Talking to parents . . . Yes, but how?

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Presentation Outline

1. Communication between the school and family

2. The expectations of parents and teachers

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family

4. Avenues for intervention

5. Conclusion

6. References and additional resources

1. Communication between the school and the family

1. Communication between the school and family

- **Communication between the school and the family** is a specific aspect of **collaboration between the school and the family** and **relationships between the school, the family and the community**:
  - **It is difficult to completely separate these three dimensions.**

- **Relationships between the school, the family and the community:**
  - **Collaboration between the school and the family, or between the school, the family and the community**
    - **Communication between the school and the family**
      - **Kindergarten for 4- and 5-year-olds**
        - **Full-day kindergarten for 4-year-olds from disadvantaged areas**

- **In kindergarten, communication between the school and the family is particularly important:**
  - Starting school
  - The age of the child
  - To establish harmonious and constructive medium- and long-term relationships

1. Communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **The quality of the communication between the school and the family** is important because it directly influences **parents' perceptions** of the school and the teachers.

- **Studies have shown that . . .**

  - parents who **have confidence in the teacher are more involved** in their children's education (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2005)

  - parents who have **difficult relationships with the school communicate less** and are **less involved** in monitoring their children's progress (Lamb-Parker *et al.*, 2001)

  - parents **have a more positive image of the school** when its teachers and non-teaching professionals **communicate with them** (Elman, 1999)

  - **communication between the school and the family fosters parental collaboration with and participation in** the school and should be given greater priority among **parents of vulnerable children** (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen and Sekino, 2004)

1. Communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- However, **a number of factors impede** communication, especially:

    - **teachers:** **lack of time, lack of skills or a low estimate of their own ability to work with parents**, especially due to a **lack of training**

    - **parents:** **different perceptions of their educational roles, a low estimate of their own skills, living conditions** (family structure, work schedules, cultural or leisure activities etc.), and a **lack of time,** all of which leads to difficulty **reconciling work and family lif**e and achieving a **school-family balance**

2. The expectations of parents and teachers

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- **What expectations do teachers have with regard to collaboration or communication with parents?**

- **What expectations do parents have with regard to collaboration or communication with teachers?**

2. The expectations of parents and teachers (*Cont.*)

- Generally, **teachers would like parents to . . .**
  - **reply to their messages**
  - **speak positively** about the school to their children
  - provide the **materials** their children **need**
  - **attend meetings** (parent-teacher meetings at the beginning of the school year, at report card time, etc.)

- More specifically, teachers **would like parents to . . .**
  - **recognize the work that they do**
  - **monitor their children's progress in school** (which is also what they expect of the teacher)
 - **support** them

2. The expectations of parents and teachers (*Cont.*)

- Generally, **parents want** teachers . . .
  - to **care about** their children
  - to provide an **environment** conducive to their children's **learning and development**
  - to meet their children's **expectations and needs**
  - to meet their own **expectations and needs**

- More specifically, **parents want . . .**
  - **to be reassured** about their child's well-being, behaviour, learning and development
  - **to be guided** so that they can monitor and support their children at home with regard to behaviour, learning and development

2. The expectations of parents and teachers (*Cont.*)

- **The expectations of parents** and teachers during communication guide discussion and influence the interpretation and quality of relationships.

- **The quality of communication is also influenced by the objectives, which may vary depending on the types of meetings.**

  – Group information meeting at the start of the school year

  – Meetings relating to report cards

  – Personal meetings by appointment

  – Informal encounters in everyday life

  – Meetings as part of committee activities, etc.
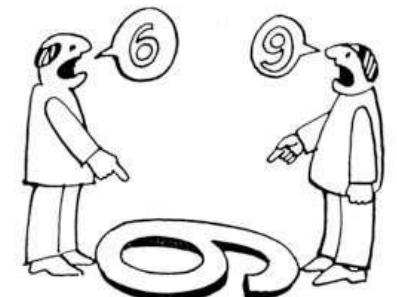
3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family

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- **School-family communication** (or communication between parents and teachers/parents and administration/parents and other school staff) is . . .
  - an interpersonal relationship
  - between **two or more people**
  - who have different perceptions, goals and expectations
  - but who share at least **one point in common: the child/student**

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **Communication between the teacher and the parent** is primarily about **attitudes:**

    – **Being truly interested in communicating** with the parent and showing it

    – **Being respectful and open** to others, their differences and individual characteristics

    – **Being confident** and **trusting**

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

According to Gervais (1995, p. 27), **the attitudes to emphasize** in order to foster **collaboration** with parents are:

- Being welcoming, open and respectful
- Being flexible and understanding with parents
- Being attentive to educational models (expectations, values) and the most appropriate methods
- Being receptive to what parents have to say
- Being frank and honest
- Avoiding making parents feel guilty
- Being open to parents' suggestions
- Being positive toward children and their parents
- Being able to protect onself against the emotional reactions of parents and knowing how to interpret these reactions
- Being rigorous, tenacious and determined, even if parents do not seem interested; changing strategies or methods of communication
- Being interested in motivating and encouraging them
- Being proactive in communicating
- Fostering reciprocity in learning

# 3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont*.)

- **Communicating between teachers and parents** is also a question of **abilities:**
  - Being able to **listen**
  - Being able to **express oneself clearly**
  - Being able to **develop a relationship with others**
  - Being able to **solve conflicts**

ON PARLE LA MÊME LANGUE, MAIS ON NE DOIT PAS PARLER LE MÊME LANGAGE.

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **Communication between teachers and parents** is also a question of **knowledge**
  - **Knowing oneself**: one's strengths, limitations, values, biases, etc.
  - **Knowing the child**: his/her characteristics, tastes, interests, strengths, challenges, etc.
  - **Knowing the parent**: his/her family status, family history, type of relationship with the school, strengths, challenges, realities, etc.
  - **Knowing the living situation** (educational, social, cultural, economic) of the the child and his/her family
  - **Knowing one's profession** (child development, the education program, etc.).
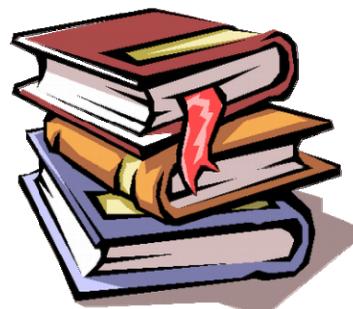
3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **Four general principles to observe when communicating with parents**

  1. Respect the parent.
  2. Listen to the parent.
  3. Emphasize factual information.
  4. Support, stimulate or engage with the parent.

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- Rely on **two-way communication**.

- Avoid using **professional education jargon**.

- When there is a **real or potential conflict**, collaborate and communicate with the parent using a **win-win approach**.

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

Generally, during a meeting with parents . . .

- give the parents a clear indication of your intentions

- speak no more than half the time

- listen attentively to both parents

- respect the parents' emotions

- verify your information and perceptions

- see the children as extensions of the parents

- remind the parents that you all have the same objective in mind and that you all care about the same child

- draw upon your creativity, your intuition and your interpersonal skills

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

Beware!

- Negative judgments and comments about the parents or child can **block** communication

- **Exaggerated positive** comments can result in confusion.

- It is important to rely on the **constructive resolution** of problematic situations.

- Distinguish between what **can be changed** and what cannot be changed.

- Determine what each person can do (the parent, teacher, child), **his or her responsibilities and limitations.**

- Encourage the parents to make a **judgment** about the situation or decision.

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **Remember that . . .**

  - talking with parents is a difficult and sometimes delicate task that involves a certain number of **challenges**

  - even so-called difficult parents have **positive personality traits** that are worth pointing out

  - **parents**, like **teachers**, are a **mixed group**

  - To **foster collaboration and communication** with parents, it is important to take into account:
    - the parents' perception of their **educational role**
    - the parents' **feeling of competence**
    - **opportunities** for collaboration and communication

3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **Challenges specific to full-day kindergarten for 4-year-olds from disadvantaged areas**

  - Identify **the means of communication best adapted to parents** who are **not sufficiently fluent in the English language**.

  - **Be aware of one's own biases** and those of other people who work with children and their parents.

  - **Be familiar with and respect** families with regard to **their realities**.
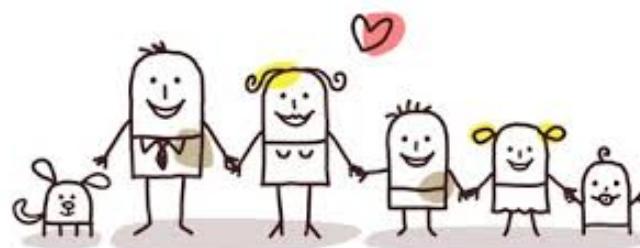
3. Some basic principles of effective communication between the school and the family (*Cont.*)

- **Challenges specific to full-day kindergarten for 4-year olds from disadvantaged areas**

  - Engage in discussions with families in an attempt to **reduce the discrepancy between our respective perceptions and values with regard to school**, to foster a **shared understanding** of the socioeducational environment and academic success.

  - Work **with** the parent instead of **for** the parent.

  - **Focus on the strengths of the parents and children** (**skills**) instead of their weaknesses (lack of skills).

  - Work with **community organizations**.

4. Avenues for intervention

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- **Some avenues for intervention, to foster harmonious and effective communication:**

    - Establish a **relationship of trust** with the parents as soon as possible at the start of the school year, or even before then.

    - **Invite parents to communicate** with the teacher or the school and take part in monitoring their child's progress at home and in school.

    - **Offer means of communication** and collaboration that facilitate their participation (transportation, daycare, interpreters etc.).

    - Welcome the parents warmly, and make them **feel welcome at the school**.

    - Define and **clarify the respective roles** of parents and teachers (or of the school).

    - **Validate the parents** in their educational role.

    - Help them to **understand how the school functions** and its expectations.

4. Avenues for intervention (*Cont*.)

- **Some avenues for intervention, to foster harmonious and effective communication:**

  - In difficult situations, **give parents hope**, **set realistic objectives** and help them to find **resources**.

  - **Recognize parents' competencies** and consider them as allies of the school.

  - **Communicate positive messages** to parents with regard to their children; don't wait for a problem to arise in order to communicate with them.

  - Develop an **annual action plan** for the class or school regarding communication between the school and families.

4. Avenues for intervention (*Cont*.)

- **Make communication between the school and the family a part of the school's annual planning.**
  - for the class
  - for the school

- Set communication objectives for all the parents (group objectives).

- Set communication objectives for certain parents (individual objectives).

A model of school-family planning (FS)

2014-2015 school year

↓

Identification of SF communication practices (real and potential)

↓

Identification of needs, interests, strengths, weaknesses, constraints and priorities

Objective 1	**Objective 2**	**Objective 3**	**Objective 4**
Communication about the school	Communication about learning	Communication about behaviour	Other subjects of communication

↓

Identification of communication strategies

↓

Evaluation and adaptations

4. Avenues for intervention(*Cont*.)

A 10-step plan:

1. Identify your actual school-family communication practices.

2. Identify your potential school-family communication practices.

3. Identify your needs, interests, strengths, weaknesses, constraints and priorities.

4. Identify parents' needs, interests, strengths, weaknesses, constraints and priorities.

5. Identify students' needs, interests, strengths, weaknesses, constraints and priorities.

6. Set communication objectives in various areas (the school, learning, students' behaviour, community resources, etc..).

7. Plan implementation strategies focusing on means, timing, resources, etc.

8. Identify means for evaluating the extent to which you have attained your objectives.

9. Carry out your action plan.

10. Evaluate the results and identify possible adaptations.

Identification of actual and potential SF communication practices

- Draw up a list of the teachers' and the school's actual and potential school-family communication practices, specifying . . .
  - the places where communication takes place (school, home, community)
  - communications situations and topics
  - people involved in communication
  - means of communication used
  - means of communication that could be used

- Examples of means or tools of communication:
  - the information meeting
  - plastic folder
  - the monthly calendar
  - the agenda
  - weekly communications
  - log
  - telephone calls
  - Impromptu meetings
  - report card meetings
  - presentations of projects or special activities
  - the school's e-mail addresses or Web site, etc.

Identification of needs, interests, strengths, weaknesses, constraints and priorities

- Draw up a profile of the situation with respect to needs, interests, strengths, weaknesses, constraints and priorities of various stakeholders in order to take communication strategies into account.

	Teacher	Students	Parents
Needs			
Interests			
Strengths			
Weaknesses			
Constraints			
Priorities			

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Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4
Communication about the school	Communication about learning	Communication about behaviour	Other subjects of communication

- **Set one or more communication objectives about . . .**
  - the school (functioning, social activities, educational outings, etc.)
  - students' learning or development
  - students' behaviour
  - any other topic of communication

- **Set objectives . . .**
  - group
  - individual
  - for the class
  - for the school

Identification of communication strategies

- For each objective, identify communication strategies for the class or the school based on the:
    - type of communication situation (group or individual, formal or informal, one-way or two-way)
    - type of communication (agenda, telephone call, e-mail, school newsletter, etc.)
    - frequency of communication?
    - Topic (information to be communicated)

Example	Objective 1 School	Objective2 Learning/ Development	Objective 3 Behaviour
Topic	School outing		
Type of situation	Group, formal, and two-way communication		
Type of communication	Letter and group meeting		
Frequency of communication	4 (start of the school year, three weeks before the outing, two days before the outing, after the outing)		

Evaluation and adaptations

- Identify indicators to evaluate communication according to the objectives targeted.

- For example, for the objectives concerning . . .
  - the school: comments, survey, observations, etc.
  - learning or child development: MELS program
  - child behaviour: observations

- Evaluate the attainment of the objectives with respect to the indicators.

- Identify possible short-, medium- and long-term adaptations that could be made in the classroom or the school as a whole.

- Review the school-family communication practices used in the classroom and the school as a whole.

- For greater consistency, **establish a frame of reference for good communication practices within the school**.

5. Conclusion

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- **Communication is the basis** for collaboration and relationships between the school and families. Although the school plays an important role, this is a **responsibility shared by the stakeholders concerned**.

- For greater consistency and effectiveness, it is important to incorporate the actions of communication into a global approach by the school; hence the value of developing a **reference framework for good communication** as well as **annual planning of school-family communication** within the school.

- **Communication with the parents of 4-year-old children from disadvantaged areas in full-day kindergarten** is no different from communication with parents of children in other levels of education or other schools. However, in certain respects, **it involves** greater **challenges** than those facing students from other environments who live in better conditions.

- **Regular and harmonious communication** between the school and parents (and children) contributes to the well-being of all and, ultimately, to academic success.

6. References and additional resources

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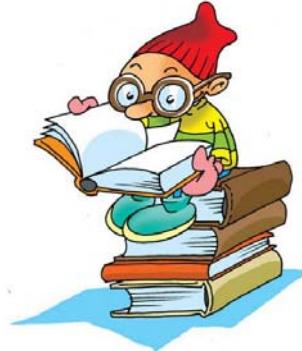
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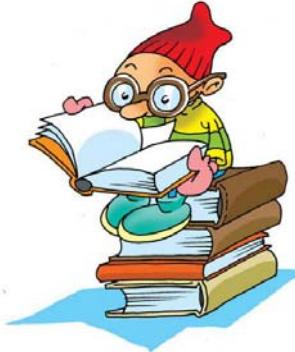
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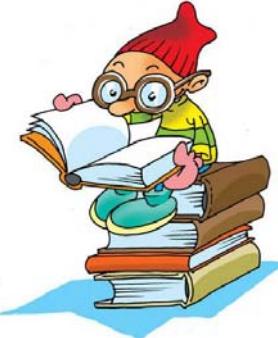
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6. References and additional resources (*Cont*.)

Electronic resources:

•Répertoire d'activités: Collaboration École – Famille – Communauté (in French only) http://edupsy.uqac.ca/crre/wp-content/resultats/Collab%20%C3%89cole-famille-communaut%C3%A9%20Dumoulin%20et%20al.pdf.

•Coeuréaction: School – Family – Community Partnerships http://www.coeureaction.qc.ca/en/home.aspx.

•Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ) (in French only): http://www.ctreq.qc.ca/.

Questions?

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