



FAMILYeduNET 
FAMILIES FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS
ΕΥΧΑΡΧΑΚΛΑΥ

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OPEN ONLINE
FAMILY TRAINING COURSE
GUIDELINES

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INTRODUCTION

Project summary

FamilyEduNet – Families for Educational Success (2014-2016) is a European project, financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, aiming at the upscaling of the successful XarxaClau project of FAPAC.

The objectives of the project are:

- to create a network of organisations to accompany, follow and train families in Actions for Educational Success (AES),
- to disseminate the scientific evidence that leads to AES to students' families and parents' associations in Europe,
- to train families in AES with special focus on families from a Roma background, living in rural areas or with children attending rural schools (ES), or having hospitalised children,
- to provide families and the educational community in general with participation tools to create a network of families to achieve educational success.
- The main outputs of the project will be an open online family training course and the present guidelines for training of families in AES

Complementarity between the course and the guidelines

What can we do as families from our community and from our formal/informal organisations to promote educational success? We could promote participation environments encouraging other families to participate in social activities that can increase their parenting skills and, simultaneously, promote positive family communication.

Networking is based on communication and exchange of expertise on needs and values, and these connections are likely to generate cohesion, links and new knowledge.

We could promote volunteering in the community and solidarity between generations.

The lives of our children and young people develop in the family but also within communities with values and practices that affect their development and growth.

The local community, the neighbourhood, the town play a key role in promoting learning environments and ensuring the right to education of all children.

FamilyEduNet project supports the above by both intellectual outputs: the online course and the guidelines. The first one offers tools and inputs to understand and reinforce the role of parents in the achievement of educational success. Meanwhile, the guidelines want to go further, revealing the final objective, the added value of the course: highlighting the importance of networks between families and the educational community and families' organized forms. The tool that can channel all family and community efforts for educational success is the Successful Educational Plan (SEP). The SEP is a planning of Actions for Educational Success (AES). In this guidelines we explain methodological patterns while also giving examples to support families and families' organisation in this crucial process.



ABOUT THE OPEN ONLINE FAMILY TRAINING COURSE

What is the *FamilyEduNet* course for?

The course tries to help parents and parents' associations' leaders to identify challenges of educational success, where they might improve their competences and daily practices, in order to promote children's personal development and academic achievement.

It also aims to provide them with a policy perspective to design innovative strategies, to build family and school environments that help all children, irrespective of their socio-economic, geographical, cultural or ethnical background, gender, health condition or family circumstances, to reach their full potential.

Who is the course for?

In addition to parents and parents' associations, the course can also be interesting for:

- 1) stakeholders involved in educational practice and policy who are responsible for or influence leadership development and school improvement;
- 2) research/academic communities interested in working to promote educational success and school-family-community partnerships to improve children's personal development, school achievement and school effectiveness.
- 3) developers/providers of education and school-family-community partnerships training programmes, focusing on supporting parents and parents' association leaders on how to create family and school cultures that value respect, diversity, and promote fairness and high learning achievement.





What is in the course?

Those interested in taking part in this course will find resources focusing on five policy challenges for educational success and school-family-community partnerships that support reflection and policy planning on the matter. Recommendations on how to promote children's personal development and academic achievement are included.

The resources consist of textual and audio-visual materials to stimulate a better understanding of a specific challenge for educational success and school-family-community partnerships. The resources are useful for families in general but also for families with children in hospital, rural families and Roma families (e.g. through definitions, comments, good practice examples, etc.).

What are the course's aims?

This on-line course has three main objectives:

1) to help parents reflect upon

- a)** good practices to support children's development and academic achievement, and policies to address challenges for educational success;
- b)** state-of-the-art research results on educational success as a means to improve children's school achievement and personal development, as well as school effectiveness.

2) to help parents check their own practice ideas about

- a)** practical changes they can make to support their children's school achievement and personal development;
- b)** how parents might support educational success in their children's school, or in other schools or across a school system.

3) to stimulate parents' attitudes and values on

- a)** how to create family and school cultures that value and respect diversity, and promote fairness and high learning achievement;
- b)** how, in a particular context, educational success practices based on those attitudes and values can be developed and supported.



THEORETICAL BASIS OF OUR INTELLECTUAL OUTPUTS

Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Areas of Parental Involvement in Education (Joyce Epstein)

We organized the online course into five modules of educational challenges:

- 1) Supporting Parenting
- 2) Learning Together
- 3) School-Families Communication
- 4) Volunteering
- 5) Community Participation.

(Epstein's original areas – *Participating and Collaborating with the Community* are addressed together as *Community participation*).

These challenges are based on J. Epstein's (2004, 2011) work on six types of parental involvement, adopted by the coordinating institution of this European project, the Federation of Associations of Parents of Students of Catalunya-FaPaC to run its *Xarxa Clau Catalunya 2015-2020* project (FaPaC, 2011, pp 18-19).

Epstein's (2004) six types of parental involvement are framed into her *Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence*, which emphasizes that families, schools and communities should share interests and responsibility for supporting children's learning and development. This theory states that the way schools care about children is an indicator of how they also care about their families, always keeping in mind two

key caring concepts: trust and respect. The theory states that when educators understand students as children – not just as students -, they are more willing to create partnerships with both the family and the community to encourage children’s education and development, and thus contributing to their success in school and in later life. This is possible because partnerships can help improving school programmes and coexistence, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. Thus a caring community for children-students’ support should be built among families, schools and community agents.

Source | Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., et. al., Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools

Epstein claimed that, in order to connect this theory with practice, successful partnership programmes can be organized around six types of parental involvement, which results can benefit not only children-students, but also parents, teachers, schools and their communities.

These six types are:

- 1) Parenting
- 2) Communicating
- 3) Volunteering
- 4) Learning at home
- 5) Decision making
- 6) Collaborating with the community

Source | [http://www.unicef.org/lac/Joyce_L_Epstein_s_Framework_of_Six_Types_of_Involvement\(2\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/lac/Joyce_L_Epstein_s_Framework_of_Six_Types_of_Involvement(2).pdf)





ACTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS (AES) BASED ON THE 6 TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT

The 6 areas of parents' involvement in education described by Epstein (2004) can be the basis to organise actions of families to improve the educational success of our children. From now on we will call all those actions which fulfilled these criteria: Actions for Educational Success (AES)

- actions which improve the educational success of ALL children of a school: these actions should ensure that all children of the school benefits from these actions regardless their conditions.
- actions planned, organised and carried out by families of a school: families should play the leadership role in the actions although other actors, such as teachers or students, can be invited to participate in.
- actions that are part of a wider plan for the involvement of families at school: families of the school should have a plan to develop several AES within an organised framework.
- actions based on the existing who is organising them: all these actions should be developed with the resources that are in the community, it is the only way for it to be a realistic actions.

These type of actions are based on the conviction, encouraged by research and experience results, that when families are involved in their children's educational process, it leads to educational success.

The publication of the National Resource Centre on Charter School entitled "*Family Engagement in Education. Seven Principles for Success*" (s.d., p.3) provides a useful diagram to explain how families' engagement has effects on students, families and schools. For the first group, the students, there is an improvement on grades, attendance, attitude, behaviour, homework completion, and social skills among others; as well as, a reduction of dropout rates. But also families improve their self-efficacy and empowerment when they are engaged in the educational process of their children, and they are more open to approach the school for needs. And finally, schools also benefit from this situation because their communication, collaboration and problem-solving abilities are improved and the distance between teachers and families is reduced.

So, all the Actions for Educational Success (AES) should be oriented to the achievement of these results, which can be carried out basically in two environments (Comas, Escapa & Abellán, 2014):

- at home: this block includes actions related to two of the areas defined by Epstein (2004): Supporting parenting and Learning at home.
- at school: this one includes actions related to Epstein (2004) areas: Communicating, Volunteering and Participating and Collaborating with the Community.



Note

Partnering with Families and Communities. *Schools as Learning Communities*. 61, 8 12-18 and from information delivered by the Center for the Social Organization of Schools, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218-3843.

Additional references of Joyce Epstein work are

Epstein, J.L. (2011). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Epstein, J.L. (Coord.) (2009). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Third Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Epstein, J. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2002). Family, school, and community partnerships. In M. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Source | csos.jhu.edu/p2000/nnps_model/school/sixtypes.htm



THE SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL PLAN (SEP): HOW WE DO IT.

In this section, information on key processes to build a *Successful Educational Plan (SEP)* is detailed.

KEY 1 | THINK

1. Define what goals we want to achieve.

Consider what we need to do to improve educational success in our educational community and what objectives must be defined to meet these needs.

2. Remember that we have experience and competencies.

We know what to do and who could work with us and help us.

3. Consider what we need.

Resources, people, skills, time, etc. What else? Should we learn something before starting? How do we do?

KEY 2 | ORGANISE

1. How will we disseminate outputs to reach all families?

Let them know what we want to build. What do we tell the families? What do we want to ask of them?

2. How do we distribute the work?

Do we form a commission? What time availability do we have? And skills? Do we have allies within the community?

3. What timetable do we propose?

Both for meetings and for the activities we do. How often should we meet: weekly, monthly? When do we start?

KEY 3 | ACT

1. Communicate. Maintaining communication and coordination with the rest of the educational community always helps us, though the beginnings can be difficult.

2. Share the experience. It will be very useful for communicating the results to the rest of the family, strengthening links with the educational community, inviting people not yet involved, etc.

3. Learning. We learn doing and sharing all that we discover! If something does not go right the first time, we must remember that we are learning by doing! Do not be afraid to change or make a mistake.



KEY 4 | VALUE

1. Results. What have we achieved and what have we not? Why? How do we feel?

2. "Lessons learned." What have we learned from this whole experience? What did we gain individually and collectively, as parents' organisation?

3. The future. Now what do we do? Do we continue our successful educational actions? Do we want to add more fields, modify some aspects, and continue this first experience of educational success?

Steps for a SEP

- 1) Detected needs
- 2) Specific objective/s
- 3) Area of involvement
- 4) Successful Educational Action/s
- 5) Resources needed
- 6) Participants and target group
- 7) Dissemination
- 8) Timetable
- 9) Expected results
- 10) SEP Evaluation

We do our Educational Success Plan

In this section, we apply the methodology of the successful educational plan to some practical examples close to the reality of families and family organisations.

Doing our Successful Educational Plan is an educational path, a way to practice, learning from each step. The examples we offer here are not closed solutions, magic formulas: they do not necessarily need to be applied as we present them, we do not have to apply each of them or simultaneously as in the examples. They can be adapted, reinvented: everything depends on our reality and where we can get our parents' organisation.



AND ALL THE STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO MAKE IT!

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Detected needs | 6 | Participants and target group |
| 2 | Specific objectives | 7 | Dissemination |
| 3 | Area of involvement | 8 | Timetable |
| 4 | Successful Educational Action/s | 9 | Expected results |
| 5 | Resources needed | 10 | SEP Evaluation |

EXAMPLE 1

“Could we talk about...?”

We start thinking about our lack of participation in the parents’ organisation, but first we see that families do not communicate with us and with the school: we remember that when we organised a school for parents we spoke about the communication difficulties with children in some situations, topics and stages. We realise that communication is difficult and a controversial issue for everyone and at the same time very important for collaboration and participation: sometimes we do not communicate because we do not know how or we do not feel we are heard. Thus, we think that we could start training ourselves to improve communication: if we do not communicate, we do not understand each other, and that is difficult for participation.

1 **Detected needs** | Effective communication skills

2 **Specific objectives**

To improve communication: increase and diversify spaces, styles and communication channels for all families and individuals (children, teachers, parents, neighbours...).

To strengthen the relationship between school and families / family organisations.

To improve communication within the family.

3 **Area of involvement** | Communication

4 **Successful Educational Action/s** | We could organise a series of training workshops for parents and open to the centre on communication styles and how to improve communication at home and in the community.

... And, how does this benefit the educational success of our children?...

Good communication between schools and families is essential for everyone to contribute to the educational success of students, each one from their position but in partnership to enhance the results achieved. Good communication between parents and their children is essential for our support to education. If we cannot communicate we cannot participate, and if we do not participate, we cannot contribute to the achievement of educational goals.

5 Resources needed | Trainers and educational resources on communication, time and spaces to conduct workshops, online tools for dissemination (blog, Facebook...); resources to translate into other languages

6 Participants and target group

Participants: parents, Communication Commission of the parents' organisation, volunteer trainers, centre
Target group: parents and children of the school

7 Dissemination | Dissemination to the parents of the school and to the school management (a nice poster with dates of the workshops, a post on the school blog/Facebook, etc...); dissemination in the local community and in social networks to find volunteer trainers or training resources on the subject, etc...

8 Timetable

In the first quarter, we can create a Communication Committee in our parents' organisation and seek trainers, volunteers or material to train us; in December, we plan the training and the first poster to be distributed during the Christmas dinner of the school;

in February, March and April we do the training sessions, communication styles:

1. with children or adolescents;
2. between families and school;
3. between parents' organisation and families.

In May we can organise an informal meeting and assess the training with families and the centre (brainstorming: how to continue?).

9 Expected results | More families come to the school and the parents' organisation; family organisation uses more communication tools and improve communication; families are more effective in communication with the school and with children; communication committee strengthened with volunteers, and planning for next year

10 SEP Evaluation

Questionnaire to families at the end of each session;

An informal meeting at the end of the training with participatory dynamics for evaluation.

Meeting with teachers at the end of the year to assess the initiative, results, continuation...

EXAMPLE 2

“The same and also different”

The issue of conflicts among children remains [hot?] among parents: it is recurrent, and we thought it might be cases of bullying and lack of mediation; parents' organisation organise a meeting with delegates of the class evaluate cases and find that many of them have a gender component in common: so we decide to start improving gender equality, with families (parents and children).

- 1 Detected needs** | Low awareness of gender equality between girls and boys by families.
- 2 Specific objectives** | Guide and support families to develop their responsibility in co-education and development of children's gender identities and relations. Realise the importance of the behaviour of parents in the personality development of children. Promote an equitable and inclusive educational community and school environment.
- 3 Area of involvement** | Positive parenting
- 4 Successful Educational Action/s**

Action 1

Thematic film forum for parents examples:

<http://xarxanet.org/comunitari/noticies/5-videos-sobre-infancia-i-sexisme-per-a-reflexionar>



Action 2

The centre could carry out a research in class on gender representation in various cultures and eras.

Action 3

As families/family organisation, we can organize a theatrical representation of search results (era-culture)



Action 1

- 5 **Resources needed** | Time, adequate space, projector and other equipment for screening, training material. Collaboration with the school; etc....
- 6 **Participants and target group**
Participants: parents, school
Target group: children and community
- 7 **Dissemination**
We disseminate to parents (by Film forum); to school (to organise cross-curricular activities – research project); and to boys and girls.
Ways of dissemination: a letter in the backpack, Facebook and WhatsApp; we can do posters and murals for boys and girls... and we have to include other languages and cultures
- 8 **Timetable**
At the beginning of the school year, we form a thematic committee, to prepare the programming of the film forum. In the first school board meeting, we present the proposed multidisciplinary project (research in the classroom).

We can organise a meeting to present the project to the rest of the families;
November- February: film forum,
with monthly sessions;
March-June: preparation of the theatre piece;
June: we present the theatrical piece in the party for the end of year (parents and children)
- 9 **Expected results** | Reducing conflicts, more equality between girls and boys; families confident in their educational role; more collaboration of school-parents-children
- 10 **SEP Evaluation** | Observation: conflicts decreased? Quiz to families and to the centre on the end of the year; Film forum final evaluation by families; assessment with girls and boys (with dynamics) quarterly and at the end of the year (about the project and the theatre)

And, how does this benefit the educational success of our children?

If we work to create an environment inclusive to diversity, we encourage the development of children's personality and identity, essential for the overall growth of each individual; academic skills must be developed in parallel with the social and emotional ones that give context favourable to learning.

EXAMPLE 3

“I am also of the neighbourhood”

In our centre and family organisation, there is a problem of participation, some families do not seem interested in the parents’ organisation and we hardly know them. We are a school in a neighbourhood where, in recent years, there have been many changes, the community fabric is not the same, and in the school we feel the same way: we do not know each other. Perhaps the lack of participation is the result of this lack of community ties and this is a common problem in the school and in the community.

So, nothing better to encourage participation than to have fun together: Do we know each other as neighbours? Do we know our environment? And the resources we have?

1 Detected needs | Participation in the parents’ organisation; links to the community

2 Specific objectives

Strengthening community ties in and outside school.

Getting resources, institutions, people in the community and establishing community ties.

Actively participating in the life of the town or neighbourhood to establish a learning community that’s strong, cohesive and participatory.

Fostering a sense of belonging for increasing participation.

3 Area of involvement | Community participation

4 Successful Educational Action/s

Action 1

Organise a photographic gymkhana: go out on the street near you with your family taking pictures and collecting stories of what has been discovered with challenges and slogans to make a collective mapping of the community resources (for example, find a place that has not changed in last 50 years / Good place to read / my favourite place for playing / where I can learn other languages /etc..).

Action 2

Map your community: a mural made by the boys and girls as a curricular activity – in collaboration with the school.

Action 3

We call for party at a facility of the area, open to all residents, to present the mapping, which is made up of photos of the families who participated in the gymkhana, and the drawings of girls and boys.

... And, how does this benefit the educational success of our children?...

When community ties are present, children feel more secure and integrated to their environment and receive more incentives from all members of the educational community, families are better integrated in the community (closer ties lead to a stronger community more involved with the education of children).



The school is closer to the community and the community itself to school and education, assuming a more active role: all together as a school community and amplify the conditions for educational success. Identify resources that can help enclose the education and learning of our children.

5 Resources needed | Time; volunteer parents; phone cameras; entities and neighbours collaborating; space, equipment; resources for printing photos; material and resources for mapping; resources for dissemination (languages? graphics?) We can ask around the neighbourhood for sponsors – photographic study or resources from public administration?

6 Participants and target group

Participants: parents, children, school and neighbours, organisations, local administration, school
Target group: D-school families

7 Dissemination | We have to think of diversified channels and formats for families, girls and boys, school and neighbours which channels do we use normally? Do they work? What encourages us as neighbours? A nice mail or a poster, or event on Facebook? And what would we like to publicise between girls and boys: more visual content? Do we incorporate other languages? Could we do something more with the participation of other entities (library, civic centre, etc.)?

8 Timetable

First quarter: create a committee for the project and speak with school institutions – neighbours' association, historical archives, libraries, etc – to collaborate with photographic gymkhana

January: dissemination of the gymkhana to school and families; starting of the mural project (dissemination by parents' organisation and school to all families)

February-March: Gymkhana outputs; weekly, the district in the classroom, preparing the mural

April: organisation and dissemination provided by the district party and the gymkhana mural (by mail or Facebook or WhatsApp...)

May: Feast of the district / *June:* presentation of the video/photo mural at the end of year party, in the parents' organisation blog or Facebook page.

9 Expected results

- A mural of the neighbourhood made by families with drawings, photos, stories
- A party in the neighbourhood, owned by families and neighbours.
- More families are actively involved in the community and parents' organisation.
- Families newly arrived in the neighbourhood know and use more community resources / Stronger ties and more exchanges between schools, parents organisation, community entities, etc...

10 SEP Evaluation | Rating with collaborators of the district at the end of the project/after the neighbourhood party/ questionnaire and dynamics for evaluating with participants – presentation of the mural in the festival of the district / quarterly, evaluate organisations' involvement, participation and dissemination to families/centre / with children evaluating with colour cards!

EXAMPLE 4 “I’m also reading!”

In the School Board, the shortcomings of students in relation to their reading skills have been discussed: they did not reach the levels of skills for their grade; they generally do not express interest in reading; they use resources a little or not at all (library). The entire educational community has agreed that this is a priority, we have various activities during the year to improve this aspect.

- 1 **Detected needs** | Reading habits and skills appropriate to the different developmental stages
- 2 **Specific objectives** | Improving reading skills of students
- 3 **Area of involvement** | Participation
- 4 **Successful Educational Action/s** | Create a literary café for parents, where families can bring their concerns and proposals about reading (propose books, lectures, unforgettable personal stories or reading habits (*school library, storytelling, extracurricular activities, book exchange, reading club, literary competitions, theatre, ...*))
- 5 **Resources needed** | Adequate space and resource materials, specific materials (resources in different languages, etc.), volunteers, resources for dissemination.



- 6 Participants and target group**
Participants: parents' organisation, volunteers.
Target group: parents of the school
- 7 Dissemination** | Disseminate before and after each activity organised by the committee.
- 8 Timetable** | At the beginning of the school year, create the commission and organise a schedule of meetings of the literary cafe. It will be monthly or quarterly (depending on availability of volunteers); the first could be in December and you can assess how often you need to meet from January. At the end of the course, a summary of the sessions (read materials, sharing concerns/solutions; include photos, etc.)
- 9 Expected results** | Increasing of the % of active participation in the parents' organisation; increasing of parents' participation in all other activities for reading. Collect feedback in book format (with photos, stories, etc.)
- 10 SEP Evaluation** | Quarterly, commission will make an assessment of their work. At the end of each literary café, a rapid assessment of the dynamics of the target... participants answer an end of course questionnaire with evaluation of proposals below, etc.





SUGGESTED TRAINING AREAS CORRESPONDING WITH THE CHALLENGES TACKLED

Challenge 1 | SUPPORTING PARENTING

We are not born to be parents. There are several knowledge areas and skills to develop to be what we are expected to be: the best possible educators of our children. Education or upbringing is the main job of every parent and we all want to do the best for our children. Research shows that up to age 11-12 parents have the most important impact on their children, their attitude towards learning and school, their educational success and motivation. Not even the best school or kindergarten will have a larger impact. This leading role is taken over by the peer group in early teenage years, but parents still play an important role. Thus the basis of educational success is education at home, from birth.

TRAINING AREAS

- Child development stages – understanding how children develop and what we can expect from them in different stages
- Understanding learning – in order to best support our own learning as well as our children's you need to be aware of the ways people learn and also to explore the best learning methods for your children and yourself
- Parenting styles – an important factor depending on our personality, but something that can be consciously adapted to the best interest of our children once you understand the effect of different parenting styles
- Family diversity – another important factor with a great effect on the future educational success of our children
- Rights and duties of parents – the legal framework giving us duties and obligations, but also obliging the states to support parents
- Rights of the child – one of the most important aspects to be taken into consideration when upbringing our children
- The national education system – the most important support system that offers families services complementing our parental job and helping parents as educators





Challenge 2 | LEARNING TOGETHER

Learning is one of the most important activities parents and children do together. Until the moment they first have to sit down with their children to help with homework, parents often do not realise how much their children are learning from them, but it is even more difficult to realise how much parents learn from their children. All parents should be aware that it was them who managed to help their children learn the mother tongue, learn to dress, to eat with a knife and fork, say hello, or ride a bike. To consciously support learning, parents need to be aware of a few important issues related to the learning of their children as well as their own learning.

TRAINING AREAS

- Motivation for learning – we need to be aware of motivational factors, but also beliefs, not only for learning in childhood, but also for becoming lifelong learners, including delicate issues, like talent, but also taking into account the effect of learning environments
- Learning at home with school-age children – with special focus on school assignments and homework, dealing with the topic of responsibility for and effectiveness of homework, but also taking into account the physical space provided for it at home
- Learning informally – an often neglected, but extremely important field of learning, offering a wide range of possibilities for learning from each other, ensuring the right to play, supporting innovation and fostering creativity, and also to experiment with digital technologies
- Critical approach to today's school – to encourage posing the right questions, while all parents have the feeling that something is fundamentally wrong with general schooling today, we need to consider what schooling is for
- Home-schooling – and un-schooling are initiatives that are getting momentum these days, as a result of the above mentioned critical approach



Challenge 3 | COMMUNICATION

Good communication, the exchange of messages, information between school and parents, but also between parents and children, as well as reacting on these the right way, are key to living together smoothly, to collaboration and also educational success. Teachers often complain that some parents are difficult to reach, but at the same time have difficulties with highly demanding parents, while parents often feel they are not listened to, being talked down on and not considered equal partners. More often than not this all results from bad organisation and a lack of basic communication skills. For an effective home-school communication we need to explore the process itself

TRAINING AREAS

- Communication channels between home and school – in order to make communication effective all partners (parents and teachers, but also the students) need to be aware of the possible communication channels, to explore ones possibly not used before, but there is also a need to assess which channels are preferred and suitable for different users and messages
- Communication styles – is another area that needs to be explored for successful relationships between home and school, so there is a need to be aware of different communication styles, to access one's own style and be aware of it, and within this category also be able to measure one's level of involvement in school
- Living together in school – having good communication gives a good basis for smooth living together, but there is a need to explore its possibilities, so it is important to widen your knowledge of this area, as well as assessing what the school is offering in this field, and what the parents can do to promote and strengthen this aspect of collaboration within the school building and beyond, especially the home and in the immediate environment of the school

Challenge 4 | VOLUNTEERING

Parents volunteering in the school context is a form of involvement typical in most countries, making it possible to engage more in the day-to-day life of schools, but also supporting individualised learning by offering free assistance or per se teaching without extra staff cost for the school. Volunteering can take many forms and there are large differences in time, skills and resources devoted by individuals, but also there is a wide range of acknowledgement from praise to near ban. In general, parents volunteering in schools not only contribute to the learning of their own children, but also to a wider group of learners, teachers among them. We need to explore volunteering from two main aspects, the viewpoint of the volunteer and that of the organisation. The latter is very important, and a long-standing demand of parents' organisations from all over Europe that parents as volunteers need to be acknowledged by schools, but also by governments by offering benefits for volunteers, especially in the form of paid leave.

TRAINING AREAS

- Me as a volunteer – needs to be explored from three angles: what are the motivations for my wish to volunteer, when can I do it, how does it fit my schedule, and what does volunteering mean with regards to my rights and duties, my contribution to eg. the life of school and my own benefits from volunteering, especially my own lifelong learning
- Volunteering in a parents' organisation – a more systemic approach to organised parental involvement, namely assessing different kinds of volunteers, their motivations and ways of motivating them, the room parents' organisations have in the life of a school and the potential in it, and the mutual benefits from volunteering, with exploring ways to solve the problem resulting from a lack of time

Challenge 5 | PARTICIPATING AND COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Parents and parents' organisations are working in a wider local community context, not only in the context of family and school. One of the main educational goals parents need to meet in present European societies is to educate active and responsible citizens. This learning is best taking place in the ultimate safe environment of the family and later the school. Parents need to be active citizens themselves in order to be a role model, and this need an understanding of the forms, possibilities and challenges of active citizenship.

TRAINING AREAS

- Citizenship itself – what models are there for citizenship and what forms it takes, in what ways and how deeply you can be involved, what makes an active citizen
- Diversity of people – to be able to analyse the needs of people depending on their age or cultural background is necessary to adjust to these differences, but from a parents' point of view it is equally important to understand and encourage the participation of children and young people from a very young age, and engage them in formulating their own lives and immediate environment
- Environment – is an important factor, partly predestining the lives of citizens, and partly flexible, but to explore the limits and flexibility you need to be aware of possibilities of networking within a wider local community context and of the resources the community have, be them financial, intellectual or human resources
- Parents' organisations – are an important means of active citizenship, so parents need to know about different models of parents' representation from school level to national level and beyond, different leadership models and challenges around setting up and operating such an organisation

GOOD EUROPEAN PRACTICES FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION THAT WE COULD CONSIDER IN SEP METHOD

“Make the school an attractive place”

Joint initiative of the parents, students and teachers from Primary school “Hristo Smirnenski” in Byala Slatina

Primary school “Hristo Smirnenski” is located in the centre of the Roma neighborhood in the town of Byala Slatina, Bulgaria. The school includes a huge yard, the building of the school, football and volleyball courts and open space, which is cemented. It is the only place where children can play and ride bikes, free from traffic.

The school yard is also used by youngsters to play football and volleyball and young adults with children. This place had turned into the only park space as there was no park or playground close to the neighbourhood where parents and children can relax and play.

Teachers, parents and students actively participated in the implementation of activities. They restored the football playground, installed benches and bins, planted trees and rose bushes. They also outlined playgrounds for football, volleyball and dodgeball. The school yard became very attractive for students and everything was achieved with joint efforts.

Hand in hand during the Christmas holidays

One of the activities with proven involvement of parents is the preparation and making of festivals. The following conclusions can be made regarding Roma parents: the more educated they are and the more involved they are in education activities, the more positive their attitude towards education.

Obviously, active parents are needed to attract and retain Roma children in schools. Holidays are the events which become the bridge between the school and parents.

Thus, parents and teachers of the primary school “Vasil Levski” in Karadzovo village, Bulgaria organized a celebration for Christmas Eve together. Parents took an active part in preparations for the holiday, by preparing meals for the Christmas table and designing a special stick, made of a cornel twig, decorated with popcorn, candies and dry fruits – the so called “survaknitsa”. Children use it on the first day of the New Year to wish for health and prosperity.

The parents also provided different household items from ancient times to make the atmosphere of the holiday more traditional. Thus they became not only an audience of their children’s’ presentation, but a part of the celebration.

Presenting knowledge in the form of celebrations stimulates the cognitive activity of students, motivating them to join the celebrations of the different ethnic groups and led to the formation of ethnically tolerant relations. This is in line with current challenges that require new standards of behaviour – to live your life by living with others.

Forming a parent club to the secondary school “Paisij Hilendarski”, the town of Varbitza, Bulgaria

During the academic year 2013 - 2014 the parent club “Unity” started working in a new format. Parental focus groups were created in the three education levels that were simply called 1, 2 and 3. Focus 1 parent group was joined by the parents of students from the early school stage, Focus 2 parent group united the parents from primary school, and Focus 3 parent group included parents of secondary school students. The idea was prompted by the fact that every school age has its peculiar problems and solving them requires specific impacts pertaining to the school community – students, teachers, parents. Moreover, it made the empowering of more Roma parents possible – that ensured bigger support in the realisation of our ideas. Parents of Focus group 1 helped the class teachers in the organisation and conduct of thematic parent meetings as moderators.

The parent club was supposed to meet once a term. Each of the parental focus groups was involved in 3 workshops during the months of March, April and May.

The topics of the trainings were selected according the challenges in each school level and under the supervision of Amalipe Center. Thus parents of early stage students have gotten acquainted with Roma groups in Bulgaria and discussed the roots of aggression among the smallest.

The parents in Focus group 2 actively discussed reasons “for” and “against” early marriages, and parents of secondary school students agreed on the need for higher education and shared their expectations for career development of their children.

Children’s Town Council

The idea of the project initiating the foundation of the Children’s Town Council, commenced in 2003 as an initiative of the Pupils’ Council and its custodian from Primary School No.6 in Mielec, Poland with the support of teachers and parents. Its main aim was to create conditions that would facilitate the inclusion of pupils into the decision-making process affecting the school, local community and town. Collaboration between pupils’ councils within primary and secondary schools, parental boards, local authorities and institutions resulted in setting up a successful Children’s Town Council, whose objectives include initiating activities affecting the life of young people in the town, submitting application and concepts to the local government, representing the pupils’ community before the Town Council authorities, promoting the concept of self-governing, civic engagements and learning about democracy through its creation and practice. Annual meetings of the CTC led to constructing a roofed ice-rink, sledge track, skate-park, bicycle lanes, multiple playgrounds, a new swimming pool and free film screenings for pupils of primary and secondary schools.

Cooperation Group

The Cooperation Group includes representatives of all main school stakeholder groups – parents, pupils and teachers (PPT/RUN). Each group has four representatives that are elected independently within each stakeholder group, following their internal regulations. Meetings are held every fortnight. The Cooperation Group is intended to act as a body for the resolution of problems raised by representatives of all three stakeholder groups and delivered mainly in the form of opinions. Resolutions passed by the Group are passed to the school’s headmaster. The initiative aims to bring the three school stakeholder groups closer together

and to develop rules of mutual cooperation. It addresses the needs of all three school groups (PPT/RUN). According to a survey, all three groups pointed to a lack of efficient communication between the three groups as the reason for potential problems in the school. It was decided that the solution was the 'Cooperation Group'.

The group is active in three areas: the organisation of the work of the school, education (teaching and education) and school space. Activities of the Cooperation Group are regulated by two documents: *The School Programme of Active Cooperation* and *The Rules of the Cooperation Group*. Meetings are held systematically, and their dates are settled in advance. Each meeting is preceded by internal debates within each of the stakeholder groups that are organised by members of the respective groups. The initiatives are evaluated twice a year.

ALCUIN Award winners

"Ohne Eltern geht es nicht und ohne Eltern tun wir's nicht" (We can't do without parents – and we won't do without parents) – project of the Parents' Office at Schulzentrum Am Stoppenberg, Hauptschule in Essen, Germany winner of 2009. The school provides a parents' office, which is the formal and informal link between parents, school students, teachers and other staff. The so-called tearoom – run by parents – offers a cosy atmosphere, where everybody feels welcome. Parents prepare breakfast for students daily that is a great help, especially for disadvantaged families. Parents not only get profound information and trainings on parenting issues, ICT, literacy, music and arts, but also individual support if necessary. So many educational and social challenges and problems can get solved directly easily on eye-level what is very much appreciated by the parents.

Supporting Migrant Parental involvement in the Irish Primary Education System – project by the National Parents Council Primary, Ireland, winner of 2010. The program permits migrant parents to engage with services of National Parents Council, in drop-in centres operated by parents and teachers. It also includes a training programme to migrant parents with drop-in sessions at informal coffee mornings or afternoons, with the possibility to speak to helpline officers to get a better understanding of the Irish school system, the integration of these parents into Parents' Associations and thus, migrant parents are better involved in schools.

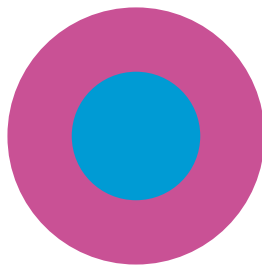
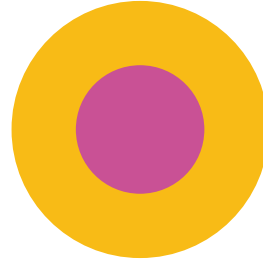
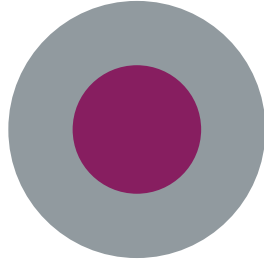
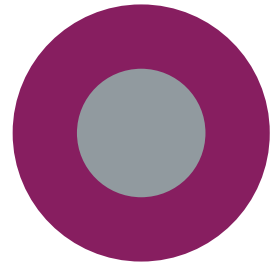
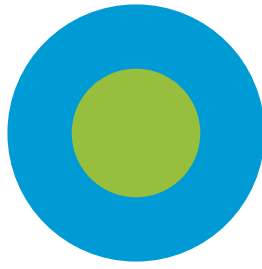
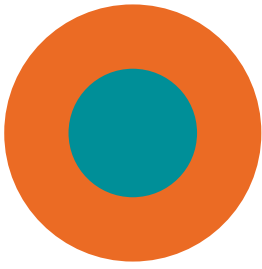
Parents building desegregated neighbourhood schools – initiative by Stichting Kleurrijke Scholen, winner of 2011. In The Netherlands, over 80 groups of volunteer parents work on desegregating schools through promotion, lobbying and quality-improvement. In cooperation with the school and the neighbourhood, schools get desegregated in a non-forced, natural way, but persuading parents. Schools are more connected to their environment and educational quality improves through parental involvement. Kleurrijke Scholen facilitates parental groups through peer-professional support, supports innovative parental involvement strategies on national and local education policy levels, sets up parent-school-neighbourhood connections and organises school-information tours for parents in order to choose by the quality of schools instead of choosing by colour.

"Rencontre Parents-Ecole" – initiative by APEL, France winner of 2013. Producing and making available a communication kit for leaders of parents' associations, enabling them to lead an evening between teachers, principals and parents about educational issues, for example: authority, motivation, orientation, values, being a parent at school.

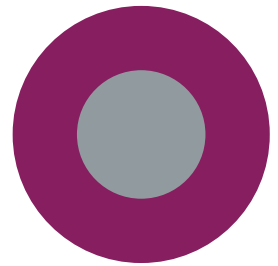
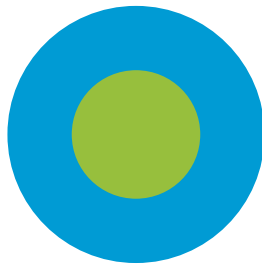
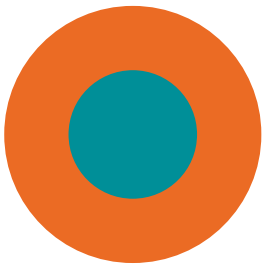


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