

Teaching Module: Communicating – Connecting: Can you hear me now?

Objectives

At the completion of this lesson students will:

- Identify parent and school roadblocks to effective communication
- Develop strategies that will dismantle these roadblocks
- Be able to recognize, discuss, and develop solutions that eliminate tensions

Introduction

What is Communication?

- Sender
- Receiver
- Making connection
- Dealing with interference
- Dealing with dropped calls

Activity

Roadblocks to communication:

- There are “put up” even before communication begins
- Once a roadblock is understood, it is easier to help bring down the block with effective communication:
- How will you dismantle them...or avoid them?
- Your task –
 1. Get into a group
 2. Look at your roadblock
 3. Decide how you will handle the roadblock
 4. Each group will share their findings

(1.) Parent Roadblocks

Protector Role – criticize my child and you criticize me. When parents are hurt by a child’s inability to progress, the parent tends to blame the school, the teacher, or the system.

Inadequate-me Role – Parents who do not feel they belong – feel they are not as smart or as successful may tend to not come to school. If they do come, they find it difficult to communicate their desires or feelings with the staff.

Avoidance Role – these may include self-assured parents who do not respect the school or the way it treats parents and students. Sometimes these are parents who they themselves struggled in school or perhaps, dropped out of school.

Indifferent-parent role - Two variables take away the attention of parents – time and financial pressures. Sometimes, parents feel that the school has the job of raising their children. When students sense parent indifferences, they may be attracted to attention-getters – drugs, alcohol, truancy, and pregnancies.

Don’t Make Waves Role - Sometimes, parents do not want to be open and honest with the school because they don’t want this to affect their child. The teacher could be harder in marking a grade; the counselor could place the student with harsh teachers. These parents repress open communication.

Club-Waving Advocate Role - Sometimes, parents get carried away with their devotion to their children and they exhibit this through a power play. These parents can get abrasive and express their concerns through confrontations.

School Roadblocks

Authority Figure Role - Sometimes, a person in a leadership position in a school exerts an authority role, ready to impart information to the parent. They neglect to set the stage for the parent to be a partner in the discussion. If parents are locked out of the conversation, they will not enter into a conversation easily.

Sympathizing-Counselor role- School personnel who focus on the inadequacy of the child as a way to console the parent miss an opportunity of communication. Parents want to solve their concerns through constructive remediation or support.

Pass the Buck role - Sometimes, parents find that school personnel refer the concerns of a parent to another agency – the counselor, the testing department, for example. While it may be necessary, it also gives the appearance that the concerns are being moved along without any attention to the issue at hand.

Protect the Empire Role - A united, invincible staff can cause parents to think no one cares about their needs. School personnel need to work together and support one another, but they also need to listen to the parents and should advocate for the parent as they formulate an educational plan for the student.

Busy Teacher role - Perhaps the greatest roadblock to good communication between parent and teacher is time. Both teachers and parents need to reduce stress and set aside time for communication. How can this be done – class coverage, short means of communication, reorganized schedules.

(2.) Gain a True Self-Perspective

Cooley's Looking-Glass-Self

Looking Glass Self Concept depends on how you view yourself and this depends on your perceptions about how others see you. There are three phrases in this exercise:

- Reflection (parents looking into the mirror)
- Interpretation of the reflection (how the parents interpret what they see)
 - If they see a positive image, they will have an increased feeling of pride.
 - If they see a negative image, they will have a decreased feeling of self.Teachers play a critical role in this second step.
- Feeling of pride or mortification

(3.) Try out some effective strategies

We need to work away from the deficit model, that is, what is wrong with the system and with parents. Let's find some positive strategies to begin this process:

First, it is not about you or me or them. It is about many things of which we are not aware. Try to consider stressors in the lives of parents who are not actively involved in school – money, fatigue, and loneliness.

Solution: Let parents know you are supportive and whenever they want to be more actively involved, they are always welcome. Keep communication open through telephone calls.

Second, many parents do not feel comfortable in a school environment. Consider where you don't feel comfortable – the bank? The hospital? The high intensity aerobics class?

Solution: First, acknowledge that parents need to develop confidence to walk into school. They may not feel educated or they do not understand the language used in school. Try to draw out parent ideas through notes home or through times when they do come to school. Use these parent conversations as ways to help parents see that their ideas are valued.

Third, parents need to change their belief that education is the job of the teacher. Parents need to recognize that their ideas are important, too.

Solution: Starting with parent teacher conferences or home visits, the teacher needs to convey to the parent that he or she is a true partner in education. Their interaction with the child is essential in a child's education. Take for example when a parent asks the child about what happened in school that day. The daily conversations are the one true research finding that has a correlation to an increase in student achievement.

Fourth, many teachers do not know about the parents' interests, strengths, and abilities. Unfortunately, knowing about what is wrong with the parents is more typical than what is working in the parent household.

Solution: Finding out a little about parents puts some definition on the parent as a person. It also helps teachers develop the first link in communication with the home.

(4.) Tensions and Solutions: Parents are stressed. Parents are not involved? What to do?

1. It is not about you or me or them. It is about many things of which we are not aware. Try to consider stressors in the lives of parents who are not actively involved in school – money, fatigue, and loneliness.

Solution: Let parents know you are supportive and whenever they want to be more actively involved, they are always welcome.

2. Many parents do not feel comfortable in a school environment.

Solution: First acknowledge that parents need to develop confidence to walk into school. They may not feel educated or they do not understand the language used in school. Try to draw out parent ideas through notes home or through times when they do come to school. Use these parent conversations as ways to help parents see that their ideas are valued. Keep communication open through telephone calls. Set up newsletters that include student names (could use first names with last initials) so students get “positive press.”

3. Parents need to change their belief that education is the job of the teacher. Parents need to recognize that their ideas are important, too.

Solution: Starting with parent teacher conferences or home visits, the teacher needs to convey to the parent that he or she is a true partner in education. Their interaction with the child is essential in a child’s education. Take for example when a parent asks the child about what happened in school that day. The daily conversations are the one true research finding that has a correlation to an increase in student achievement.

4. Many teachers do not know about the parents’ interests, strengths, and abilities. Unfortunately, knowing about what is wrong with the parents is more typical than what is working in the parent household.

Solution: Finding out a little about parents puts some definition on the parent as a person. It also helps teachers develop the first link in communication with the home.

5. Parents do not know how to help their children with homework. Should they?

Many students are attempting to complete their homework and studies, but require assistance, not monitoring. When a parent does not know how to help their child with homework, it creates frustration. Also, many parents work full-time and sometimes, it is difficult for them to review with the child.

Solution: Teachers could offer assistance to parents by devising creative assignments and study methods in order to make it easier for parents to involve themselves in the course. Perhaps, it is also possible to every so often create a parent assignment in which both are involved. In this way, parents feel involved in helping their child.

6. Parents do not know if they should be involved, especially at the middle and high school level.

Solution: Parents need to be involved more at the middle school level than even at the elementary level. By the time a student is in high school, parents need to be involved in what will be happening in the future of their students.

(5.) Moving Away from the “You” Message to the “I/We”

- **You** set up blame.
- **I** provide a clear message of concern.
- **We** brings the two partners together

Discuss some **You**, **I**, and **WE** messages.

(6.) Strategy Sheet Write

- Take a minute to write a strategy that you might use in your classroom
Explain how you are going to use your strategy and your expected results.
- Share with the class

(7.) Participant feedback – Participants will write their answers on the participant feedback sheet.

- What did you learn today about communicating and connecting with parents?
- Why is that important?
- How will you use this information in the future?
- What else would you like to know more about related to this topic?