Developing Effective Communication Skills in Children

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Introduction

I have chosen to develop the reading area of my setting due to the current need to improve children's reading. The setting is populated with mostly English as an additional language (EAL) pupils, and most children face difficulties in understanding Children's English literature due to their ethnic backgrounds. The statistics from the Reading Agency (2014) provide some evidence of issues that we currently face, and the need to improve the standard has emerged. The Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) emphasizes Communication and language to develop and enhance children's literacy. To achieve that, parental involvement has been acknowledged as the key factor in children's well-being, and therefore, parents as partners have become a part of the legal framework (DfE, 2017). In order for me to promote this paradigm, I have participated in arranging a workshop for parents to attend in order to inform them of the developmental aspect. I have performed numerous strategies of effective communication in arranging the workshop, conveyed the importance of developing children's reading, and urged parental collaboration in this aspect of development.

Description

Children are constantly learning and relying on adults for guidance; it has emerged that their learning skills are associated with their cognitive development and the surrounding environment that they inhabit (Taylor et al., 2004). As the focus is on children and their development, it is necessary to have effective communication skills to persuade the parents about what their role is in the child's development and what they need to do to enhance their relationship with their children (Ward, 2009, p. 13). Using the ecological model of Urie Bronfenbrenner to make a change within a social context involving parents and other family members, I needed to take the initiative for discussion around managing change with my colleagues and come up with a developing idea for home reading (Bronfenbrenner cited in Lindon and Trodd, 2016, p. 181). This 'scope of change' is not a huge one, but an 'Improvement change'; it is an existing feature of Communication and Language that needs to be made interesting with new ideas for both the parents and children (Lindon and Trodd, 2016, pp. 184-185). Therefore, the reading workshop was intended to focus on change using effective communicative skills, which allowed me to interact and communicate using verbal, non-verbal, formal, and informal methods of communication with the teacher, staff, head teacher, and parents

(Businessballs, no date). This was to have a firm grip on my speech in making the audience grasp the true meaning of words that are uttered and understand the concept of making changes. There are cases when people take words out of context, and the speaker becomes unable to communicate what he or she initially meant to say. People perceive communication to be a one-way process. However, effective communication is a two-way process, as the person communicating not only speaks but listens to what other people have to say (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 16). It is necessary for an effective communicator always to be aware of his or her tone so that the audience is persuaded to do what the speaker wishes them to do. In this case, the purpose was to persuade the parents to understand the importance of reading skills in the early years [My School, 2018].

The aim of communication is to listen and to be heard, whether through writing, speech, or gestures (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 24). The reason why miscommunication happens is that, most often, people do not use the right words to convey their message to the audience. It can occur in both verbal communication and written communication, as in both situations, people tend to read between the lines and get the wrong message. To avoid such a situation, some basic communication principles should be followed. Building trust and showing respect is one of the fundamental principles of communication (Ward, 2009, p. 13). The audience, in this case, the parents of the children, need to have trust in the early providers, who care for the children and pay special attention to each and every child. If the parents are not treated with respect and given the treatment that they deserve, then they will not be ready to listen (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 16). To get them to listen to my point, I allowed them to share concerns with me regarding their children and what they thought was needed to enhance their child's learning process. If the parents are made to feel like they are unaware of what their child needs and how to tackle it with a child, then it will set off their mood and make them less attentive to what is being said. The parents need to be made sure that they are not being judged and instead are being encouraged to present their opinions. It is important in any communication to have an understanding between the speaker and the audience; otherwise, the point of the whole interaction is lost (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 12). Therefore, an important strategy that I used was to keep the parents involved throughout the process so that they are open to all kinds of advice and share their views as well. This has resulted in a positive outcome as the parents were persuaded to help their child work on his or her reading skills (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 13). Active listening is another principle of effective communication and focuses on the person speaking. To actively listen means to not interrupt the person speaking and to allow them to finish what they are saying. By doing this, the speaker's message becomes clearer, and in this situation, the parents' concerns are brought forward (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 30). Parents need the help of early providers to help their children learn and develop, which is why it is important to allow them to express their concerns and suggestions for improvements. Judging the parents for expressing concerns makes it seem like the providers put themselves above the parents. Such an act can lower the parent's confidence and cause communication issues (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 12). I had to give them space in which they could share their opinions first before giving my own opinions on the matter, such as the development of reading skills in children and how to enhance their progress in this area of learning [My school, 2018].

For the purpose of communicating my developmental goals to the parents, teacher, staff, and the head teacher, I utilized strategies from Mehrabian's communication model theory. I used both verbal and nonverbal methods. I had to engage in a dialogue with my class teacher in order to actively organize a workshop and use, where appropriate, non-verbal methods such as writing out emails to the head teacher and staff and sending out alerts and email messages to parents to inform them of a reading workshop. Leading up to the workshop and during the workshop, I communicated through a variety of strategies using gestures, expressions, visual narratives, and vocal sounds. Mehrabian's work is dedicated to providing the foundations for the most often quoted and simplified statistic for the effectiveness of verbal communication. Mehrabian pointed to a statistical chart associated with spoken communication in which he added that about 7% of the spoken messages are based on feelings and attitudes, 38% of messages associated with feelings and attitudes are paralinguistic and 55% of messages relating to feelings and attitude are based on facial expressions. The findings show that most of the messages are associated with the facial expression of the speaker and less with the way the messages are conveyed and the words that are used to convey the message to the audience (Businessballs, no date). Communication methods have transformed over the years; it is only now that we can use multi-communication methods. This transformation has been influenced by the radical change in technological communication such as mobile phone alerts, emails, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, landline phones, Skype, and webcam. It seems to make it easier to connect and communicate faster than ever before. Unfortunately, technological communication is getting far more advanced and dangerous for children and adults. To tackle these problems, it is extremely difficult to keep up with policing the sites and their abusers (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 15).

There are several effective ways that have been recognized and implemented in order to make communication effective. The most recognized one is the Semiotics School, which is considered to be part of 2 schools of thought. It emphasizes the symbols or languages theory, which recommends that schools deal with the communication barrier by using a mixture of symbols, signs, and messages. It involves the sender and the receiver of the message. The sender will carry out the message, and in turn, the receiver will answer through a prescribed sign.

Additionally, researchers recommend another theory to efficiently fill the communication gap. The Hypodermic theory uses the media to convey messages because it influences the most. The impact it could leave is why this theory is also referred to as the bullet theory.

Models of communication include Aristotle's model, which includes five factors: Speaker, Speech/message, Audience, Effect, and Occasion. This model guides the speaker in designing the message while viewing the type of audience. The children facing the issues due to their living background had to be considered while designing the message. Every child needs separate attention from parents, as suggested earlier, and from the teachers as well.

Newcomb's Model was derived in 1953, specifically focusing on the issues faced by teachers and students regarding communication barriers. This model focuses on the equilibrium and sustaining it in society. As can be seen in the following figure, the connection between A (Teacher) and B (Student) is

made through X (Lesson). If the X is not clear and is not accepted by the B, then the A should amend the X after considering all the possible ways of making it understandable.

Wilbur Schramm's Model helps in understanding the complexities of communication between two people. An understanding of the complexities can be gained through the signals which are common to both. The communication between them includes 3 acts, which are decoder, interpreter, and encoder, which can be seen in the following figure.

The crucial step is identifying the problem, which is the duty of the teacher, and providing help to the learner to overcome that problem (Nagy and Neff, 2015).

To be aware of issues, limitations, and discourses, professionals have to evaluate the impact of poor communication and make appropriate developments to ensure that practice runs effectively. For a desirable result, professionals have to continue with effective communication. At times, there might appear situations in which adults are faced with bias due to cultural differences, and in such situations, they need to react without creating any problems for themselves or others (Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2004).

The principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) focus on different areas of learning. However, children are mostly taught through games (Tickell, 2011). Some of the learning areas that the early years pay attention to are communication and language, physical development, personal, social, and cognitive development, literacy, problem-solving questions, apprehending the world, and learning how to use expressive art (Tickell, 2011). Literacy, mathematics, and arts help children enhance their knowledge. It also focuses on what the early years providers have to do to ensure that the child is learning something and developing through the process. Literacy includes reading and writing and is a crucial area of learning (Tickell, 2011). It also works on promoting teaching and learning skills to make sure that the children are getting the required skills that they need to be able to progress through their school and future life (Tickell, 2011), (DfE, 2017).

The role of parents in helping the child learn literacy is evident through a variety of behaviors exhibited by the parent. These behaviors can be seen in routine activities, such as the parent's verbal involvement with the child during playtime or when feeding the child. In other instances, the parents indulge in intentional efforts to motivate the child to learn, such as urging the child to speak or to read a word or phrase. Any activity carried out by the parent at home is an important step towards supporting the child's learning and development. Playful activities have a long-lasting impact on children's learning as they advance academically in school. Toddlers who are unable to speak or haven't learned how to communicate need the parent's attention in the process of talking. Parents need to actively participate in their child's life so that the child learns the basics of communication and apprehends new words and ideas. Also, the interaction between parents and the providers who care for the children can impact the child's development. Interactions allow both the parents and the providers to learn a lot of things about the child and also learn how to support the child's learning, keeping in mind the needs and the circumstances. In cases where the child has special needs, for

instance, the child suffers from Dyslexia, both the parents and the providers can learn new ways of handling the reading process of such a child. This situation was also addressed with the parents, and the support network information was provided to them (Irlen, 2005). Children who have learning disabilities show difficulties while reading, such as not being able to read a specific paragraph, or they might skip words and phrases while reading (Irlen, 2005). In some cases, children reverse the order of the words and utter them backward as they are unable to tell right from left (Irlen, 2005). To treat such a problem, I gave some examples to identify such issues; this visual and narrative communication helps to focus on the word learning skills by simplifying it with pictures and gestures, cutting out a rewritten sentence, and sticking it back on a notebook in order. Parents should pay attention to how the child comes up with different words and also help the child understand how each word is to be uttered (Chapman and Tunmer, 2003).

The fishbone model has been applied in order to understand the core of the issue that children face regarding children's English literature (Idouakass et al., 2014). The following five steps involve identifying the problem—the difficulties faced by the children in understanding Children's English literature—through brainstorming sessions. The sessions included the teachers, staff, head teachers, and parents, who were part of the 4Ps of the fishbone model. All the people involved identified the causes that were mentioned in the fishbone diagram.

One of the many issues identified and addressed to date is bringing up children to appreciate and respect the diversity of cultures, move past these differences, learn to peacefully co-exist with others, and later on, as adults, pass down these values to the next generation (Taylor, Clayton and Rowley, 2004). Cultural differences include physical and social differences in lifestyle, celebrations, dress, and families. Sometimes, there are children who are brought up by other members who are not the child's biological parents, and it becomes the responsibility of the practitioners to build a good relationship with the guardian (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 7). With respect to cultural differences, curiosity has to be addressed and answered by teachers and parents in an appropriate manner early in the childhood years so that children may grow up to respect these differences and consider no one inferior but unique in his own individual identity (Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2004). It is exciting to live in a multicultural society, but there can be a handful of barriers and conflicts with differences and communication methods (Hughes and Read, 2012, p. 9). Educators should be open to questions from students from an early age about reasons for differences among individuals, like accents, practices, dressing, etc. (Taylor et al., 2004). But this requires more than just patience on the part of the educator.

Conclusion

Throughout the project, I have recognized and become aware of my own strengths and limitations in communication and the impact that I have on other people during this project engagement. This has made me explore areas of limitation and how to overcome barriers. When speaking to people, we are always going to face somebody who is not listening, or perhaps I would be in that position. A typical

example of that is when I was on a ‘Reading duty’ about one week ago, and it was nearly home time for me; the Nursery nurse came over to me and said that I was taking too long reading with children. I had to read with six children in a space of half an hour. I felt that I was rushed and could not listen to the children. The ADKAR model, Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, was founded by Jeff Hiatt, the founder of Prosci. Each step of this model is a sequential pattern; you cannot just apply one aspect of the model to make a successful change. To make a successful change, all of these stages of the model need to play their purposeful roles. It provides a structural direction to change with successful outcomes and measures failures. The fishbone model, along with several effective ways, including the Semiotics School, which is considered to be part of 2 schools of thought and theories like the Hypodermic theory, Aristotle’s model, Newcomb’s Model, Wilbur Schramm’s Model, has been applied and analyzed to make the learner and teacher effective by filling those gaps. However, failure does not mean that it may be linked to the sequential stages of the model; it is a problem of people’s initiatives and how they are applied to the change (Prosci Inc, 2018). Using this example of the model, it is clear that, to make a successful change, there has to be a team effort and the willingness to drive to success. Similarly, parents also need to make that commitment to the school to participate in making changes to their children’s education and well-being.

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