

Projekt Comenius Regio:

“Education in areas characterized by a lack of access to infrastructure and highly qualified jobs in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy”

Cooperation between school and parents. Supporting the educational process

A guidebook for schools and parents

'I wanted to change the world. But I have found that the only thing one can be sure of changing is oneself.'

Aldous Huxley

Partnerzy projektu w Polsce:



I Introduction

As teachers we are involved in the school environment on a daily basis, face the realities and problems of different nature. Some of them can be solved on a current basis, others require long-term actions, organisational or even systemic changes, while some do not depend on us in any way.

Nevertheless, the keyword which initiated the idea for the Comenius Regio Project was *the change* itself. A change requires strength, time, self-reflection, exchange of views, maturity, a quick reaction to the surrounding world, constant activity. All that came into being thanks to our project – EDU – P.A.S.S.

We managed to take notice of a need for changes and develop specific ideas, which may make school more efficient and facilitate students' and teachers' personal development. We succeeded in setting the door ajar to invite changes for better.

The following publication is an outcome of interinstitutional and international talks and activities. It is a collection of ideas and rules which we recommend could be implemented to “make friends with school” and to see its benefits. This friendship should involve all links of the puzzle – parents, teachers, students. We would like to point out how important a tight cooperation between school and parents is, we give some hints why it is worth doing and how it can be organized. We looked with a critical eye at what already exists and suggested changes, which will contribute to a more complete support of the educational process.

II The objectives of cooperation between teachers and parents

Effective educational work implies tight cooperation between parents and class teachers/tutors. They should develop a model of cooperation which will bring the best results.

It is essential to be aware of the objectives of this cooperation:

- parents' participation in the teaching and educational process,
- aiming at unifying the educational influence of the school and home environment.
- cooperation in recognising students' developmental abilities,
- raising parents' educational awareness,
- passing knowledge on the child's progress at school,

- finding out about the parents' expectations concerning school,
- creating partnership between parents and the school environment.

Appropriately organised cooperation between the school and family brings visible benefits. It enables a better understanding of students by teachers and parents, agreeing on the best educational approach, giving mutual assistance and creating the right educational atmosphere at school and at home.

III Creating cooperation between parents and school

Both home and school exert educational influence on the student.

In order to achieve satisfactory results both groups have to cooperate closely. Creating appropriate conditions will make the cooperation effective.

1. Conditions necessary for good cooperation of the home and school environment.

Assumption: We are working for the good of the same child. Let's unite forces and unify requirements and educational methods to achieve a better result.

A good relationship requires: good will, openness, respect and sympathy, honesty, discretion.

In the process of building the relationship it is important to take several steps:

- Diagnosis of mutual relations,
- Agreeing on expectations,
- Establishing clear rules for cooperation,

To make the cooperation with parents run smoothly and efficiently, it is worth establishing several conditions:

Teachers should:

- take the first step towards a good collaboration,
- reject prejudices and be ready to communicate with every parent,
- believe that the effectiveness of cooperation depends on both sides,
- grant parents the same rights they want to have,
- create a friendly and peaceful atmosphere for the conversation,
- engage all parents in collaboration,
- receive and calmly analyse criticism,

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- change what can be changed, be open to new ideas,

It is essential for the following forms of communication to prevail:

- direct, because they integrate, build trust, minimize the distance which impedes communication and the exchange of information,
- taking place in the school, making it the main place and platform for cooperation,
- voluntary, as thanks to them collaboration can be treated as a right and a privilege, and not an unpleasant duty,
- being an open, friendly conversation, which makes parents feel involved.

The “recipe” for a good cooperation with parents:

- meet the students and their family environment,
- be honest, open and communicative,
- listen, let them talk, show understanding and concern,
- do not think that you are always right and know everything,
- do not cling to clichés and beliefs,
- look, listen, feel and search,
- be flexible, open to change and suggestions,
- think about the form and content of the conversation by choosing the right place and time,
- speak clearly and firmly about your requirements and expectations, so that they are known and understood by the parents,
- intending to give the parent bad news start by finding the child 's positive qualities,
- in the case of criticism - do not be offended. Think and calmly analyse the complaints,
- monitor the student's progress on an ongoing basis and keep the parents informed,
- do not leave a parent with a problem - offer help, show ways to cope, or direct to the right person.

2 The benefits of good home-school cooperation:

- √ There is a common goal - parents and teachers care about the best development of the child,
- √ Unifying school and home educational systems, which gives a better chance to influence the students.
- √ Building a common friendly atmosphere conducive to the educational development of the child, with consistent rules,

- √ Mutual assistance in solving educational and problems,
- √ Parents' involvement in school life.
- √ A friendly atmosphere needed to carry out the activities of the school.
- √ Parents' opinions and expectations may influence the school and planning of its development and changes,
- √ Teachers' sense of being understood and appreciated.
- √ Partnership in communicating with parents leads to greater trust and appreciation of the influence on school life.

3. Difficulties in home-school cooperation:

| | Teachers | Parents |
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| | Lack of time | Lack of time |
| | A feeling of not being listened to by the other side | A feeling of not being listened to by the other side |
| | Doubt that a conversation might change anything | Doubt that a conversation might change anything |
| | A sense of lack of real influence on the behaviour of parents towards their children | Fear that a conversation with the teacher may have a negative impact on the treatment of their child. Lack of trust |
| | Their own or other teachers' previous experience indicating absence of effects of cooperation with the parents or the parents' underestimating of the efforts undertaken by the teacher | No real sense of support from the teacher Fear of hearing " bad news " about the child, thereby also of lowering their value as parents |
| | The feeling that the problem lies not in the pupil, but the family and the teacher is not | Escape from taking on (unconsciously) the |

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| <p>able to change the whole complex situation</p> <p>Fear of public performance</p> <p>Objective difficulties in the organization of meetings, such as: lack of time and space for quiet conversation, etc.</p> <p>Burnout, aversion to communicating with the so-called "difficult parents" because of the emotional costs of this type of relationships.</p> | <p>role of the student - defenseless against the authority of the teacher (behaviour as in the childhood: parents forget that they are adults).</p> <p>Not feeling welcome, teachers have to (not want) to organise a meeting, time pressure, poor organisation of the meetings.</p> <p>No sense of the need for the real involvement in the school matters</p> <p>Parents' negative experiences - decisions in relation to their children are made arbitrarily, without their participation or asking for their opinion</p> <p>Lack of parents' integration, strangers have problems working for the common goal.</p> |
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IV Forms of cooperation between teachers and parents:

"It is not so important for a man to know a lot, but to know well, not to memorise things, but to understand them, not to care a little, but to be really committed, to have a passion." Janusz Korczak

The common role of school and family home is to teach children certain skills, curiosity of the world, openness, resourcefulness, empathy, coexistence and cooperation. Since both environments have the same goals, the more should they work together. To make the cooperation more effective the tools described below can be used.

1. Tools used for cooperation with parents.

- Parent -teacher meetings, organised 4-6 times a year, whose aim is to discuss various organisational matters concerning the class, students' school achievements and difficulties which teachers encounter in their work;
- Social meetings, organised on the occasion of celebrations and class or school events enabling parents a better understanding of the atmosphere prevailing at school.
- Meetings of the parent class or school council, usually taking place while organizing various school and class events.
- Meeting with an expert, held with the participation of a specially invited person, giving the parents help in matters beyond the professional competence of the class teacher/tutor, often taking the form of:
 - meetings concerning educational problems, in which all the students' parents can take part,
 - parent training meetings in form of conferences or lectures held during parent-teacher meetings.
- Individual forms of cooperation between teachers and parents complement and enrich their collective communication. These include:
 - monthly parent-teacher consultations, during which the parents have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the requirements and expectations of teachers and the educational situation of their child;
 - home visits, whose aim is closer and direct knowledge about the conditions in which students live and establishing personal contacts with all members of the family;
 - written communication via:
 - student's diary, which is primarily used to inform parents about the child's marks;
 - letters to parents, which may be:
 - open letters, concerning education;
 - letters for parents of individual students.

Written communication with parents should:

- reflect mutual respect,
- contain specific information written in plain language,
- cover all the important information, not just the negative,
- be neatly written,
- be confidential if it contains content intended only for adults.

- written reports of students' behaviour and academic achievements are used mostly during parent-teacher meetings, (these are pre-prepared cards with marks in all subjects including a behaviour mark)
- telephone calls during which information and advice concerning the student's academic progress and behaviour is given.

A variety of ways to improve contact with the parents makes it possible to choose the most suitable ones for your environment, tailored to the opportunities that respond to the needs of the school and parents. Keep in mind that each new opportunity can help to establish the relationship between the school and the parent, thereby improving the situation of the child and their academic performance.

Why use those tools to contact the parents? Below are their advantages. Each tool was subjected to a critical analysis at the international meeting within the framework of Comenius Regio project. Despite the indicated inconveniences it was agreed that it is worth using a number of methods of communication in order to effectively reach the parent.

| Tools | Advantages and opportunities |
|--------------------------|---|
| E -register | Enables checking learning outcomes and school attendance. |
| Parent- teacher meetings | Frequent meetings (once a month) allow current monitoring of attendance and learning outcomes. It helps to enable the direct cooperation of the parent who may be involved in the school activities |

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| Individual contact | <p>It allows quick and ongoing solving of individual problems with the student or the problem that arose in the school or in the class.</p> <p>Good cooperation with the parent.</p> |
| Students' information diaries | <p>All excuse notes are included in one booklet, available for inspection.</p> <p>It facilitates monitoring of students' absence.</p> <p>Fast written contact with parents.</p> |
| Common organization of trips, sleigh rides, class events, etc. | <p>Integration of the parents with the school, class, teacher.</p> <p>The sense of belonging to the school community and involvement in the child's life.</p> |
| Cooperation with the school counsellor | <p>Common solving of problems with learning, family finances, domestic problems, etc. Referring students to the Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre. The possibility of obtaining support.</p> |
| School website | <p>Access to current information, school documentation, available for downloading.</p> |
| Training parents (workshops / meetings for parents) | <p>Information on basic principles and rules.</p> <p>Allowing contact with a specialist.</p> <p>It helps understand the child and their development.</p> |

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| <p>Parent Council - influence on decisions concerning students.</p> | <p>Easier collaboration, greater motivation for parents to cooperate. Giving a chance to change, participation in the building of the principles, rules, giving opportunities for young people to develop.</p> |
| <p>Open lessons for parents</p> | <p>Openness indicates transparency and concerns of teachers about the education of young people. Individual parents are closer to educational problems.</p> |
| <p>Mentors (older peers) of the first year students - an idea borrowed from the Austrian partner school</p> | <p>Appointed senior school pupils take care of the first year students. Students - mentors have high self-esteem. First form students have a sense of security in the new environment.</p> |

2. Principles of organizing an ideal parent – teacher meeting

Why organize another meeting for the parents?

Anyway only the best students' parents will come ..."

No one will want to cooperate ..."

And again will I hold a brief meeting and it will end up with a queue of parents wanting to discuss individual matters ..."

And again won't I learn anything interesting ..."

I will listen to what a bad student my son / daughter is..."

Why should I go all the way to the school for a ten-minute meeting ..."

Parent and teacher have you ever said that before? Do you think the same? It is time to change it, let's use the opportunity to meet with the parents effectively, and let it be an opportunity to

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constructively solve problems, cope with our own and the students' weaknesses. Remember! The students has to be the purpose of the meeting. It is for them we devote the time and effort! It is worth it!

Please note that the link to generate a fruitful, long-lasting and sincere cooperation between the school and the parent are not only teachers and parents, but also the school management and the school counsellor. These elements should be a source of information, support, mentoring, knowledge and competence.

Here are some useful tips on how to make a parent- teacher meeting different than before, and to finally meet its function:

Teacher:

- Prepare for the meeting- set the time, place and the purpose (what you want to achieve, try to anticipate difficulties, to be able to counteract them, be positive)
- Instead of starting with saying what is wrong (a students have not done their homework), Start with what is good (I like Jurek's sense of humour)
- Instead of telling what the student did not do (he was daydreaming during lessons, he has not learned the multiplication table, ...) describe what the child should do (students who have been ill have to catch up on schoolwork)
- Instead of saying negative things about the student and loosing faith in his success (well he is not Einstein...), end the meeting with a positive statement that the parent may repeat the student (please tell Andrew that I believe that he is able to learn)

Parents

- Instead of hiding important information (my son spends four hours in front of his computer) provide information relevant to the case (because of that he is too tired to do his homework)
- After the meeting do not forget about the arrangements you discussed with the teacher, act according to the plan (sisters help each other and get better marks, your husband has had more time recently, so he has been helping his son with homework, Bartek no longer spends so much time in front of the computer.)

Parent and teacher:

- Instead of giving each other advice (you and your wife should ..., teachers should not you give so much material for reading), describe what is happening at home and at school, what

brings good results (I noticed that after a break my son has more energy, he works better when he makes a break every 15 minutes.)

- Agree on a common plan of action (e.g. the teacher will ask one of the students to help the child with mathematics, the parent will make sure that their child does not spend so much time in front of TV)

Or perhaps half-jokingly, half-seriously☺. The following "recipe" can also be provided in the form of a poster in the annex to this publication.

An idea for the parent-teacher meeting:

Ingredients:

1 teacher

Approx. 30 parents

15 benches

30 chairs

1 kg of good intentions

50 dag of smile

50 dag of understanding

1 kg of openness

Preparation to the parent-teacher meeting:

Teacher!!!

1. The parent is your ally - smile at them.
2. Prepare yourself for the meeting!
3. Create a pleasant atmosphere – ask the parents to take off coats, arrange benches in a less academic style, thank the parents for coming, and maybe prepare some attractions - coffee / tea.
4. Do not sit behind the desk - sit with the parents.
5. Set targets for the meeting - prepare a meeting agenda.
6. Start with the positive assessment of the students, remember their achievements. Praise students by names.
7. Discuss the studying results – but not personally.

8. Discuss issues related to coursework/ school – talk about problems, not individual students.
9. Discuss individual student achievements only in private, in a sincere, kind and constructive way.
10. Show organizational matters objectively. Prepare an information leaflet for the parents.
11. Pay more attention to organizational and educational matters rather than financial.
12. Present and remind the rules of the school.
13. Consistently follow these rules and require the parents to do the same.
14. Suggest a discussion of problematic issues.
15. Involve the parents in the affairs of the class (organization of trips, school events).
16. Prepare a brief lecture to inform the parents on.
17. Offer your help to the parents.
18. Tell them how they can help students at home.
19. Diagnose class problems using questionnaires.
20. Offer the parents a leaflet, quote, educational tip, etc.

Headmaster!!!

1. Prepare a list of the most important information for the teachers to the parent-teacher meetings in advance.
2. Remind the parents and students about the parent-teacher meetings in advance (via website, Facebook, on a bulletin board, etc.)
3. Support young teachers with your presence or knowledge at their first meetings with parents (arrange a "briefing" for them)
4. Send letters of congratulations / thanks to the parents.
5. Invite the parents to school events (start of the school year, graduation)

School counsellor!!!

1. Suggest a topic for a short lecture for the parents and short materials to be used during the parent-teacher meeting.
2. Suggest workshops with a specialist.
3. Support young form teachers/tutors with your presence or knowledge at the first meetings with parents (arrange a "briefing" for them).
4. Provide the form teachers with diagnostic surveys.

V Summary

Cooperation among the teachers, the head teacher and the school counsellor must be professional, involve many aspects, be carried out on several levels, but most of all it must initialize and take advantage of co-operation between the educational institution and the parent. It is up to the teachers to establish the first contact, make it long-lasting, efficient, and resulting in better school results achieved by the students. This seems to be one of the most difficult tasks for the teacher. In this task the teachers can be supported by the internal organization of the school, but also by the openness to cooperation with the parents and raising the parents' awareness of the need for communication with the school. All participants (teachers, students and parents) of this process should be aware of the opportunities offered by a well-organized cooperation.

We hope that the tips and advice included in this publication will contribute to changes in the schools and lead to real effects and changes in thinking. Finally, we suggest a few tips for parents. The following "Good Practice Bank " is also presented in the form of a poster to print out, attached to this publication.

Good Practice Bank

Parents!!!

1. Attend the parent - teacher meetings – be aware of your child's progress and what is happening at school.
2. Get to know the place where your child spends half their day.
3. Meet the teachers who are educating your child together with you.
4. Take advantage of the new media – school website, electronic school register, Facebook, e-mail. Check! Read! Find out!
5. Do not be passive – have some influence on the school your child attends. Have your say at the parent-teacher meetings.
6. Learn – help yourself understand the teenager. Take advantage of the workshops organised by the school.
7. Supervision does not mean surveillance – you have to know how your child is doing at school.
8. Seize the opportunity to listen to expert advice (a psychologist, school counsellor).
9. "How was school?" is not enough! Maybe a tea together and a conversation.
10. Come to the parent-teacher meetings on time (as far as possible).

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11. Try to take full advantage of the time allocated for the meeting (do not think that your bus leaves shortly, and the next one goes in half an hour).
12. Call the school if you have questions!

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