Assignment 1. SPE3008. Communication and Collaboration.

Response to Scenario 1.

Parents of aggressive children need to be told about their child’s behaviour without their child being condemned and without themselves being criticised (Porter, 2008). The most successful programs for addressing children’s behaviour are, according to Marshall and Mirenda (2002) as cited in (Fettig, Schultz & Ostrosky, 2013) based on partnerships between practitioners and parents. Friend and Cook (2013) note that interpersonal communication is transactional whereby both communicators are simultaneously sending and receiving information, which makes it impossible to distinguish between a sender and a receiver.

Whitaker and Douglas (2001) cogitate that one of the challenges, which all educators face is building credibility with parents. Taffel (2001) as cited in Graham-Clay (2005) believes that the majority of parents feel unsupported, misunderstood and overwhelmed by the demands placed on them by schools. To address the barriers, which hinder good communication between educators and parents, educators should appreciate that every previous positive interchange will increase trust and build strong relationships with parents and the wider community (Graham-Clay, 2005). It is far easier to communicate with a positive person than it is to communicate with somebody who is difficult (Whitaker and Douglas, 2001). The following scenario response is situated at the classroom level, distinct from the whole school level and is intended to elucidate the process of communication between the teacher, the parent and the child.

Caleb lives in a stable family environment, his parents are happily married and he has two older sisters. Generally, the teacher communicates with Caleb’s mother, however in this instance Caleb’s father is the parent attending the parent teacher meeting.

DeVito (2014) promotes a win-win approach to setting up the meeting whereby the teacher brainstorms potential win-win solutions, focusing on areas of agreement and expressing a willingness to give ground for the sake of the other person and the relationship.

Stage 1:

Communication skills are not solutions to problems, but they are the tools for solving problems (Porter, 2008). Plan to trust all the human senses in sending and receiving messages. Environment and noise are factors worthy of consideration in the communication process as they relate to the areas of differing backgrounds and contexts which may interfere with the process of communication (Friend & Cook, 2013).

There is potential for Caleb’s father to exhibit ‘communication apprehension’ (CA). According to McCroskey (1976) CA refers to an anxiety syndrome associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. As the father may already have formed a prejudice, referred to as psychological noise by Friend and Cook (2013), Whitaker and Douglas (2001) reason that the phone is the teacher’s best friend. Use the phone to convey to the father something positive about the messages to come in the meeting. At this point it may be purposeful to agree on a common goal for the meeting. According to Cathcart, Samovar and Henman (1996) these explicit or implied expectations will likely be unique to this meeting and the participants and could serve to unite the group members. Semantic noise is the interference created when the speaker and listener have different meaning systems therefore DeVito (2014) cautions against the use of jargon or overly complex terms whereby meanings can easily be misinterpreted. DeVito (2014) maintains that it is more likely for parents to respond to the simpler messages as they may be experiencing information overload, which occurs when they have to deal with excessive amounts of information that may be ambiguous or complex. DeVito (2014) suggests this concept of feedforward will be useful when you feel the listener needs background information as in the case of Caleb’s father. Park, Alber-Morgan and Fleming (2011) note that in identifying parental challenges in this way, the teacher can design interventions that will not exacerbate the problem.

Baker (1980) posits that one of the basic tasks of the human brain is to maintain order and consistency among all the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes it retains. A defensive attitude may exist within people such as Caleb’s father when they encounter communication situations in which they may feel uncomfortable (Baker, 1980). Defensiveness is seen by Baker (1980) as a major barrier to effective communication and may be mitigated if the teacher show signs of empathy, treatment of others as equals and genuineness. Baker (1980) believes that this defensive behaviour prevents the listener from objectively concentrating on the message being received therefore the message sent and the message received is distorted.

DeVito (2014) seems to accept that differences in gender, can be attributed to biological theory, whereby differences in brains and chemistry account for the differences in the ability to express and detect emotions in others but also differences can be cultural in nature. Therefore the teacher should be aware that men and women use communication for different purposes i.e. men generally communicate more for information and women seem to communicate more for relationship purposes (DeVito, 2014). In the initial stage of communicating in a new relationship, Verderber, Verderber and Berryman-Fink (2010) accept that there will not be strong connections to each other consequently it is suggested that there is an initial focus on learning new information in reference to Caleb’s father. As more information is gathered, further decisions can be made about how to act with the other person (Verderber, Verderber and Berryman-Fink, 2010). A major perceptual goal in interacting with others is discovering what each person has in common with others making it possible to reduce uncertainty and feel more comfortable with one another (Verderber, Verderber and Berryman-Fink, 2010).

Stage 2:

It would be appropriate to arrange the seating for the meeting out in the open away from a desk with comparable seats because as McCroskey (1976) notes, in small group communication settings such as the teacher parent interview, certain seating could be perceived as ‘leadership’ or ‘dominant’ positions. Settings like this would likely cause an increase in the level of anxiety experienced by individuals with CA behaviour (McCroskey, 1976).

During the meeting establish and maintain eye contact, which McCroskey (1976) believes will generally increase the probability of communication and the continuation of interaction between the source and the receiver. DeVito (2014) states that listening plays a significant role in the management of interpersonal conflict and further notes that effective listening, even during a heated argument will go a long way toward helping to manage the conflict and prevent it from escalating. To be a good listener DeVito (2014) suggests focusing attention on the speaker’s verbal and nonverbal messages rather than on how to respond, maintaining the role of listener, avoid interrupting the speaker and refrain from presupposing what the speaker is going to say before they actually say it.

Persons involved in interpersonal communication should note that as a source-receiver of information they need to consider that they present message meaning in code through their soundwaves, gestures, facial expressions or body movements either verbally or nonverbally (DeVito, 2014). Interpersonal effectiveness will often hinge on an individual’s competence in metacommunication, that is they are able to verbally and nonverbally convey the message about a message (DeVito, 2014). Cook and Friend (2013) propose that sending a single message over multiple channels can strengthen or emphasise the message and that the preferred communication channel will affect the way an individual receives, understands and responds to your message.

Perception is an active process of becoming aware of objects, events and people through human senses (Friend & Cook, 2013) and is important to interpersonal communication in the way it influences communication choices (DeVito, 2014). Perception is a selective process (Cook & Friend, 2013) and is often necessary in professional interactions, not unlike the communication scenario outlined earlier, because communication is quite complex (Lustig & Koester, 2019) as cited in (Friend and Cook, 2013). Through selective perception a person will attend to things that are of most interest, most pronounced or seem most likely to meet one’s needs (Friend & Cook, 2013). Whilst organising the selected information an individual will typically categorise the information received using schema based on similarities between the source and receiver (Friend & Cook, 2013). Interpretation will occur when meaning is assigned to what has been perceived and is influenced by factors such as involvement and past experience, general assumptions about human behaviour, expectations for the situation and knowledge of a similar experience (Friend & Cook, 2013). Negotiation reflects the transactional nature of communication and is the process through which communicators influence each other’s perceptions and create shared meanings (Friend & Cook, 2013).

The fictional scenario referred to in this document is set in a Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) State School and therefore the teacher is expected to attend to the Code of conduct for the Queensland Public Service (2011). Within the context of the aforementioned code of conduct, the teacher is expected to abide by the fundamental principles of ethical behaviour essential to the integrity and accountability of the public sector. These principles include integrity and impartiality, promoting the public good, commitment to the system of government and accountability and transparency (DET, 2011). Teachers are expected to commit to the highest ethical standards and in doing so should ensure any advice that they provide is objective, independent, apolitical and impartial (DET, 2011). To safeguard against the uncommon instance of confrontation it will be necessary to have knowledge of the school policy in relation to confrontations (Porter, 2008) as described in the management procedure set out in Appendix A, (Phase 2. Deciding how to handle the complaint). When stressful situations go unresolved it can lead to physiological and or psychological illness (Work Cover Queensland, 2015). Throughout the scenario presented above the teacher has demonstrated their ability to engage professionally with parents/carers by establishing and maintaining a respectful collaborative relationship with the parent regarding their child’s learning and wellbeing as expected by The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2014). By identifying principles of ethical behaviour expectations for teachers and the teacher’s demonstrated knowledge of relevant policies, the teacher has also attended to focus areas 7.1 and 7.2 of Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014). In order to effectively communicate with parents, The Queensland College of Teachers (2011) expects teachers to demonstrate respect, professionalism and sensitivity in all their interactions.

Stage 3:

Good communication is the result of a good balance between self-disclosure and feedback (Armstrong, 2006). According to Armstrong (2006) the Johari communication model says there are two things an individual can do to improve communication; ask questions or disclose information about self. DeVito (2014) states that self-awareness is an individual’s knowledge of self and a useful way of reviewing self-awareness is through the Johari window. The more an individual understands about why they view themselves as they do, the more they will understand about who they are (DeVito, 2014). Polayni (1958) as cited in Hattie (1992) believes that individuals may focus on seemingly isolated characteristics about self and not see what may be evident to others. To find out aspects about self that an individual may be unaware of and reduce the ‘blind self’ pane of the Johari window (DeVito, 2014) proposes seeking feedback from others in relation to the teacher’s positive and negative traits.

Appendix: A

Template for Developing a School Complaints Management Procedure

School Complaints Management Procedure

Complaints come to principals and other school staff in many forms. Complaints can be from parents/carers, community, staff or students.

This document outlines the procedures undertaken at this school to manage complaints. Complaints management at this school is also underpinned by section 46 of the Education (General-Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld) , Education Queensland’s Complaints Management - State Schools and Making a Complaint located on the department’s website.

All complaints are handled in a positive and open way.

1. Documentation

The school documents all complaints.

Complaints are recorded and reported to the principal as soon as practicable after receiving the complaint.

Complaints can be made directly to the principal.

The record of the complaint:

• uses objective language clearly stating the facts

• contains information in chronological order as practically possible

• uses quotation marks, where appropriate and necessary

• is neatly and legibly written in biro/pen or in print in clear unambiguous language

• includes, where necessary, initialled and dated corrections

• includes signature, designation of the author, and time and date of the incident/complaint.

If the complaint is not resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint is acknowledged within five working days by telephone, in person, by email, or in writing.

Documents related to the complaint are kept and stored in accordance with the relevant departmental policies and procedures. Please refer to Information Management and Access to Records Held in Schools.

2. Complaints Management Phases

There are four key phases in handling a complaint, with the option of a fifth phase for review of a complaint outcome:

Phase 1. Receiving and clarifying the complaint

Phase 2. Deciding how to handle the complaint

Phase 3. Finding out about the complaint

Phase 4. Making a decision about the complaint

Phase 5. Review

Phase 1 - Receiving and clarifying the complaint

Any member of staff can receive a complaint.

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Template for Developing a School Complaints Management Procedure

All complaints are received in the following manner:

• being respectful and helpful

• giving the person your undivided attention

• not being defensive, apportioning blame

• remaining positive

• not perceiving anger as a personal attack.

When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

• listen carefully to the issues being raised

• summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is telling you

• empathise and acknowledge the complainant’s feelings

• find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint

• tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed

• resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint

• advise the complainant what will happen with their complaint

• thank them for their complaint.

Complaints are sometimes made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or by a third party (as agreed between the complainant and the principal). In this case staff will receive and clarify a complaint from more than one person.

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring.

When the complaint is not resolved immediately, the complaint is referred to the principal as soon as is practicable.

A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved informs the complainant of the further options of:

• putting their complaint in writing, or

• assisting the member of staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received.

However, if the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/sexual) of a student under 18 years attending a state educational institution, refer to Student Protection, for detailed obligations of all Education Queensland employees.

Once the complainant indicates that they would like to register a formal complaint verbally, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs (indicating their personal designation, for example, ’Year 7 Teacher, XYZ State School’) and dates the complaint.

No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded.

If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member’s interpretation and notes only. The complainant may not, at a later date, make another complaint based on a lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.

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Template for Developing a School Complaints Management Procedure

Receiving a written complaint

When a written complaint is received it is date-stamped and forwarded to the principal.

Receiving an anonymous complaint

When an anonymous complaint is received, the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with making an anonymous complaint.

Phase 2 - Deciding how to handle the complaint

When a staff member receives a complaint, they:

• begin the process of making an assessment about a complaint from the moment the complaint is received

• make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with as a concern or a complaint

• if they are not the principal, refer the complainant or the complaint to the principal for addressing.

The principal decides whether to:

• take no further action

• attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation

• refer the complaint to the relevant internal or external agency if required

• initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required.

Co-ordination of complaints

The principal has the final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under his/her jurisdiction. The complaint can be referred to another staff member in the school for action (for example, the deputy principal, business services manager or nominated staff member).

If the complaint relates to departmental policy, or a departmental policy position, the complainant is advised to take their complaint to the relevant regional office.

If the complaint is in relation to official misconduct, student protection or a perceived breach of privacy, the complaint is directed to the Ethical Standards Unit and the Legal Administrative Law Branch.

Record of complaint

The principal ensures that records of a complaint and any referral of a complaint are kept for either internal or external review.

Phase 3 - Finding out about the complaint

The principal or delegate gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice of all parties concerned.

The principal or delegate investigates complaints by:

• collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter

• working collaboratively with all people involved

• finding the facts relating to the matter

• identifying any contributing factors to the matter

• consulting the relevant DET Procedure Register on issues that relate to the complaint

• documenting the investigation report or outcome.

Phase 4 - Making a decision about the complaint

Based on the facts gathered in Phase 3 about the complaint, the principal or delegate makes a decision on the complaint.

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Template for Developing a School Complaints Management Procedure

Notifying the complainant of the decision

Within 28 days of the receipt of the complaint, the principal provides the complainant with either:

• a written response, including reasons for the decision, or

• a written notification that their complaint has been referred to an internal or external agency.

Phase 5 Review Phase

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the school principal and/or advised to contact the principal’s supervisor, the Executive Director, Schools at the regional office.

Further review of the decision is available from the Queensland Ombudsman as described in Making a Complaint.

Principal {insert school name}

Date

Regional Director {insert district name}

Date

Date of review

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