to finding and developing the budding intellectuals. Secondly, the emphasis on cultural heritage, mastery of basic skills, and patriotism is significant since many twentieth-century conservatives set the same goals for their elementary schools. (Dupuis, 1984, 40)

Plato sustained the principle of equal educational opportunity or egalitarian education. Egalitarianism is a principle in which all people in a society have equal rights and receive impartial treatment in the same circumstances. An equal educational opportunity can be possible through the establishment and operation of various grants and scholarship awards.

Plato was persuaded that all children and youth are given ample opportunity to demonstrate their intellectual capacity.

Plato accepted the method usually used in the Greek elementary schools based on the memorization and recitation of selected contents from an approved list. He also used the teaching method of question-answer employed by Socrates especially at the advanced level of education.

## 2.6 John Dewey's educational pragmatism

John Dewey (1859-1952) was one of the most known philosophers of education.

His educational theory was affected by the novel theories about nature and man based upon species' evolution.

In the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, and others argued that man was not a ready-made species but had evolved from lower animal forms.

Evolutionism had many implications for educational theory.

The first is that human beings don't constitute a static species. Consequently, in contrast with traditional education theories, they are not the same everywhere and at all times. Second, the importance of the evolutionary process environment entails that education is an essential tool for human progress. Continuous education will prevent regression in human development.

Moreover, the dualism mind-body is rejected. Mind and body are not separate entities but different aspects of the same evolving organism. Man is not the result of a supernatural intervention but manifests a higher level of natural development.

In the book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey tackles the question of the dualism mind-body, or spirit-matter. He argues that classical philosophy's dualism is responsible for the unnatural cleavages in society and education, e.g., labor-leisure, practical-intellectual, man-nature, culture-vocation, ends-means, and so on. For Dewey, the removal of these unnatural dualisms gives unity to education and life.

Dewey and his followers were persuaded that a new educational system, completely different from that of the past, should be needed.

In *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey pointed to the fundamentally social nature of education. He argued that social situations' demands stimulated the child to act as a member of a unity, rather than an isolated individual. This social stimulation pressed the child to act for the welfare of the group to which they belong. Indeed, he believed that man's nature was socially built, and an individual derived his mental powers and other traits from society. Dewey argued that man's nature was neither innately good nor evil but neutral. Consequently, he disagreed with Rousseau's romantic idea about man's innate goodness.

Dewey sustained that traditional education was miseducative since it was teacher-centered and subject matter-centered. He made democratic egalitarianism the focus point of his conception

of education. Whereas Plato had taught that all men by nature fall into three distinct classes and only one of these classes is fit to rule, Dewey argued that all men have the potential to direct their own activities in association with other equals. Educational opportunities should be for all the children and all the people.

In Dewey's education theory, problem-solving was a primary factor. He distinguished the following steps of problem-solving:

1. felt difficulty;
2. location and definition of the problem;
3. suggestions of possible or alternatives solutions to the problem;
4. determining of bearing or probable consequences of each suggestion;
5. further observation and test of experience leading to the acceptance or rejection of the solution.

Dewey pointed out that traditional conservative education claims the importance of educating students' character, but, actually, all classroom activities are designed to develop intellectual powers. To combat this narrow idea, he proposed the introduction of vocational, health, and physical education as well as moral training.

Dewey synthesized all the liberal progressive ideas of other authors, first of them, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).

Spencer applied the theory of evolution to societies that he considered organisms that progress through changes similar to living species. The Spencer's philosophy claims that societies (like organisms) would begin simple and then progress to a more complex form.

Dewey rejected the idea that the school is an institution apart from the home and the community. The school should be the continuation of the pupil social life and cannot be isolated from the processes of daily living:

I believe that the school must represent life - life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground.  
[...] Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living  
(Dewey, 1959, 9).

### **3. The main pedagogical theories**

In the following paragraphs the main pedagogical theories are synthesized.

#### **3.1 Behaviorism**

Behaviorism is a term coined by the American psychologist John B. Watson. It is based on the idea of a stimulus-response pattern of conditioned behavior.

One of the most famous experiments in classical conditioning was performed by Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov. By introducing the sound of a bell to go with the placing of food in front of a dog, Pavlov was able to create a conditioned response in the dog where the dog would salivate even at the ringing bell's sound.

Some of the most important developments in behaviorism, especially as it relates to pedagogy, took place in the mid-twentieth century with B. F. Skinner's work. Skinner studied operant, or voluntary, behavior and called his approach "operant conditioning." Skinner's mechanisms included positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, non-reinforcement, and punishment. In a classroom setting, ignoring misbehavior hoping that the lack of reinforcement

would discourage the behavior usually proves disastrous.

### 3.2 Cognitivism

Cognitivism became the dominant force in psychology in the late twentieth century, replacing behaviorism as the most popular paradigm for understanding the learning process.

Cognitive theory is not a refutation of behaviorism but rather an expansion that uses behavior changes as indicators for processes within a learner's mind. The concept of cognitive theory utilizes the concept of "schema," a structure of internal knowledge, as well as the concept of short and long term memory.

Cognitive theory suggests that meaningful information is easier to retain, and new information is affected by context, environment, and previous schemata.

### 3.3 Constructivism

Constructivism is based on a set of assumptions about the nature of human learning. It values developmentally appropriate teacher-supported learning that is initiated and directed by the student.

According to the constructivist approach, learners construct and interpret their individual realities based on their perceptions of experiences. Learning is regarded as a process in which the learner actively constructs new ideas or concepts based upon current and past knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, constructivist learning is a very personal endeavor, wherein internalized concepts, rules, and general principles may consequently be applied in a practical, real-world context.

The teacher acts as a facilitator, encouraging students to discover principles for themselves and construct knowledge by working to solve real problems. Working with other students enables the sharing of viewpoints and an emphasis on collaborative learning. Constructivist theories are behind many modern teaching styles, such as Generative Learning, Inquiry-based instruction, Discovery Learning, Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and knowledge building, promoting students' free exploration within a given framework or structure.

### 3.4 Current pedagogical contemporary models and strategies

Some current contemporary models/strategies are:

- Productive pedagogies,
- Multiliteracies Model
- Gardner's Multiple Intelligences
- Co-operative Learning

#### 3.4.1 Productive pedagogies

Productive pedagogies (PP) are one of the new educational strategies. The Education Queensland developed PP as a research tool for classroom observations during the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) 2001.

PP has been defined as a "multidimensional model of classroom practice [that] is recognized as a framework for professional development that focuses on classroom practices and equity concerns in education" (Education Queensland 2003a).

The PP describes a common framework under which teachers can choose and develop strategies concerning:

what they are teaching  
the variable styles, approaches, and backgrounds of their students

Teachers can use PP to focus instruction and improve student outcomes. Some are more suited for teaching certain knowledge and skills than others.

The central premise of successful application of the PP is that teachers:

- consider and understand the backgrounds and preferred learning styles of their students ;
- identify the repertoires of practice and operational fields to be targeted;
- evaluate their own array of teaching strategies and select and apply the appropriate ones.

In general, PP can be considered as a theoretical framework that teachers can use to reflect critically upon their current classroom practice; that is, a vehicle to use as a professional ‘vocabulary’ (or parlance) around which to have conversations about teaching practice with colleagues and to focus on individual student needs.

### **3.4.2 Multiliteracies model**

Multiliteracies provide a framework for re-thinking curriculum in all learning areas and focus on how social, technological, and economic changes have redefined literacy.

Multiliteracies also refer to different modes of meaning to address some of the major aspects of change in our contemporary communications environment. These days, exchanges of meaning are rarely just linguistic. They are almost invariably multimodal (Chapuis, 2003). These include: Linguistic, Visual, Audio, Gestural, Spatial.

### **3.4.3 Co-operative learning**

Co-operative learning is a structured teaching strategy that combines classroom-based education with practical work experience and can be defined as "a program that formally integrates a student's academic studies with work experience with participating employers" (CAFCE, 2005). It also uses active participation methods in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use various learning activities to improve their understanding of a concept or subject.

Each team member is responsible for learning what is taught and helping teammates learn, thus promoting academic achievement and cross-cultural understanding (Chapuis, 2003).

The University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada) has the world's largest co-operative education program.

### **3.4.4 Constructivist pedagogy**

Constructivism is a theory which argues that individual create their own new understandings based on an interaction between what they already know and believes and ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact (Resnick, 1989).

Constructivism holds that learning is essentially active. Constructivists argue that by definition, a truly passive person is incapable of learning. In constructivist learning, each structures his or her own knowledge of the world into a unique pattern, connecting each new fact, experience or understanding in a subjective way that binds the individual into rational and

meaningful relationships to the wider world (Wilson & Daviss, 1994; Richardson, 2003).

As scientists study learning, they realize that a constructivist model reflects their best understanding of the brain’s natural way of making sense of the world (Feldman, 1994).

This is in total contrast to the behaviorist model that dominated learning theory in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – that is, “people expected rewards to do tasks, their brains were blank sheets awaiting instruction and intelligence was innate and largely inherited” (Abbot & Ryan, p. 67, 1999). “Constructivism is not only an open-ended form of learning; it is essentially about reality, connectivity and the search for purpose” (Abbot & Ryan, 1999).

#### 4. Educational psychologies

All educational theories, models, and practices have an underlying psychological theory.

Figure 1 shows the learning perspective based on the psychological theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and connectivism.

<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drill and practice</li> <li>- Rote learning</li> <li>- Exams and tests</li> </ul>	<p><b>Behaviorism</b> Learners are passive and leaning is an external process</p>	<p><b>Cognitivism</b> Learning is an internal process</p>	<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active participation</li> <li>- Using thinking to learn</li> <li>- Computer metaphor</li> </ul>
<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self directed learning</li> <li>- Group content-sharing</li> <li>- Network metaphor</li> </ul>	<p><b>Constructivism</b> Leaning occurs experiencing things and reflecting on experiences</p>	<p><b>Connectivism</b> Learning is both an internal and a networking process</p>	<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self directed learning</li> <li>- Group content-sharing</li> <li>- Network metaphor</li> </ul>

**Figure 1.** The four learning perspectives based on behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and Connectivism (own source).

Over the last few decades, although variously re-modulated, the dominant psychological approaches in education have been behaviorism and humanism.

##### 4.1 Behavioristic approach

The Behavioristic approach has had a great influence in education. The antecedents of behaviorism can be traced back to Ivan Pavlov’s research on conditioning and involuntary reflex actions. Pavlov is well known for the experiment with dogs in which, after continued pairings of food with the sound of a bell, the dog salivated at the sound of the bell alone.

An important contribution to behaviorism came from John Broadus Watson and Eduard L. Thorndike. Watson’s article *Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It* (1913) is considered to be the

behaviorist manifesto. In this article, Watson outlined the major features of behaviorism, e.g. that psychology is a purely objective experimental branch of natural sciences:

Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. The behaviorist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behavior of man, with all of its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviorist's total scheme of investigation (Watson, 1913, 248).

In 1932, Thorndike was the first to propose that rewards were better reinforcers than punishments, because they strengthened the connection between the stimulus and the desired response: one can catch more flies with a spoon of honey than with a gallon of vinegar.

For behaviorists, human beings are biological organisms existing in a socio-cultural environment which determines their nature and essence. Individuals and cultures are influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Values are expressions of (or preferences for) those forms of behavior which have been reinforced. As a consequence, behaviorists reject the view that humans are innately inclined to evil or good. Note that for a long time the Western world was dominated by the idea that man is a very imperfect being and, consequently, must be strictly educated and guided otherwise they will choose evil rather than good. This view posits that children are inclined to misbehave and should be constantly held in check to control their inherent bad instincts and be educated to maintain a right conduct.

The most remarkable exponent of behaviorism was the American psychologist and social philosopher Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904 – 1990). The theoretical position of Skinner was closely related to that of Logical Empiricists. He rejected the platonic dualism of mind-body (spirit-matter) as well as the attribution of certain human traits to human nature or instinct:

An organism which has received a painful shock will also, if possible, act to gain access to another organism towards which it can act aggressively. The extent to which human aggression exemplifies innate tendencies is not clear, and many of the ways in which people attack and thus weaken or destroy the power of intentional controllers are quite obviously learned. (Skinner, 1976, 34)

The “hunter or warrior instinct” is a meaningless expression since what is claimed to be instinct is an attitude due to external conditioning (Dupuis & Gordon, 2010, 22):

Similarly, moral values are derived by experience and are retained because of positive reinforcements. Aesthetic values, just as moral values, may be held individually, socially, or culturally.

Behaviorists claim that educational objectives should be expressed in a measurable way. Indeed, every educational program should contain behavioral objectives and means for the objective evaluation of student success in achieving those stated objectives.

Skinner is especially critical of useless goals of education such as excellence or creativity since these terms are not carefully specified. In response to those who claim that discovery is the best means of learning, Skinner responds that:

Working through a program is really a process of discovery, but not in the sense in which that word is currently used in education. We discover many things in the world around us, and that is usually better than being told about them, but as individuals we can discover

only a very small part of the world. Mathematics has been discovered very slowly and painfully over thousands of years. Students discover it as they go through a program, but not in the sense of doing something for the first time in history (Skinner, 1984, 951).

A fundamental behaviorist belief is that learning encompasses the entire range of the human life. Their idea is that what serves the needs of an individual, society, or the culture of

today may be completely different for people in the future centuries. For this reason, continuous guidance is necessary for curriculum designers to update programs in order to meet changing needs.

#### 4.2 Humanistic approach

Humanism is a psychological and philosophical approach which is the diametric opposite of behaviorism.

Humanists don't share common agreement on any theoretical principles, except one. They sustain only that human beings are free and that freedom is the expression of humanity. As a consequence, all humanists are apt to insist that they don't wish to be restricted by any system.

For humanists, the subjective human situation is the real subject matter of psychology.

They claim that the major concerns of human existence cannot be examined by the empirical methods of the sciences: my experience is not the same as yours.

The interest of humanists focuses on relationships among human beings as well as on death, alienation, anxiety, fear, value choices, and so on. Humanists claim that behavioral sciences are of little help in providing knowledge on such subjective matters. They consider that the most important kind of truth is personal experience.

Furthermore, in his book *Personal Knowledge*, published in 1959, Polanyi attests that our personal experiences and ways of sharing knowledge have a profound effect on scientific discovery. He objects to the stereotype of the wholly objective and dispassionate researcher, pointing out that *knowing* is still an art, and that not only logical reasoning but also personal beliefs and passions are necessary parts of research. Polanyi argues that the objectivity of science is rooted "in the very depths of our culture":

Yet the prevailing conception of science, based on the disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, seeks—and must seek at all costs—to eliminate from science such passionate, personal, human appraisals of theories, or at least to minimize their function to that of a negligible by-play. For modern man has set up as the ideal of knowledge the conception of natural science as a set of statements which is 'objective' in the sense that its substance is entirely determined by observation, even while its presentation may be shaped by convention.

[...] That is why scientific theory is represented as a mere economical description of facts; or as embodying a conventional policy for drawing empirical inferences; or as a working hypothesis, suited to man's practical convenience—interpretations that all deliberately overlook the rational core of science (Polanyi, 2012, 16).

The biggest contribution of humanism to education comes from the American psychologist Carl R. Rogers (1902-1987) who was among the founders of the person-centered approach to psychology. This approach is based on techniques that allow a client to engage their own resources to act in their world with others and overcome their problems:

When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or a therapist, I discover another characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my presence is releasing and helpful. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, then I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviors turn out to be right, in some odd way. At those moments, it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself, and has become a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present. (Rogers, 1979, 102).

In the 1960s, the computer program Eliza was created by Joseph Weizenbaum (1966). It was a tongue-in-cheek application which emulated the responses of a Rogerian non-directional psychotherapist in an initial psychiatric interview. The Weizenbaum program demonstrates how simple it is to simulate the Rogerian psychotherapist paradigm.

However, the person-centered approach has borne a wide range of application in various domains, such as psychotherapy and counseling (client-centered therapy), education (student-centered learning), organizations, and other group settings.

In regards to education, Rogers claims that conditioning plays the major role in determining value preferences among infants, but that later the child moves beyond the stage of self-satisfaction and tries to please others. He argues that, stage by stage, an individual develops values based on their life experiences and arrives at a synthesis of all these experiences. Finally, he states that the broadest aim of education is the facilitation of learning in an ever-changing world.

### **4.3 Participatory learning approach**

In the 1990s, participation was a popular buzzword, and the concept of participation was also extended into the field of education.

Since the 2000s, participatory learning has been seen as an increasingly appealing educational approach that can positively affect learners since it engages them as active participants in the full educational program, including homework and exercises.

Participatory learning is grounded in John Dewey's idea that learners achieve better results if the learning process "reproduces, or runs parallel to, some form of work carried on in social life" (Dewey & Boydston, 1983, 93).

From a philosophical point of view, participatory learning can be seen as the natural consequence of two Deweyan concepts: that learning is a problem-solving process, and that there isn't any dualism between the subject matter and the method (Dupuis & Gordon, 2010).

Participatory learning has often been experimented to support sustainable development, above all in regards to the agriculture of developing countries (Coldevin, 2002), and has been seen as a means to aid the democratic progress of emerging countries, since participatory learning is, by its very nature, collaborative and so directly fosters democracy.

Certain adult participatory learning techniques are also very popular and widely used in management training (especially for project managers and supervisors), such as brainstorming, problem-solving, project work, and critical incident response. Most of them have their theoretical basis in behaviorism as well as in constructivism (Rodrigues, 2014). Indeed, constructivist theories

of learning argue that knowledge is constructed by learners who better learn by actively applying their know-how to meaningful problems (Brown & Palincsar, 1989).

Participatory learning methods comprise a wide range of activities, which share a student-centered view aimed at enabling learners to play an active and influential part in their learning process. This means that learners are not merely listened to, but also actively collaborate to acquire knowledge and skills: in other words, participatory learning focuses on student participation.

An element that characterizes participatory learning is the necessity of facilitators. Indeed, every participatory process needs the presence of skilled facilitators (Kaner, 2014) who help participants to interact together.

In the educational context, facilitators provide learners with discussion subjects, present case studies, organize tasks that call for participants to work together in small groups, and so on. Their task is to support the active involvement of learners in the learning process, stimulating them to think through their mindset and share with others their experience and knowledge, as well as collaborate to accomplish the expected achievements.

It has to be noted that, although facilitators and coaches have many overlapping skills and functions, their role is different: a coach provides individual attention and addresses personal development with an emphasis on a specific task, whereas a facilitator provides a group with meaningful dialogue and broadens personal perspectives, encouraging the entire group to participate collectively so as to increase their ability to operate effectively on their own.

Participatory learning strategies are considered effective in adult learning since they can reduce the difficulties due to the inhomogeneity of trainees that can affect adult educational programs. In this regard, the Participatory Adult Learning Strategy (PALS) is a proven model that can be adopted in parent training educational programs. PALS is an evidence-based approach by Dust and Trivette, which results from over 20 years of research and practice and, more recently, from the findings of the meta-analyses of adult learning methods and the synthesis of research studies into the most effective adult learning practices (Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, & O'herin, 2009; Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2010).

PALS authors analyzed and measured the positive effect of four adult learning methods: accelerated learning (Meier, 2000), coaching (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990), guided design (Hancock, Coscarelli, & White, 1983), and just-in-time training (Hew & Brush, 2007; Novak, 2011). From their research, the relative importance of active learner participation in learning new knowledge or practices emerged, and from this result, a procedure was designed for using evidence-based practices in adult learning. The PALS model encompasses a 4-phase process that includes:

1. Introduction – the learning topic and related information is preliminarily provided to learners, as well as in-class/workshop warmup exercises and illustrations/demonstrations.
2. Application – trainees apply information learned; the instructor/facilitator observes their activity, giving feedback and evaluating their use of knowledge.
3. Informed Understanding – trainees are engaged in self-assessment, reflection, and group discussions.
4. Repeat Learning Process – the next steps in the learning process are planned in order

to provide further learner understanding, knowledge use, and mastery.

However, nowadays, because of the increasing growth of digital technology, a topical question arises about participatory learning. How do participatory practices work in an online learning environment?

This question is a part of a more general issue that concerns the portability of participatory approaches and techniques to online web-based learning contexts.

Indeed, Web 2.0 tools suggest new forms of learning at a lower cost, such as learning through blogs (Downes, 2004; Farmer & Bartlett-Bragg, 2005) or through podcasts and videocasts (Ractham & Zhang, 2006).

Regarding participatory e-learning, there are some assumptions that are generally agreed upon. One of these is that the success of participatory e-learning depends on the interaction of learners, since they are bringers of knowledge and skills (Kok, 2015).

Another important aspect is that active learning is fundamental for participatory e-learning: learners are involved in practices that require them to actively construct new knowledge and understanding.

#### **4.4 Peer education**

Peer education is an umbrella term used to describe interventions in which trainers and trainees cooperate between themselves (Shiner, 1999). Nowadays, it is a topical buzzword in every sector of education.

Three theoretical roots are usually associated with peer education: Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), the social inoculation theory (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961; McGuire 1964) and the differential association theory (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974). However, Miller and Dollard are considered the precursors of learning by imitation (Grusec, 1992). In their book *Social learning and imitation* (1941), that was based on experiments on rats and children, they argued that imitation can greatly hasten the process of independent learning since it enables the subject to perform the first correct response sooner than they otherwise would.

#### **4.5 Social Cognitive theory**

Bandura's Social Cognitive theory has influenced many disciplines, such as education, health sciences, social policy, and psychotherapy. This theory is based on the idea that an individual learns from their interactions with other individuals in a social context (Bandura, 1977). For example, by observing the behavior of others, people develop similar behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior (Nabavi, 2012).

In the 1960s, Albert Bandura, Dorothea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross conducted an experiment in order to test imitative learning (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961). This test, known as the Bobo doll experiment, involved 36 boys and 36 girls enrolled in the Stanford University Nursery School. They ranged in age from 37 to 69 months, with a mean age of 52 months. Two adults, a male and a female, served in the role of model, and one female experimenter conducted the study for all 72 children. Bandura reports that:

Subjects were divided into eight experimental groups of six subjects each and a control

group consisting of 24 subjects. Half the experimental subjects were exposed to aggressive models and half were exposed to models that were subdued and nonaggressive in their behavior. These groups were further subdivided into male and female subjects. Half the subjects in the aggressive and nonaggressive conditions observed same-sex models, while the remaining subjects in each group viewed models of the opposite sex. The control group had no prior exposure to the adult models and was tested only in the generalization situation (Bandura, 22-23).

Figure 2 show the attacks against Bobo Doll.



**Figure 2.** Images from the Bobo Doll experiment (source: Albert Bandura, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmBqwWlJg8U>)

The findings of Bandura's experiment were that children learn social behavior such as aggression through the process of observation learning - through watching the behavior of another person. More specifically:

- Children who observed the aggressive models made far more imitative aggressive responses than those who were in the non-aggressive or control groups.
- There was more partial and non-imitative aggression among those children who have observed aggressive behavior, although the difference for non-imitative aggression was small.
- Girls also showed more physical aggressive responses if the model was male but more verbal aggressive responses if the model was female;
- Boys were more likely to imitate same-sex models than girls. The evidence for girls imitating same-sex models is not strong.
- Boys imitated more physically aggressive acts than girls. There was little difference in the verbal aggression between boys and girls.

Continuing the illustration of Social Cognitive Theory, according to Muro and Jeffrey (2008), one can claim that it combines elements of behaviorist learning theories and cognitive

learning theories. Social Cognitive Theory encompasses attention, memory, and motivation, and posits that people learn from one another, via:

- Observation;
- Imitation; and
- Modeling

Based on these general principles, learning can occur without a change in behavior. In other words, behaviorists say that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behavior; while, in contrast, social learning theorists say that because people can learn through observation alone, their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance (Bandura, 1965). Learning may or may not result in a behavior change (Bandura, 2006).

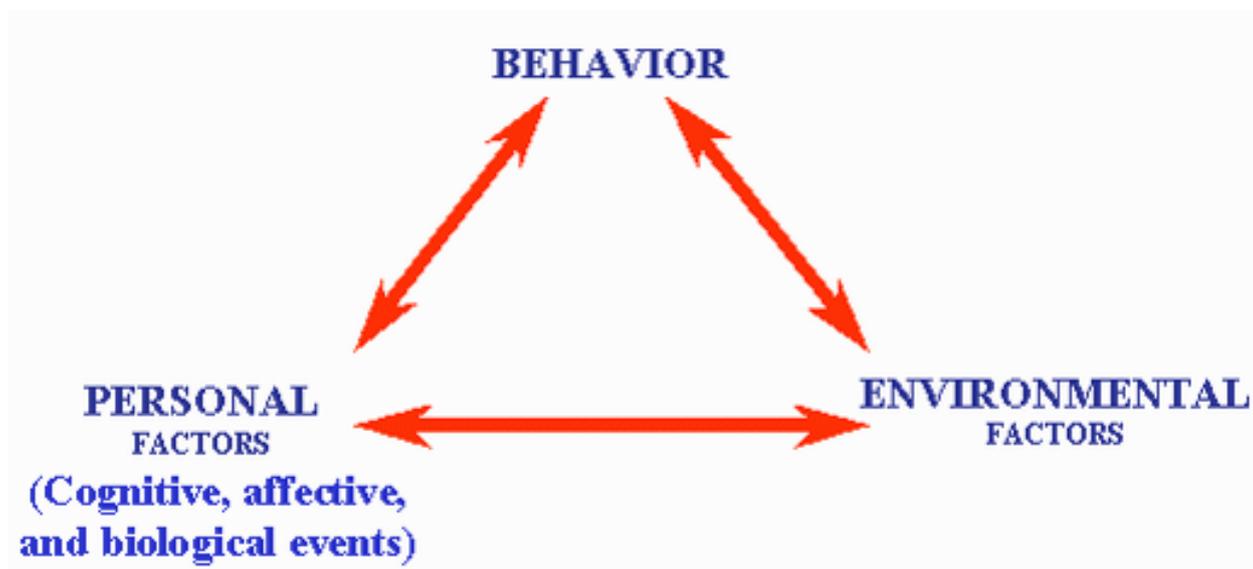


Figure 3. The Social Cognitive Theory model (own source)

What emerged from a recent research was the topicality of Bandura’s learning concepts in internet-based learning approaches. In fact, the concept that “learning is a social activity” where individuals achieve their learning goals by interacting with each other is shared by many researchers engaged in internet social learning and online collaborative learning (Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, & Chang, 2015; Liao, Huang, Chen, & Huang, 2015).

#### 4.6 Social inoculation theory

The inoculation theory was developed in the 1960s by the social psychologist William J. McGuire for inducing resistance to persuasion (McGuire & Papageorgis, 1961). Social inoculation theory studies means of protection against attempts at persuasion, either through direct attack or indirect pressures. In a similar way to how inoculation and vaccination are used to immunize the body against specific diseases by artificially stimulating the body’s immune system, social inoculation theorizes that persuading people not to be persuaded is possible, by inoculating an individual with certain arguments and at the same time giving them counter-arguments to refute those arguments. Indeed, it is possible to make heuristic use of the inoculation analogy in deriving hypotheses about producing resistance to persuasion, choosing:

[...] to deal as far as possible with beliefs that had been maintained in a “germ-free” ideological environment, that is, beliefs that the person has seldom, if ever, heard attacked.

Nearly all beliefs should be of this sort, according to the selective-avoidance postulate, which implies that a person avoids dissonant information wherever possible (McGuire, 1964, 200).

In McGuire's view, cognitions can be strengthened by exposing an audience to mild attacking arguments and then providing the same audience with arguments with which to counter those negative attacks.

The application of social inoculation to peer education has been motivated as follows:

- peers are a credible source of information and advice;
- peers can exercise a positive influence;
- arguments presented by peers may be more acceptable.

There are applications of social inoculation in many scopes, especially in health care prevention and marketing.

A meta-analysis conducted by Banas and Rains (2010) shows that inoculation is an effective method for instilling resistance to attitude change, but more work is needed to clarify the various nuances of the process of inoculation.

In the 1980s, Evans first used social inoculation to prevent young people taking up smoking (Evans, 1984), and his success led to the use of social inoculation in drug prevention (Donaldson, Graham, Piccinin, & Hansen, 1995; Donaldson et al. 1996; Donohew, Sypher, & Bukoski, 2012).

It is interesting to note Regis's criticism of peer-led health education, in which the author expresses his doubts about approaches aimed at resisting peer pressure:

Isn't there something a little odd about trying to use young people's *susceptibility* to peer influence in these programs, when resistance to social influence from peers is at least part of the message?

[...] This is a type of homeopathy, where a little of the poison of peer influence is used to attempt the cure.

[...] I know that until we know a little more about how and why they work, peer-led programs may still need still handling with care (Regis, 1996, 78).

#### 4.7 Differential association theory

Differential Association Theory is one of the theories that come under the umbrella of the Chicago School. It was formulated by the sociologist Edwin Sutherland in 1939 and revised in 1947 in order to explain deviance and juvenile delinquency. Differential Association Theory views criminality as social interaction, and posits criminal acts as learned behaviors. Sutherland's theory was broadly agreed by criminologist circles and it has had a great impact on modern criminology and on how people reflect on crime (Regoli, Hewitt, & DeLisi, 2010).

According to Sutherland, criminal behavior results from a learning process in which bad values are transmitted. As in the case of law-abiding values, criminal values are learned in order to interact and socialize with others who agree to those values.

The differential association theory consists of nine principles:

1. Criminal behavior is learned; it is not inherited. This means that a person who is not already trained in criminal acts does not invent such acts, just as a child does not make courteous remarks unless they have had training or socialized to that effect.
2. Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with others through communication. This communication is verbal in many respects but also includes the gestures often

described as non-verbal communication

3. The learning occurs in intimate groups: Sutherland claimed that only small, face-to-face gatherings influence behavior.
4. When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) Techniques for committing it, which are sometimes complicated, and sometimes very simple; (b) the specific direction of motives and drives, rationalizations and attitude.
5. The specific direction of motives and drives are learned from definitions of legal codes as favorable or unfavorable. This means that, when one's associates define the legal codes as things to be observed, the learning of criminal acts may be impeded. The reverse is also true.
6. A person becomes criminal because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of the law. This is the core principle of differential association theory. It reinforces the belief that the definitions favorable to the violation of the law can be learned from both criminal and non-criminal people. This principle is loaded with counteracting forces of favorable and unfavorable definitions to the violation of the law.
7. Differential association (tendency towards criminality) varies in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity. This means the longer the time, the earlier in one's life, the more intensely and more frequently people are exposed to a set of attitudes about criminality, the more likely it is that they will become caught up in the fray.
8. The process of learning criminal behavior involves the same mechanisms involved in any other learning. This implies that the mechanisms for learning criminal behaviors are the same as those for law-abiding values and other socially relevant skills.
9. Both criminal and non-criminal behaviors are expressions of the same needs and values. Put differently, the goals of criminals and non-criminals are usually the same. What is different is the means they adopt to pursue this same goal. For instance, thieves generally steal in order to secure money. Honest laborers likewise work with monetary gain in mind.

## 5. Parent training and learning approaches

The importance of training parents is widely emphasized by researchers and practitioners (Wang, Lam, Kim, Singer, & Dodds, 2016). For example, parents of children with autism or Down Syndrome have been successfully taught to improve the parent-child relationship, increase communication skills, and decrease inappropriate behaviors.

However, despite the numerous examples and variations of parent training courses (see the multifarious social coaching offers), evidence-based guidelines for designing, implementing, running, and evaluating parent training programs are not available. Moreover, parent training techniques are not widely studied by students in social pedagogy and social worker study programs. Addressing parental training, some aspects should be considered. For instance, although one talks about parent training, usually only one parent, the mother, is involved in the activities. The involvement of the father is broadly recommended, but there is a lack of data regarding this point, even though their involvement increases the effectiveness of interventions (Peacock & Collett, 2011).

Most parent training models are based on the social learning theory approach, and foresee

the following steps:

1. didactic instruction
2. trainees' skill modeling
3. parental training of the skills and exercise with the trainer
4. parental training of the skills at home

### 5.1 Learning 2.0 and 3.0.

Many e-learning systems offer collaborative functions that allow cooperation and facilitate communication among learners, teachers, mentors, tutors, and administrators. These collaborative functions result from the Web 2.0 revolution that in the last few years has swept away the old paradigm of digital communication.

Web 2.0 encompasses a variety of websites and applications that allow anyone to create and share online information and materials they have created. The key difference between Web 2.0 and the traditional types of websites is that it does not require any web design or publishing skills to create and publish materials on the Web.

There are a variety of Web 2.0 applications including wikis, blogs, social networking, folksonomies, podcasting, and so on. Many of the most popular websites are Web 2.0 sites, such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram. The Web 2.0 revolution has also influenced the educational field with e-learning 2.0 that has expanded the concept of the learning community, focusing on supporting the development and solving of educational problems through online collaboration.

The principal aims of e-learning Web 2.0 are:

- to make learning collaborative, easy, and simple;
- to allow learning materials to be used on a global level;
- to allow a real interactivity between teachers and learners, and among learners;
- to encourage developing practices through the sharing of educational content and teaching methods.

Recently, the advances in semantic web found application in education and e-learning 3.0 was born. Fundamentally, this opens a whole new dimension of learning going beyond traditional e-learning that is based on video lectures and multiple-choice assessments. IE-learning 3.0 is an evolution of the learner-centered approach. It leverages advances in scientific learning and tools to make learning faster, more effective, more enjoyable, and applicable to a larger set of learning areas. It's the end of systems, where course production considerations trump learner experience.

Online learning 3.0 has a few fundamentals aspects:

- Modern user experience design, similar to what folks are seeing in the consumer web.
- Visually engaging overview, e.g. what am I going to learn, how am I doing, what's next, etc.
- Personalized, allows learners to test out and navigate in a nonlinear fashion.
- A knowledge graph frame of reference, instead of a list of materials to get through.
- Learn-by-doing.
- Integration of external materials.
- Interactive content and assessments.
- Human involvement at scale, for example, online coaching or group collaboration.
- Engagement tools, e.g. gamification, mobile, social integration, etc.

- Visible and transportable credit for what's been learned.
  - Delivered in the context of lifelong learning programs.
  - Heavy use of data to improve the learning experience and course material over time.
- Finally, a new paradigm, crowd learning, has attracted the interest of researchers. Crowd

learning essentially encompasses three main areas:

- Machine learning
- Crowdsourcing and crowd sensing applications
- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

Indeed, crowd learning is designed as a process that involves “harnessing the knowledge and expertise of many people to answer questions, solve problems, or enable collaborative learning” (Sharples, Kloos, Dimitriadis, Garlatti, & Specht, 2015). It can accordingly be seen as a process of learning from the knowledge and experience of others.

Crowd learning can be defined as a form of collective learning in which individuals contribute their knowledge and experience to the achievement of prefixed learning objectives. This definition encompasses machine learning as well as crowdsourcing. In effect, we can gather data from crowdsources in order to implement machine learning solutions, but studying the knowledge acquisition of individuals in time and space, namely in crowd contexts, could lead to the implementation of more effective crowdsourcing applications (Prpić, Shukla, Kietzmann, & McCarthy, 2015). Learning how a crowd behaves and knowing its attitudes are crucial factors, both in designing new services for a broad audience and in emulating learning capability in a machine. Furthermore, Big Data and data mining technologies are creating new learning needs aimed at effectively exploiting the mass of information available on the Web (Witten, Frank, Hall, & Pal, 2016)

## **5.2 Digital social learning**

It is widely agreed that online learning is the logical solution to satisfy the demands of modern education in terms of flexibility, professionalism, and economic sustainability (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009).

There are, however, also those who hold a different view. Their criticism revolves around two principal elements, the content reliability of online learning and its effectiveness. How can one identify credible and reliable content on the internet? An emblematic case is Wikipedia, the popular open encyclopedia. It provides internet users with a vast quantity of information but Wikipedia's content is not always of a high quality. Many entries are incomplete, superficial, incorrect, or even intentionally absent. Moreover, Wikipedia's content is usually anonymous, as very few authors use their real names.

Online education is also argued to be neither practical nor effective since teachers cannot adapt their teaching style to the learning needs of students, and the face-to-face relationship is lacking (Cowan, 2006).

Despite criticisms, the internet indisputably represents an opportunity. It can be an important source of supplemental information, although it cannot be used in all circumstances and for all needs.

Recently, several researchers have started to investigate the non-formal and informal learning processes that take place on the Web. This mode of learning has been designated *social learning* (Baldwin, 2016), but it would be preferable to address this modality of learning as web learning or digital social learning, so as to avoid confusion with the social learning theory.

In the literature, digital social learning is considered as a part of informal learning. For this reason, it is helpful to highlight some basic principles of informal learning.

The definition of informal learning is commonly introduced in terms of a contrast with formal learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2001). In fact, in many respects, these two forms of learning are complementary.

Three basic types of informal learning have been identified:

- Self-directed learning that is intentional and conscious; it refers to learning programs undertaken by individuals or groups without the assistance of teachers, instructors, or facilitators.
- Incidental learning that is not intentional but conscious; it occurs when we learn without any intention of learning, e.g. by direct experience.
- Socialization that is not intentional and conscious; it refers to attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and skills acquired in everyday life, often through imitation.

Considering digital social learning only as a part of informal learning is an evident reduction of the digital social learning scope. It appears, de facto, as a specific learning modality since it can be included in overall learning activities, especially in non-formal training programs. For instance, training courses can include self-directed learning activities carried out on the Web.

Sharing information and knowledge among peers by means of Web-based interactions is a usual practice (see forum discussions for the use of words or to solve computer problems. If you don't know how to do something, for example how to open a file with the extension ".rar", you can search on the Web and find the software to download and manage this type of compressed file. Moreover, there are a huge variety of tools and sites available on the Web that support learning processes allowing collaborative technologies (groupware applications, webinars, online conferences, etc.) and which provide a wide range of peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

- As a consequence of the digital revolution and the resulting instability of employment, integrative and flexible forms of education are in great demand. It is not the case that, in this decade, validation of non-formal and informal learning has suddenly become a topical issue and a priority for national and European vocational education and training (VET) policies.
- Nowadays, social learning represents both an opportunity and a challenge for the training profession (Bowers & Kumar, 2017). Benefits essentially concern the integration of formal curricula with just-in-time knowledge. Challenges concern how effectively it manages informal content and the risks hidden in social media.

## 6. The RUBI program

The Research Unit on Behavioral Interventions (RUBI) is a program designed to help parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to learn strategies aimed to reduce their “child’s problem behaviors, such as tantrum, noncompliance, aggression, and self-injurious behaviors, as well as improve daily living skills, such as getting dressed, bathing, and brushing teeth (Bearss et al., 2018, p. 1).

Note that, recently, a questionnaire whose acronym was also RUBI (Reaction to Unacceptable Behavior Inventory) was developed in Netherland to monitor the implementation of new interventions to support Nonviolent Resistance (NVR) in residential youth care settings (Visser e al., 2020).

The application of the RUBI parent-training program produced encouraging results and is popular among researchers (Charman, 2020; Eskandari, Pouretamad, Mousavi, & Farahani, 2020; Lecavalier et al, 2017; Postorino et al., 2017).

The first application of RUBI involved 180 children between ages 3 and 6 years with ASD and moderate or greater behavioral problems and their families (Scahill et al., 2016). Parent participated in training activities for 24 weeks and were invited to return for assessment at weeks 36 and 48 to evaluate longer-term outcomes.

Recently it has been delivered to four small groups of caregivers (N = 11) of children (M age = 4.82 years) with ASD and parents demonstrated to these groups more acceptableness, attendance, and treatment while the majority of the children demonstrated improvements in problem behavior (Edwards, Zlomke, & Greathouse, 2019).

In another experiment based the RUBI parent-training program and conducted with children with ASD and disruptive behaviors, all parents indicated that they would recommend the treatment, while therapists demonstrated 98.8% fidelity to the manual., and 64.7% of the autistic children were rated as much/very much improved by an independent evaluator (Burrell et al., 2020).

The RUBI program is essentially a tool to help parents to collect, organize, and reflect on the behavior of their children.

It is composed of a behavioral support plan and 11 core sessions (60-90 minute) that all families participate in.

The support plan is a set of forms that parent should fill to define the behavior parents wants to address in treatment. It includes the list of target problem behaviors and perceived functions as well as the identification of the situations that may cause the behaviors to occur more frequently and related reinforcements (Figure 4, 5, 6).



Child's Name:	ID
<b>Behavior Support Plan</b>	
<b>TARGET PROBLEM BEHAVIORS:</b> <i>Definition of the behaviors we want to address in treatment</i> (Topography)	
Behavior 1:	
Behavior 2:	
Behavior 3:	
Behavior 4:	
<b>PERCEIVED FUNCTION(S):</b> <i>The cause of target behaviors</i>	
Behavior 1:	
Behavior 2:	
Behavior 3:	
Behavior 4:	
<b>PREDICTORS/TRIGGERS FOR PROBLEM BEHAVIORS:</b> <i>Situations that may cause the behaviors to occur more frequently</i>	

Figure 4. Behavior support plan - Target problem behaviors, perceived functions, and predictors/triggers for problem behavior (source: Bears et al., 2018, p. 3)

Child's Name:	ID		
<b>Behavior Support Plan</b>			
<b>DATA COLLECTION:</b> <i>How to track progress of problem behaviors</i>			
Acronym	What It Stands for	Definition	Examples
<b>A</b>	Antecedent	Cue or trigger that occurs right before the behavior takes place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Being told what to do</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not getting what the child wants</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not getting attention</li> </ul>
<b>B</b>	Behavior	The target behavior that can be observed, counted, or timed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hitting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Yelling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talking back</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Whining</li> </ul>
<b>C</b>	Consequence	What occurs right after the behavior; can be positive or negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Time out</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Privilege removal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ignore</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reward</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hug/praise</li> </ul>
<p>1) Use your ABC's to determine the function of the behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To escape or "get out of doing" demands</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To get attention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> To "get what the child wants"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Because it's "self-stimulatory"</li> </ul> <p>2) Determine which behavioral strategy (or strategies) would make the most sense to target the <i>function</i> of the behavior</p> <p>3) Create/use data tracking forms to track your implementation of the strategy and progress in terms of changes in the child's behavior</p>			

Figure 5. Behavior support plan – Data collection (source: Bears et al., 2018, p. 4)



## 6.1 The RUBI program's core sessions

The RUBI program's 11 core sessions are:

1. Behavioral principles. It introduces the ABC model that includes overall treatment goals, concepts of functions of behavior, antecedents, and consequences of behavior (Figure 7).
2. Prevention strategies. It presents examples of categories of prevention strategies, e.g., avoid situation or people, control the environment, change order of events, respond to early signs of the problem, etc. this session include the use of video vignettes.
3. Daily schedule. It addresses prevention strategies related to problems occurring in a child's daily routine, e.g., change the time of a demand, use fun activities to reward completion of less desired activities, establish routine (Figure 8).
4. Reinforcement 1. It concerns the identification of the six items or activities that might be reinforcing to a child and the top five reinforcers. It also give to parents suggestions on how to select a reinforcer and when reinforcers have to use to change the child's behavior.
5. Reinforcement 2. It focuses on the behaviors that would be useful to target using "Catch them while they're" method. High importance it is attributed to play time.
6. Planned ignoring. It identifies the child's behaviors that one wants to decrease. Planned ignoring is a consequence that can be used to reduce attention-seeking behaviors.
7. Compliance training. It identifies the most six frequent requests a child will readily follow and those they will not follow.
8. Functional communication training. It focuses on communication behavior that should be taught to a child to replace a target behavior (manual sign, verbalization, picture, clap or other gesture, etc.). It aims to replace a child's noncompliant and defiant behavior with a more appropriate way for communicating wants or needs, for example by using a sign, picture, or a word.
9. Teaching skills 1. It aims at identifying what skills might help a child to stop disruptive behaviors. Children with ASD often need extra help in learning a new skill. They may require a systematic teaching plan. Steps for teaching new skills are suggested.
10. Teaching skills 2. It carefully analyzes what kind of help can support the acquisition of new skills. Prompting is one way to help a child learn and incorporate new skills. Prompting is when a parent or therapist engages in encouraging the desired response from a learner. ... An example is a parent teaching a child to spell the word "ball" by saying, "Spell Ball," then prompting the child for the correct response, "B-A-L-L."
11. Generalization and maintenance. It aims at to promote skill maintenance and generalization of positive behaviors. Generalization is important to increase the likelihood that the positive behaviors occur in different settings and when conditions vary, such as with different types of materials a variety of people.

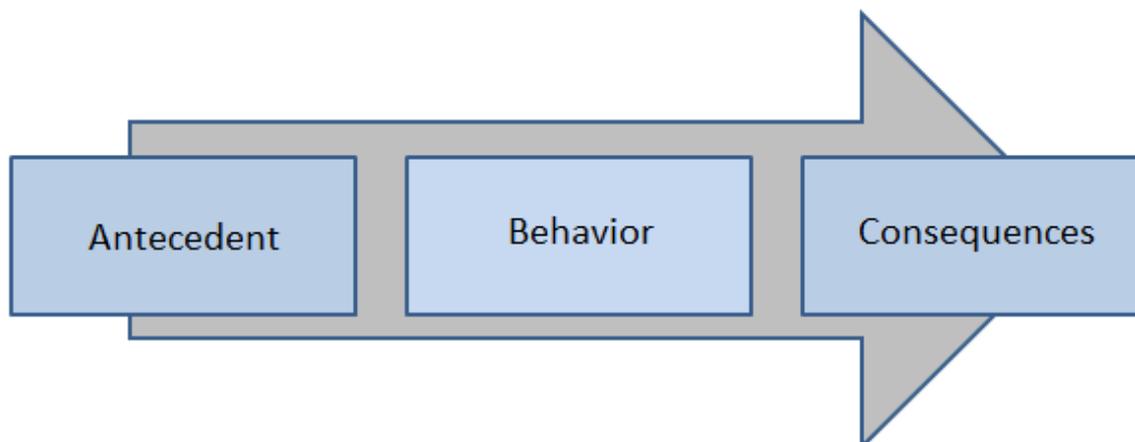


Figure 7. The ABC model (source: own elaboration from Bears et al., 2018)

Get Dressed 	Brush Teeth 	Eat Breakfast 
Get off Bus 	Put Backpack Away 	Eat Snack 
Play Outside 	Eat Dinner 	Wash Dishes 
Play with Toys 	Take Bath 	Go to Bed 

Figure 8. Daily schedule (source: Bears et al., 2018, p. 39)

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## **PART III**

### **ESEC TRAINING ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the training experience of the Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Janus Korczak Pedagogical University, and Mancomunitat de la Ribera Alta within the ESEC project.

The training experience was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seeking for new forms of interaction and communication was crucial, due to the necessity to run the ESEC training course remotely,

The following chapters illustrate the learning strategy of the training course and the issues occurred during its delivery.

Some notions about communication in parent-training programs are also highlighted.

The classes “Communication with parents” cover the most topical issues of Parenting Science with a focus on communication. The items are chosen for discussions according to the parent most attended questions of parent integrated roles, communication among parents and children, peculiarities of communication in digital age; these are contextualized with the current social processes and needs. Articles and clips are suggested to consider and discuss. The course consists of suggested and optional activities, as well as tests for parent self-evaluation of their communication skills, conflict solvation, and reflections on the content of the course. Wide literature suggested for parents’ choice, local country issues are welcome.

Parenting Science develops not only because of the large variety of education possibilities and NGO that assist parents. The perceptions and conceptions change due to the diversity of cultures living side-by-side in the countries; this also because of the expanded knowledge on parenting and a shift in mindset that cause the need to replace the concept of parent authority, child obedience, and authoritarian style of child-rearing and communication in families – this is being replaced by the more complex concept of positive parenting: parental responsibility, respect to the needs of each family member, mutual protection of everyone’s rights, fostering the child rights and skills of critical thinking, self-expression, or responsible autonomy.

The content and its implementation are organized into three mutually integrated parts of activities; these three parts are:

- (1) activities that initiate communication - participants communicate with their peers, discuss, share views, agree, disagree, etc. – this makes a reason to communicate, covers the functions of warm-up, and starts integrating the content;
- (2) activities that are directed to evaluate and improve communication skills – these make use of part (a) to have an evidence-based discussion on communication and skill improvement;
- (3) activities that develop skills of an active listener – this belongs to a successful communication and improves parent and parent educator competencies; unfortunately, this part usually is missing in traditional programs.

## Chapter 3 - Communicational and emotional skills training: definition of concepts

by the Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University

### 1. Emotional communication

Emotional communication refers to situations in which an expected emotion by the interpreter is understood by the listener.

### 2. Social emotional Learning (SEL)

The notion of Social-emotional learning (SEL) encompasses various learning aspects, such as:

- Maintaining cooperative relationships.
- Making responsible decisions.
- Managing strong emotions.
- Communicating clearly and assertively.
- Solving problems effectively.
- Recognizing emotions in oneself and others.
- Having empathy for others.

Jonathan Cohen present an overview of SEL from ancient time to present arguing that SEL is a new term that is centrally related to an educational tradition that began 3,000 years ago (Cohen, 1999).

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, social-emotional learning (SEL) is:

[...] the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2013, p 6)

Figure 1 shows the five social and emotional learning core competencies. They are:

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
2. **Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
3. **Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
4. **Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

5. Responsible decision making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.



Figure 1. The Five Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies (source: CASEL, 2013, p. 9)

Research shows the skills taught in SEL curricula have wide-ranging benefits that affect children’s success in school, career, and life. For instance, kindergarteners with stronger social and emotional skills are more likely to graduate from high school and college and have stable, full-time employment while being less likely to commit crimes, be on public assistance, and have drug, alcohol, and mental health problems.

CASEL and Committee for Children define some SEL benefits:

- More positive attitudes toward oneself, others, and tasks, including enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection and commitment to school, and a sense of purpose:
- More positive social behaviors and relationships with peers and adults
- Reduced conduct problems and risk-taking behavior
- Decreased emotional distress
- Improved test scores, grades, and attendance.

Many researchers argue that social and emotional competence can increase the likelihood of high school graduation, readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behavior, and engaged citizenship (Haymovitz, Houseal-Allport, Lee, & Svistova, 2018; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Weissberg, 2019; Zhao, 2020).

According to The Report for CASEL: “Ready to Lead: A 2019 update of principals’

perspectives on how social and emotional learning can prepare children and transform schools” one can summarize:

- 1) This report builds on and updates many of the findings from the original nationally representative survey of principals in 2017. The central messages of this 2019 report are that (a) principals continue to see SEL skills as highly teachable and a priority in their schools; (b) more schools are implementing specific SEL benchmarks by significant percentages; and (c) principals and teachers are assessing SEL skills at much higher rates than just two years ago. At the same time, the survey shows that more work is needed to ensure SEL is systemic across schools and districts and for principals to think existing assessments are useful.
- 2) Most of all, this report shows that the movement to embed social and emotional learning into every classroom and school in America has reached a tipping point. Principals stand ready to bring systemic, school-wide SEL to their schools, but they need greater support from leaders at the state and district levels to ensure every student has access to a high-quality education that nourishes their social and emotional skills along with academic learning. Now is the time for policymakers to heed the calls of educators and provide the necessary supports for a student-centric, whole child education that develops the leaders of tomorrow.

### **3. Parents' Cooperation in the light of mostly demanded skills**

It often happens these days that three words are used in order to describe effective teamwork: collaboration, coordination, cooperation.

However, semantically those words are not the same or nearly the same. Thus, they should not be considered synonyms. When used interchangeably, their meaning dilutes and diminishes the potential of creating powerful, collaborative workplaces. Recently, collaboration has been a highly important word in the media thanks to Marissa Mayer's explanation of her decision to bring Yahoo employees back to the office:

"To become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working side-by-side" (Stoner, 2013, p. 2).

Mayer strongly believes that when people work together, they work better because they create real relationships the building of which is a lot easier when having face-to-face contact. Coordinative and cooperative efforts are crucial for effective and efficient work commitments and accomplishments. At least some face-to-face time spent together makes a huge difference. Examples of productive, valuable teamwork can be found in all types of environments. High performance teams, in particular, share common characteristics. Depending on their intentional objectives that are supposed to be achieved, they might rely more on cooperation or coordination than on collaboration. Cooperative work and undertaken efforts of parents of the disabled children serve as one of excellent examples.

Parents of the disabled children can benefit from the perspective of mutual cooperation under the condition that they preserve their freedom to exercise their own judgments. They need opportunities for experimentation, chances to experience failure and to learn from mistakes. One of the advantages of cooperation is thinking together, valuing and respecting each other's personal opinions and contributions for the purpose of new and creative solutions to problems.

#### **4. Teaching parents' emotional communication skills**

Significantly important soft skills understood in terms of necessary human qualities are: analytical thinking and innovation; creativity, originality and initiative; critical thinking and analysis; complex problem-solving; leadership and social influence; emotional intelligence; reasoning, idea-producing.

Parents who aim at a successful cooperation with other mothers and fathers of the disabled children need to acquire knowledge in the field of developing psychology, be aware of scientific explanations of disorders, get familiar with family role models and relationships. From among skills, they mostly require communication skills, accompanied with self-consciousness and the ability to properly diagnose and analyze the situation. From among desirable attitudes they need to express: patience, tolerance, acceptance, stress-resistance, responsibility, respect of differences.

Parents who take advantage of their soft skills are prepared to play a variety of roles in front of their children, no matter if they are disabled or within generally recognized norms of psychophysical development. A list of parents' roles can be immensely extensive and the selection of priorities should rather be left to the parents' themselves for the sake of the well-being of the child. Suggested parent roles cover a broad spectrum of activities as: advisers, coaches, assistants, guides, mediators, protectors, managers, care-takers, enablers, leaders, instructors, supporters, initiators, companions, evaluators, listeners, models, teachers, assessors, coordinators, facilitators, story-tellers, partners, or trainers.

##### **4.1 Parental successful communication with children**

Understanding the importance of collaboration and interpersonal communication is a driving force of activities that are being undertaken. At the same time, the awareness that the communication process depends on many factors is necessary to be admitted. Verbal and non-verbal behaviour strongly interferes with communication and collaboration. On the one hand, if verbal signs are supposed to give directions for an effective communication, they need to be used in a very clear way, so that the message is explicit and unambiguous. On the other hand, non-verbal signs, like body language with facial expressions and gestures, sometimes play a more significant role in communication than the language itself. At the same time, one needs to recognize that if verbal and non-verbal signs do not coincide, the partners' communication process will be confused and the collaboration is damaged. Parents are expected to know that their perception of the real world is different than that of their children, because it is influenced by their socialization factors, in particular. Parents observe reality through a specific filter of individual experiences, thoughts and values. This does not mean that children who are involved in communication and collaboration do not apply their own filter, as well. Without keeping one's distance in respect of another person, the open-minded approach cannot be experienced.

A group of necessary conditions for a successful communication can be named as contextual situations that are shaped by time, place or environment. The communication partners receive mutual messages within two perspectives: the information-level expressing opinions, emotions, experiences, values, and the relationship-level immensely driven by emotional tensions between partners. Holding back one's own emotions may contribute to a rational communication and collaboration. Sometimes, the language of communication has to be simplified in favour of an easier and better understanding. Active listening to children or even putting oneself in their position, together with a high self-esteem, are a good prognostic for successful communication.

## 4.2 Parenting competence

Studies show that parents who have at their disposal a broad spectrum of parenting strategies feel more comfortable and competent in their roles and have more positive mental health. Patience and understanding are usually ranked as the most required skills for successful parenting practices. However, social and communication skills are considered the most critical skills to learn. Six key factors are commonly examined in order to understand parenting practices, including "[...] warmth and emotional support, monitoring, communication, psychological control, behavioural control, and parent efficacy, all of which can involve the use of social and emotional skills" (Miller, Wanless, Weissberg, 2018, p. 11-12). It often happens that parenting practices are in a trap of repeated patterns from parents' own childhood experiences while not coordinating with their currently accepted values, beliefs or authentic feelings towards their children.

The conceptual model of the connections between parenting and social and emotional learning (SEL) can be put into action when taking into account the following factors that are characteristic of: parent background, family and child. These factors remain strongly interrelated:

"Parent background - parent influences: parent upbringing, parenting practices, family climate, parent access to resources and education about SEL and parenting, friends, teachers, trusted others, culture.

Parent SEL skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making;

Parent outcomes: wellbeing, stress and burnout, depression, physical health and longevity.  
Family parenting practices: love, modeling, intentional teaching, discipline.

Family climate: collective sense of belonging, trusting relationships, psychological safety, norms for emotion management.

Child SEL skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making.

Child outcomes: positive social interactions, age appropriate risk taking, emotional resilience and mental wellbeing, academic success, healthy relationships" (Miller, Wanless, Weissberg, 2018, p. 13).

## 4.3 Emotional intelligence of parents of children with special needs

The term of emotional intelligence, as a psychological category, was developed by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1997. They agreed that:

"Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (*Goleman's ET*, 2009, p. 1).

Further steps towards descriptive approaches in the field of this psychological theory were successfully undertaken in the late nineties by Daniel Goleman, a prominent science journalist and researcher, who brought emotional intelligence on the internationally recognized bestseller lists. Goleman has authored a number of books on the subject, including *Emotional Intelligence*, *Working with emotional intelligence*, *Social intelligence: the new science of human relationships*, to mention just a few.

After Goleman, attention should be focused on five principal components of emotional intelligence:

- Self-awareness - perceived as the ability to recognize and understand personal

moods, emotions and their driving forces, as well as their impact on others. Self-awareness is interrelated with self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-disapproving sense of humor. It enables to monitor one's own emotion state and to properly identify and name one's emotions.

- Self-regulation - meaning the ability to keep disruptive impulses and moods under control, as well as to change their direction and, thus, to suspend premature judgments and to reflect before acting.
- Internal motivation - relating to a passion to work for internal reasons that aren't associated with money or status (as external rewards). Actions and efforts are grounded on an inner vision of what really matters in life, brings joy in doing something, pushes to learning for curiosity. A strong driving force is to achieve a goal, to express optimistic attitudes, also when facing a failure.
- Empathy - explained as the ability to comprehend the emotional makeup of other people and as a necessary skill in demonstrating attitudes towards people in accordance with their emotional reactions. Empathy, by its nature, asks for cross-cultural sensitivity. Meanwhile, in an educational perspective, empathy is often understood as a step leading to sympathy with its implications of concern, care or a desire for diminishing the intensity of negative emotions and individual experiences in others. It's worth stressing that empathy does not necessarily mean a feeling of pity for the suffering or misfortune of others, in other words it does not engage compassion.
- Social skills - meaning a great facility in managing relationships, cooperation and building efficient networks. They involve effectiveness of actions and joint initiatives, as well as they have the power to persuade.

Studies dedicated to families with children suffering from ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), autistic disorder, Down syndrome, mental retardation and learning disabilities demonstrate that "[...] higher care giving demands are associated with poorer psychological and physical health states for parents and other family members. [...] Parents are known to get impacted in many ways because of having a special child. These include feeling sad, depression at various stages of life and experiencing other emotional reactions. Their social life may get affected, recreational and leisure activities get reduced, interpersonal relationships with the family members also get affected, financial problems may arise, parents' own physical and mental health also tend to be at a greater risk" (Vidhya Ravindranadan, Raju, 2008, p. 34-35).

It is justified that parents of the disabled children should possess higher levels of emotional intelligence competences in order to better cope with unprecedented mental tensions. Parents who competently manage their emotional intelligence usually experience a better quality of life, subjective wellbeing and a higher sense of life satisfaction. There can be observed a reciprocal influence - the more professional management of parental emotional intelligence, the more satisfactory understanding of the child's emotions, and in addition to that, the more promising communication with other family members.

Working on and improving the emotional intelligence of parents with the disabled children brings as a result an increased quality of their lives. Emotional intelligence scale used to measure individual scores takes into account major qualities of self-awareness, mood management, self-motivation, impulse control and people skills. The scale of the quality of life measures three main

aspects of physical, psychological and social circumstances of the life of individuals. The quality of life determinants include: gender, marital status, age, family and friends, household, income, employments status, community and environment. A proper insight into parents' emotional intelligence constitutes an important implication of their psychological, social, physical and emotional wellbeing.

The majority of parents recognize that social and emotional communication skills are a high priority for the success of their disabled children. On the other hand, most cannot readily articulate how they

are utilizing, promoting or directly implementing these skills in their own families. Even professionals in the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) may strenuously fight in making the translation between their professional knowledge and their personal and individual parenting practices.

#### **4.4 Good Practices in communicating and cooperating with other parents**

There is evidence that "[...] many parents find it helpful to become members of a parent-to-parent support group. Parents meet regularly in one another's houses, not only talk about their children or the problem they present, but as a means of mutual support and building up self-confidence through being able to help others. Sometimes, such groups provide individual support to a new parent" (Mittler, Mittler, McConachie, 1986, p. 23).

Some of such groups of parent support may give wonderful examples of good practices.

##### **4.4.1 Family Network on Disabilities (FND) in Florida, USA**

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) was established in 1985 by a group of parents of the disabled children who came together for two basic reasons: for mutual support and information-sharing. This body is a grass roots organization for individuals with disabilities and their families. FND is, in the first place family-centered and family-driven. It operates as a national network of persons without any age limit who might be at risk, who have disabilities, or who have special needs and their families, professionals and citizens who are concerned about their situation and their wellbeing. On the one hand, the principal mission of FND is focused on the complete integration and equal opportunities of the disabled in a society without barriers. On the other hand, the organization makes great efforts to serve families of children with the full range of disabilities from the very birth through the age when they turn 26 years of life.

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) strives for a broad range of goals to be achieved. Let us have a closer look into three types of activities through the operation of the following programs:

- Parent Education Network (PEN), Parents of the Panhandle Information Network (POPIN) and Parents Educating Parents in the Community (PEP) constitute programs designed to guarantee that parents of children with the full spectrum of disabilities have access to training and information they need in order to get their children, firstly, ready for school and, secondly, to enable them productive, independent lives that they can experience to the fullest extent possible. The program is addressed to the whole territory of Florida, including isolated, rural areas.
- Family STAR (Support, Training, Assistance, Resources) is Florida's Family to

- Family Health Information Center. It is a highly professional Center that provides information and support to families of children and youth with special health care demands.
- The Jan La Belle Scholarship Program (in operation since 2009) offers a financial resource to the disabled individuals who desire to pursue their personal goals and professional career through attendance at a postsecondary educational institution. The school they are going to choose may be either academic or vocational, depending on personal abilities and interests. This Scholarship Program awards from 16 to 24 individuals who are following higher education.
- The Youth Advocacy & Action Project (for people aged 14-22). Activities are free of charge to families. The final goal of the Project is to leave in place a well trained and confident group of youngsters who later on will be in the position to advocate for themselves. They will be able to improve their own lives, as well as their communities. The Project activities focus on actions that lead to more effective participation of individuals with disabilities and their families in meeting the vocational, independent living. They also give emphasis to specific rehabilitation needs of the disabled (FND USA About Us, 2019).

#### **4.4.2 Family to Family Network in Houston, USA**

The crucial message for Family to Family Network activities is striving for success of children and young adults with disabilities by strengthening and empowering their families as they navigate the complex education, health care and social service systems. The organization, through guidance and training helps families to discover potential where others see just only barriers. The driving force of all actions aims at changing stereotypical attitudes and mindsets about disabilities and, by doing that, making sure that every individual gets to live his/her best life.

Family to Family Network offers families of children with disabilities the opportunity to communicate and cooperate with other families in similar situations, in order to learn from one another and help each other. The body in question operates by providing: education and training events on the special education process, developmental disabilities diagnosis information, referrals to community resources. Commonly adopted tools consist of: annual conferences, a website dedicated to trustworthy information about the special education procedures, a monthly e-mail newsletter on family and community activities, a leadership and advocacy training program.

One of the mothers caring of and bringing up her disabled child gives the best testimony of the need to take part in Family to Family Network: "It is very easy to become overwhelmed and frustrated when trying to find help raising a child with disabilities. The best part about Family to Family Network, for the family, is being able to speak with other parents who have walked in our shoes. Their own personal experiences and advice they shared with us have been so valuable. We have learned the importance of planning ahead and visualizing what the future will look like for our son and then showing us steps it takes to get there" (*Family to Family Network*, 2017).

Parents very much appreciate to have experienced every kind of opportunity to know both their children and each other. They claim to be very fortunate to have learned the true meaning and importance of the community belonging. Mutual cooperation opens to individuals with disabilities better chances in the fields of education and employment, and it builds a stronger consciousness of independence.

#### 4.4.3 Growing up Together Plus Program of Workshops with Parents, Croatia

The Program is addressed to parents of preschool (up to eight years of age) children with disabilities, including children with developmental delays and additional specific educational need and developmental risks. It is justified that the age range of children with disabilities is extended up to eight because, usually, the demands and developmental characteristics of older children are not consistent with the chronological age. Moreover that their enrolment to primary school is frequently postponed even up to several years. The advantage of grouping parents of children of different ages

comes out from the fact that they have acquired more varied levels of personal experience, awareness of their difficult situations, as well as an uncommon intensity of stress. The Program is intended for parents of children with similar and/or different disabilities. Evidence shows that this approach of a joint participation enables to receive information and acquire knowledge from different parental perspectives, which does not at all mean a barrier to mutual understanding.

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## Chapter 4 - The Rezekne Academy Of Technologies Experience

### 1 Teaching-learning strategies

The session 2020 conducted by RTA Communication with parents cover the most topical issues of Parenting Science with a focus on communication. The items are chosen for discussions according to the parent most attended questions of parent integrated roles, communication among parents and children, parent educator communication with parents, peculiarities of communication in digital age; these are contextualized with the current social processes and needs. Course educators can add some specific activities to meet special needs of the course participants. Articles and clips are suggested to consider communication peculiarities, competence improvement, and discussion. The course consists of thematic activities that include short introductions and tests for the course participant self-evaluation of their communication skills and conflict prevention, as well as reflections on the content of the course. The transition situations when paradigm shifts in the societies make parents and their educators feel powerless to decision-making and acting or behaving to achieve the new more complex parental goals; parents feel losing control over their children that quite often is accompanied by a feeling of lost mutual understanding among the members of the family.

*The leading conception.* During the last decade the parent, social worker, parent educator, as well as stake-holder conception of what parenting is or what it should be has changed considerably and challenge a new look at the content of parent educator courses, as well as introduce a new paradigm of Parenting Science. This is not only because of the large variety of education possibilities and NGO that assist parents. The perceptions and conceptions change due to the diversity of cultures living side-by-side in the countries; this also because of the expanded knowledge on parenting and a shift in mindset that cause the need to replace the concept of parent authority, child obedience, and authoritarian style of child-rearing and communication in families - this is being replaced by the more complex concept of parental responsibility, respect to the needs of each family member, mutual protection of everyone's rights, fostering the child rights and skills of critical thinking, self-expression, or responsible autonomy.

The term *positive parenting* has entered the area of family up-bringing to inform about the approach that has emerged from European policies in the family relation area, but parents do not know how to implement this; and their educators need some assistance to prepare them for implementing this paradigm shift. More specifically the term has been described in the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2006) to Member States on Policy to Support Positive Parenting (<https://rm.coe.int/168046d340>). The positive parenting framework initiated by the Recommendations facilitates the development of programmes, projects, services and/or measures to support families that aim to foster equal opportunities for families; it necessarily implies providing support for the NGO, educators, other professionals who work with families on regular basis.

The chapter of the project completed by Rezekne Academy of Technologies followed the philosophy that parent education and support programming should assume that parents are more likely to provide appropriate nurturing and guidance as they acquire a greater understanding of child development and children needs, as well as the parent roles in the changing and technology-rich social environment. All parents need support from community agencies: (a) to grasp the most

topical changes in society and learn appropriate ways to implement these; (b) willing to improve family education and want to be successful.

The aim of the classes: to offer parents an opportunity to improve their understanding and skills of parenting; obtain deeper knowledge in Parenting Science and practice; further develop their communicative skills and accents on cooperation, as well as improve self-evaluation experience.

The content

1. Parenting Science and parents' roles, the main content of parenting science and essentialities of practices; adult learning features, their self-evaluation - 4 + 4
2. The essence and benefits of cooperation; role of cooperation in adult learning and parenting; cooperation in child rearing and family upbringing - 4 + 4
3. The essence of communication, its relation to successful cooperation; role of communication in children and adult learning; communication as a core of parenting; self-evaluation of communication practices - 4 + 4
4. Self-evaluation and evaluation of parenting skills – a starting point of the further target- setting; principles of a productive and successful self-evaluation - 3 + 3
5. Evaluation of the outcomes - 2

## **2. Teaching-learning organization**

The course has been organized according to the project proposal. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was organized as a blended training course.

Course participants learned and improved their skills and competence (the themes of the program were mutually integrated by the design of classes):

1. Parents' roles and adult learning features
2. Role of cooperation in adult learning and parenting
3. Role of communication in adult learning and parenting
4. The basis of the parenting science
5. Self-evaluation and evaluation of competencies
6. Outcomes of the classes 'Communication with Parents':
7. Course participants will acquire new knowledge in 'Parenting Science';
8. Further develop their skills to communicate with children;
9. Learn how to identify the core problems and specificity of the children in digital age;
10. Obtain the basic skills of self-evaluation.

## **3. The dominating family needs of parents in the European context**

What parents need to know and be able to achieve in their children's upbringing? Which is the social context of parent education in the EU 21st century?

- post-industrial changes and digital technologies
- young people lives among and with digital technologies;
- Too much time spent in communications via mobile devices and too few for live communication;
- Enormous speed of changes in technologies and technological devices;

- Responsibilities of families change in the uncertain social world and new way of their children thinking;
- youth employment becomes a problem related to appropriate education and their will to work; demonstrated will of youth's independence and self-confidence coupled with comparatively poor life experience.

#### 4. ESEC teaching-learning activities

In the following paragraphs the main teaching-learning activities related to the ESEC experience are highlighted.

##### 4.1. Activity 1-1

Taking into consideration the European context in 21st century work in groups and make a list of the dominating needs of parents: (5 min.):

1st The dominating family needs from your experience (take into consideration the impact of the digital age, etc.)	2nd Parents' learning possibilities, and how they are making use of these  (to be filled in during the session)	3rd What the course of <i>Parenting Science</i> can provide more  (to be filled in by the end of the session)
Knowledge:  Skills:  Attitudes:		

When the 1st list is ready participants will share their opinion in small groups. Additionally they give answers in the following questions:

- Why do you consider the selected needs dominating?
- Where is the main problem?
- Agree upon one need (these can be more if you can allocate more time for discussions) that is the most common for families that are represented in the group.

##### 4.2 Activity 1-2. Positive parenting - discussion

Reading of small chapters of articles which the participants chose before the sessions and suggested for discussion: read, comment, views, other participant experiences, conclusions (suggested for discussion: Rodrigo, M.H., Almeida, A., Spiel, Ch., and Koops, W. (2012). Introduction: Evidence-based parent education programmes to promote positive parenting. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 2012, 9 (1), 2–10); the following statement and a question had been suggested:

- (a) the full implementation of the Council of Europe Recommendation positive parenting

requires an appropriate response to these challenges – what the challenges and achievements could be?

(b) What do you understand by notion *positive parenting*

### 4.3 Activity 1-3. Communication in solving topical parenting problems

Parenting (child rearing) is a process of promoting and supporting the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to a raising of a child in balanced and coordinated relationship of biological and social development (Abraham, 2017).

Make a list of problems you want to solve and means that you have for it.

What do we want to solve?	What do we know about the need/problem?
What tools/means/methods do we have?	What do we need to learn, understand, and do?

When the table is ready, discuss it in small groups or plenary session (if there are few participants).

Spot out common needs for the majority of the participants; discuss why? What are the reasons? What knowledge, understanding, and communication skills do you have or lack to cope with the needs that you experience?

### 4.4 Activity 1-4. Perception in communication

What can you judge of this family: For the session two pictures had been used:

- Initiate a discussion on what the participants noticed and how their perception influences their reaction and communication in general. The participants imagine their possible reaction and comment the picture (below) from: <http://theconversation.com/alone-together-how-mobile-devices-have-changed-family-time-111478>;
- Which apps do your children use? Should you know all possible apps or you can rely on your children's choice? Do you talk of these possibilities with your children? The picture from: <https://www.pinterest.com/mashable/the-best-apps/>) The picture of apps to self-check the course participants or children's recognition; also, to comment their possible usage by exchanging views of the participants, identifying those used by the participants' children, as well as discussion of how these could be introduced to parents and used when assisting them.

Use the pictures below to discuss the chosen hints. You can choose more relevant pictures from the web.

Some hints on the ways of acquiring competencies:

- Involvement in activities, cooperation with school and children
- Communication – value sharing, mind-set development
- The most effective way to do it is learning every-time, any-where
- Learning together with peers, teachers, parents, and others

- Parents' learning from their children and children's learning from their parents
- Discuss the family members' achievements of each day, just devote some minutes to this strengthens mutual understanding
- what can you judge about mutual relations in this family; what can you 'read behind' the picture?
- What can parents do in favour of their children and young generation?
- What are the parents' roles? Do they change in the age of technologies?

Mind: there is a noticed tendency – as soon as parents or teachers join an app child use to change for another app.

Do you know what APPs your children use? Use the picture *Alphabet of APPs* (below).  
More pictures are available at: <https://www.pinterest.com/mashable/the-best-apps/>

Do you know how, when, with whom your children communicate in the web?

You can choose for the discussion:

- The most popular free applications
- The most popular iPhone apps –what is on the screen of your child's iPhone?

#### 4.5 Activity 1-5. Non-verbal communication

Using nonverbal means is a powerful communication skill. Ask participants to describe a situation when either the speaker or the listener used nonverbals like facial expression, body postures and actions, body space boundaries, eye contact either appropriate or addressed to something else, and why these means are important in knowing if someone is listening.

Discuss in groups/plenary session the term *appropriate eye contact*. What can you 'read' in other's eyes?

#### Suggested pictures for Activity 4.



The picture from the blog: *Alone together: how mobile devices have changed family time* Available at: <http://theconversation.com/alone-together-how-mobile-devices-have-changed-family-time-11147>



The picture from: <https://www.pinterest.com/mashable/the-best-apps/>

## 5. Improving communication skills

The following paragraphs report the activities related to the improvement of the communication skills.

### 5.1 Activity 2-1. Self-evaluation

This activity starts with self-evaluation (Table 1 is given by the program below - *Questionnaire: Interpersonal Communication*) – participants evaluate their communication skills, make conclusions, and then discuss in the group:

- the most advanced and those that need improvements. The educator suggests to group the two kinds of skills (well-developed and under-developed), usually these are the same in major.
- Then the discussion goes on by identifying the reasons; these are also grouped into traditional and normative (parent-centered) education and the child- or learner- learning centred.

Conclusions on Table 1.

### 5.2 Activity 2-2. Styles of communication

Suggest commenting on two styles of adult communication in a family; use the self-assessment table to make conclusions on well-developed or under-developed communication skills:

- When you are at home you never pay attention to me/ as if you do not notice I am at home. You return home every evening and go straight to the TV/computer/iPhone. You seem to care more about the news in the world than what is happening in our family/with our children.

- I feel like we are not paying attention to each other/children/domestic affairs when we both return home from work. I wonder if your family/me/children are less attractive than the events in the world. Would you like to share the news of the day/ what was the day like for both of us/children? I think we are not connecting very well to discuss our family affairs/we should contact closer to discuss.

### 5.3 Activity 2-3. The most topical problems in families are communication-related

What are the most topical problems of your children, what they want to be, to have, and avoid? What do we want to achieve by solving a topical problem?

Spot out topical problems in families and why do these exist

What is the problem we want to solve?	What are/is our children/child problem that they want to solve?
What do we know about our children's problems?	What do your children tell you about their problems?
Spot out the most topical of your children's problem	Initiate a discussion with the child/children

Discuss these in small groups then in plenary session: Communication-related problems in families.

You will see that you and your children want to be successful, recognized, accepted in peer and/or adult communities (family), need more communication, and arrive to the mutual understanding among their family members. Actually, your needs are common, the tools, ways, means of achieving might be different (because of different experiences).

Now it is time to discuss the problems with your children/youth deeper, in details, and make it a regular affair in families. It will take some time, actually discussions should be non-stop, and these should be a normal topic among constant communication in your families. This is what your children need first of all; this is where your children learn life.

If you can allocate more time for your group discussions, you can exchange experiences and spot out what you do often or do not do at all.

### 5.4 Activity 2-4. Your family target skills

*Skills are the expertise or talent needed in order to do a job or task: practical jobs, learning, drawing, swimming, communicate, cooperate, etc. These allow a person for doing particular job at a respective level of quality and achieve the desired success. Skills make a person confident and independent in life. Almost any skill can be learned or improved if they are set realistic.*

2020 growing/emerging mixed skills – (not every skill for everyone). Introduction by The World Economic Forum, 2019, on the most required jobs and competencies in the nearest forthcoming years.

- (a) Work in groups and distinguish between hard and soft skills: Analytical thinking and innovation vs. knowledge  
Active learning and learning strategies vs. passive knowledge  
Creativity, originality and initiative - by problem-solving  
Technology design and programming - active technologies' user  
Critical thinking and analysis - view-point for discussions, ideas, arguments  
Complex problem-solving - context vision  
Leadership and social influence - manage a particular areas of activities, self-management  
Emotional intelligence - clear shared attitudes, responsibility, reciprocity  
Reasoning, problem-solving, idea-producing - target-oriented activities, process management
- (b) Use the list of the most topical skills by The World Economic Forum, 2019. Range the skills according to: (a) priorities in your family, (b) priorities of your children, or (c) planned to acquire in the nearest future by your children or... (you may choose the most topical criteria for skills/competence analysis).

### **5.5 Additional activity. Systems analysis and evaluation – self-evaluation, target-settings**

*Self-assessment is an activity of collecting evidences to evaluate one's knowledge, skills, abilities, attitude, and other qualities. Self-assessments may also have a strong effect on how people are perceived within the family. This includes a look back over the quality of accomplishments and demonstration of communication and cooperation; they reflect mutual relations in families. Self- evaluation is a background for target-setting.*

Compare parent and children skills. You can draw one more table to analyse what skills/at least some bases of these each of your children or your have acquired and demonstrate them in learning and everyday activities, what skills are still unknown to you and your children. You will notice that, say, digital skills might be better developed by your children (age or other individual differences might interfere).

You can also self-evaluate your knowledge and skills.

## 5.6 Activity 2-5. Evaluation of hard and soft skills

Discussion:

Why soft skills (human qualities) become as important as the hard (pragmatic, technical) ones?

Select an item from the suggested above or choose your own and create one more table:  
Values and individual qualities in your family

What values do our children/youth share among their peers?	What values that they share follow those of our generation?
Which of these can you accept and which not? The main answer will be to the question 'why'?	Find reasonable arguments to the question: why your children's values correspond to yours and why not?

Suggest to complete this table: (a) by parents and (b) by children. Then do a small comparative study: dominating values of children compared to those of parents. Isn't this a nice reason for discussions? Can we judge of dissonance in values? What can we say of communication, misunderstanding, and reasons of conflicts in families? Comment: children often complain that parents do not understand them – what could it mean?

Now you can discuss in small groups or at plenary session, why children or youth challenge human qualities alongside with the practical skills; how is digital competence valued, etc. – you can choose the most appropriate focus.

### 5.7 Activity 2-6. Discussion on parent roles

Participants should be able to

- identify the various aspects of parent roles
- agree upon a set of the generic role aspects of parenting
- reflect upon conceptualisations of parenting from a European perspective (use experiences of the participant countries in this seminar/program)

By developing a critical awareness through discussions of the various aspects of the parent roles, participants will be encouraged to adopt a differentiated approach in endeavouring to respond to the individual needs of parents and adult learners at various stages of their professional development.

Discuss if and how parent roles are related to values and communication style in families

With reference to your own experience, consider the following roles.

Then identify those **five roles** you consider to be the most important aspects in parenting and place them in rank order. **Comment your choice**

**When selecting each role, please, register the questions which you put forward here:**

Discard any roles you deem of little importance or irrelevant and add any roles that you consider essential, but have not been cited on the cards. Please give reasons for your choices.

Share your thoughts with the members in your group and agree a list of parent roles, which you consider to be 'essential' or 'less important'. Add any roles that were not included in the original list on the blank cards provided.

In the plenary, **share your group's decisions** with all participants.

*Need analysis to meet the parents' roles and features of adult learners*

**Suggested list of parent roles (you can add more roles):**

<b>Adviser</b>	<b>manager</b>	<b>initiator</b>
<b>Coach</b>	<b>care-taker</b>	<b>partner</b>
<b>Assistant</b>	<b>enabler</b>	<b>evaluator</b>
<b>Guide</b>	<b>leader</b>	<b>or listener</b>
<b>Mediator</b>	<b>instructor</b>	<b>model</b>
<b>Protector</b>	<b>supporter</b>	<b>facilitator</b>
		<b>or</b>

Select to your opinion the most important parents' roles and spot out possible ways to integrate these. If you choose it an individual activity discuss your individual vision with the other participants of this program. You will see much in common. Now you can exchange opinion how parents can integrate their roles in everyday family life.

**5.8 Activity 2-7. Adult learners - parents as learners**

*The best learning is learning together with your children – make it a joint venture! What can you children teach you?*

Please, find below some most important features of adult learners. Read them and discuss in groups:

- What you have to master for parenting to improve your family upbringing or family pedagogy?
- If you are a teacher or educator to deliver the Parenting science program for parents, what you have to take into consideration when preparing and delivering classes for parents (they are adult learners).

Discuss in groups what you should spot out as the dominating features – these might be specific and differ between the two above mentioned target groups.

***Discuss the ways you can meet the adult learners' features***

Each group takes one cluster (or more if you can allocate time for this):

1. Adults have a need to know why they need to learn something before they undertake learning it. They look for the practicality of content. Traditionally adult learners tend to take courses without questioning why the course is important to their education. Usually they do not choose unnecessary courses.
2. Adults have a need to be responsible for their own decisions and to be treated as capable of self-direction. (School learners, on the other hand, often have a need for direction to be provided by teachers.
3. Adult learners have a variety of life experiences which are their richest resources for learning. This is in contrast to traditional learners who rely heavily on the teacher's knowledge. Why parents often experience problems with their children? What are the dominating problems?
4. Adults are motivated to learn things that they perceive will help them cope with real-life tasks or problems. They are also motivated by a sense of self-esteem. Traditionally school learners are more subject-oriented and they seek to

successfully complete courses regardless of how the content is related to their own goals.

### 5.9 Activity 2-8. Cooperation: perceiving – understanding – doing

*Cooperation is the process undertaken by two or more people of working, learning, creating something, organizing one's life together to complete a task or achieve a goal. The value of cooperation/collaboration is achieving better results by putting experiences together; this often creates synergy, that is impossible while working alone.*

1. **Video on attention and perception** (you can choose other clips that you find relevant).

#### **Find in the web:**

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/why-people-with-creative-personalities-see-the-world-differently>

1. Please, pay attention to the instruction of the video.
2. After watching the video, please, speak out what you have noticed/perceived
3. If you have to make a decision, what is your perception (how many cases did you notice to base on for your decision?)
4. What else did you notice to make your conclusion?

Your conclusion on the video and decision-making: Your ideas for cooperation with the group? What activities can you initiate with the group?

Compare the components and discuss differences and common features of Cooperation and Collaboration

**(You can enter the web-site and test your collaboration skill. Test: English: Online Collaboration Skills Barometer / <http://dev.ecdl.it/project/online4edu/index.php?lang=en>)**

**Synergy** – additional possibility which is not available when working individually; the importance of this phenomenon lies in possibilities to create new knowledge.

**Discussion:** what you consider to be the most important components of collaboration at the conceptual level? What components should be improved?

- Awareness – We become part of a working entity with a shared purpose
- Motivation – We drive to gain consensus in problem solving or development
- Self-synchronization – We decide as individuals when things need to happen
- Participation – We participate in collaboration and we expect others to participate
- Mediation – We negotiate and we collaborate together and find a middle point
- Reciprocity – We share and we expect sharing in return through reciprocity
- Reflection – We think and we consider alternatives
- Engagement – We proactively engage rather than wait and see

### 5.10 Activity 2-9. Values of communication.

Now we have collected situations, views, experiences; communication helped us with this. What is communication, why it is so important?

Make a list of communication values and discuss it in small groups or at plenary session

Mind a methodological statement: *communication and different kinds of action are two interrelated phenomena that make a background for human individual development and enhancement.*

*Communication is an act of transferring information from one person or group to another. Quite often communication reaches the form of discussion – exchange of knowledge, views, opinions, or values.*

### 5.11 Additional/extra activity. Strategies for effective/positive parenting

Avoiding children and adult behaviour problems, avoiding physical or/and mental violence/misbehaviour.

**Table 2. Some hints for a program for parenting skills' enhancement Reasons.**

<p>Children and even adults feel <i>frustrated by a problem that's too big for them</i>. They <i>haven't yet learned how to control their impulses</i>, or avoiding conflicts in socially acceptable ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- kids don't process emotions and information the way adults do;</li> <li>- hostile attributions keep hot the very problem they want to solve or even create new ones</li> </ul>	<p>Assistance in developing experience of reasonable behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss the problem to spot out reasons (aims and desires; means or tools chosen to solve the problem; finding common desires and negotiating on differences</li> <li>- Discuss possible solutions, let children, /adults themselves make a decision</li> </ul>
<p><i>Special difficulties</i> - like stressful life events, emotional regulation problems, attention deficits, autistic symptoms, o quite often - hyperactivity</p>	<p>Theories and practice of special pedagogy</p>
<p>Behaviour depends on <i>how people perceive the world it is shaped by the social environment</i> and <i>how people evaluate</i> the influences of the world agents (according to individual meaningful <i>criteria</i>)</p>	<p>Family <i>culture</i> and its cultural contexts Behaviour, parents as <i>behaviour models</i> Discussion on events, literature, theatre, etc. in families – <i>creating emotional culture and values</i></p>
<p>Family members <i>can have a powerful influence</i></p>	<p><i>Moral support</i> and <i>practical training</i> of socially acceptable behaviour - developing Experiences</p>

Some pedagogical hints to solve conflicts

<b>Do not...</b>	<b>Do... / parents need assistance:</b>
<b>Do not</b> address <i>the whole person</i> – this destroys chances to change (like: you are a bad child); people might perceive a situation differently	Address his/her <b>behaviour</b> (like: this reaction / behaviour is not the best way you can do it... Just think of it)
<b>Do not</b> make <i>immediate</i> decisions and evaluations – people (especially children) might need more time to process verbal instructions, require more practice	First try to <b>understand</b> the reasons, come to realistic expectations (this might take time for considerations); re-shaping demands
<b>Do not lose a focus on feeling protected</b> in family - emotionally dis-balanced people and kids are less likely to learn on their own	<i>Get realistic expectations</i> about the development of empathy, kindness, attitudes, relations; Support their <i>sense</i> of being protected
<b>Do not</b> lose focus on maintaining a <i>positive relationship</i> ; ... do not keep listing misbehaviours	The first step is <i>reorganizing one's priorities</i>
<b>Do not sacrifice</b> one's own emotional well-being, <i>do not complain</i> about bad relations, misbehaviour etc. Stress shades thinking and damages relationships	Learn how to manage stress, how to maintain good relationships

Let us self-evaluate our communication skills. Why communication is important?

Optional Activity

**Let us design a course/classes „Parenting Science: Positive parenting “:**

(a) for parents if you are teachers/mentors/educators;

(b) for your personal development if you are parents and want to go deeper into Parenting Science.

1. The aim: to assist parents (adult learners) in developing parent and children engagement skills, provide parents opportunities for acquiring the basis of the *Parenting Science* to enable them self-conduct the improvements of their parents' competence.

2. The achievements: knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, ... experiences etc. – the *focus of the program*. Will you, please, reflect on what you have learned during this session?

3. The content – items/components of *Parenting Science* which the program covers to offer the parents a possibility to gain the planned achievements:

- Knowledge and understanding of their children (psychology, anatomy, health, caring...): cognitive abilities, emotional balance etc.
- Educational possibilities and functions of a family: *role models, engagement, communication, cooperation, sharing partnership and values*
- **Cooperation and communication** – basis of family engagement; **why** it matters to the success of children and schools



- Exploring the impact of **family engagement** to better educational outcomes and learner developmental success
- **Exploring effective** parental practices
- Helping parents to achieve understanding of the most often reasons and preferable **responses to children misbehaviour**
- **Special needs.**

Engagement is essential for kindergarten, school, college, as well as family upbringing improvements. It is also increasingly recognized as an integral element for proficient practice as an educator.

4. Tools, technologies you will suggest:

5. **Self-evaluation** and evaluation of the program outcomes

Suggested table for self-evaluation

**Table 1. Questionnaire: *Interpersonal Communication***

The following confident statements have the aim to help parents (also teachers and/or educators) to conduct effective communication by reflexing about *skills for interpersonal communication*. The questionnaire can be used either for regular classes or for final self-evaluation. For a current session in the Parenting science program we accentuate communication (choose the most appropriate partner of communication and self-evaluate accordingly) or chose as many as you like – this then will take more time to complete:

- a) with children
- b) with colleagues
- c) with acquaintances
- d) with other parents
- e) with...

	Not Confident 1	2	3	4	Very Confident 5
1. I understand the importance of interpersonal communication with ...					
2. I understand that the communication process depends on many factors					
3. I know that I can manage some of these factors (mention them)					
4. I know that some other of these factors do not depend on me or on what I want ( <i>mention them</i> )					
5. I understand that my whole behaviour is involved in communication, verbal and non-verbal signs					
6. I know that for an effective communication the verbal signs I use must be clear					
7. I know that non-verbal signs, body language (facial expressions, gestures) are sometimes more significant for communication than language itself.					
8. I am aware that, if verbal signs and non-verbal signs do not coincide, the communication partner(s) will be confused ( <i>please, think of a situation for a group discussion</i> )					
9. I understand that the way I perceive reality differs from that of my <b>children</b> (other persons)					
10. I know that the way I perceive reality is a result of my socialization					
11. I know that I perceive reality through a “filter” consisting of my experiences, my thoughts, my values ( <i>think of cases to be discussed</i> )					
12. I know that the same ‘filter’ applies for <b>children</b> (any other person) involved in communication					

13. I understand that I have to distance myself from this “filter” and think of the <b>children’s</b> (partner’s) experiences in order to be “open-minded” for successful communication					
<b><i>Think of situations when current context interfered with communication, prepare it for the group discussion or self-evaluation</i></b>					
14. I understand that every communication process takes place within a communication context					
15. I know that this context consists of: time, place, situation, and everything else that has preceded between the communication partners					
16. I know that all messages of the communication partners have to be “heard” at two levels: the information-level and the relationship-level ( <b><i>please, be prepared for a discussion</i></b> )					
17. I know that at the information-level the message includes opinions, emotions, experiences, values etc. of the partners					
18. I understand that at the relationship-level the messages might be strongly influenced by emotional tension between communication partners					
19. I can hold back my emotions, so that I can communicate in a rational manner					
20. I can simplify my language, so that my partner can understand more easily what I mean					
21. I understand that communication requires certain abilities like the following ( <b><i>mention some of them and suggest for discussion</i></b> ):					
22. I can listen actively to what my partner ( <b>children</b> ) say, e.g. I can put myself in his/her position					
23. I have a high self-estimation that allows me to communicate with others in an honest way					
24. I understand the importance of the meta-communicative competence (e.g. understanding principles of communication)					

*Discussion:* what collaboration and communication skills we have, and which ones still need improvements?

*If you are a teacher who delivers these classes:* What should be of special attention in the program which you are going to offer the parents/choose for your individual development?

*If you are a parent:* How such classes for parents could be improved?

## 6. Active listening – an important component of communication

(Modified from the TISSNTE project, 128825-CP-1-2006-1-UK-Comenius C21). Parent educators can choose any of the suggested activities or do all if there is enough time; it is possible also to suggest some activities for parent autonomous completion.

Communication is successful if partners are good listeners. Quite often in family communication fails if the partners do not know how to listen to each other. When you decide that you really want to listen to someone, and give them a chance to tell you whatever they want to tell you, then active listening is appropriate; it will not necessarily always be a counselling situation; in fact it is extremely useful in educator - group or parent – child communication.

The aims of active listening are to put the listener into a neutral, non-directive, non-judgmental frame of mind, so that she can give full attention to the person who is speaking, and

allow him to make his own way through his story without interference. We often think of it as a gift, because the luxury of talking through an issue without interruption or blocking of any kind is very rare indeed.

Activities should be introduced by a short instruction because Active listening is rear part of programs: When you decide that you really want to listen to someone, and give them a chance to tell you whatever they want to tell you, then active listening is appropriate; it will not necessarily always be a counselling situation; in fact it is extremely useful in educator - group or parent – child communication. The aims of active listening are to put the listener into a neutral, non-directive, non- judgmental frame of mind, so that she/he can give full attention to the person who is speaking, and allow him to make his own way through his story without interference. We often think of it as a gift, because the luxury of talking through an issue without interruption or blocking of any kind is very rare indeed.

### **6.1 Activity 3-1. What is active listening and why it is important?**

The participant group is split into two parts, each has an assignment that is not known to the other group: – one is the speaker’s group, one reads a text, speaks on the qualities of active listening, or on any chosen topic; the rest of the group watch the listeners (preferably each watches one listener) and makes notes that are evidences of attentive (or just opposite) listening. Preferably for reading/speaking a longer text is selected, lasting for some 10 minutes so that there is enough time to collect evidences. It might be a theoretical chapter.

Discuss the collected evidences, possible mistakes in perception, and reaction to the situation of those who are not attentive enough listeners.

*Listening is an evidence of respect.*

Afterword, they practice active listening in pairs, changing the roles. This practice can be videotaped and analysed as well.

The aim is to help parents or parent educators use evidences to better understand the concept and development of the active listening, as well as develop skills of a good listener. The focus of this practicing exercise is effective communication. It can be used at the beginner phase and also for experienced participants of the activity. The activity can be individual, and pair work – the choice depends on the participants.

Chapters for the exercise Active listening should be chosen by the educator.

### **6.2 Activity 3-2 and 3-3. Evidences of active listening**

Active listening is a component of communication, perceiving some information, knowledge, evaluations, etc. that will be use to participate in communication or react. The participants:

- (a) individually read a small suggested chapter about active listening to answer some questions;
- (b) reflect on their experiences and select evidences of active listening.

Afterword, they practice active listening in pairs, changing the roles. This practice can be videotaped and analysed as well. The aim is to help parents, parent mentors/educators understand

the concept and development of the active listening, as well as develop skills of a good listener. The focus of this practicing exercise practice is effective communication. It can be used at the beginner phase and also for experienced participants of the activity. The activity can be individual, and pair work – the choice depends on the participants.

Chapters for the exercise Active listening should be chosen by the educator.

### 6.3 Activity 3-3.

The course seminar of this project suggested Half, R. (2015). 10 Quotes to Inspire Active Listening. (Available at: <https://www.roberthalf.com/blog/salaries-and-skills/10-quotes-to-inspire-active-listening>). The participants comment the Quotes to Inspire Active Listening (when time is limited, participants can choose one or two statements to comment, illustrate by their own situations when they were either successful or ‘bad’ listeners. This activity can be optional).

10 quotes to comment are (the focus of comments can be chosen either by participants or the educator):

- Listen at least as much as you talk.
- Listening is a sign of respect.
- Never stop listening, the speaker will decide when to stop; or you can apologise and ask to stop.
- Learn by listening and think what you can learn from your child or educator from a parent.
- Listening should be open, demonstrate interest in it and will to know the speaker’s view.
- Learn to bite your tongue, learn to keep silent when your partner/parent/child speaks.
- Don't try to multitask, do not suggest several topics or problems at a time.
- Use your eyes and your ears, demonstrate your ‘listening’ by all senses.
- Exercise the creative force, listening creates us, we obtain our qualities by listening.
- Do more listening than talking

### 6.4 Activity 3-4. Active listening compared to everyday conversation patterns

Suggest parent educators (or parents) to reflect on their everyday communication and note down the differences between Active listening and Normal conversational patterns (make a table), when the exercise is ready, suggest a discussion and conclusions, as well as statements on their achievements, what they have learned from this activity. From this activity, participants can see that there could be many other choices of responses.

Think of any other possible “Active listening” responses for the discussion. Very useful might be situations from the participant experience when violated one or more advise (of the 10 given here): interrupted talk by the listener had the effect of blocking the flow of what the talker wants to say, and directing the conversation in the direction of what the listener wants to know; people cannot manage to do active listening and anything else at the same time - that is what we mean when we say it requires strict self-discipline; you remember situations when your child stopped conversation by saying ‘you do not love me...’, etc.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

### **6.5 Activity 3-5 – Peer learning**

Choosing a way of listening to your peers, family members, or anyone else (focus should be chosen). Suggest parents/parent educators to reflect on:

- a. In what situations do you think you would find active listening useful in your private life?
- b. List the “rewards” of active listening (what you can learn, acquire a skill to communicate, make friends, etc.)

Using nonverbal means is a powerful communication skill. Ask participants to describe a situation when either the speaker or the listener used nonverbals like facial expression, body postures and actions, body space boundaries, eye-contact, etc., and why these means are important in knowing if someone is listening to what others are talking about.

Discuss the term *appropriate eye contact*. How nonverbals can reflect a person’s inner world. Suggest a situation or choose one described by the course participants.

### **6.6 Activity 3-6. Self-evaluation to improve one’s skills of active listening**

Suggest parent educators (or parents) to reflect on their everyday communication and note down the differences between Active listening and random conversational patterns (this can be a home-work; make a table), when the exercise is ready, suggest a discussion and conclusions, as well as statements on their achievements, what they have learned from this activity. From this activity, participants can see that there could be many other choices of responses.

Think of any other possible “Active listening” responses for the discussion. Very useful might be situations from the participant experience when violated one or more advise (of the 10 given here): interrupted talk by the listener had the effect of blocking the flow of what the talker wants to say, and directing the conversation in the direction of what the listener wants to know; people cannot manage to do active listening and anything else at the same time - that is what we mean when we say it requires strict self-discipline; you remember situations when your child stopped conversation by saying ‘you do not love me...’, etc.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

Suggest parents/parent educators to reflect on:

- a. In what situations do you think you would find active listening useful in your private life?
- b. List the “rewards” of active listening (what you can learn, acquire a skill to communicate, make friends, etc.)

Note: the number of activities depend on the scope of the program, time allocated for the course/program, as well as the peculiarities or needs of the course participants - course educators can select the most appropriate activities and modify them.

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## **Chapter 5 - The ESEC teaching-learning experience of the Mancomunitat de la Ribera Alta**

### **1. Introduction**

The session 2020 conducted by MANRA *Emotional Interaction - Family Disruption* cover the most topical issues of *Social and Emotional Skills* with a focus on communication. The terms are chosen for discussions according to the parent most attended questions of parent integrated roles, communication among parents and children, parent educator communication and active listening with parents, peculiarities of communication in digital age; these are contextualized with the current social processes and needs. Course educators can add some specific activities to meet special needs of the course participants. Articles and clips are suggested to consider emotional interaction peculiarities, competence improvement, and discussion.

The course consists of thematic activities that include short introductions and tests for the course participant self-evaluation of their emotional interaction skills and conflict prevention, as well as reflections on the content of the course. The transition situations when paradigm shifts in the societies make parents and their educators feel powerless to decision-making and acting or behaving to achieve the new more complex parental goals; parents feel losing control over their children that quite often is accompanied by a feeling of lost mutual understanding among the members of the family.

Regarding to the *main conception* of the learning units, it is important to clarify that over the years the parent, social worker, parent educator, as well as stake-holder conception of what parenting is or what it should be has changed considerably and challenge a new look at the content of parent educator courses, as well as introduce a new paradigm of *Social and Emotional Skills*. This is not only because of the large variety of education possibilities. The perceptions and conceptions change due to the diversity of cultures living side-by-side in the countries; this also because of the expanded knowledge on parenting and a shift in mindset that cause the need to replace the concept of the different educational styles and educational patterns to be fulfilled by parents introducing new educational skills related to the emotional interaction, active listening or emotional intelligence.

### **2. Definitions of terms, usefulness of the learning unit to parents training**

Regarding to the *definitions of terms and the usefulness of the learning units to parents training*, the term *emotional interaction* has entered the area of family up-bringing to inform about the approach that has emerged from European policies in the family relation area, but parents do not know how to implement this; and their educators need some assistance to prepare them for implementing this paradigm shift. The *emotional interaction* framework facilitates the development of strategies, skills and measures to support families that aim to foster equal opportunities for them; and it includes the support of social educators, associations and other professionals that work with families.



The chapter of the project completed by Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta followed the philosophy that parent education and support programming should assume that parents are more likely to provide appropriate nurturing and guidance as they acquire a greater understanding of child development and children needs, as well as the parent roles in the changing and technology-rich social environment. All parents need support from community agencies: (a) to grasp the most topical changes in society and learn appropriate ways to implement these by learning emotional and social skills; (b) willing to improve family education and want to be successful.

The content of the 2020 session held in Alzira is divided into three mutually integrated parts, with respect to the theme of Emotional Interaction, which consist of various sub-topics about emotional and social skills that are organized in the logic of integrating content rather than suggesting separate topics related to emotional interaction - this breaks with the traditional form of content organization. Therefore, the content is offered through various activities in each part. The three parts of the activities are:

1. those that are related to the **active listening**; to complete these participants have to communicate developing this skill, discuss and understand (these belong to a successful communication, nevertheless are seldom attended and included to parent education programs);
2. activities that are directed to evaluate and improve communication skills regarding the **emotional intelligence** – these make use of part (a) to have an evidence-based discussion on skill improvement;
3. activities that develop skills in order to learn how to **normalize a feeling** when parents go through undesired emotions – this belongs to a successful interaction and improves parent and parent educator competences.

### 3. Activities

#### 3.1 Section 1: Active listening

##### *Definition*

‘Hearing’ is a physical yet passive act involving the process and function of perceiving sound. ‘Listening’ is hearing the sounds with deliberate intention. Therefore, unlike hearing, listening is a skill that improves through conscious effort and practice. It is important to enhance the skill of listening when you want to create an environment of share and a relation of trust. Active listening involves also the capacity to help the speaker share more and feel more comfortable to do so, without feeling pushed. It also has the capacity to grow into the speaker a feeling of being understood and a more reflective way of thinking.

#### 3.2 Section 2: Emotional intelligence

##### *Definition*

Emotional intelligence is the capability of individuals to recognize their own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them

appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal(s).

In our case, emotional intelligence will be a useful tool as to understand the emotions felt by the parents and to grow in them the capacities to understand them as well. Recognize the emotion felt is the first step as to deal with them. Family facing the situation of a child with a disability might have trouble of emotion sharing and overall communication that can affect the relations between the different members (parents/children/grand-parents...).

(a) activities that develop skills in order to learn how to **normalize a feeling** when parents go through undesired emotions – this belongs to a successful interaction and improves parent and parent educator competences.

### **3.3 Section 3: Normalizing a feeling**

#### *Definition*

As seen in the lectures, parents and families as all go through a set of undesired emotions, that can ruin or alternate communication and emotional connection between the family members. Normalizing the feeling is a good way to help someone accept and make peace with the emotions felt.

So first of all what does it mean to normalize a feeling. Normalizing is when emotions are diffused or reframed in a more acceptable manner to preserve the status quo. This technique focuses on both the experience and expression of emotion, perhaps because emotions, cognitions, and behaviors are often highly interactive. It is necessary to understand that normalizing doesn't mean neutralizing or to change the expression of the emotion to more socially accepted way. It is about giving another perspective to the person about the situation or emotion felt as to help grow a more acceptable perception.

The perspective of the person isn't to be made wrong, but to propose another independent perspective to the situation.

The main aspect that this special content brings is the integrating activities by involving experiences of parent education to identify and practice the above-mentioned paradigm shift about *Social and Emotional Skills*.

## **4. The applied teaching-learning theory**

Regarding the theory described into the chapter *Emotional and Social Skills: Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption*, the learning unit of *Emotional Interaction* consists of the following theoretical aspects:

#### Key learning point

This lecture aims to give the capacity for special educator to create a trust space with the parents where they feel heard and understood and can freely share their emotions, as well as give them the appropriate tools to resolve disruption between members of a family.

- Title of the learning unit: Emotional interaction.

-Contents (list of its  
Sections):

 **Active**

**listening tools:**

- Definition.
- Showing that you are listening (behavior and body language...).
- Ensure that you understood (example paraphrasing).
- Encourage the speaker to share (nonjudgmental state of mind, open questions...).

 **Emotional intelligence:**

- Definition.
- Emotional awareness (emotional literacy, levels of awareness).
- Emotional validation.

 **Normalizing a feeling:**

- Definition.
- Perspective and perception (reframing the situation).
- Empathy (using a video explaining the concept of empathy).

### Lesson summary

Having a child with a disability tend to create tension and turmoil of emotions that are coped differently by the members of the family and can create disruption between them. Giving tools to the special educator to understand and release those emotions are necessary, as well as resolve the conflicts. It is also important to add that those techniques are useful for the parents to use.

### Expected achievements

This lecture aims to give the capacity for special educator to create a trust space with the parents where they feel heard and understood and can freely share their emotions, as well as give them the appropriate tools to resolve disruption between members of a family.

In addition, referring to the content integrated into the subject of *Family Disruption*, the subject consists of the following theoretical aspects:

- Title of the learning unit: Family disruption.

-Contents (list of its sections):

 **SECTION 1: Lesson introduction** (Family stages of acceptance, disintegration, negation and acceptance, reintegration, personal experience, personal characteristics, values, social environment).

 **SECTION 2: The couple as the base of the reconstruction** (The effect on the couple, how to help).

 **SECTION 3: The grandparent's involvement.**

 **SECTION 4: Siblings of a child with a disability** (The emotions felt by the sibling; dividing experiences into three tendencies: hungry of attention, perfect kid

- and early maturity; helping parents find a balance in their relations with their child).

## SECTION 5: Testimonies.

### Key learning point of the lecture

- Understanding the effect of the diagnosis of the disability on the interpersonal relationship between the members of the families involved in the care taking of the child.
- Introducing to different experiences and testimonies as to provide different scope of the disruption that can occurs.
- Providing tools and advice to help the families facing this situation.

### Lecture summary

- The emotions felt when having a child with a disability are diverse and varied, some like anxiety for the future, shame, stress, grieving, pride is shared by the different members of the family
- The couple has to have a clear understanding of the expectation of each one, as to best prepare for the necessities that they will face. Helping them understand their emotions and share them is an important first step to a reconciliation.
- Grandparents can be a source of help for the parents giving them room to reorganize their family system and find a balance in the different interpersonal relations involved.
- Parents have to find a balance in their comportment toward their children and acknowledge that the sibling is also affected by the events.

## 5. Teaching methodology

Regarding the *teaching methodology*, it is relevant to mention that exercises used at the sessions are suggested and described in the part of the program produced by MANRA in major follows the interactivities of the hands-on or workshop sessions:

- suggested short hands-on activities, their evaluation and identifying possible modalities to conclude on their usefulness when working with parents;
- individual experiences and situation analysis to come to conclusions of possible usage to meet the parent particular needs; identifying experienced or possible situations when the conclusion or the activity might be helpful;
- a set of questions related to the content of the sessions (these are included into the session program and plans);
- lists of testimonies on examples and different skills, etc. to compare, analyse and reach a conclusion on their suitability for current situations and the needs of parents or children; these are concentrated in the assessment questionnaires;
- illustrate some important aspects that emerge when examining the impact of particular parent education examples in real-life contexts;



- comment the chosen video-clips, images, etc. that are selected for their essential message, such as apps, which are popular with children and less popular with parents; video clips that report features on social skills, etc.
- session participants had been asked to make their own personal contributions to the proposed exercises (especially valuable for observing the diversity of opinions, experiences and knowledge emerging from the group), which makes the collective learning process more enriching.

The sessions with the parents' educators held in Alzira are organized in three parts that mutually integrate with their specific methodological accents: active listening, emotional intelligence and normalization of a feeling.

The suggested activities should be related to *emotional interaction*, provide information on important parenting decisions, local strategies in a broader context, social skills, etc. Anyway, on the basis of the theoretical content and the activities proposed, participants should initiate a debate on the subject and thus reach their conclusions. The activities should inform the participants of the session by talking about the target issues to which they are addressed and trigger discussions.

Here are the illustrations (one for each part) of such activities that must be modified according to the specific needs of session participants in local areas and cultural settings.

### *Active listening*

This is an important component of communication, unfortunately, it is seldom addressed in parent or parent educator education programs.

Parent educators can choose any of the suggested activities or do everything if there is enough time; it is also possible to suggest some activities for the autonomous termination of parents. Communication is successful if partners are good listeners. Very often a family communication fails if the partners do not know how to listen to each other or stop the process of interaction without listening to each other's opinions, considerations, needs, etc.

Activity 1. The participants, visualizing the content on active listening, worked on the definition of the concept, how to learn how to show that you are listening (behaviour and body language), make sure that what they have told us has been understood (as for example, paraphrasing) and encouraging the speaker to share (nonjudgmental state of mind, open questions...). Participants commented on all these aspects, discussed with each other, and responded to the session's concluding questions about active listening to observe acquired skills and knowledge.

Some of the key aspects addressed during this part are: learning to listen as much as you speak, learning that listening is a sign of respect, learning by listening and thinking about what you can learn from your child or parent's educator; listening must be open, show interest in it and know the opinion of the speaker; learn to remain silent when your partner/ parent/ child speaks; demonstrate your perception of what is being said by all senses; exercise your creative force - listening creates us, we get our qualities by listening.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

Activity 2. The participants, regarding the content on emotional intelligence, worked on the definition of the concept, the explanation of the emotional awareness term (emotional literacy, levels of awareness...) and the emotional validation. Participants worked on all these concepts and content, discussed with each other, and responded to the session's concluding questions about active listening to observe acquired skills and knowledge.

#### *Normalizing a feeling*

Activity 3. The groups of learners, regarding the content about learning how to normalize a feeling, worked on the definition of the concept, the explanation of perspective and perception (reframing the situation) and empathy (using a video explaining the concept of empathy).

Participants worked also on all these concepts and content, discussed with each other, and responded to the session's concluding questions about active listening to observe acquired skills and knowledge.

At the end of the reading of the contents and the realization of the proposed exercises, as well as those presented in the subject of Family Disruption and the deepening of testimonies, the participants evaluate their acquired social skills, make conclusions and then discuss in groups.

#### Notes:

It is always useful if the educators who conduct such classes have extra exercises to change

for the more appropriate ones or for those that better fit the context or participants need etc.

Time allocated for each activity depends on the program planning and time allocated for each session.

## **6. Practical issues for social educators**

The training course organized by Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta, in the chapter on *Emotional and Social Skills: Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption*, within the framework of the ESEC project, provides a whole series of practical issues or notions to social educators with the aim of learning how to articulate the educational task with the families that are in these circumstances.

It is a series of skills that train the social education professional to subsequently be able to apply that knowledge by working with families and thereby promote the acquisition of behaviors, strategies and knowledge that allow parents to interact with their children and develop these skills to learn to handle situations of stress and conflict with children.

As to extend the capacity of a social educator facing the situation of a family having a child with a disability, the course proposes different tools to be taught, that enhance the capacity of communication and emotional interaction.

This program is useful for the special / social educator:

- To control the emotions felt in the case of an outburst from emotional parents.

- To create a safe space from judgements and a relation of trust and confidence with the parents.
- To understand the emotions felt by the parents in their situation and be able to respond to it with empathy

## 7. Practical issues for parents of children behavioral disturbance

Parents of children with behavioral disturbance express specific needs and expectations - when accurately recognized, the accomplishment of particular goals might be possible. Those goals are directly related with emotional and social support, and then with encouraging parents' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Parents expect to be empowered in order to take over the control of challenging situations, understand and anticipate problems with parenting a disabled child. What really matters is training them in successful communication with and support to the child, as it leads to increased and improved parental roles.

A mother of a child who suffers from cerebral palsy discloses her opinion about the advantages of working together:

"Little did I know that these workshops would affect me so much. I normally don't talk that much with people about what is going on in our lives, because they don't understand, so why waste words and time... I just say: Verica has cerebral palsy, and that's it. [...] At the workshop, when you meet

<fellow soldiers> WHO KNOW HOW MUCH IT HURTS, this is something else entirely...Thank you, thank you, I am charging my batteries, which is the most important thing" (Grubić, 2014, p. 38).

The benefits and values of group work can be connected with the fact that this kind of experience is an entirely natural human experience. Thus, by its nature, it gives to individuals who are involved in it a strong sense of reality. Right after, the participants are able to feel a sense of predictability and emotional stability. The next crucially important step is hope and a sense of optimism. A commonly shared benefit of working together is the opportunity to achieve emotional relief by expressing one's feelings.

### *Values of group work can be divided into the following categories:*

- sharing - people feel less alone when they see that others feel the same;
- identification - people are willing to identify with others in a similar situation;
- accepting help from <similar people> - people accept help more easily from those who are in a situation similar to theirs, who understand them;
- checking - people in a group can be checked, tested in a variety of important roles;
- mutual assistance - people are often able to provide assistance to others who are experiencing the same or similar situations, which raises their self-esteem;
- social exchange and acceptance - people need a sense of belonging and acceptance, which is possible to gain in a group of people with the same experience (Grubić, 2014, p. 39).

The Growing up Together Plus Program of Workshops with Parents follows a

routine of eleven broadly formulated topics that are consecutively addressed during workshops. They consist of such issues, as:

- The idea that every child is special, as well as every parent asks for a special attention;
- Parents' and children's expectations versus adaptation to particular situations;
- Most significant pillars of parenting to be agreed while working together;
- Psychological needs of disabled children versus parental objectives;
- All children are our children and they deserve to be loved;
- Listening as a basic parental skills;
- How a disabled child learns about the surrounding world;
- Why and how the boundaries exist?
- Parental responsibilities - what really counts?
- What does it really mean to be a parent? Influences and choices
- The end and new beginning - what parents should avoid and what kind of approaches to adopt?

In the light of the above-listed topics, parents stated that after having participated in the workshop events they have learned to talk about their feelings, they have appreciated a value of exchanging experiences and acquiring knowledge that other parents are facing similar problems and challenges. They became conscious of the fact that contact with other parents who have children with different, but too much extent parallel circumstances, opens chances for new ways and standards of communication and direction towards the child's mostly expected needs and abilities.

### **7.1 Playing together**

Group work activities do not neglect the aspect of playing together. Parents feel like to inform other mothers and fathers, how their children react to different games. At the same time, they expect to play themselves having in mind the purpose of bringing about relaxation and relief. A question "what are we playing today?" is often asked. One of the examples is the activity whose name is "Three wise thoughts" during which parents receive three sentences cut into pieces that need to be connected. When searching the right solution, they communicate, cooperate and start to know each other better and better. Those sentences are, as follows:

- What do / good gardeners do? / They help / a rose become / a rose. / Mothers and / fathers are / like good / gardeners.
- Those / who / conquer / fear / can / scare / even / a tiger.
- There are no / hopeless / situations; / there are / only people / who / feel / helpless / in certain / situations.

The message for parents, as regards playing with their children, reflects the idea that mothers and fathers are children's best and most valuable toys. That is why they should play together. A set of tips for parents that encourage them to get involved in games give important advices to be followed, such as:

- Take time to play with your child every day and focus solely on him/her.



- Let the child choose the game to play.
- Draw your attention to positive feelings and good communication, in the mood of having fun together.
- Get involved as many family members as possible.
- Let playing become a routine family activity.
- Stress the child's skills and virtues, encourage initiative and the sense of competence.
- Teach your child to accept victory and defeat, as both need to be taken for granted. Respect the rule that time comes for the game to stop.

*Activity 1:*

Read the article: Vidhya Ravindranadan, Raju, S., *Emotional intelligence and quality of life of parents of children with special needs*, Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 2008, vol. 34, p. 34-39. [medind.nic.in/jak/t08/s1/jakt08s1p34.pdf](http://medind.nic.in/jak/t08/s1/jakt08s1p34.pdf)

Aim of the activity:

Understand the importance of emotional intelligence for the quality of life and the wellbeing of parents of children with disabilities.

Task to carry on:

Discuss what parents of a disabled child can do in order to improve the level of their emotional intelligence.

*Activity 2:*

Read the article: Roya Koochak Entezar, Nooraini Othman, Azlina Binti Mohd Kosnin, Afsaneh Ghanbaripanah, *The influence of emotional intelligence on mental health among Iranian mothers of mild intellectually disabled children*, International Journal of Fundamental Psychology & Social Sciences, 2013, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 12-15. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>

Aim of the activity:

Understand the impact of emotional intelligence on mental health among mothers of mild intellectually disabled children.

ning course organized by Mancomunidad de la Ribera Alta, in the chapter on ***Emotional and Social Skills: Emotional Interaction and Family Disruption***, within the framework of the ESEC project, provides a whole series of practical issues or notions to the parents with the aim of learning how to manage the educational task with their children by providing them with the correct strategies to develop emotional interaction and control situations of family disruption.

Consequently, the training provides families with a set of knowledge, through testimonies, experiences and personal experiences on these situations that invite them to



reflect, to rethink their children's education from another point of view (understanding emotions) and with it to develop new educational guidelines suitable for managing behavioral difficulties, the facing of the situation and a continuity or follow-up regarding the application of these emotional and social skills within the development of one's family dynamics.

This program is useful to be taught to the parents:

- To understand the emotions felt during the various stage of acceptance
- To control their emotions in case of outburst or overwhelming situation
- To reestablish a communication with their partner (or an another member of the family) on a base of sharing in a non-judgmental space and understand that his/her experience may vary from the another member of the family

## Chapter 6 - Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University: The Esec Training Course Experience

### 1. Introduction

This chapter presents the training experience of Janus Korczak Pedagogical University within the ESEC project.

The training experience was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the necessity to run the ESEC training course remotely, seeking for new forms of interaction and communication was crucial.

The following paragraphs illustrate the learning strategy of the training course and the issues occurred during its delivery.

Some notions about communication in parent-training programs are also highlighted.

The general objective of the ESEC course was to increase and improve the ability of social educators and social workers in parent-training programs, focusing on parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or sensory dysfunctions.

The importance of training parents is broadly emphasized by researchers and practitioners (Wang, Lam, Kim, Singer, & Dodds, 2016), and many studies argue the effectiveness of parent-focused interventions. For example, to improve parent wellbeing (Rutherford et al., 2019), although a research effort is needed to determine the optimal parent intervention models. Parent training has been defined as a program in which parents actively acquire parenting skills through mechanisms such as homework, modeling, or practicing skills. According to Callias, parent training refers to “educative interventions with parents that aim to help them cope better with the problems they experience with their children” (Callias, 1994, p. 918). These definitions are based on decades of research showing that active learning approaches are superior to passive approaches (e.g., Arthur et al. 1998; Joyce & Showers 2002; Salas & Cannon-Bowers 2001; Swanson & Hoskyn 2001).

The following paragraphs report the experience matured in carrying out the ESEC training course. In particular, some specific aspects are illustrated, such as the issues encountered in remote learning and notions about emotional communication, these latter useful for social educator and social workers in parent-training programs.

### 2. The remote learning context

From March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced SAN, like other European higher education institutions, to adopt online teaching-learning methods. According to the International Association of Universities:

[...] more than 1.5 billion students and youth across the planet are affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak. (International Association of Universities, 2020, <https://www.iau-aiu.net/Covid-19-Higher-Education-challenges-and-responses>).

However, the speed with which this move had to be implemented was unprecedented and often left both students and teachers utterly bewildered. Indeed, many online teaching-learning activities had to be hurriedly improvised and, consequently, their

standards of quality differed greatly from the well-planned components of previously existing online courses. Moreover, the organization of remote classes and virtual exams, as well as of the various bureaucratic activities proved very challenging.

### **2.1 Higher education institutions in Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Poland were obliged to either suspend classes entirely or switch to a remote mode of teaching.

On March 3, the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education (MSHE) issued a recommendation outlining strict preventive measures to apply in order to significantly reduce the risk of the infection spreading.

In particular, the MSHE recommended the suspension of all study trips by students, Ph.D. students, academic teachers, and researchers either to or from areas threatened with outbreaks of coronavirus COVID-19.

Normal classes and seminars for undergraduates, postgraduates, and doctoral students conducted in a traditional form remained frozen until May 24.

Most universities also published guidelines on what to do in the event of being infected, or on how to behave when staying in dormitory accommodation, and so on.

The activities of HEIs in Poland are regulated by the following authorities:

1. Government of Poland: [www.gov.pl/web/coronavirus](http://www.gov.pl/web/coronavirus)
2. Chief Sanitary Inspectorate: <https://gis.gov.pl/>
3. Ministry of Science and Higher Education: <https://www.gov.pl/web/nauka/rekomendacja-ministra-nauki-i-szkolnictwa-wyzszego-w-zwiazku-z-sytuacja-zagrozenia-epidemiologicznego-w-kontekscie-pracownikow-uczelni>
4. Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange: <https://nawa.gov.pl/en/>

On March 16, the MSUI announced a series of detailed recommendations to tackle the COVID-19 threat in the university context. These recommendations included the introduction of new modalities of working designed to protect the academic community, urging institutions as much as possible to consider the adoption of remote working. Access restrictions to buildings and premises were introduced for those who were unable to work remotely.

The MSUI recommendations also applied to undergraduates and doctoral students, outlining measures to be taken for courses to be taught remotely. To mitigate some of the disruption, a temporary flexibility was proposed in regards to various administrative procedures, such as for the acceptance of papers or documentation by university departments, as well as the extension of deadlines for submitting applications and sitting exams.

The MSUI recommendations were not binding, however, and rectors were given the final responsibility for making decisions regarding the implementation of specific measures.

In Poland, the adoption of massive online teaching-learning during the lockdown was an unheard-of experience. Although all higher education institutions had installed Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as Blackboard, Moodle, and Coursera, online

learning had not previously been widely followed.

According to research by Statistica, in 2019, only about 5% of the Polish population as a whole had participated in an online course, and 10% had used some form of online training materials. The situation is a little different if we take students into account. About 15% of students had attended an online course. Slightly more than 30% of them had used online training materials, while 23% had had contact with the teacher/instructor through educational websites and portals.

## **2.2 The remote teaching-learning experience of the Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University**

Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw (JKPU) is one of the most experienced private universities in terms of blended learning and distance learning in Poland. From 2009 thanks to the EU funds, which JKPU won the important project for digitalization of lectures, seminars, classes and others forms of academic content, JKPU has collected and prepared hundreds of e-learning content units for its students and academic staff. In years of 2009-2011 there were recorded hundreds of content units for students of JKPU. There was created e-learning platform, where were settled content with a special application for students and teachers to use it. Year by year the system of e-learning have been enlarging by content and modified and updated from the technical point of view. Despite the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, JKPU was able, thanks to its experience and e-learning platform, to continue educational process. Beside the e-platform JKPU's employees and teachers were also using such equipment as MS Teams, Webex Cisco or Skype applications to communicate with students and stakeholders of our projects such as the ESEC project.

In spite of the well prepared personnel and students of JKPU to distance learning the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic conditions in Poland forced JKPU to change the modality of the training course of its some running projects which consist of distance learning. For instance in the case of courses proposed within ESEC agenda courses, according to the ECEC proposal, the training course was articulated as follows:

1. Learners (20 participants, 20 hours face-to-face lessons; 30 hours distance learning lessons) will be taught about parent training.
2. Learners, in 4 small groups, will design, organize, and run a parent training course (15 hours face to face lessons, 50 hours of distance learning).

As soon as it was possible there were organized e-learning meetings mainly on Skype application since May/June 2020, where there was impossible to deliver face-to-face lessons. JKPU organized the training course using distance learning and e-learning modality, preserving the course's original structure. The training course was held mostly in English and with some elements of Polish language just in case of help. Participants who took part in the proposed courses of the ESEC consisted of 2 social educators/social workers participated to the online training course. Participants have been selected according to:

- Their interest in the topic of parent-training;

- Their availability;
- Access to a computer and the internet;
- Using English at least on the level B1 or mixed groups where some of them know English well;

JKPU's employee - Marek Kawa Phd organized educators/social workers who wanted to take part in the course; he helped them in understanding the given units of the courses interpreting English terms and version into Polish. The e-learning units were earlier prepared and uploaded into the Moodle system according to the requirement of the Rezekne Academy of technologies (a partner within ESEC project). It resembles the similar system of e-learning system which JKPU has possessed its own for educational purposes. JKPU organized lectures in distance learning modality, using mostly Skype. Power-point slides have been prepared for distance learning lectures.

Participants have been divided into 4 smaller groups in order to manage interactivity with them and respond to the needs of those that cannot participate in the morning sessions. Indeed, in some cases, in the morning, the same computer was shared for parents' smart working and distance learning of children. The same distance lectures were held in the morning and the evening of established before by groups. The distance learning lectures were holding as two units of 45 minutes. Exercises were organized and dividing the participants into smaller groups, and giving them tasks to perform together. Tasks were:

- Searching on the internet parent training materials to realize a short report.
- Organizing a parent-training event using the didactic materials of the training course.

Educators supported the groups of learners. Basing on the case of the ESEC project the curriculum of the courses was referring to problems and issues of pedagogy and dealing with special pedagogy. There were some special popular topics in the proposed content such as: Communicating with other parents, [Family disruption](#), [Emotional interaction](#), [Reducing stress](#), [Preventing and responding to sexual abuse of disabled children](#)...etc.

Beside the theoretical tasks there were also proposed some practical assignments. Therefore participants in the group were asked to read some literature analysis. Their work aimed to study the difficulties mainly reported by parents who daily interface with the Autistic Spectrum Disorder or other disorders of their children with special needs. In their analysis, the authors report the key points and the most challenging macro-areas in this scope.

Referring to the main difficulties that emerged, parental stress occupies a position of considerable importance. Indeed, it has been empirically shown that parents caring for a child with special needs experience significantly higher stress levels than parents of typically developing children.

Of course JKPU developed in its system of e-learning the evaluation methods to verify and enhance the system, application itself and the work of JKPU teachers and lecturers who have been involved in distance learning already for ten years. In the case of ESEC e-learning courses



the completed evaluation documents were also collected and submitted.

### 3. The ESEC teaching-learning

Proposed structure is reflecting the presented fields of training. In this regard, the first part is dedicated to the participants who wish to learn or improve their range and level of skills and competencies mostly which have to do with emotional communication skills. From among the above-listed skills, parents who up-bring, educate, protect and support their disabled children should particularly make use in their everyday work of those skills which are useful for emotional communication. It is desirable to focus more on soft skills than on the hard ones, because they open the way to effective involvement, cooperation and communication.

In the second part there are issues of social emotional learning and emotional intelligence for parenting with competence. There is no doubt that social and emotional skills obviously matter in raising children. Huge majorities of parents admit that they need a fair amount or a lot more support to learn social and emotional skills. In these days there is a higher awareness that parents of children with intellectual disabilities undoubtedly feel categories of emotions that are substantially different to those of parents of typically developing peers. Mother - child and father - child relationships due to the context of disorders or impairments are special, stressful, maybe rewarding, but still extremely challenging. The emotional wellbeing of parents of children with special needs is negatively affected, as there is probably no event more devastating to a family than a child born with a birth defect.

The last major part of the training consists of practical approaches for communicating and cooperating with other parents of children with disabilities. Children and adults have their basic psychological needs. Meeting them is important for personal wellbeing. Parents when working together, communicating and cooperating in a satisfactory way develop attitudes and behaviors that bring opportunities for the fulfillment of the child's psychological needs to a lesser or greater extent rather than to complete satisfaction. Fundamental psychological needs of individuals can be divided into at least three categories:

- The need for connection with important person/s in the environment, for love, acceptance, close relationships, a <safe base> and for security, predictability and stability of this connection.

- The need for autonomy, independence, appreciation, freedom of choice. It relates to experiencing self-initiative, freedom of choice, feeling that I am the one directing my own behavior and making decisions important for my life (rather than

behaving under duress and extrinsic pressure).

- The need for competence, the ability to have an effect on the people and things that surround the child and to master knowledge and skills.

In general, parents of children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs) need good communication with and efficient support from various environments: other family members, siblings, teachers, professionals.

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