Communicating With Parents

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B.C. Ministry of Education Resources

Reporting Student Progress: Policy and Practice Policy

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/classroom_assessment/09_report_student_prog.pdf

- 3 formal written report cards per year:
  - o communicate significant aspects of the students' progress in the areas of intellectual, social, human and career development
- 2 informal reports that describe, in relation to the curriculum:
  - o what the student is able to do
  - o the areas of learning that require further attention or development
  - o ways the teacher is supporting the student's learning needs

Practice:

- evaluation is based on standards, called prescribed "learning outcomes," and expected levels of performance (Performance Standards)

B.C. Ministry of Education Resources

BC Performance Standards

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf_stands/   -

- developed for voluntary use in B.C. schools

- intended as a resource to support ongoing instruction and assessment

- performance standards describe levels of achievement in reading, writing, numeracy and social responsibility

- used when reporting student progress

Teachers:
Building Relationships with Parents

The common goal: helping students achieve their highest potential

Some opportunities:

- **Meet-the-teacher Night**
  - The first informal meeting between teachers and parents. It is a great chance for teachers to show their enthusiasm for teaching.
- **Parent-Teacher Conferences**
  - It is not just a chance for teachers to tell parents about their children, but also for parents to ask questions about their children's learning
- **Parent Advisory Councils (PACs)**
  - It is an opportunity in which parents and teachers can discuss respectfully about their concerns and opinions

Reporting Student Progress: Policy & Practice
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/classroom_assessment/09_report_student_prog.pdf

.This ia great resource for teachers who want to know how to assess and report student progress formally and informally. It is important for teachers to be familiar with proper student progress report before, during, and after communicating with parents.

Practical Methods(Williams, 2012)

Techniques	Examples
Share positive news on a regular basis	Make commendation ("good news") calls or emails (It is such a pleasure to have Peter in the class)
Commit to an "Open Door Policy"	Invite parents to observe your teaching
Multiple modes of communication	Newsletters, emails, blog (post photos and videos of student learning)
Literacy bags	Materials and activities provided to help parents support and connect with children's learning
Active listening	Understand the parents' point of view; invite parents to share thoughts
Talk simply and directly	Outline points, avoid jargon, be clear and concrete; do not generalize
Parent surveys	Gather information about students' background, strengths, weaknesses, interests, activities, etc.

Email Communication

With the prevalence of technology in education, it is accompanied by an increase in electronic forms of communication between educators and parents as well.

PROs

- Correlated with increase in parental involvement
- Increase parent-teacher communication: opens up continuous dialogue
- Increases some students' achievements

CONs

- Higher possibility of misinterpreting messages: absence of nonverbal cues
- Works best for exchanging concrete information such as grades and scheduling
- Harms some students' achievements: reliance on parents
- Not all parents are computer-literate and have access to computers

Parents:
Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences
(Adapted from Canter, 2010)

Tip	Examples
Collect relevant materials	Records: report cards, test scores, health records
Talk with children before conference	Assure them you are learning about their experiences at school Address concerns
Familiarize with children's assignments	Difficulty level? Completion?
Generate questions	Are my children meeting expectations? Do they exhibit any behavioural issues? Are my children getting along with classmates?
Be positive	Assume teacher has child's best learning interests in mind Respond calmly

http://engage.bcedplan.ca/2011/10/question-2/
This is a site where parents can visit to discuss on ways to become more familiar with their children's learning.

Teachers: Parent-Teacher Conferences

(BC Teacher's Federation)

Before	During	After
• Be aware of school procedures regarding conferences • Know your students • Allocate time wisely (share your points, but also leave time for parental concerns) • Be prepared: student portfolios	• Greet parents • Be an active listener • Encourage parents to share information • Always mention positive things about the student • Develop practical goals with parents	• Write down notes for you and the parent • End on a positive note • Summarize discussion and emphasize the goals created • Ask parents if they have any more questions

Parent-Teacher Conference Tips:

Active Listening: Use the "LAFF Don't CRY" Technique (McNaughton & Vostal):

L – Listen, empathize and communicate respect

A – Ask questions and ask permission to take notes

F – Focus on the issues

F – Find a first step

Don't

C – Criticize people who aren't present

R – React hastily and promise something you can't deliver

Y – Yakety-yak-yak

Conference Outcomes

Helps teachers:

• Understand parents' impressions and expectations of the school and the educational program

• Obtain additional information about the children in their class

• Encourage parents' understanding and support of the program

• Communicate children's development and progress and suggest ways in which parents can support their children's learning

• Strengthen the communication between home and school

Helps parents:

• Better understand the school program

• Increase their understanding of learning and assessment

• Heighten their awareness of their children's abilities

• Participate in the reporting process

Learn ways they can support their children's growth, progress and learning

Conference Outcomes

Helps students:

• join their parents and teachers in examining and reflecting on their learning

• demonstrate their skills and abilities

• participate in setting personal goals for future learning

• take responsibility for their learning through self-evaluation

• gain knowledge of themselves and enhance their self-esteem

(BC Ministry of Education, Reporting Student Progress: Policy and Practice)

An Alternative: Student-Led Parent-Teacher Conferences (Benefits)

Teachers	Students	Parents
• Shared burden of explaining student progress to parents • Better communication with parents	• Responsible for own learning • Self-awareness: strengths and weakness • Social skills: leadership, public speaking • Self-reflection: setting personal goals for improvement	• Higher attendance • Better connection with teachers • Better understanding of children's learning experiences • Home-school connection

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/classroom_assessment/student_centered.pdf
This is a great resource that helps teachers and students plan and create student-led conferences.

Conclusion:
A Triple Win alternative!
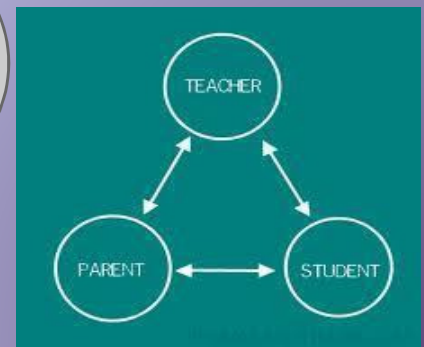
Aboriginal Students and Families

"Research has shown that parent involvement is the single most important determinant of students' success in school."

BC Ministry of Education. (2002). Building Better Partnerships for Aboriginal Education.
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/reports/abed_partnership.pdf

"Each Aboriginal learner and family must experience a sense of belonging and place within educational settings, where their voices are heard, where they have choice and influence in decision making, and where their cultures, histories and contributions are respected and reflected."

School District #39 Vancouver. (2009). Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement

http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/school-files/Programs/VSB_AEEA.pdf

Teachers: Connecting with Aboriginal Families

- Make personal contact with students and their families at the beginning of the school year (before formal meetings)
- Talk to parents on a regular and consistent basis about their children's progress, interests and activities in school
- Showing respect for, and understanding of, Aboriginal cultures
- Organize activities, in consultation with Aboriginal parents, to encourage Aboriginal families to visit the school (eg. social, recreational, educational)
- Attend Aboriginal cultural events (on reserve/in community)
- Acknowledge the importance of parent involvement and participation

Practical Methods

Barriers	Strategies
Negative educational experiences of Aboriginal parents - racism, residential school history, lack of success	Using Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal Enhancement workers, role-models and mentors to support home-school connections, change perceptions and increase trust
Cultural awareness – not just one Aboriginal culture	Increase understanding of Aboriginal culture, history and current issues unique to the local Aboriginal community
Communication	Offer choices regarding type and location of contact; use "parent friendly" language; show respect for parent information and feedback
"Negative" contacts	Increase "good news" messages and contacts
Lack of understanding of family and community issues	Involve Aboriginal Enhancement workers for increased home-school contact
School's expectations of parents' participation – intimidating; traditionally and culturally different	Provide clarification and rationale for school's expectation for parent involvement; encourage parents to provide feedback; offer choices
Lack of engagement by schools	Respect Aboriginal culture by planning cultural activities in consultation with Aboriginal families and resources
Poverty and illness affecting participation in school	Offer support in a respectful manner (eg. bursaries; baby-sitting during meetings)

BC Ministry of Education. (2002). Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/reports/parent_engage.pdf

This research project was designed to identify and develop strategies that could be used by schools and Aboriginal communities to improve the level of Aboriginal parent involvement in local schools.

Developing a Partnership – "Successful education is about developing successful partnerships." *BC Ministry of Education. (2002). Building Better Partnerships for Aboriginal Education.*

- respect and celebrate Aboriginal culture – visible displays of Aboriginal art; involve Aboriginal elders; inclusion of Aboriginal culture in curriculum content
- recognize and address the barriers
- establish effective avenues of communication
  - use opportunities for positive contact to encourage dialogue and trust
  - use multiple modes – verbal and written; aboriginal cultures generally respect personal contacts, this varies with the individual
- collaborate - engage parent involvement in the decision-making process for school activities & programs, as well as problem-solving and mutual goal-setting for their children
- involve students in parent-teacher interactions/discussions to increase their trust and comfort level with the teacher/classroom
- utilize Aboriginal parents' skills in the classroom (eg. arts/crafts, music, drama, local history, traditional skills, etc)
- strategies will vary depending upon the region and the individual family involved
  - not all communities have band representation
  - not all Aboriginal parents are affiliated with bands

Communicating with ESL Families

The learning success of English as a Second Language students requires support from the school, teachers, and families.One of the biggest predictors of the high rate of school among these students is poor home-school communication.

General Barriers (Yan, 2006)

1. Linguistic Differences
2. Cultural Differences of home-school communication
3. Teacher Misconceptions
4. Different Perspectives on Education
5. Unfamiliarity with Educational System

Barrier #1: Linguistic Differences

- Hinders ability to communicate children's progress
- Lack of translation services at school contributes to problem
- Usage of English in formal school-parent communication

Solutions:
Provide bilingual forms of communication
Sufficient translators for parent-teacher conferences

Barrier #2: Cultural Differences of home-school communication

Not a generalization, accumulated from studies reported by Yan (2006)

Parent Involvement in Western Cultures	Parent Involvement in Non-western Cultures
Communicating with schools	Social stigma: means child is in trouble
Attend parent-teacher conferences	Belief that they should not interfere with school processes
Volunteer at school functions	Home environmental support: print-rich, quiet study areas, emotional support
Help children with homework	Look through textbooks, agendas, assignments, scores on tests
Initiate parent-teacher meetings if concern arises	Reluctance to challenge teacher's authority

Solutions:
Teachers should learn about immigrant cultures
Teachers should learn and value parents' individuality within and across cultures

Barrier #3: Teacher Misconceptions

- View lack of involvement as lack of concern for children's learning
- **Institutional racism**
  - Example: A group of Latino parents in California advocated for a bilingual program for their children but their request was ignored and they were deemed "difficult, stupid, and selfish" (Yan)

Solutions:
Professional development workshops on cultural sensitivity
Ask teachers to examine own feelings and biases
Multicultural dinners

Barrier #4: Perspectives on Education

Some studies conducted to compare different cultural perspectives on education

Chinese parents in UK

- Valued education highly
- Desired higher homework load
- Wanted a stricter school structure

Taiwanese ESL families in Vancouver (1998)

- Dissatisfaction with holistic learning approach
- Believed ESL classes delayed progress in content classes

ESL Teachers on ESL Programs

- Help with listening, speaking, reading, and writing in shortest time
- Acquire basic study skills

This shows an English as a Second Language student teaching the class how to say words in her native language.

Solutions:
Emphasize same end goal = best education for immigrant students
Incorporate ESL parents' home cultures into school curriculum
Acknowledge unique ways ESL parents are involved in their children's education

Barrier #5: Unfamiliarity with Educational System

- Inability to help children with homework
- Not integrated into children's learning experiences

Solutions:
Organized parents' nights that inform with about school policies and ESL program, answer questions, expectations

Glossary

Active Listening - a communication technique that requires the listener to feed back what they hear to the speaker, by way of re-stating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words, to confirm what they have heard and moreover, to confirm the understanding of both parties.

ESL - English as a Second Language

Institutional racism: idea that only parental involvement that aligns with school policies and instructional practices is welcomed, whereas parents' values and views whose culture, ethnicity, SES, and language background differ from the white middle-class norms are deemed "foreign"

Meet-the-Teacher Night: the first informal introduction to parents and guardians regarding the teacher and his or her curriculum

Parent Advisory Councils: established to "advise the board and the principal and staff of the school...respecting any matter relating to the school..." (BCTF)

Parent-Teacher Conference: meeting to exchange information between home and school

Student-led parent-teacher conferences: students explain to parents and teachers their learning experiences, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and goals.

Annotated Bibliography

BC Teachers' Federation. The Practice of Teaching: A Handbook for New Teachers and TTOCs.
   Retrieved from http://bctf.ca/uploadedfiles/public/NewTeachers/handbook.pdf

This document prepares new teachers into the profession of teaching. It covers the benefits of being a teacher on call and it goes into detail on the procedures upon arriving at a new school. More importantly it covers classroom management skills and effective parent teacher relations which are paramount to teaching. I felt it was a useful article even for Teacher Candidates who are just starting to become familiar with the classrooms.

BC Ministry of Education. (2009). Reporting Student Progress: Policy & Practice. Retrieved from
   http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/classroom_assessment/09_report_student_prog.pdf

This document provides teachers and administrators with policy guidelines and suggested practices for reporting student progress from Kindergarten to Grade 12. This is a very useful document that provides information to assist with both formal (report cards) and informal (parent-teacher conferences) reporting procedures. .

Borba, J. A., & Olvera, C. M. (2001). Student-led parent-teacher conferences. *The Clearing House,*
   ***74*(6), 333-336. doi: 10.1080/00098650109599220**

.This article discusses the use of student-led parent-teacher conferences to improve on student learning. It explains the benefits of student-led parent-teacher conferences, such as allowing the active participation in students' progress in school and direct communication with teachers and parents about their learning experiences. Though not explicitly discussed, it would be a useful article that could address the issue of communicating with parents effectively when teachers do not speak the same language. With students as guides, they could be bridges that connect parents and teachers. .

Annotated Bibliography

Canter, Andrea. (2010). "School Conferences: A Guide for Parents." *Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter*, *26*(2), 1-2.

This short article was writtent to provide parents with suggestions on how to communicate with teachers effectively during parent teacher conferences. The emphasis was on the preparation component of the process that would be crucial for a smooth meeting with teachers. It listed some suggestions and provided specific examples of what those tips entailed. I felt it would be very useful for parents from diverse backgrounds as well.

Evans, R. (2004). Talking with Parents Today. Independent School, 63(3), 96-102.

This was a short article that covered tips for teachers regarding effective communication with parents. It discussed three important suggestions: understanding parental assumptions, active listening,, and communicating with simplicity. I felt it was an interesting article because it discussed the psychological benefits for parents and teachers using these communication strategies.

McNaughton, D. & Vostal, B. (2010). Using Active Listening to Improve Collaboration With Parents: The LAFF Don't CRY Strategy. *Intervention in School and Clinic,* **45, 251-256**

Effective parent-teacher communication is essential for building working relationships that result in home-school collaboration and support for student learning. This article summarizes characteristics of effective interactions and recommends that teachers use active listening skills when working with parents. A specific strategy is presented, with the mnemonic LAFF don't CRY, that outlines positive communication behaviours that convey respect and empathy. This article provides practical information that would improve parent-teacher interactions, regardless of the cultural background. This approach stops teacher from dominating conversations and allows parents to express their concerns and feel like valued partners in their child's education.

Annotated Bibliography

Thompson, B. (2008). Characteristics of parent-teacher E-mail communication. Communication Education, 57(2), 201-223. doi: 10.1080/03634520701852050

I enjoyed reading this article because it speaks to the popularity of email communication in the education system today. It examined the specific content of the emails relayed between parents and teachers and pinpointed the implications of them. It showed a balanced perspective of email communication, which I liked.

**Williams, K. *9 Techniques for Building Solid Parent-Teacher Relationships. Retrieved from:*
http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/9-techniques-building-solid-parent-teacher-relationships**
This article highlights practical ways of building effective parent-teacher relationships. It is written from the perspective of a teacher who uses these nine techniques on a regular basis in the classroom. It is useful because it also discusses how these methods impact parent-teacher relations.

Yan, G. (2006). "Why didn't they show up?" Rethinking ESL parent involvement in K-12 education. *TESL Canada Journal*, 24(1), 80-95.

This article looks at a specific group of parents and their involvement with the school: English-as-a second-language (ESL) parents. It speaks to teachers who need to understand barriers preventing these parents from participating in their children's learning. It discusses some successful strategies for teachers to communicate with ESL parents, such as including bilingual forms of communication and organizing parents' nights so parents can become acquainted with the school system.