

Research Digest

Standard 12 Communication

Communicating effectively in the best interests of the child requires policies, procedures and actions that promote the proactive sharing of knowledge and information among appropriate stakeholders, with respect and confidentiality.



Introduction



In order to be effective, communication must extend beyond its dictionary definition of simply being the means by which information and ideas are exchanged. Instead, it should be considered in its broader context: the imparting of thoughts, opinions and information through speech, writing or signs; our ability to convey and understand verbal and non-verbal meanings; a method by which gaps are bridged; and a mechanism through which team thinking can be bolstered. Traditional forms of top-down communication have been replaced, with practitioners now having a more pronounced and active role in the determination of policies, procedures and actions within their settings. This type of individual-focused communication is about paying attention, affirming, bonding, influencing, and encouraging a greater sense of responsibility (Conaty, 2002).

Power relations are an inherent element within communication, due primarily to its largely interpretive nature (e.g., one person's understanding of a conversation may be completely different to that of another's, although both were involved in the same conversation). To counteract this, it is important that policies and procedures are recorded, so there is a traceable point of reference. A range of stakeholders should be involved in the processes of devising, implementing and reviewing these policies and procedures, which should promote the sharing of knowledge and information in the best interests of the child. Ensuring that all relevant staff and adults within the setting understand and follow these procedures is itself dependent on effective communication, thus highlighting the cyclical nature of the Standard.

Recent Research

Collection of relevant and appropriate information

Moyles (2006) presents an evaluation tool for effective leadership and management in early childhood settings. She refers to the importance of management skills in ensuring the efficient operation of basic administrative procedures, including the collection of relevant and appropriate information. This requires understanding the need for, and the implementation of:

- Policies and procedures on managing information
- Accurate admission and registration procedures for children
- Systems for monitoring and updating children's admission and retention details
- Appropriate recording of children's learning and development
- Secure storage of all records, with access in emergencies ( Research Digests/Standards 8: Planning and Evaluation and  10: Organisation)

Communication between all adults involved with the child's care and education is fundamental if the child is to experience the continuity essential to a holistic experience of life (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2005). Brostrom (2002) suggests establishing positive relations between the home and the setting, characterised by warm personal contact and followed by ongoing communication about the activities and the curriculum of the setting.

Information sharing



Research demonstrates that better outcomes for children, in their cognitive and social development, emerged from early childhood settings where child-related information between staff and parents is shared. In addition, parental collaboration in decision-making about their child's learning programme is reported as significant (Taggart, 2007). Key professional skills

identified by Moyles (2006) include promoting high quality and open communication, dialogue and information sharing between all stakeholders (children, staff, management, parents, supporting professionals and voluntary and statutory organisations). Just as the curriculum is mediated to meet the needs of individual children, how one communicates must also be tailored. Effective communication requires accurate, relevant information delivered to the right people, in a language that is understood, and in ways that are appropriate to all. Active listening, personal courtesy, honesty, sensitivity, responsiveness, friendliness, and respect are just some of the attributes an effective communicator should have (Moyles, 2006).

Awareness of the consequences of revealing any information about families, children or the centre must be instilled in staff, from both legal and professional perspectives. Permission must always be sought from parents, even in the event of giving information for birthday party invitations (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003). According to the *Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations* (Department of Health and Children, 2006), information on children in early childhood settings will only be open to inspection by:

- A parent or guardian of a child attending the service, but only regarding information entered in the register concerning their own child
- A person working in the pre-school service who is authorised by the person carrying on the service
- An authorised person

It should be noted, however, that all personnel have a duty to share information in the event of suspected child abuse and, in such circumstances, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed

( Research Digests/Standards 9: Health and Welfare and  15: Legislation and Regulation).

Confidentiality and communication policies

Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) reason that confidentiality is a crosscutting issue regarding leadership, management and administration. Trust, respect, reliability and the protection of

privacy, as hallmarks of confidentiality, should be included in practice. Of paramount importance is the acknowledgment that parents need assurance regarding the confidentiality of the information they provide.

Managing and distributing a variety of paperwork is highlighted by Moyles (2006) as important, involving office management and organisational skills. There is a requirement on staff to be vigilant, non-judgemental and objective while recording observations of children's learning, evaluating plans and writing accident reports (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003). Written policies and procedures regarding the secure storage and appropriate dissemination of recorded material should also be in place (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Moyles, 2006), and should clearly articulate the lines of responsibility and authority in dealing with records.

Implementing the Standard

In striving to communicate effectively in the best interests of the child, a setting must undertake the collection of relevant and appropriate information on all children. While the research section outlined the importance of management skills in ensuring that such data is collected, there are a number of practical ways (both formal and informal) in which a setting can achieve this:

- The nature of the information sought and stored
- Ensuring that information is recorded correctly and accurately
- Facilities for the safe storage of this information
- Access to this information
- Access to records in an emergency situation
- Ensuring that the information gathered is regularly reviewed and kept up-to-date
- Sharing information (formally and informally) between all relevant stakeholders

- Use of child observation records
- Involving parents

The sharing of information requires the setting to be proactive, ensuring that the best interests of the child are safeguarded at all times. When deciding how this information is shared, settings need to take certain considerations into account:

- Adults within the setting
- Appropriate stakeholders outside the setting
- Regular feedback to parents regarding their child
- Dissemination of information from other relevant organisations to parents
- Provision of information to other organisations and services in the area on the services provided by the setting
- Promoting easy access for children and families to other services within the community
- Making information available to persons who speak other languages or who have disabilities (e.g., parents who are deaf or hard of hearing, parents who are blind or partially sighted, parents who have other disabilities that impact on their ability to receive or understand information)

Confidentiality must remain central to information collection and storage, and should be reflected in practices such as assurances to parents, compliance with relevant data protection legislation, consultation with parents regarding consent for the sharing of information about their child, and the use of secure storage facilities for records.



Conclusion

The proactive sharing of knowledge and information among appropriate stakeholders within a setting, along with the simultaneous observation of the principles of respect and confidentiality, are the hallmarks of effective communication. It ensures the development and application of policies, procedures and actions that, in turn, contribute to the feedback, evaluation and delegation mechanisms that operate in the day-to-day running of the setting.

Having considered the more intricate elements involved in the communication process within early childhood care and education (ECCE), perhaps the most concise synopsis of effective communication is that offered by Conaty (2002:169):

“A good communication method calls for clarity on the part of the person delivering the message. It also requires that the deliverer has a clear understanding of the audience and its interests. Added to the foregoing requirements is the need to discern just what information the audience requires. Finally, the deliverer needs to decide on the method for use.”

Resources for Communication

Brostrom, S. (2002). Transitions from Kindergarten to School (in) Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A. (Eds.). *Transitions in the Early Years: Debating Continuity and Progression for Children in Early Education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer, pp. 146-154.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (2005). *Early Childhood in Ireland: Evidence and Perspectives*. Dublin: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Conaty, C. (2002). *Including All: Home, School and Community United in Education*. Dublin: Veritas Publications.

Department of Health and Children (2006). *The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Ebbeck, M. and Waniganayake, M. (2003). *Early Childhood Professionals: Leading Today and Tomorrow*. Sydney: MacLennon and Petty.

Moyles, J. (2006). *Effective Leadership and Management in the Early Years*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Taggart, B. (2007). The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Intensive Case Studies of Practice across the English Foundation Stage. Keynote address presented at the CECDE Conference, *Vision into Practice*, Dublin Castle, 8th–10th February 2007. Accessed at: http://www.cecde.ie/english/conference_2007_symposia.php, 28th February 2007.

Notes:

Notes:

Notes:



síolta

The National Quality Framework
for Early Childhood Education

