

ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership Project
"Extending Social Educators Competences/ESEC"
2018-1-PL-KA204-051126

"Communication with professionals and educators"

ABSTRACT

The situation of COVID 19 in 2020 changed the plans of the sessions and workgroups of the whole project. The Projected activities and communication with the course participants were limited to totally on-line ways of communication and distance learning. The project organizers had to changed and adjusted the prepared organizational settings and materials to unexpected conditions of pandemia, as well as conducting sessions and activities. Therefore one of the results of training activities of ESEC is the offer of training handbook.

The Handbook Report consists of description of chapters developed by each international partner to provide more detailed information about materials, considerations and suggestions based on its own and national experience in that field. Some parts of it also are based on the 2020 sessions of parent educators developed in each country, within the framework of the European project Erasmus + ESEC "Extending Social Educators Competences".

This report contains the content of the learning unit prepared by By Janusz Korczak Pedagogical University in Warsaw (JKPU), which is a leader of the project ESEC, including the training course held mostly by then internet communicators in JKPU, where participants who wishe to take part into come from all over Poland.

In this chapter there is presented material on "Communication with professionals and educators" with the aim of the completion of a training course organized by JKPU (Poland).

In the context of COVID-pandemia even more we may observe how ways of communication are affecting our life and activities. Gaining practical and precise knowledge, using variety of channels of communication especially have impact on quality of life for families of children with behavioral disabilities or children with special needs. For such families and parents a new knowledge and enhancements of their life, assessment methods understanding and assessing parent's needs, suitable methods to support families in order to improve their quality of life and motivated to self care are enormously important. Therefore communication skills are so crucial for this triad: children - parents – professionals/educators of which is devoted this chapter.

Teachers communicate with students, parents, colleagues and administrators every day. Whether communicated face-to-face, on the phone, in print, electronically or through the public address system, the message must be constructed carefully and delivered clearly to be properly received. Good handwriting, spelling and grammar are very important in all forms of written communication.

In our proposed training topic: "Communication with professionals and educators" we offered for participants the following structure of needed content:

- SECTION 1: Introduction where we put our proposal, approach and context of the subject of training.
- SECTION 2: We introduce the context of New Technologies of Communication Applied to Education with Short Historical Review.
- SECTION 3: We present how communication skills are used in of education.
- SECTION 4: We present Communication strategies and good practices.
- SECTION 5: We describe the main subjects-actors of communication process within triad: parents – student – educator.

Educators and parents just from professionals receive many inspirations in dealing with difficult situation of bridging interactive gaps but also how to get into inside of soul and mentality of interlocutors as children, parents...etc. One of the helpful method is a group of cognitive tools and methods.

They are usually referred to as unconventional methods. Their most important feature is to focus attention on the learner and ask for his right - to take into account his sense of security, learning style, interests and preferences. These methods pay attention not only to what we want to learn, but also to how to do it. They remind you that communication is taught not only to the mind but also to the body and even emotions. They try to incorporate knowledge in the field of learning psychology to reduce the child's effort and increase the efficiency of communication. These methods are increasingly adopted as the philosophy of language schools, but even more often they enrich the repertoire of conventional methods and the eclectic communication method with their techniques. Here are the most important of them: Whole body method (TPR) This method, called Total Physical Response for short TPR, was developed in the 70s in the United States by James Asher. It is based on the assumption that two types of student behavior - silent listening and physical movement related to the content of the message - are conducive to learning and permanent remembering of new language material. By these group of unconventional means and methods there are coming with help of effecting communication a variety of digital of social media.

Such communicators as Whats'up, Twitter, Messenger...etc. probably are not the best online tool for two-way communication, but it can still serve as a fast, simple tool for daily class updates. If you go this way, it's probably best to keep things simple with quick, one-way classwork, homework, and announcement posts.

However, the goal in using any social network for two-way partner communication should be to boost involvement, and engage beneficiaries on the platforms they already use. For this, in recent years some educators have turned to using a closed Facebook group for their class. Parents and students can join, and everyone's posts to the group page will show up in only the closed group, not on their personal Facebook feeds.

1. Introduction.

Communication skills are important for many professions but are crucial for teachers/educators. Teachers communicate with students, parents, colleagues and administrators every day. Whether communicated face-to-face, on the phone, in print, electronically or through the public address system, the message must be constructed carefully and delivered clearly to be properly received. Good handwriting, spelling and grammar are very important in all forms of written communication. As long as you're considering a social media option, what about using Instagram or Snapchat to connect? It may seem far-fetched, but these platforms could offer powerful new ways to connect with and engage partners. More than a few teachers are already going this route and finding success. No matter what kind of online outreach strategy is used, it should go without saying, of course, to always keep your students' (and parents') privacy and safety in mind. Never post anything to a public forum that contains anyone's personally identifiable information, and be cognizant of what "private" really means on various social platforms; and no matter where you connect, remember to keep your posts brief, helpful, informative, and professional.

Key learning point of this training

- Understanding the importance of the interpersonal communicating and relationship between the members of the families involved in the care taking of the child and educators or professionals.
- Introducing a variety and different experiences in the communicating of stakeholders.
- Providing tools and advice to help the teachers, families and professionals.
- How to improve and ease the communication: i.e. how to provide a message clearly and with tact within the triad (*parents-educator-student*).
- How teachers/professionals should be comfortable communicating with parents and in regular way using phone calls and the latest devices of electronic (ICT, Apps, TCT...) and social media communication.

Expected achievements:

- to facilitate the kind of social interactions and relationship between the members of the families involved in the care taking of the child and educators or professionals.

In the beginning we have to describe the key roles of agents of communication in the context of relationships: educator/teacher – professionals – students - parents of students (sometimes students with special needs).

Communicating to Parents

Teachers must be able to express themselves both verbally and in writing in order to report student progress to parents. They need to explain the strengths and weaknesses of their students so that parents will understand the message and be receptive rather than defensive. This is especially important when the teacher conveys a difficult message about the student's misbehavior or learning problems. The message must be delivered clearly and with tact. Teachers should be comfortable communicating with parents regularly, with phone calls and informal notes in addition to formal report cards.

Interacting with Colleagues and Supervisors

Although teaching is often done in the isolation of a classroom without the presence of other adults, good teaching involves consultation with colleagues. Schools that see themselves as professional learning communities encourage teachers to plan lessons together and learn from one another. They take a team approach when problem-solving, especially for difficult students. This all requires excellent communication. Teachers stay abreast of new developments in education by reading journals, listening to new ideas from their administrators and school board consultants, and sharing and discussing these ideas with colleagues.

Teaching Individuals and Groups

Communication is both receptive and expressive. Teachers/educators must be skilled at listening to their students as well as explaining things clearly. Teachers need clarity of thought to present their ideas and instructions. They must be able to break down complex ideas into simpler parts and smaller steps to transmit to their students. They must be able to adapt their methods of communication to all students regardless of ability or learning style. They are able to "read" their students and adapt to the needs of the individual. Effective communication includes transforming the boring into the interesting and having good presentation skills.

Communicating Caring

In addition, good teachers communicate concern and caring by their tone of voice and use of body language. They transmit genuine commitment and affection for their students. Good teachers care about their students' progress and let their students know it at all times. They learn their students' names early in the school year and use their names when addressing them. They get to know their students' hopes, fears and preferences and communicate this knowledge to their students. They communicate their appreciation for what their students do by celebrating their successes and constantly encouraging them. This helps students feel recognized and validated.

2. New Technologies of Communication Applied to Education. Short Historical Review

Most young people, active educators and professionals use technology to facilitate the kind of social interactions that we all recognize. There is always a smaller group of digital pioneers in focus group that is pushing at the boundaries of conventional practice. For every focus group there is a 'leader of the pack' who used to be one step ahead of the rest. These individuals have strong digital identities and are making the shift from consumption to creation. A range of characteristics is common to this type of activity – self-motivation, ownership, purposeful creativity and peer-to-peer learning.

According to diagnosis of professor Hugh Bradlow (2015) today's ICT environment can be characterized in terms by three significant trends which also condition required communication skills and competencies:

1. Computing is moving into the cloud and consequently becoming abundant and cheap;
2. Media distribution is shifting from broadcast to broadband, thereby creating the technology environment for immersive solutions that allow realistic telepresence;
3. Environmental pressures such as climate change, food and water supply, as well as social pressures including security, health and an ageing population, are creating the need to measure the world around us so that we can influence it.

Therefore these trends are supported by a range of emerging and compilation of technologies:

- Cloud services;
- The Internet of Things;
- Big Data;
- Artificial intelligence and robots.
- 5G and 6G platforms.

Necessary skills and competencies will follow these areas of ICT and will be to some extent dependent on them. For example users of electronic data will have to obtain sophisticated knowledge on solutions to surf in such environment of electronic data. New employees have to master the technical ability to take particular sort of data and store it in a scalable cloud-computing environment (i.e. Big Data). In many circumstances, there can be a need to analyze data in real-time (consider, for example, medical monitoring where timely intervention is critical). Next significant change was tendency that the computer is now out of the box. Recent technological breakthroughs are turning non-routine tasks into well-defined problems.

3..A little historical perspective

Technological ways of communication as well as other changes have not always been viewed as positive ones. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates regretted the introduction of written text because he felt it would reduce the skill of memory and the ability to engage in active discourse – skills that were necessary for an informed citizen of his day. He felt that written text was something worse than oral discourse because of its lack of interactivity – the reader could not engage in dialogue with it. Till these days skills in decoding and comprehending written text have become the core of our conception of literacy. The invention of the printing press made the knowledge encoded in text available to a larger number of people, and it started to make mass literacy an important part of everyday life. The press and the enlarged knowledge caused significant social transformations, such as the rise of Protestantism and the scientific revolution. Recent years have seen a tremendous growth of technological development, much of it related to the invention of the computer and the internet. In the fifty years from the end of the Second World War to the eve of the second millennium, computers evolved from huge, almost room-sized machines used for military needs to the compact, typewriter-sized devices found in a third of American homes, half of American workplaces, and in classrooms serving more than 70% of American students.

Over the past 40 years, we have seen unprecedented advances in computing and communications that have led to powerful technology resources and tools for learning. In these days, low-cost Internet access devices, easy-to-use digital authoring tools, and the Web allow access to information and multimedia learning content, communication, and collaboration. They provide the ability to participate in online learning communities that cross disciplines, organizations, international boundaries, and cultures (Transforming American Education, 2010: 11). In less than twenty-five years – roughly half the evolutionary time of computers – the internet grew from a top-secret military computer network designed to survive a nuclear first strike into a popular information system. Almost from the very beginning of computerizing process computers have been used systematically in the teaching and learning. We can find that already since the 1960s, another important step was the introduction of the personal computer (PC) in the late 1970s that made computers accessible to a wider audience.

Lack of technology also limits communication opportunities for many families. Teachers should never assume that students have access to technology at home (Ramirez, 2001). They should survey parents regarding access to voice mail, computers, and the internet. In addition, many teachers and parents are still uncomfortable with the use of technology. thus, Ramirez noted that “paper-based” communication should still have a fundamental place in the overall communication strategy of the school, despite extensive technology use. Importantly, the rules to written communication also apply to e-mail and webbased content, and confidentiality of personal information must be ensured.

Some pedagogical theories helped to introduce the ICT infrastructure into education and made this process smooth and useful. It allowed large information-based software packages such as encyclopedias to be cheaply and easily distributed. As a result educators became more focused on the use of the technology to improve student learning. In this day because of possibilities of such tools like iPods, iPhones, smartphones, tablets, and the large internet sources consisting of wikis, blogs, podcasting, bookmarking...etc. the resources, materials, dictionaries and other needed staff for teaching and learning are available almost on the same level to teachers as well as to students for twenty four hours a day.

4..How some pedagogical theories and methods have exploited and influenced communication in education.

The first theory which made enormous influence on the educational process was Jean Piaget concept of segmentation in upbringing and adaptation with organization as well also effected to some extent applying ICT means to education. Piaget early around 20's of last century believed that two principles guided intellectual growth and biological development: adaptation and organization. He believed in 4 developmental stages that affect a child's learning. Computer programs (games, videos, etc) found online can teach students different concepts while matching their developmental stage. There are many websites that teachers can access to develop student's phonemic awareness while matching their develop stage. The another theory in history of upbringing and education was Dewey's Experiential Education Learning Theory from 1938. Dewey is most known for his beliefs regarding experiential learning. In 1938, he published "Experience and Education" and it had a profound impact on progressive education. Dewey regarded education in a democracy as a tool to enable a person to integrate his or her culture. Dewey's theory continues to influence the design of innovative educational experiences. This theory can be used in conjunction with technology to design activities that allow students to explore a topic.

The next influential concept of approach to student was B. F. Skinner's theory of reinforcement which was employed within pedagogy and language acquisition too. Skinner's theory of reinforcement helped to establish the Behaviorism and Programmed Instruction movement, which states that learning should have clear behavioral objectives, small chunk of instruction, self-pacing, and immediate feedback. Teachers can use this theory with technology in many ways. They can use the theory of reinforcement to teach young students how to correctly use a computer, type, open/save documents, but also apply to grammar drills and vocabulary acquisition. Also around 50's and 60's became J. S. Bruner's psychological theory of discovery learning. Discovery learning is an inquiry-based, constructivist learning theory that takes place in problem-solving situation. According to Bruner, his theory promotes student engagement and motivation, autonomy and responsibility, and develops students' creativity and problem-solving skills. Most modern technology is based on the idea of discovery learning. Students can engage in discovery learning by researching a topic online, engaging in simulations, etc. Therefore electronic media and social media which provide safe distance for interlocutors may help to engage students and teachers/educators much more than it used to be having to do with traditional ways of communication.

The base of constructivism which today became the core of teaching and learning process is another helpful for ICT involvement, which is Vygotsky's Social Development Theory. Let us remind you that Lev Vygotsky's theory consists of three major assertions: one of them says that social interaction plays a huge role in cognitive development, the another points that the more knowledgeable other refers to someone of a higher ability level, and the last one is the idea of zone of proximal development. Modern technology programs can determine a child's ZPD (i.e., accelerated reader, MAP testing, etc) and teaching and learning largely bases on the importance of social interaction within for example of language acquisition.

From the historical point of view of enhancing communication strategies, including also in a education field the educators and professionals should take into account the cognitive theory widely spread in education which outlines nine instructional events and corresponding cognitive processes in pedagogical communication: gaining attention (reception), informing learners of the objective (expectancy), stimulating recall of prior learning (retrieval), presenting the stimulus (selective perception), providing learning guidance (semantic encoding), eliciting performance (responding), providing feedback (reinforcement), assessing performance (retrieval), enhancing retention and transfer (generalization). These stages should satisfy or provide helpful the necessary conditions for learning communicating and serve as the basis for designing instruction and selecting appropriate media (Gagne, Briggs & Wager, 1992).

Expressed communication involves one-way or two-way exchanges (Berger, 1991). One-way communication occurs when teachers seek to inform parents about events, activities, or student progress through a variety of sources, such as an introductory letter at the beginning of the school year, classroom or school newsletters, report cards, communication books, radio announcements, school Web sites, and so on. Two-way communication involves interactive dialogue between teachers and parents. Conversations may occur during telephone calls, home visits, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and various school-based community activities. Teachers should actively incorporate both strategies to maximize sharing information with parents.

If we examine the main indicators of skills and competences determined as necessary for work, we are left with two main groups of basic capabilities: one referring to a broad range of literacy skills, ranging from comprehensive reading to writing or mastering foreign languages, and the second focusing more on soft skills deriving from personality and habits. Understanding this point could serve to orientate the first steps to take in preparing individuals for future professional careers.

One of the most successful educational approaches, not only in a strict learning sense but also in terms of preparing individuals to compete in the wider world and to gain new competences and skills, is that taken in Finland. The educational system implemented in Finland represents one of the most innovative social and educational systems in Europe, and worldwide. Also it concerns communicating teachers/educators with parents, professionals and students as well. What is remarking in this comparison is that, on the side of the Finnish paradigm, there is a significant focus on the individual learner/student and his Q&A skills, who is at the center and the core of all the educational and skilling activities. A student is the base in the triad: parents – student – educators. As we can observe from the above table, therefore, such skills as creativity, risk taking, responsibility, and individualization, are considered as being absolutely crucial by Finnish educators, teachers, and counselors, irrespective of the family background, or socioeconomic status of the student, or of any other factors or conditions. These are crucial because they are derived from the pedagogical idea of asking questions and questioning things and ideas too. We can also add here that such values as relationships built on trust and belief are laid down as a corner stone of this educational system.

It demonstrates a fundamentally different approach to work in education and process of socialization in which, instead of the tendency to focus on the process of teaching, the stress has been put on the process of learning, in particular focusing on objectives and competencies rather than content, and focusing on the joy of learning, on a collaborative operational culture, on individualizing learning paths, etc. In fact, the Finnish approach, cognitive one, which has been so successful, demonstrates the effects of a holistic learning in which the ethos is “no student left behind” by close relationship with students, children, proposing a crucially different structure of applied skills and competences that is clearly worth considering (Figure 3).

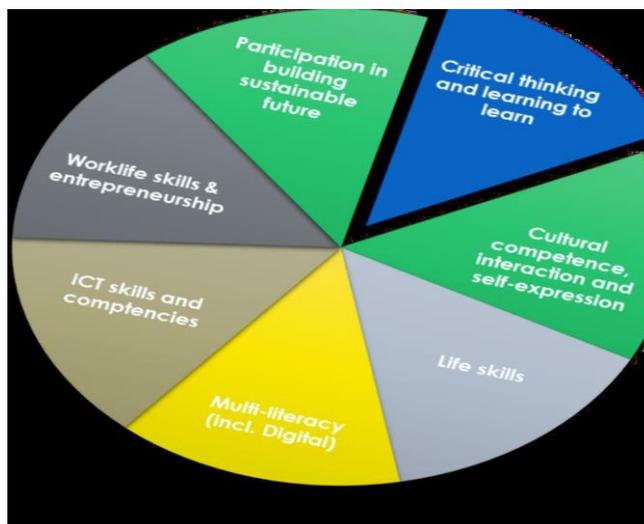


Figure 3. Key skills in the Finnish approach (source: prepared by Tiina Malste for a presentation of the Finnish Educational system, given at the Finnish Embassy in Warsaw, Poland, May 8th, 2019).

There are so many proposals and predictions concerning future, essential sets of skills and competences. Sooner or later, students must face this challenge, and how well they do so will depend in a decisive way on their given model of education. There is no question that elements from such successful models of education as the Scandinavian, Japanese, or Israeli ones should come to play a key and important role in the acquisition of these new skills & competences.

Communication strategies and good practices

In such fundamental triad of educational communication, which was pointed out by the way of Finnish approach, the key issue is the problem of clear and comprehensive communication with parents of student or kid. Personal contact, including conferences, home visits, telephone calls, and curriculum nights or open houses, seems to be the most effective form of communication and may be among the most familiar. However, the establishment of effective school-home communication has grown more complex as society has changed. The great diversity among families means that it is not possible to rely on a single method of communication that will reach all homes with a given message. It is essential that a variety of strategies, adapted to the needs of particular families and their schedules, be incorporated into an overall plan.

Some strategies consider unusual tools and means, such as:

- Parent newsletters,
- Annual open houses
- Curriculum nights
- Home visits (where applicable)
- Phone calls
- Annual school calendars
- Inserts in local newspapers
- Annual grandparents or "special persons" days
- Involving a person who is responsible on the local level for education process (i.e. Board of Education spokesperson, education assistant, counselor...etc.) or communications officer to regular meetings in school, preschool..etc.
- Homework hotlines
- Annual field days
- Notices and handouts in local markets, clinics, churches, mosques, temples, or other gathering sites
- Website for the school
- Workshops for parents
- Communications that are focused on fathers as well as mothers.

Now let us look at a few practical effective communication strategies which involve such staged activities as:

- **Initiation:** teachers/ educators should initiate contact as soon as they know which students will be in their classroom for the school year. A such contact can occur by means of an introductory phone call or a letter to the home introducing yourself to the parents and establishing expectations.
- **Timeliness:** adults should make contact soon after a problem that has been identified, so a timely solution can be found. Waiting too long can create new problems, possibly through the frustration of those involved.
- **Consistency and frequency:** parents want frequent, ongoing feedback about how their children are performing with homework.
- **Follow-through:** parents and teachers want to see that the other will actually do what they say they will do.
- **Clarity and usefulness of communication:** parents and teachers should have the information they need to help students, in a form and language that makes sense to them.

There may be a very useful idea to sometimes surprise positively a parent. Because parents are not accustomed to hearing unsolicited positive comments from teachers about their children, especially through a phone call from the school educator should try to imagine how you would feel, as a parent, if you were contacted by a teacher or the school principal and were told that your son or daughter was doing well in school, or that your child had overcome a learning or behavior problem. When you make calls to share positive information with parents, be prepared for them to sound pleasantly surprised. Research shows that school-home communication is greatly increased through personalized positive telephone contact between teachers and parents. Remember, when a phone call from school conveys good news, the atmosphere between home and school improves. When educators/teachers have good news to share, they do not have to wait, but can make the call and start a positive relationship with a parent; this is a much better occasion than any unpleasant case of student's school behavior.

Phone guidelines to communicate

Sometimes, as a new teacher or educator, it's difficult to make the first call to a parent or care taker/giver. Before making a call, a teacher should write down the reasons for the call. One reason can be simply to introduce yourself to the parent or taker/giver. Here are several guidelines to follow for being well prepared:

- Introducing self;
- Tell the parents what or how their child is studying, present that brighter side of it than negative one;
- Invite the parents to an open house and/or other school events, meetings, charities...etc.;
- Inform them of their child's achievements (taking part in school/preschool competitions, "the Best Homework Award"
- Inform them of their child's/kid's, strengths or share an anecdote;

Moreover, preparing your individual communication strategy, please also take into account the given key points which may be quite helpful too, such as:

- Effective communication is a key to positive partnerships with parents.
- Effective communication involves active listening and clear, respectful speaking.
- When professionals and parents share knowledge and experience, it's good for children's wellbeing and development.

Communicating with diverse families and environment

No family is the same. For example, families with vulnerabilities, rainbow families, blended families and culturally and linguistically diverse families all have different support and communication needs. In general, a family-centered approach can help educator better understand what different families need.

Different families are likely to respond to the chosen communication strategies and support in different ways too. So it might help to be aware of how to communicate verbally and non-verbally with families. Sometimes there are bilingual families who speak two or more languages or dialects. For example, if a teacher speaks a different language than a family, then he or she might need to use non-verbal signals more. Sometimes a smile can be more powerful in building a trusting relationship with parents than verbal communication. Of course, it would be great if teacher/educator should learn some basics of their language or dialect to get some of their trust. Moreover, if there is possible educator/teacher should learn some specifics channels of communication within a given family, especially with children of special needs.

Cultural and personal differences are very sensitive issue and require careful approach because it heavily affects the way teacher communicates and receive feedback; educators may ask others or do some research online or in books. Effective communication between educators and parents or other stakeholders is important -- if not crucial -- for helping to achieve educational aims. Of course, every case, situation, group, student, child, teen or classroom is unique, and we all face different challenges: Some teachers suffer from inbox fatigue trying to keep up with a constant barrage of parent emails, while others struggle to get parents involved at all. It all depends on situation.

Very important for educator/ teacher is being of proactive; any time educator could streamline the parent-teacher-student communication chain, she or he spent less time responding to parent phone calls and emails, and students tended to perform better. It requires a bit more work up front, but when everyone's on board:

- Parents wonder less about what's going on at school. When everyone's in the loop, at-home conversations about schoolwork are more productive. Parents are empowered to work with teachers as allies to help their kids succeed.
- Teachers have more time and energy to focus on in-class learning. Believe it or not, the more you reach out to parents (and students) proactively as a group, the less time you'll spend reacting to questions and concerns over email or by phone. When questions do arise, they'll likely be more informed and constructive.
- Students take more accountability for their own learning. With clear expectations and a supportive team of in-the-know parents and teachers, kids are more likely to perform and do their best work.

The most important thing is simply to keep everyone on the same page -- parents, students, and teachers. It's probably never been simpler, thanks to a bevy of great edtech options available today. Consider how you might utilize one or a number of new tools in combination with the parent-outreach strategies you're already using.

4. Practical issues for social educators.

Parents are experts on their own children. When you work in partnership with parents, you'll get the best outcomes for children. Effective communication builds understanding and trust. And when educators and parents understand and trust each other, for all sides there'll be better to work together to support children's wellbeing and development. This is why effective communication is key to establishing and maintaining positive partnerships with parents. For professionals working with parents, a positive partnership means sharing knowledge and experience to understand a child's situation, and it can lead to developing plans together to support the child. Therefore the key aim of well communicated our triad is to bridge gaps and deal with communication barriers, They are identifiable obstacles in the learning environment that prevent effective exchange of influential ideas, or strategies between educators and parents that work against academic success of learners (Stalker, Brunner, Maguire, & Mitchell, 2011).

Laluvein (2010) examined the context of teacher decisions in connection to children with special educational needs. The first session engaged uniquely with the perspectives of parents and the second session involved a separate interview with parents and teachers that spoke about individual children as well as their perspectives concerning one another (Laluvein, 2010). Data were drawn from a small-scale interview of 10 pairs of parents and mainstreamed primary teachers jointly involved in providing an education to the child that was giving cause for concern (Laluvein, 2010). Based on the data in the transcripts of parents and teachers, the facts surprisingly showed that an initial consensus of concern occasionally emerges (Laluvein, 2010). Consensus existed among parents, professionals and teachers, who shared both similarities and differences concerning the understanding and interpretations of the cause and nature of children's educational difficulties (Laluvein, 2010). The mutual respect, effective communication, and action were perceived to be appropriate and increased the space for extending understanding and negotiating provisions among parents and teachers (Laluvein, 2010).

Listening to parents

Listening is the foundation of effective communication. When you listen well, you get more information about children and their families. You also get the full benefit of parents' in-depth knowledge of their children. And you show parents that you value their experience, ideas and opinions and take their concerns seriously.

Here are some ideas for listening well to follow:

- Let parents know that they are listening and interested by nodding or saying some quasi meaningless words occasionally.
- Let parents finish what they're saying before educator speaks. Then summarize what parents have said, and check that you've understood correctly.
- Check on the feeling as well as the content of what parents have said. For example, 'Am I right in saying that you felt upset when the other parent told Peter to stop shouting?'
- Use open-ended questions to get more information if you need it. Open-ended questions give people a chance to expand on what they're saying rather than just saying 'yes' or 'no'. For example, 'What sort of things did Peter do when he was being naughty?'
- Try to understand parents' perspectives, even if you disagree with what they're saying. Put yourself in their shoes. For example, 'It sounds like you felt judged as a parent'.

Speaking with parents

In every interaction with parents, one of your goals is to strengthen your partnership with them. You're more likely to achieve this goal if you consistently speak to parents in a clear, respectful and considerate way.

Here are some ideas for this kind of speaking:

- Find and share the positives about a child's learning, behaviour and experiences. For example, 'Peter did a great job of sitting still for two minutes in class today. It's a big step forward for her'.
- Be open and honest. Give parents accurate information on what you observe. For example, 'After a couple of minutes, Peter started pushing the child next to her'.
- Think before you speak, especially when you're talking with parents about difficult or sensitive issues.
- Ask for parents' input. For example, 'How can we help Peter to learn of taking part in group work without distracting other children?'
- Let parents make the decisions. You can suggest ideas, but it's up to parents to decide what to do next. For example, 'We could try a behaviour chart. Or Peter could start with short group activities and build up to longer ones. What do you think?'
- If you're not sure about what to say next or how to say it, you don't have to respond straight away. For example, 'I'd like to think about that more. Can I get back to you tomorrow?'
- Use ordinary, everyday language that parents can understand. Parents are likely to find professional jargon daunting and alienating, so it's best avoided.

Raising concerns with parents

As a professional, there might be times when you need to raise concerns with parents about a child's behavior, wellbeing or development. A problem-solving approach will help you and parents work together to address concerns. This approach involves:

- identifying the problem;
- brainstorming as many solutions as possible;
- jointly evaluating the pros and cons;
- deciding on a solution to try;
- putting the solution into action;
- reviewing the solution after a period of time.

One of the keys to this approach is talking about concerns when they come up. Problems usually don't go away by themselves. And if you leave them to escalate they might be more difficult to repair later.

Here are some tips for putting this approach into action:

- Prepare for conversations about difficult issues. This is because parents can feel upset and stressed by these conversations. If you think ahead about what you need to say and about the most sensitive and respectful way to say it, it can help your discussion go well.
- Try to schedule a time when parents are most available. For example, if you're a child care educator or a teacher, this might be at pick-up and drop-off times. Or it might be best to call parents during the day.
- Discuss concerning behaviour without judgment. Try to focus on facts and whether the behaviour is appropriate. For example, 'Ben drew on the wall and said that another child did it. This behaviour isn't OK'.
- Explain what might contribute to the behaviour. This can help you and parents work out how to change the behaviour. For example, 'Starting school can be challenging. Children often feel worried about getting into trouble'.
- Check what parents think about the issue. Remember that perceptions of what's appropriate can differ between cultures or contexts. For example, 'How does your family handle it when children don't tell the truth?'
- Offer realistic strategies suited to each family. For example, if a child needs to make new friends but she gets stressed in public, parents might start by inviting other children for playdates at home.

It's good to keep talking with parents after the initial meeting to see how things are going. You can schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss whether your agreed strategies are working out or if a new approach might help.

5. Practical issues for parents. Training.

Reading activities:

Activity 1:

Read the definition included below and propose your interpretation and understanding of „communication partnership” based on your experience:

According to Epstein (2001), the definition of communication partnership in education includes the following:

Both the direct and the indirect verbal and nonverbal exchange of student information between parents and educators in the learning environment works to benefit instruction of children. When parents and educators communicate effectively as it related to student's education, thus creating a partnership which plays a positive role in children's education, therefore causing children do better in school. (p. 113)

Reference: Epstein, J. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Aim of the activity:

- Understand how important is cooperation between educator and children's parents.

Task to carry on:

- Discuss your interpretation and understanding of „communication partnership” based on your experience.

Activity 2:

Read the article linked below and watch the linked video:

1. Reh, F. John. (2019), Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills at Work.

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/improving-your-communication-skills-at-work-2275766>

2. "Learn How to COMMUNICATE!" | Jordan B. Peterson (@jordanbpeterson) | [#Entspresso](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6A4-fuK4cg>

Aim of the activity:

- review and estimate your communication skills;

Task to carry on:

- evaluate your communication skills after reading the linked article and watching the linked video.
- ask yourself how to bridge your communication gap and flaws?

References:

American Federation of Teachers, (2007). *Building Parent-Teacher Relationships*. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/building-parent-teacher-relationships>. Last accessed 27.04.2020.

Berger, E. H. (1991). *Parents as partners in education: The school and home working together*. New York: Macmillan.

Bradlow, H. (2015). 'The impact of emerging technologies in the workforce of the future'. In *Australia's future workforce?* CEDA, pp. 39-47.

Effecting communication with parents; for professionals. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/professionals/working-with-parents/communicating-with-parents/communication-with-parents#effective-communication-why-its-important-nav-title>. Last accessed 27.04.2020.

Gagne, R. (1962). "Military training and principles of learning". *American Psychologist*, 17, 263-276.

Gagne, R., Briggs, L. & Wager, W. (1992). *Principles of Instructional Design* (4th Ed.). Fort Worth, TX: HBJ College Publishers.

How Parents and Teacher Can Collaborate to Help Students. <https://eduzaurus.com/free-essay-samples/how-parents-and-teacher-can-collaborate-to-help-students/>. Last accessed 27.04.2020.

Laluvein, J. (2010). Variations on a theme: Parents and teachers talking. *British Journal of Learning Support*, 25(4), 194-199. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9604.2010.01466.x

McIlwain Mary, Kay Hutchinson, *Technology in Education*, <http://www.timetoast.com/timelines/56401>

Newhouse C. P., (2002) "Literature Review. The Impact of ICT on Learning and Teaching". December 2002, *Specialist Educational Services Perth*, Western Australia.

Ramirez, F. (2001). „Technology and parent involvement”. *Clearing House*, 75(1), 30-31. Survey of 1000 homeowners living with children under the age of 16. 'Teenagers in hi-tech world of their own', *Guardian*, 8 Jul 2003, cited at www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/media.html.

Transforming American Education. Powered by Technology. Education Publications Center Alexandria 2010 .

Taylor, M. Boney, (2016). *Communication Between Educators and Parents in Title I Elementary Schools*. Walden University Scholar Works. Last accessed 27.04.2020.