

Strengthening ties between family and school

4TH TRAINING SESSION
MELS
FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN FOR
4-YEAR-OLDS FROM DISADVANTAGED AREAS
Chantal Hamel
Nathalie Guimont
May 26, 2014



Aims of the activity



To become aware of obstacles to collaboration with parents.

To initiate a process of reflection:

- on the expectations of those concerned
- on strategies for **reaching parents** and **encouraging them to stay involved** in order to **strengthen ties and ensure continuity** between the family and the school

Expectations . . . a two-way street

Collaboration with parents is important

Larivée (2012); Larivée (2010); Deslandes (2006); Deslandes and Bertrand (2004); MELS (2000); MELS (2004); Epstein (2001); Saint-Laurent et al. (1994)

Collaboration

- promotes success
- influences a child's sense of well-being
- helps with a child's social and school adjustment
- increases school attendance
- has a positive influence on motivation and ambition
- has a positive impact on parents
- has a positive impact on teachers

The teachers' main expectation is that parent participation will be reflected in **supervision at home.**

(Larivée 2010a)



Expectations . . . a two-way street



Parents also **want** an educational partnership with the school

(Deslandes, Fournier and Rousseau 2005)

- Involvement with the child (help, listening, encouragement, desire to learn, guidance, respect, validation, etc.)
- Involvement with the parent (communication, closeness, trust, etc.)
- Teacher's competence on a personal level (human qualities, warmth)
- Teacher's competence on a professional level (ability to communicate clearly, provide support and guidance, etc.)

Expectations . . . a two-way street

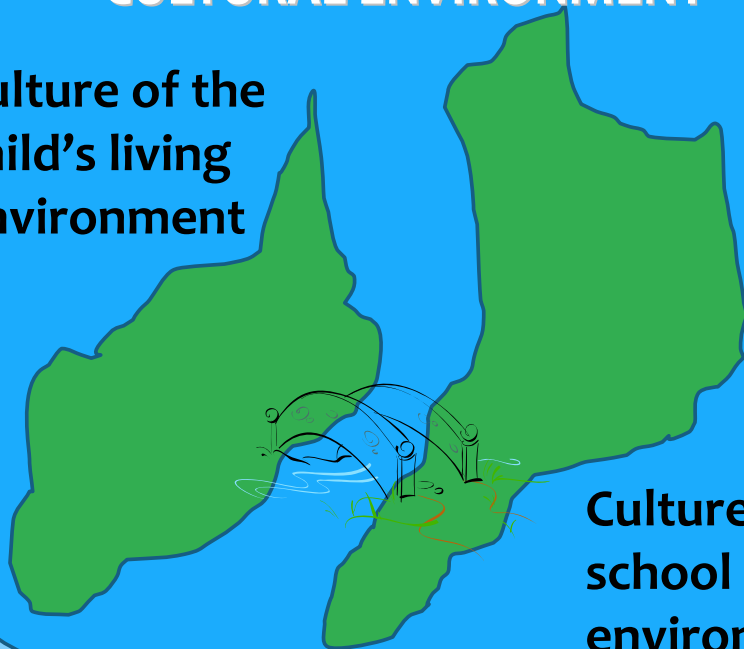
The desired partnership is not reflected in everyday practice

- Collaboration is essentially limited to the communications plan required under the *Basic school regulation*. (Kalubi and Lesieux 2006)
- Numerous obstacles are identified in the literature.

Cultural environment

PRIMARY CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT AND SECONDARY CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Culture of the child's living environment



Culture of the school environment

- Prejudices
- Fears
- Misunderstandings

- Leadership
- Mutual trust
- Incentives
- Support for communication
- Culture of collaboration



Prejudice

An **entrenched** opinion,
an accepted idea,
a judgment passed

by a person
or
group

without obtaining accurate
information or checking
the facts properly

about a
person,
group,
or
situation

Appeals to feelings and mental
images that **shape** one's
perceptions of reality

Originates in a given milieu, at
a particular time, and shows
bias against someone else

Is conveyed, repeated, said
seriously or as a joke, which
gives it strength



FAMILIES IN THEIR DAY

Life as we see it, Québec, 2014

Sound and images to a song by Plume
Latraverse: *Les pauvres* (The poor)



Simulation

- * A mother who has just received her cheque owes the daycare \$200.
- * She says she can't pay this week and arranges to give a small amount on the 20th of the month.
- * You go shopping that afternoon and see her coming out of a big box store. She has a large flat screen TV in her cart—on special this week for \$400.
- * Feeling uncomfortable, you say hello to her and look at the three kids with her. You chat a bit and find out that each of her children has a different father and that she is now a single parent.



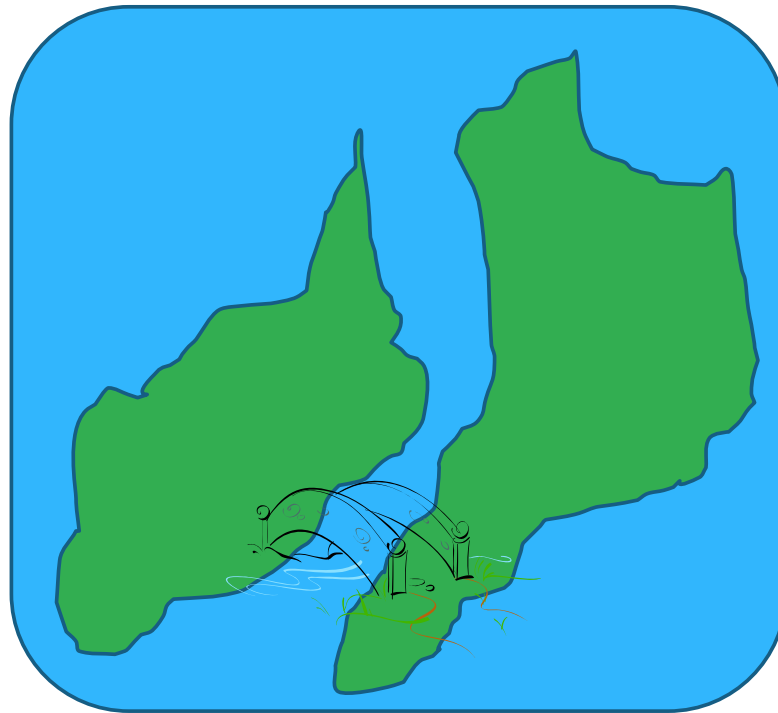
What goes through your mind?

Be honest, please!

Collaborative activity

Prejudices	

Creating a relationship of trust . . . Preserve what can be preserved



Strategic planning

Strategies for **reaching parents** and **encouraging them to stay involved** in order to **strengthen ties** and **ensure continuity** between the family and the school

Four essential ingredients*



Seen from the vantage point of education partners, we would have school principals and teachers who:

- recognize that families and the community can also contribute to achievement of the school's mission and that, together, all partners share a unique and essential role in attaining a collective goal
- concretely acknowledge and value the opinions and observations of families and community representatives
- create an enjoyable working atmosphere for all partners
- take genuine steps to make education partners a real part of the project

▶ Approach

▶ Attitudes

▶ Atmosphere

▶ Actions

Rollande Deslandes, *Crucial Conditions for Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships* (Québec, QC: Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec, 2010), 5.

http://rire.ctreq.qc.ca/media/pdf/Coeureaction_Condessent_FINAL-en.pdf

Experiential knowledge*

We recognize the following:

All parents care about the success and well-being of their children.

Parents know their children best.

Working alone, the school cannot ensure that all students achieve success.

We intend to:

- work toward a common goal: the success and well-being of the children
- **recognize** parents' qualifications for achieving this aim
- become partners
- establish a relationship of **mutual trust**
- establish a **two-way communication** channel

Parents have a strong influence on:

- the value their children place on school (education)
- their children's sense of belonging at school
- their children's participation in extracurricular activities
- the extent to which their children follow school rules

* Providing support to a school team in a disadvantaged area, Nathalie Guimont



TRUST







COMMUNICAT
ION



RECOGNITION

Four focus areas for collaborating with families



- Focus  1 Diversifying and facilitating communication
- Focus  2 Helping parents exercise their role
- Focus  3 Encouraging parents to participate in school life
- Focus  4 Working more closely with the community to meet the needs of families

Bringing Families and Elementary Schools Closer Together, MELS 2005

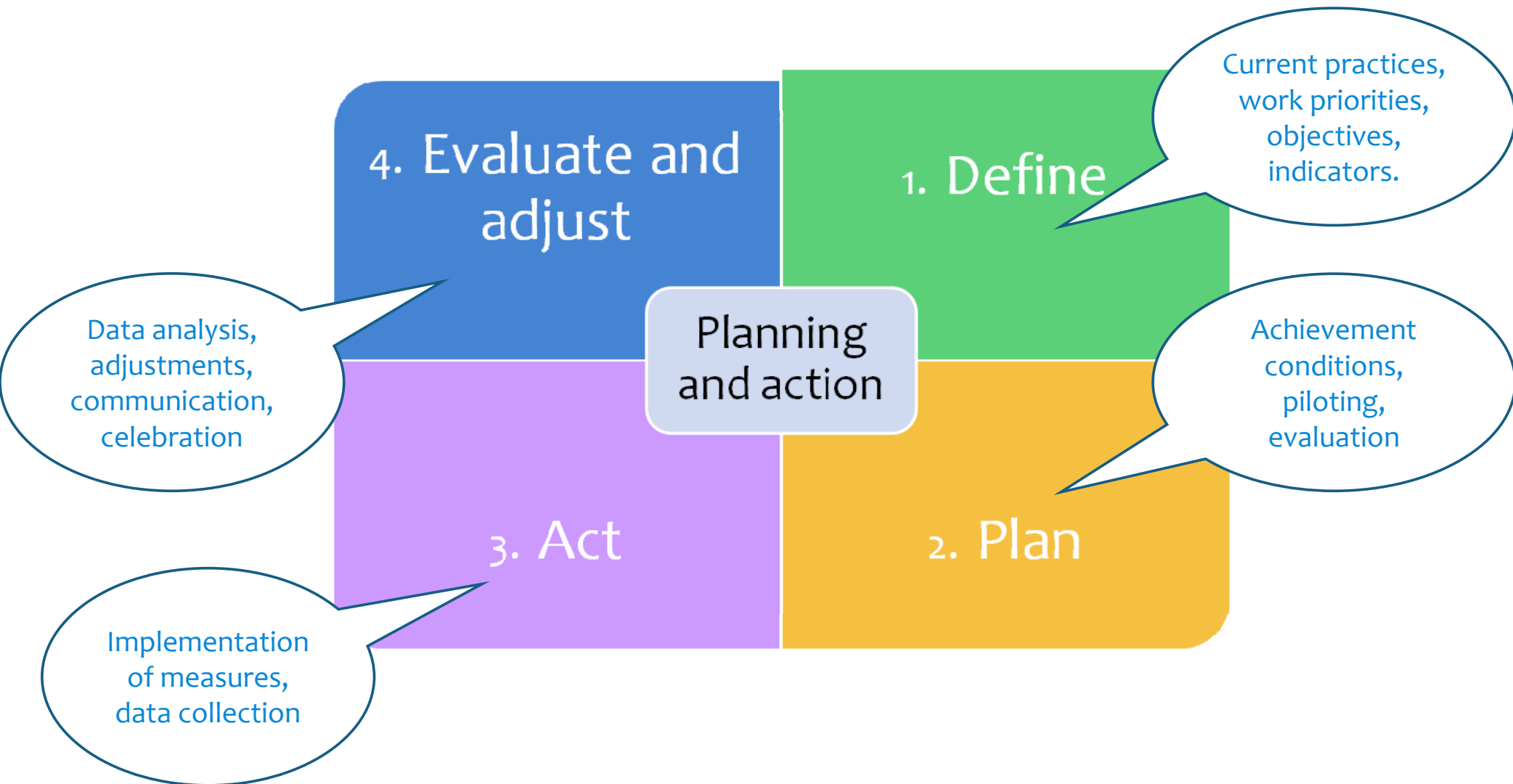
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/dpse/adaptation_serv_compl/Companion_Guide.pdf

Overlapping spheres of influence

Project based on Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model (2001 - 2005), as presented by Deslandes (2006)

CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES
1. Parenting support (e.g. parenting workshops)	Workshops, parenting-education groups
2. Diversification of communication methods	Portfolios, regular phone calls, memos, letters, e-mails, report cards
3. Parent involvement in school life	Volunteer work, attendance at special events
4. Support for parents to help with school work	Workshops on the required skills
5. Involvement in decision making	Governing board, PPO
6. Collaboration with the community	Information on services for families; extracurricular activities

Developing a culture of collaboration



Taking it further...



Pierre
Foglia

Grocery shopping

"Twenty-five dollars," the parish priest repeats out loud to make sure he's got it straight as we go into the Loblaws in Cowansville. We have agreed that he will act as our main witness. My role is to serve as court clerk and keep a record of the proceedings. Paula, the leader of our strange little band, has brought along her daughter's yellow and orange toy calculator. It has a few broken keys, but still works reasonably well up to about \$25. Paula is an anglophone, originally from the London suburb of Twickenham, on the banks of the Thames. She immigrated to Québec a long time ago and has seen her share of misfortune and illness. She has two children, one of them a 16-year-old girl still at home. Paula turned 56 yesterday. Paula is poor. Before going grocery shopping with her, the priest and I put aside some of her social assistance payment for her rent, telephone, transportation, medication, clothing, household items and a few school supplies. There's only \$100 left over for food. Twenty-five dollars a week. Twenty-five dollars to feed two people two meals a day for seven days. You can forget about breakfast. Bananas catch our eye as we walk into the store. There's a heartfelt cry from one of us: "Bananas would be good, wouldn't they?" "Very good," said Paula. "Inexpensive, nourishing." The priest weighs four bananas and punches in \$1.08 on the yellow and orange calculator. "It's funny," I say, "when I buy bananas I always buy four too. It just goes to show that, rich or poor, some things are the same." "With bananas it's the same," Paula concedes. "Not with kiwis, mangoes or oranges." After the bananas, we buy one turnip and \$3.06 worth of sweet potatoes. The priest finds the sweet potatoes expensive, but Paula explains that they are filling. I have an idea. "We should get the meat next since

it will be the most expensive item." "No meat," Paula is firm. "What do you mean, no meat? You hardly have any fresh vegetables either. Just what do you plan to eat this week?" "Lentils and rice." "Every day?" "Every day. My daughter says we eat like hamsters." "I don't know about hamsters, Paula, but you are pretty much eating like the world's poor: Somalis, Bengalis, Hondurans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Haitians." "The difference," Paula corrects me, "is that there is more solidarity in the communities of those poor people than there is in ours, and they don't watch TV like my daughter, who would like to eat out once in a while and be able to buy new shoes like her friends." And so we put lentils and rice in our shopping cart. Evaporated milk. Tea. Two cans of sardines. Pasta. Tomato sauce. A dozen eggs. A loaf of bread. "We should be just about at our limit," the priest says, coming up with a subtotal of \$12.15.

"Let's spend the rest on a treat," Paula says. The big treat is onions. Once they have been added in, there is still one dollar to spend. The priest weighs three apples, but has to put one back.

As she leaves Loblaws, Paula lights up a cigarette. For some perverse reason, I am upset. "Twenty-five dollars on food, how much on smokes, Paula?" "Thirty dollars a week," she says, defensively. I apologize. This has got to be one of the stupidest questions I have asked in my entire career. An insensitive question. A question that Monroig would ask, or Jean Lapierre. A question that would shame my mother, a cleaning lady who scrubbed the floor of a grocer's shop on her hands and knees and who occasionally bought a piece of his most expensive parmesan from him. "Are you crazy," my father would scold her. "That parmesan is for millionaires." "So quiet,"

La Presse, May 10, 2003

she would tell him. "It's not parmesan, it's dignity." And she would grate a little more onto our spaghetti. The worst thing about poverty is not that you can't afford to do something, but that you "don't have the right" to do it because you are poor. When you're poor, you don't have the right to smoke. You don't have the right to drink beer, or buy kiwis, pastries or Häagen-Dazs. You're not allowed to take a taxi. You're not allowed to have cable, or a car, a cell phone or a computer. You don't have the right to go on vacation. Little by little, poor people withdraw from life around them and, pretty soon, their isolation is seen as a rejection of others.

The people close to me often tell me I live like a poor person. That is an insult to poverty. Choosing to go without things is not at all the same as doing daily battle in the trenches of poverty. Go ahead and smoke, Paula. Anyone who tells you it will kill you doesn't know a thing about life in the trenches.

You've probably noticed that the large grocery chains don't offer discounts on staples during the first week of the month. This is a calculated move to take money out of the hands of social assistance recipients, who receive their big cheques at the beginning of the month. The big supermarkets would steal from the blind. You may also be aware that the three big chains—Loblaws-Provigo, Sobeys-IGA and Métro—control 90% of the grocery market in Québec. In 2012, Métro CEO Pierre Lessard earned \$18 million, of which \$27 million was in shares under the law, half of the capital gains was tax free. You knew all that, did you? And did you know that Pierre Lessard is not a smoker?

Taking it further...

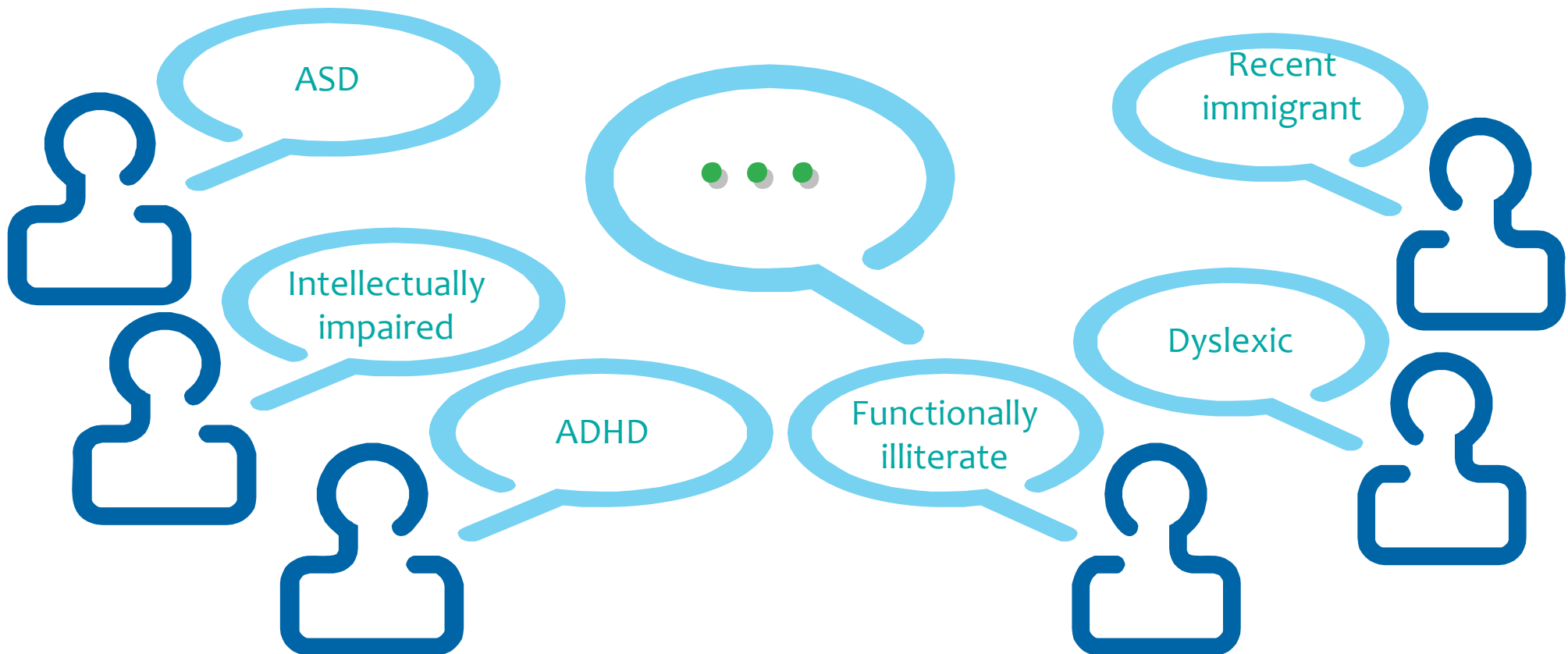


Centraide Québec et Chaudière-Appalaches, Un préjugé, c'est coller une étiquette, 2011

http://www.centraide-quebec.com/files/pdfs/document-reflexion-4-2011_2.pdf

Taking it further...

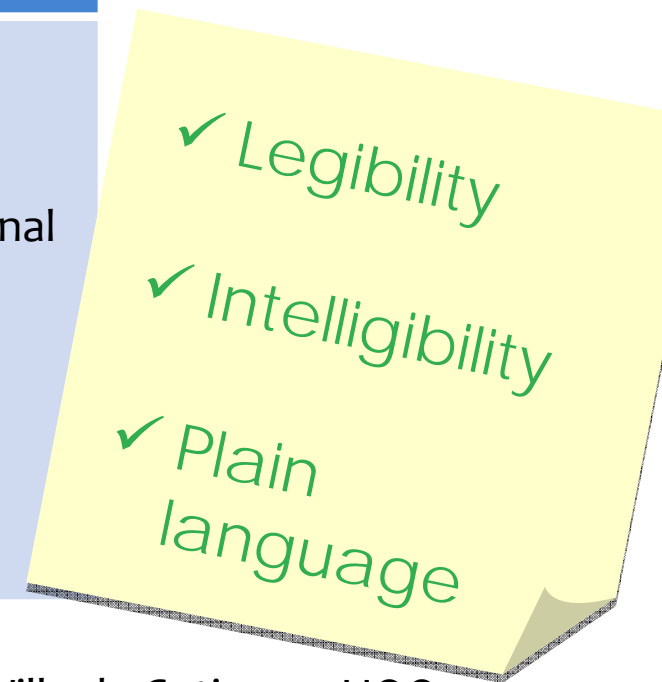
POSSIBLE CHARACTERISTICS OF RECIPIENTS OF A WRITTEN MESSAGE FROM THE SCHOOL



Taking it further...

KEY FACTORS IN GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

Appearance	Language	Information	Organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Font• Alignment• Highlighting• Colours• Tables• Lists• Spacing and margins• Titles• Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Words• Sentences• Punctuation• Style and tone• Numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Selection of information• Explanations• Pictures• Symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outline• Titles• Structure• Organizational aids





TRUST

- I invite parents to come into the classroom to see the children at work.
- I let parents know when their child does something well.
- I don't mention every instance of misbehaviour.
- I ask parents with specialized knowledge to give workshops.
- I often organize exhibitions with the children.
- I give workshops for parents.



COMMUNICAT ION

- I communicate with parents often.
- My messages are easy to read.
- I pick up the phone.
- I see parents every week.
- A parent phones to extend invitations.
- A parent helps me make appointments.
- We go outside before and after class to talk to parents and hear what they have to say.
- We put up a poster to announce an upcoming meeting.



RECOGNITION

- I invite parents to come see me about their child.
- I ask parents what works well with their child, what tips can they give me.
- I invite parents to a “homework tips exchange” evening.
- I explain the goal to parents when I ask for their collaboration.
- We provide school daycare.
- We provide a snack.