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**Effective Communication for Professional Experience**

The purpose of this resource is to:

* highlight the importance of effective communication for educators; and
* provide some strategies that could be used to develop effective communication skills.

**Effective Communication**

There are many variables that affect the way we send and receive messages. Some of these according to the New South Wales Education (cited in Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011, p. 214) are:

* self-concept and self-esteem of sender and receiver;
* personality of sender and receiver;
* attitudes, beliefs, values and biases of sender and receiver;
* perception each has of the other; and
* the assumption each makes of the other.

These and many other variables can impact on communication and result in misunderstandings.

**Communication in Educational Settings**

* As pre-service teachers you will be communicating with children/young people, mentor teachers, the director/principal, parents and others in the setting.
* The setting’s community may comprise people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and expectations.
	+ This diversity may require different communication styles on different occasions.
* The teaching and learning process is a communication event (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011, p. 214).
	+ The quality of educator and children/young people’s relationship is important for positive learning outcomes.
	+ The quality of relationships with your colleagues is important in promoting change in the setting.
	+ Interactions with parents are equally important.
* Communicating effectively in educational settings will require highly developed interpersonal skills (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011, p. 218).

**Effective interpersonal communication**

* Effective communicators need to possess an attitude of respect and acceptance.
	+ Pre-service educators need to respect and accept themselves so that they can then respect and accept others.
	+ Understanding how and why they communicate in a particular manner would enable pre-service educators to control their communication process.
	+ Having the ability to empathise with others (understanding their feelings, experiences and perceptions) will enable pre-service educators to facilitate growth.
	+ Empathic communicators will truly care about others’ thoughts and feelings.
	+ An accepting attitude will allow pre-service educators to respect what others say even though they may not agree with everything.
* Practising assertive communication strategies will empower pre-service educators to stand up for their rights while upholding the rights of others.
* Effective communicators will avoid blaming, judging, criticising, preaching, ordering, labelling, threatening, being sarcastic, patronising and contradicting.

 (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011, pp. 220-221)

**Strategies to enhance interpersonal interactions during practicum**

When you are speaking you need to:

* clarify mentally what you want to say;
* choose the most appropriate time and place to say it;
* choose the most appropriate way of saying it;
* speak clearly, concisely and simply;
* choose words that those you are speaking to will understand;
* make and maintain eye contact;
* keep to the point;
* ensure that verbal and non-verbal messages are consistent with each other;
* say exactly what you mean;
* be able to express feelings;
* be able to use ‘I’ messages;
* be able to ask appropriate questions;
* summarise and reinforce when necessary;
* watch for signals from the other person to see if your message is being understood; and
* check with the other person to ensure that the message was received the way it was intended.

(New South Wales Education Department, cited in Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011, p. 227)

**Non-verbal Behaviours**

Non-verbal communication can sometimes interfere with verbal communication. Non-verbal communication can be categorised into:

**Kinesics (or body movement)**

* Posture, gestures and facial expression fall in this category. Pre-service educators should be aware that these behaviours are sometimes culturally oriented. If you find something confusing, it would be a good idea to discuss this with your mentor educator.
	+ Confident people stand tall and those who are less confident appear less erect and huddle over.
	+ It is best to reduce height by crouching down next to them or in front of them when talking to children.
	+ Your body posture may communicate how relaxed or anxious you are.
	+ Facial expressions can send very clear non-verbal messages (smiling as opposed to frowning).
	+ Establishing and maintaining eye contact with others is a significant speaking and listening skill.
		- Educator-children/young people eye contact can help in managing the learning environment, individual motivation and the prevention of disciplinary problems.
	+ Gestures are another way people communicate with each other.
	+ Clothing and grooming can also send messages to your audience.
		- Some educational settings have dress codes for their educators and it is a good idea to find out about this.

**Proxemics (personal space)**

* The degree of personal space or zone varies according to the nature of relationship.
	+ The intimate zone is reserved for family and close friends.
	+ The personal zone is appropriate for social gatherings.
	+ A social zone is maintained for people we do not know well.
	+ A public zone is for addressing public gatherings.
* Children whom the educator approaches or permits to come close will interpret this physical closeness as physiological acceptance.
* Pre-service educators need to know that the degree of personal space will vary from one person to another and this may impact on the communication process.
* The organisation of furniture in the setting should encourage communication.

 (Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu 2011, pp. 222-225).

**Reference**

Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, R & Le Cornu, R 2011, *Teaching challenges and dilemmas*, 4th edn, Cengage Learning, Australia.