ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School
Morehead State University
February 12, 2019
BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING FOR PRACTICING K-12 TEACHERS: A VIDEO BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education At Morehead State University

By

Jeffery E. Morning II

Bardstown, Kentucky

Committee Chair: Dr. Michael W. Kessinger, Assistant Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

February 12, 2019

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BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING FOR PRACTICING K-12 TEACHERS: A VIDEO BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Effective bidirectional communication skills are important for K-12 teachers to have, and the school-home relationship, which promotes student success, is strengthened through these skills. This executive summary and capstone project is designed to fill a research supported need for training in the area of teacher communication skills. The capstone project is a professional development series uploaded to a web page, which includes videos and supplementary materials designed to assist practicing K-12 teachers in developing their skills as bidirectional communicators. Small community school districts, like Bardstown City Schools, can benefit from the training because of their heavy reliance on the community relationship.

KEYWORDS: Communication, School-Home Relationship, Professional Development, Web Series, Practicing K-12 Teachers
BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING FOR PRACTICING K-12 TEACHERS: A VIDEO BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

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DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to Jeffery I and Cheryl Morning, the entire Morning family and the entire Knighting family. We are only as strong as our parts, and we have all worked diligently to become better individually for the good of the whole. This work is, also, dedicated to the educators and coaches who made an effort to help a talkative, silly young male become a scholar and a better person. Lastly, this work is dedicated to our future, the young people of the United States of America.
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Executive Summary

What is the core of the capstone?

**Introduction.** Failure to prepare is preparation for failure. The field of education requires its professionals to communicate effectively with students, parents and other stakeholders. Clear communication between teachers and students is a part of the cornerstones of the educational process. Passing explicit messages to parents and stakeholders works to build support for the student. Unfortunately, educational professionals go untrained in this area during their college education and the course of their career. Lesson design, classroom management, school operations and theories of learning are all explicitly taught in the preparatory classes of a teacher’s college career. These items are deemed essential.

Teachers receive training in several other areas after becoming employed. Teachers are trained in the importance of and how to use technology, specific instructional techniques, and mentalities such as growth mindset and mastery learning. All of these items are considered essential and are given time for awareness, development and implementation in the classroom.

Like the previously mentioned categories, there will be innumerable instances which require professionals to interact with their students’ parents, yet there has been no specific preparation for the task. Teachers are not given expectations related to communicating with stakeholders and are held accountable only when parents complain about communication problems. With no guidelines or training, teachers develop their own methods of interacting with parents. Many teachers choose the
least personal, quickest ways to communicate which costs them the opportunity of building relationships with parents. Professionals who are given a mandate with no standards or training tend to develop bad habits, minimalize the importance of the responsibility or ignore the job outright.

**Problem Statement.** Programs to prepare current and preservice teachers for their duties as communicators are few and are not well known. Short of a public speaking course, there are no courses within education preparation programs which seek to prepare future teachers for communicating with stakeholders. Practicing teachers are posed with the challenge of building relationships with parents through communication but receive no training to help them establish or master communication skills or techniques. The lack of preparation creates and perpetuates multiple problems within the field of education.

Without training, teachers are forced to learn and function on their own. Teachers are aware of the option to make phone calls, conduct face to face meetings and send emails. Many teachers use Facebook, Twitter, Remind101 and other internet-based platforms to let parents know what is happening in the classroom (Kneidinger-Muller, 2017). Without guidance, many choose email and only make phone calls or schedule face to face meetings when the situation is unavoidable (Craig, 2004; May et al., 2010; Mires & Lee, 2017; Montgomery, 2005). These critical reasons usually are negative. Building Strong Relationships through email is difficult. It is also challenging to develop positive relationships when personal bidirectional communication is used only for negative interactions.
Teachers are mandated to communicate with parents who increasingly want more personal communication (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). Email is valid to a degree, but there are several techniques which can be deployed to build relationships with parents better. Every individual is not confident with personal forms of communication. Training could be beneficial. Discomfort with a task can cause the job to be ignored or done to minimal completion. Getting teachers to embrace communicating with stakeholders requires a degree of training in bidirectional communication techniques.

As long as teachers feel uncomfortable and untrained, there will be a lack of active relationship building attempts. The result of teachers not making attempts can perpetuate a growing distance and animosity between parents and schools (Foster, 2012). During this time of connectivity and constant, continual updates, bidirectional communication becomes vital to give contexts to the multitude of quick messages and updates.

**Purpose.** The purpose of the capstone was to fill a gap in the educational training of practicing teachers in the area of bidirectional communication. Teachers are not, currently, receiving relevant training which helps them to better communicate in synchronous bidirectional formats (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Kemp, 2010; Davis, 1991; Garmeier et al., 2015; Johns, 1992). These platforms include phone calls, face to face meetings and video calls.

Some people are naturally gifted in the area of personal communication and conversation, while many others struggle for one reason or another. Without explicit
training, those who are not gifted communicators can fight with this responsibility. Discomfort with the responsibility opens the door for missteps and mistakes. Saying the wrong thing and taking the wrong approach is commonplace, and these mistakes come from a lack of preparation (Conderman et al., 2010; Cullaj, 2015).

Building relationships and partnerships with parents increase the likelihood of student success and improve the quality of teachers on the job experience (Ferrara, 2015). Teaching teachers to communicate effectively will benefit parents, students and the teachers, themselves. Becoming a better communicator and professional conversationalist increases the chances of getting all parties on the same page toward a successful experience. While other forms of communication are acceptable, the bidirectional interactions can solidify relationships for the benefit of all parties, especially the parents.

Teachers receive no training during their preservice time and go without training during their tenure as practicing teachers. The lack of preparation must be remedied for the best interest of parents, students and teachers. Teachers have a responsibility to communicate with parents about their children, and it is critical to do so in a manner which is clearly understood. Building teachers’ skills and their confidence is a must since the demand for personal communication is on the rise (Foster, 2012; Mager, 1980; Parker & Sparkman, 2008).

**Fundamental Principle.** The fundamental principle of the capstone was to design and create a professional development web series with supplemental material to aid current educational professionals in developing effective communication skills.
With teachers going untrained in this area of their responsibilities, this innovation should better equip educational professionals to do a part of their job which often gets neglected. The overall goal is to prepare teachers and build comfort with working with the parents of the students (Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012).

The professional development consists of a series of research supported instructional videos which include examples of effective communication techniques. Supplemental materials, including worksheets and PowerPoint presentations, will be attached for continued learning throughout the school year. The resources will educate and equip educational professionals to help communicate effectively with parents and other stakeholders. After each item is created, it will be built into a central website, establishing the material as a web series.

Involving parents in the formalized learning process of school will allow the influence of their children’s development to continue outside of the classroom. The ambition to engage parents to this degree forms a need for teachers to be good communicators (McBride, 1991; Goktas, Yildirim, & Yildirim, 2009). Preservice teachers are instructed of these facts but are taught little to know strategies for communicating with parents or guardians of the students they serve (McBride, 1991). This lack of instruction creates a gap in the education of teachers.

Without training, there is a high potential for ineffective communication which leads to a lack of opportunities teachers and parents to establish partnerships (Meridio, Abercrombie, & Murray, 2016). The possibility of being impersonal and robotic, only speaking negatively about a student or using too much education
specific jargon can quickly damage the opportunity a teacher has to establish the foundation for a positive, lasting relationship with a student’s parent. If effective communication techniques are not going to be a staple of the pre-service education of teaching candidates, in-service opportunities are a necessity.

**Review of Literature**

*Teachers’ roles as communicators.* Communication is an essential skill within the educational profession (Miretzky, 2004; Symeou et al., 2012). Training educators to communicate effectively is critical for the success of schools due to the amount of interaction with parents each educator experiences (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Gartmeier et al., 2015). Teachers, administrators and other professionals must communicate clearly and work to build understandings to pass and receive information, ideas and sentiments effectively.

Educators are in a unique situation in comparison to other professionals who are required to have high amounts of communication and interaction with the public (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Kemp, 2010; Kourmousi et al., 2018). Parents can be sensitive to everything said by an educator because the topic of conversation is their child. The parent will dissect each word or phrase a teacher uses to create an understanding (Parker & Sparkman, 2008). Misinterpretation and confusion can quickly occur when speaking about someone’s child (Merkley, Schmidt, Dirksen, & Fulher, 2006; Montgomery, 2005). Reduced instances of communication between educators and adults can set the stage for a challenging future with a parent.
Though they will not be universally involved with the school, a large percentage of parents and guardians want direct open lines of communication with individuals who will work directly with their child (Foster, 2012). Parents in modern society can be as hungry for feedback as their students who attend classes regularly (Foster, 2012; Mires & Lee, 2017). Teachers who communicate regularly can create advantages for themselves because of parental support, and some teachers will create a barrier between themselves and their students’ parents because of a lack of frequency in their communication (Foster, 2012; May, Johnson, Chen, Hutchison, & Ricketts, 2010; Strom & Strom, 2010; Webber & Wilson, 2012).

The knowledge and ability to effectively communicate is imperative within the field of education (Bulus, Atan, & Sarikaya, 2017; Craig, 2004; Conderman et al., 2015; Davis, 1991; Graham-Clay, 2005; Strom & Strom, 2003; Vollmer, 2011; Quinn, 2014). Communicating in a clear and non-confusing manner has to be accomplished regularly. If teachers or administrators are not understandable, problems can occur due to misunderstandings.

Effective communication is equally important when working with students as with working with parents (Bulus et al., 2017; Gartmeier et al., 2015). Students are people too, and effective communication skills can benefit the learning environment as it can help with stakeholder relationship building. Educational professionals are in the business of relationships, and effective communication is the foundation of all positive relationships (Miretzky, 2004).
Building and maintaining positive relationships between students and teachers rely upon educators’ abilities to communicate well (Quinn, 2014). Teachers and administrators have to keep the lines of communication and avoid pitfalls when using different methods of communication (Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentocnik, 2012; Merkley et al., 2006; Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). The school must ensure parents are receiving messages and are aware of the several different ways teachers and administrators may choose to reach out. An email can be beneficial unless parents do not check their email. Each professional needs tools and techniques for navigating this portion of their job (Gartmeier et al., 2015). Teachers and administrators also have to understand the importance of being transparent while being tactful (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2000). Different communication techniques exist which have specific advantages and disadvantages.

**Communication categories.** According to Bennett-Conroy (2012), parents, at a minimum want regular updates on their children’s academic progress and expect teachers to provide them within a timely manner. The high number of students within a school tends to influence teachers’ choices of communication methods (Graham-Clay, 2005; Mapp, 2003). A large number of parents who must be contacted by teachers about student progress has made quick and less effective communication tactics the norm for parent-teacher communication. Progress reports and report cards have been staples of the educational system, but these methods alone leave today’s parents wanting more on the communication front (Learning Matters, 2010; Mapp, 2003).
With technological improvements, communicating with parents has become easier (Merkley et al., 2006). Technology now allows teachers to talk more often and with more individuals with ease. Email and specifically-designed internet-based platforms allow teachers to send notifications to parents and receive messages from parents (Graham-Clay, 2005). Blanket messages can be sent to numerous parents at once and allow parents to have individual responses to the memos. With this in mind, teachers now have avenues to broadcast. Teachers, over time, have had to move away from only using one-way forms of communication (Gram-Clay, 2005).

Teachers have to understand how one-way communication (teachers providing information without parents having the ability to comment, ask questions, or retort) can bridge a gap between meaningful contacts with parents, but they will not replace bidirectional communication’s meaningfulness (Graham-Clay, 2005). When parents do not get the chance to respond synchronously, they may not trust what teachers have to say. Responding to generic messages can make parents feel as if they are the people responsible for initiating contact with the school (Craig, 2004; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Ferrara, 2015).

Parents can also feel overwhelmed by a volume of messages which do not require or allow for timely responses (Merkley et al., 2006). Parents want to interact with educators and provide input to how the teacher perceives their child (Landeros, 2011). Communicating in a synchronous, personal fashion is an essential part of building relationships for the benefit of students.
“The participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student’s academic learning and other activities. . .” (Bennett-Conroy, 2012, p. 90) is essential to student growth and for the benefit of community building. Consistent and meaningful interaction between parents and teachers has been shown to improve student performance (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Ferrara, 2015; Graham-Clay, 2005; Merkley et al., 2006; Sirvani, 2007). As teachers establish relationships with parents and students grow, trust begins to form within the relationship between the parents and the teachers. These trust-based relationships built through communication forges a community bond between the school and the community it serves.

When discussing communication between teachers and parents, the conversations must occur at regular intervals between standardized reports of student progress (Graham-Clay, 2005). Meaningful discussion is detailed and must be specific to the child being discussed (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). Blanket statements about overall student progress are not significant when speaking to a student’s parent. Parents have expressed a want to know how their students are doing mainly to instruction, behavior and their emotional wellbeing (Mapp, 2003).

Two-way communication is any platform which promotes and allows for dialog between two parties (Graham-Clay, 2005). Two-way communication is personal. Bidirectional communication (two-way communication) typically lasts at least three to five minutes on the telephone, video-chat, or in person (Bennett-Conroy,
It allows for both sides of a conversation to express themselves and seek to be understood.

Parents want to have a say in their child’s education, so it is crucial for a teacher to be willing to listen, as well as speak (Ferrara, 2015; Mapp, 2003). Parents and guardians usually have a love for their child and this emotional investment makes them interested in all the details of their children’s school experience. Some parents link their children’s success to their self-worth, and they seek to immerse themselves in every aspect of their children’s education (Landeros, 2011).

Conversational openness builds familiarity. Open dialog promotes trust, and trust is important to the relationship between a family and a school (Cankar et al., 2012). Trust is a significant aspect of the school-family relationship and has a direct influence on student performance (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). Two-way communication is beneficial but time-consuming. With the responsibility of teaching, planning lessons, and other daily duties, dedicating five minutes per contact regularly with a large number of parents becomes nearly impossible without working outside of the school day or taking time away from other duties.

Helping educators to build effective communication skills will assist in the efficiency of communication time. Through videos and role play, educators can become better with their words and expressions to effectively communicate with stakeholders to decrease the amount of time bi-directional conferences last (Gartmeier et al., 2015). Training eliminates many of the hesitancies and barriers teachers, and
administrators have when facing the communication part of their position (Cankar et al., 2012; Conderman et al., 2010; Miretzky, 2004; Symeou et al., 2012).

**Communication practices.** Effective communication is a vital part of the success of any team, and there are several established methods which can aid the parent-teacher team when communicating bidirectionally (Bulis, Atan, & Sarikaya, 2017; Gartmeier et al., 2015; George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011; Harvard Family Research Project, 2010; Henderson et al., 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Miretzky, 2004; Pappano, 2007). Scholarly materials support the use of two-way synchronous communication techniques for the establishment and nurturing of school-home relationships (Garcia, Frunzi, Dean, Flores, & Miller, 2016).

Educational professionals have several different means of interacting with parents, bidirectionally, and should become well versed in the nuances in various categories.

Professionals must be understanding to the school’s stakeholders having different preferred modes of communication and their methods not aligning with the professional’s comfort zone (Quinn, 2014). The professional bears the responsibility of initiating dialog and laying the foundation for open and effective communication and synchronous formats will need to be used in the initial part of the teacher-parent interaction (Kourmousi et al., 2018; Levinson, 2010; Garcia et al., 2016; Mager, 1980). This initial interaction can open the door for trust and be the stepping stone to building a partnership. Communicating openly about chosen methods of communication will help parents to feel valued and important, regardless of their
background and their child’s academic/behavioral history (Bakker et al., 2012; Cankar et al., 2012; Conderman et al., 2010; Quinn, 2014).

When preparing for bidirectional interaction with parents, the professional must understand the differences in each parent as related to personality and background (Ankrum, 2016; Craig, 2004; Montgomery, 2005). The teacher aiming to use dialog as a tool should adhere to the “BE HEARD” principles for the best chance of having positive first interactions (Harvard Family Research Project, 2012). BE HEARD stands for Best intentions assumed, Emphasis on Learning, Home-school collaboration, Examples and evidence, Active Listening, Respect for all, and Dedication to follow-up. This initial mindset could help the professional to navigate parents from all backgrounds who have varying concerns for their child (Cullaj, 2015; Ferrara, 2015; Hawes, 2007; Laster, 2016; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012). The LAFF Don’t CRY strategy can be used in the same way as BE HEARD. LAFF Don’t CRY stands for: Listen, Empathize and communicate respect, Ask Questions and ask permission to take notes, Focus on the issues, find a first step, Don’t Criticize people who aren’t present, Don’t React hastily and promise something you can’t deliver, Don’t Yakety-yak-yak (McNaughton and Vostal, 2010).

Synchronous bidirectional methods of communication include face to face meetings, video conferences and phone conversations which allow both parties to read body language, facial expressions, inflection and tone (Conderman et al., 2010; Graham-Clay, 2005; Harvard Family Research Project, 2010; Merkley et al., 2006). The professional has to be in control of themselves and use every available avenue to
BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION

convey a message of respect, concern and a willingness to create a partnership.

Smiles and eye contact are helpful tools for a teacher to utilize during parent-teacher conferences or video conferences (Gartmeier et al., 2015; Harvard Family Research Project, 2010). Control of one’s voice and word choice can play a role in the way a subject will be accepted. The professional has the duty of creating an inviting tone to open the door for a positive relationship.

Professionals in the field of education are working with the public and providing a service, which makes courtesy an essential part of having conversations (Cankar et al., 2012; Conderman et al., 2012; Ferrara, 2015; Garcia et al., 2016; Levinson, 2010; Stone et al., 2000; Vollmer, 2011). The professional should strive to begin a dialog on a personal, courteous subject (Garcia et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2000). The teacher needs to be personable and show a personal connection to the parent’s child. The parent will feel more comfortable when they know the teacher is personally invested in their child (Garcia et al., 2016; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012).

Teachers must take into account parents’ work schedules, lack of professional educational training and differing educational backgrounds. Expressing appreciation for a parent’s time and apologizing for interrupting their day are positive expressions of courtesy. The teacher must not use too much educational jargon or begin speaking as if the parent has a similar level of education (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010; Levinson, 2010; Miretzky, 2004). It is important for the teacher to speak in a manner which most anyone can understand, then navigate the conversation within the
parent’s comfort zone. Over time, the conversations will become more in depth, as the parent-teacher relationship grows and strengthens (Hawes, 2007).

All positive relationships have a level of reciprocity within their communication (Bulis et al., 2017; Levinson, 2010). Half of the process of being an effective communicator in education is being a dependable listener (Garcia et al., 2016; Miretzky, 2004). Too often, educators become overwhelm parents with information, regardless of the positive or negative nature of the material. Professionals should assume each parent’s investment in their child and show a sense of value to what parents have to contribute (Bakker et al., 2007; Cankar et al., 2012; Cullaj, 2015; Garcia et al., 2016). The teacher should ensure the parent has time to speak and if necessary devote half of any conversation to listening to the parent’s concerns. In the end, this practice will build necessary trust, give the professional insight and set a stage for positivity in the next conversation, whether the teacher or parent initiates it (Cankar, et al., 2012; Davis, 1991; Foster, 2012; Garcia et al., 2016).

**Positive teacher disposition.** Disposition affects the way messages are passed when humans interact with one another (Burt et al., 2017; Johnson, 2008; Kneidinger-Muller, 2017; Shao & Tamashiro, 2013). Disposition is a significant part of educational communication. Teachers are in the people business and should seek to build open lines of communication which are clear and constructive. A teacher can use their demeanor to influence each interaction with a parent for the positive. There are ways of helping parents to understand a school’s/ teacher’s viewpoint of a
humanistic-democratic view of education (Johnson, 2008; Norris, 2008; Warren, 2018).

According to Norris (2008), there is not a common, consensus type definition of what dispositions are in the field of education. However, the definition does exist on a spectrum which includes several different short descriptions. Some see dispositions as characteristic manners of thinking and acting while others see dispositions as attitudes, inclinations and personal qualities which candidates hold toward teaching, learning, students and colleagues (Burt et al., 2017; Schussler et al., 2010). Dispositions can be habitual frames of mind, trends in actions which are intentional on the part of the person or values, beliefs and intentions discovered in patterns of behavior (Johnson, 2008; Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009; Sha et al., 2004).

With so many related definitions and concepts, teachers should gather an understanding of how to best utilize elements of all of the mentioned concepts for the benefit of their relationships with the parents of their students.

Teachers do not experience scenario planning during their preservice education, and the lack of knowledge in the area of disposition puts teachers at a disadvantage when beginning and maintaining a career in the public field (Burt et al., 2017). Working to understand and mold a proper disposition for the field of teaching is not deemed a priority within the preservice or practicing teacher education. Efforts have not been made to dictate and teach disposition to teacher candidates (Johnson, 2008). Equity is a concept which can be linked to overall disposition, and teacher
candidates are not always subject to lessons on the idea (Johnson, 2008; Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009).

According to Karges-Bone and Griffin (2009), no preservice checklist of behaviors can fully reveal or predict what a new teacher will do, positively or negatively in the field. There are, however, some questions which can guide thoughts about disposition and eventually help teachers grow per their disposition. These questions reference words such as: believe, trust, integrity, compassion, professionally, tolerance, commitment, empathy, equity (Burt et al., 2017; Johnson, 2008; Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009; Norris, 2008; Schussler et al., 2010; Shao & Tamashiro, 2013; Warren, 2018). The questions are structured to help teacher candidates or practicing teachers form an understanding of what makes a proper disposition, regardless of the evaluator. Some have a naturally good disposition, while others struggle with this part of the education profession (Warren, 2018).

Professionals with a good disposition are culturally responsive, and this directly relates to empathy (Shah et al., 2004; Warren, 2018). Cultural differences are an added complexity to an already tricky communication situation (Shah et al., 2004). Cultural responsiveness requires the communicator to be sensitive and empathetic toward the other party (Schussler et al., 2010; Shah et al., 2004; Warren, 2018). The professional must have the self-awareness to understand how things can be seen differently because of differing life situations. A teacher may call school supplies cheap, where a person living on financial disability benefits may see things otherwise.
A lack of self-awareness and empathy can lead to a teacher to be tone-deaf in the area of disposition (Karges-Bone & Griffin, 2009).

**Summary.** Teachers are being put at a disadvantage due to the communication requirements of their job and the lack of training they receive to facilitate the task. It could greatly benefit the field of education for the problem to be fixed. Teachers need research supported training in the areas related to bidirectional communication for the benefit of moving education forward during this period of constant interaction.

As times change, so must the field of education and its training. Teachers must be put into the position to succeed. Parents have demanded more synchronous bidirectional communication from teachers. Previous requests were for more interaction in general, and the demand was met through technology. Parents now want more personal interaction (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012). With more intimate contact, greater tact is needed, and teachers must become better aware of their disposition: the more interaction, the more opportunities to have missteps.

There is an abundance of information to be given and techniques to be taught to help teachers progress as effective bidirectional communicators. Much can be learned from research materials and communication publications. These materials must be delivered in a fashion which can easily be absorbed by busy professionals.

A professional development which provides teachers with information, guided practice and visuals will assist in the development of essential communication skills. Teachers have to be given an understanding of what parents desire, then be coached
on how to provide the service best. As busy as teachers are, reading about the need is not the most beneficial way of learning. Being presented the material in video form will provide flexibility in the delivery of the training. The inclusion of other brief materials to learn from will solidify the lessons, helping teachers to improve through guided practice.

Who is the Capstone Meant to Impact?

Education is a field which requires its professionals to interact with people outside of the school regularly. Secretaries, attendance clerks, instructional assistants, teachers and administrators are in regular contact with parents and guardians. Parents and guardians entrust their children with schools and the people operating them. Trust is vital, and effective communication is an integral part of establishing trust.

Teachers receive little to no training for communication, though communication is an important part of their duties. Teachers, administrators and other classified staff tend to receive no specific training in effective techniques to communicate with students or parents (Gartmeier et al., 2015; Symeou et al., 2012). Most educational professionals are expected to interact with parents with no guidance as to what is the right and wrong way to communicate. Educators are not taught how to give positive or negative feedback in safe, positive manners. One must learn on the job with the hopes of not making a misstep which could be costly. Many fear offending someone or making a parent upset, so some teachers choose one-way or asynchronous forms of communication (Graham-Clay, 2005; Montgomery, 2005).
Everyone is not naturally skilled in the art of communicating, and many need guidance. Leaders have to find ways to give teachers the tools to communicate and empower them to utilize the techniques effectively. A teacher who makes an effort to call parents may say the wrong thing from time to time if they are not coached as to how to speak about specific subjects. Individuals without training may rely on asynchronous emails to relay important messages to parents. Without tone or social presence, these emails may fulfill the obligation of communicating but will eventually break down the trust between the school and its stakeholders.

Educational professionals require specific effective communication training. This capstone project can directly affect individuals in the field of education who need to make contact with the school’s stakeholders. The training has the potential to help individuals lacking confidence as well as individuals with natural ability in communication. The training can also create an avenue for professional managers to provide feedback and coaching to individuals who communicate with parents and guardians.

The training’s design promotes both inclusivity and an instructive nature so all can benefit. Classified staff members receive little to no college training while certified educators have at least a four-year degree with education being a part of the focus. Most teachers do not receive training in college on the job, which places them on equal footing with classified individuals. Both party’s lack of instruction allows for the training to be focused on the subject of effective communication, instead of job-specific types of communication. Once all individuals are trained, more specific
professional development can be distributed throughout learning to ensure growth in specifically needed areas.

Context of the capstone. Bardstown City Schools serves a community which is small and close-knit. The district has always considered the community when hiring. A significant percentage of the district is comprised of former Bardstown students. The reasoning of the district is to keep a close connection with the community. Several teachers are not from the city and do not live in the city.

On average, the districts’ students come from a low socioeconomic background, while starting Bardstown teachers make more than the city’s median household income. Most of the teachers do not live in the same neighborhoods as the students. Many teachers do not frequent social gatherings or mingle with a significant portion of the community.

Bardstown is full of teachers who have managed to separate themselves from the community, as a whole. Teachers are mostly white females, while there is a significant minority population within the school system. Bardstown has a high special needs population who come from primarily low-income families.

Each school within the district tries to hire the best candidate available for each position, though being a good candidate from Bardstown makes a person favorable. The district sees value in working diligently to put the most relatable good teachers in the classrooms to work with students. Being from Bardstown helps the teacher to understand better the students they serve.
Connecting with students’ parents and families is imperative to the district. The families foot majority of the bill for the district. They are the individuals who volunteer their time and push students to reach their ultimate potential. Building partnerships with students and families a critical aspect of helping the district grow and district leaders would like to see improvement in this area.

**How was this capstone project developed?**

The completed capstone project consists of four videos and supplementary material which furthers the lessons of each video. The videos range from 15 to 20 minutes long, with the first video being the longest. The supplementary materials consist of PowerPoint presentations, reflection worksheets and designed role-play activity instructions. All of the content is embedded within a business website. A password must be purchased to download the material from the site.

**Video production.**

**Point 1.** The first developmental point of this capstone was choosing the important communication topics to include within the web series. There were numerous topics which could benefit teachers, and the research provided several avenues of choice. Teachers can benefit from training about face to face conversations, phone conversations, delivering bad news, delivering positive news, having tough conversations, working with difficult or untrusting parents and remaining calm while dealing with a hostile parent. Each of these subjects is worthy of a video.
Each of the four capstone videos briefly explains the goals of the web series and helps the learner understand what effective bidirectional communication is. Getting the viewers to understand the concept makes each video more effective. The message is clear, concise and poignant for teachers to realize how much the professional development can improve their effectiveness as an educator. The four video subjects are: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects; BE HEARD; Disposition and Professional Courtesy; Listening is Tough: Active Listening.

**Point 2.** The second developmental part of the capstone was scripting for the videos. The second part was the most time-consuming and challenging portion of the process. Building meaningful dialog for each video was paramount for the success of the capstone. The use of the wrong words could become confusing and cause vital information to be missed. Flawless messages must be passed from the video to the viewer, so sentence structure had to be adequate. Words and sentences had to be considered. The material had to be entertaining, to a degree. If the content were dull viewers would not pay attention.

On the other hand, the material had to be factual and academic, or it would not be taken seriously by the viewers. Teachers need to be given valuable information in a professional tone. All of these items had to be considered during the process which will make it difficult, but necessary.

After the scripting was completed, building the storyboard was the following step. This web series was filmed as professionally as possible and used different angles and techniques to emphasize points within the dialog. There are scenarios
within the videos where scenes change. There are, also, scripted scenarios between actors within the videos. It was essential to have these items planned for the sake of maximum effectiveness and a proficient turnout. Without proper planning, the videos would have been clumsy and ineffective. Each scene had to be planned.

The storyboard was written as an additional portion of the script but contained drawings to emphasize the proper vision of each scene. A short comic strip is included when a scene is designed. The comic strip increased the likelihood of the scene being carried out effectively. Including these drawings emphasized the precision and professional nature of the capstone.

**Point 3.** Next, the capstone video was recorded. A recording schedule was used to build the video for the capstone, and a volunteer actor reported in on specific days scheduled for recording. With the use of an iPhone X, Newer Ring light fixture, Zoom H1 audio recorder and a lavalier microphone, the video was recorded. Each shot has several takes do to misspeaking, and there was a level of improvisation when recording started. After each filming session, all of the recorded material was uploaded to a laptop with an external hard drive.

The recording process took place in multiple settings. The equipment provided a set-up which allowed for travel and quick deconstruction. There was potential to have outdoor scenes as well as office scenes. The recording material could handle both settings with ease. The recording equipment uses compatible software which allowed for the content to be stored together in preparation for the next process.
**Point 4.** The final part of the video creation process was editing the video and audio clips to create a product which resembles the script and storyboard. This process required the splicing of several pieces into one whole. iMovie editing software was used during the process. Specific parts of different takes were pieced together to build the videos into something which resembles a short documentary or infomercial. Some takes were used while others were discarded. Another party with editing experience was consulted when there were questions. When the process was over, the video was professionally constructed and ready for the use of teachers to build their communication skills.

**Supplementary Materials.** PowerPoint presentations were created to help viewers retain the main points of each video. The presentations follow along with the video (scripts) and highlight specific points made during certain segments. There are things in the PowerPoint presentations which directly quote what is being said in the video (scripts) to emphasize a point. The viewer can refer to the presentations before, during or after the consumption of the video (scripts). These documents supplement the learning experience within the professional development.

Different worksheets were created for extra learning and practice. There are some lessons which require pre-learning. The worksheet should be used to help the viewer realize gaps in their knowledge about specific topics. The worksheets were created via Microsoft Word and are simple. Pre-learning worksheets have two to three questions about the content of the upcoming video.
There are post-learning checks for understanding worksheets created, as well. These documents ask questions about specific topics addressed during a particular video (script) and allow the viewer to rehash the material. These worksheets should help solidify the particular lesson within the video. The worksheet questions are in several different formats including multiple choice, short answer and matching terms. Crossword format is also used when recalling points from the video and the coinciding PowerPoint presentation.

Reflection worksheets were also created for nearly all scripts. These worksheets are an important piece of the professional development. Teachers are posed open-ended questions requiring them to think about their feelings related to specific communication topics. The questions are about the strengths and weaknesses they possess within the field of communication. The reflection worksheets serve to help teachers realize why the material they just viewed will be beneficial to them in the future. It requires the teacher to think about their old ways and consider buying into new ways of thought.

The final supplementary material which was created is parental scripts for role play activities. Teachers are posed to work together. One person serves in the role of a parent within a specifically labeled scenario. The teacher has to conduct the conversation while their training partner plays the role of a parent with a variety of scripted responses. These guided practice exercises can greatly benefit teachers in preparation for dealing with parents when real communication is warranted. This
material can be used with or without video material. Activities can be conducted during a staff meeting to help teachers practice their skills.

**Web Page.** The final developmental part of this capstone project was the creation of an interactive web page to house all of the material created. The content on the web page is password protected and non-downloadable. The page is vibrant and provides information about the professional development and its purpose. The overall goals of the website are to advertise the benefits of the web series and to be easily accessible to those with the credentials to use the material it houses.

The creation of a web page required the help of an expert in the field. The correct domain had to be chosen to allow for password protected content. The platform had to be able to allow pictures and links to different material. Having a web page designer who is an expert in the field significantly improved the final product.

The final website offers several different pieces of material. There is a home page which houses an introduction video which explains the subject of the professional development and information describing what is held within of the website. The website includes contact information for the creator of the professional development. Lastly, there is a link which takes the visitor to a password protected area which contains all of the previously mentioned content.

**Why were this capstone and related strategies selected?**

The United States is currently in an era of constant communication/connection (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2011; Lewis & Forman, 2002;
Levinson, 2010; Parker & Sparkman, 2008). With the invention of social media and a multitude of avenues for communication, connectivity has become paramount in society. Business has adapted to the use of available channels of communication. Schools must catch up, but the service provided by schools have to be more personal.

Working with people’s kids make effective communication a critical skill. The skill has become much more important with the onset of the expectation of constant contact. Schools have worked to adapt to the use of social media and other methods of communication, but parents still want more in-depth meaningful conversations. One-way communication tactics and asynchronous forms of communication are the least effective forms of communication, and parents are slowing demanding more.

Society has seen a deterioration of the school-home relationship since parents began wanting more communication from teachers (Cankar et al., 2012). There is no substantial evidence as to why the relationship has become strained. Research does, however, support effective communication as a tool to build the school-home relationship (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lewis & Forman, 2002). Through effective communication, trust is established or reestablished, and parents become more confident in the motives of the school.

Effective communication has become more critical than ever, within the field of education (Ferrara, 2015; Quinn, 2014). Unfortunately, preservice teacher training does not prepare candidates for this expectation. Practicing teachers are also left
unprepared for the requirements of building relationships. They receive no additional training to their college educations on the subject of communication.

Extensive reading is a time-consuming option to train teachers to become effective synchronous bidirectional communicators. Teachers have many demands on their time, and reading copious amounts of material to become better communicators can be difficult. A one-day training on the subject, also, has a low chance of success (Gartmeier et al., 2015; Symeou et al., 2015). Some people are not comfortable with speaking on the phone or in person with parents and need guided practice or materials to review.

The creation of videos and guided practice exercises is a possible solution. Videos can be replayed often and take less time than reading about effective communication skills and techniques. The videos will have guided practice exercises and examples to help uncomfortable teachers prepare for issues which can arise when communicating with parents. A professional development series with these elements may help teachers grow as effective synchronous bidirectional communicators.

Limitations of the Capstone

The capstone was developed by an educator with nine years’ worth of professional experience in one district. The educator responsible for the creation of the capstone served as a classroom teacher for six years and as an administrator for three. The capstone does not take into account many of the other demands on a teacher or administrator’s time. Improving the bidirectional communication skills of educators does not solve the problem of finding time to communicate. The capstone
inherently advocates for more bidirectional communication but is not designed to assist teachers in prioritizing their time in the interest of increasing interaction with stakeholders.

The material within each lesson in the research-based capstone has not been administered or tested as a whole. Some of the components were not taken from education specific resources, so success cannot be assumed without proper implementation and testing. Many of the items included have been used in other areas and were not particular to the small town community the capstone is designed to serve.

The capstone is a professional development which was meant to help practicing teachers develop skills which were not exclusively taught in their preservice education. The professional development was designed to build off of prior experiences educators may have experienced or fear to happen. The project teaches new avenues and does not lay a foundation for skills to be developed. The capstone recognizes the importance of altering preservice education programs to include stakeholder interaction but does not have any preservice components.

**Reflections**

This project has been eye-opening. Communication had always suited me well during my career and research has shown why. The focus on effective communication has provided an avenue for professional conversations daily. Many have benefited from the material found in the literature used to complete this...
capstone. Through numerous collaborative efforts, Bardstown Middle School created a communication initiative and is working to overhaul its systems of communication.

Through this capstone project, with the support of superiors, other’s longing for this type of material has become evident. The positive interactions and well-wishing have driven me to work diligently through the project for the betterment of the district-community relationship. There have been numerous interactions with stakeholders claiming the need for better communication from the end of professional educators. These interactions served as the primary motivator for the diligence and completion of this project.

The capstone will be the foundation for an ongoing professional development series. More research will need to be added as the subjects expound. Effective communication has many different avenues, and the plan is to explore as many of them as possible for the betterment of the field of education.

A study will have to be conducted to understand the effectiveness of the capstone and plan an expansion of the professional development. The study would have to cover the implementation of the capstone and its effectiveness. The effectiveness can be measured from several different perspectives. Teacher confidence and stakeholder satisfaction are two of the major concepts which would need to be measured. After following through with studies, the professional development will have the ability to grow.
Capstone Project

Overview of Lessons

The capstone’s lessons will center on specific research supported communication skills. The titles of the four lessons are:

- Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects;
- BE HEARD;
- Disposition and Professional Courtesy; and
- Listening is Tough: Active Listening

Each lesson is designed to gauge teacher’s prior knowledge and feelings about the subject, teach them about the nuances about the subject, check for understanding after teaching, allow teachers to safely practice their newfound knowledge or skill and provide the educator time to reflect on the real-life implications of the material. The overall focus of each lesson was to help educators become effective communicators.

Each of the lessons is discussed in its section following this overview. These sections break down the lessons as they should be presented. After reviewing the summaries of each lesson, the scripts, storyboards and supplementary materials of the professional developments can be examined within the Appendix section.

Lesson 1: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects. A significant need for training is in the area of having conversations on difficult subjects. Many feel unequipped for the task because of a lack of training and being left to learn from trial and error. This lesson can be beneficial to all educators and can play a role in
building a strong relationship versus burning a bridge, setting the stage for a difficult coexistence.

Lesson one is shown as an outline of the training which would take place at a teacher in-service or a professional staff day. The lesson is designed to provide teachers with tools to approach these potentially tense interactions. The lesson will provide the opportunity for teachers to practice the skills they glean from the video and supplementary material. The practice is safe, so there is no chance of ruining a relationship with a stakeholder because of negative interaction. The complete video can be found at http://jenisemorning.wixsite.com/morning-msu-capstone, and the script, storyboard and supplementary materials can be found within Appendix A.

Lesson 1

Title: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects

Time: Approximately two to three hours, depending on the length of discussion and amount of practice time allotted.

Learning Targets:

Teacher will be able to...

1. **Identify** potentially difficult conversation subjects
2. **Understand** the importance of Open Dialog
3. **Explain** and **Utilize** the concept of “Finding Common Ground.”
4. **Compare** and **Contrast** instinctive response versus the use of wait time.

Points of Emphasis

- The lesson is not a cure-all which will prevent all negative interactions with parents.
- Sometimes, time is a factor when dealing with some difficult subjects.
• Some of the material is useful in all effective communication and is not strictly reserved for conversations on difficult subjects.

• The more these concepts are put into practice, the better the teacher will become.

• All concepts used are research-based.

**Necessary Materials for Implementation**

• Computer and printer to print pre and post exercises, the practice exercise and reflection worksheets.

• Project and screen or individual screens (personal devices with audio/video capability)

• Moveable seats and tables/desks for a movable work environment

• Whiteboard or access to Google Docs for group work exercises.

• Writing utensils

**Lesson Layout**

*Teacher In-service Implementation*

1. Brief Introduction to Effective Communication professional development series

2. Introduction of the topic: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects

3. Allow teachers time to work on the pre-video exercise.

4. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

5. Teachers are given the focus/follow along Notes sheets to assist with notetaking during the actual video.

6. Teachers are permitted to watch Lesson 1’s video either as a group or on individual devices.

7. Teachers should complete the post-video exercise after finishing the video.
8. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

9. Teachers should then be divided into groups of two or three.

10. Each group should be given the partner practice exercise and allowed to practice in spaces where they can hear one another, or in separate rooms calling one another.

11. After practicing, the staff should return to the common area to have one last open discussion. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

12. To conclude the event, teachers should fill out the personal reflection worksheet to gauge their learning.

**Lesson 2: BE HEARD.** BE HEARD is an acronym which stands for Best intentions assumed; Emphasis on learning; Home-school collaboration; Example and evidence; Active listening; Respect for all; Dedication to follow up. Within the listed actions, there is a level of wisdom provided which is research supported and promotes healthy bidirectional communication between teachers and stakeholders. Because these items are not common knowledge, many educators leave these things out of their interactions with parents and lose a level of effectiveness with every missed element. The lesson can be beneficial to all educators who will have to focus on building a lasting relationship with stakeholders and talk to them multiple times over a significant amount of time.

Lesson two is shown as an outline of the training which would take place at a teacher in-service or a professional staff day. The lesson is designed to provided teachers with items to help promote and strengthen professional relationships with
stakeholders over time. The lesson will provide the opportunity for teachers to glean
information from a video and build a comprehensive BE HEARD plan for future use
as a starting point when working with parents. The practice exercise is safe, so there
is no chance of ruining a relationship with a stakeholder because of negative
interaction. The complete script, storyboard and supplementary materials can be
found within Appendix B.

Lesson 2
Title: BE HEARD
Time: Approximately one to two hours, depending on the length of discussion and
amount of practice time allotted.
Learning Targets:
Teacher will be able to...
   1. **Label** each of the letters of the BE HEARD acronym
   2. **Explain** what each portion of the acronym means
   3. **Create** a plan for the using BE HEARD

Points of Emphasis
- The lesson is not a cure-all which will prevent all problems when working
  with stakeholders.
- Significant effort is essential to the success of using BE HEARD.
- Some of the material is useful in all effective communication and is not
  strictly reserved for phone or face to face communication.
- The more these concepts are put into practice, the better the teacher will
  become.
- All concepts used are research-based.
Necessary Materials for Implementation

- Computer and printer to print Pre and Post exercises, the practice exercise and reflection worksheets
- Project and screen or individual screens (personal devices with audio/ video capability)
- Moveable seats and tables/ desks for a movable work environment
- Whiteboard or access to Google Docs for group work exercises.
- Writing utensils

Lesson Layout

Teacher In-service Implementation

1. Brief Introduction to Effective Communication professional development series
2. Introduction of the topic: BE HEARD
3. Allow teachers time to work on the pre-video exercise.
4. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/ group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.
5. Teachers are given the focus/ follow along Notes sheets to assist with notetaking during the actual video.
6. Teachers are permitted to watch Lesson 2’s video either as a group or on individual devices.
7. Teachers should complete the post-video exercise after finishing the video.
8. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/ group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.
9. Teachers should then be divided into groups of two or three.
10. Each group should be given the practice exercise and allowed to plan future BE HEARD plans to be used for future interaction with stakeholders.
11. After planning, the staff should return to the common area to have one last open discussion. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

12. To conclude the event, teachers should fill out the personal reflection worksheet to gauge their learning.

Lesson 3: Disposition and Professional Courtesy. As professionals with a vested interest in building relationships with the stakeholders of the school, teachers must have a solid understanding of their disposition and professional courtesy. These dynamics can be critical to the relationship building process. Training is in order to be successful in these categories. Teachers will need opportunities to safely learn the look of the right disposition and professional courtesy.

Lesson three is shown as an outline of the training which would take place at a teacher in-service or a professional staff day. The lesson is designed to provided teachers with items to help promote and strengthen professional relationships with stakeholders over time. The lesson will provide the opportunity for teachers to glean information from a video and work through a scenario on paper with hints to THINK. The practice exercise is safe, so there is no chance of ruining a relationship with a stakeholder because of a negative interaction. The complete script, storyboard and supplementary materials can be found within Appendix C.

Learning Targets:
Teacher will be able to...

1. **Explain** what disposition is and looks like for teachers
2. **Categorize** specific dress as professional and not professional
3. **Create** the criteria for professional courtesy for themselves and fellow teachers

**Points of Emphasis**

- The lesson is not a cure-all which will prevent all problems when working with stakeholders.
- There are gender-specific expectations for professional dress in the United States.
- Some of the material is useful in all effective communication and is not strictly reserved for phone or face to face communication.
- The more these concepts are put into practice, the better the teacher will become.
- All concepts used are research-based.

**Necessary Materials for Implementation**

- Computer and printer to print Pre and Post exercises, the practice exercise and reflection worksheets
- Project and screen or individual screens (personal devices with audio/video capability)
- Moveable seats and tables/desks for a movable work environment
- Whiteboard or access to Google Docs for group work exercises.
- Writing utensils

**Lesson Layout**

*Teacher In-service Implementation*

1. Brief Introduction to Effective Communication professional development series
2. Introduction of the topic: Disposition and Professional Courtesy
3. Allow teachers time to work on the pre-video exercise.
4. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

5. Teachers are given the focus/follow along Notes sheets to assist with notetaking during the actual video.

6. Teachers are permitted to watch Lesson 3’s video either as a group or on individual devices.

7. Teachers should complete the post-video exercise after finishing the video.

8. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

9. Teachers should then be divided into groups of two or three.

10. Each group should be given the practice exercise and allowed work through the scenario in the ‘Using THINK to help a parent help their student’ activity.

11. After working through the scenario, the staff should return to the common area to have one last open discussion. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

12. To conclude the event, teachers should fill out the personal reflection worksheet to gauge their learning.

Lesson 4: Listening is Tough: Active Listening. Listening is a skill which is necessary for success in any field where people are the focus of everyday work.

The need for listening skills is essential in the field of education. Listening skills are one of the foundational parts of effective communication and should be given proper attention in a professional development designed to equip teachers for the task.

Listening takes practice and thought, and teachers require safe methods of learning these skills.
Lesson four is shown as an outline of the training which would take place at a teacher in-service or a professional staff day. The lesson is designed to provided teachers with items to help promote and strengthen professional relationships with stakeholders over time. The lesson will provide the opportunity for teachers to glean information from a video and create active listening dialog. The practice exercise is safe, so there is no chance of ruining a relationship with a stakeholder because of a negative interaction. The complete script, storyboard and supplementary materials can be found within Appendix D.

**Learning Targets:**

*Teacher will be able to...*

1. **Describe** what good listeners do
2. **Demonstrate** the use of asking questions to promote understanding
3. **Develop** a professional conversation using the tools gained from the video lesson

**Points of Emphasis**

- The lesson is not a cure-all which will prevent all problems when working with stakeholders.
- There are times when listening is just sitting back to absorb, but active listening skills will still be relevant.
- Some of the material is useful in all effective communication and is not strictly reserved for phone or face to face communication.
- The more these concepts are put into practice, the better the teacher will become.
- All concepts used are research-based.
Necessary Materials for Implementation

- Computer and printer to print Pre and Post exercises, the practice exercise and reflection worksheets
- Project and screen or individual screens (personal devices with audio/video capability)
- Moveable seats and tables/desks for a movable work environment
- Whiteboard or access to Google Docs for group work exercises.
- Writing utensils

Lesson Layout

Teacher In-service Implementation

1. Brief Introduction to Effective Communication professional development series
2. Introduction of the topic: Listening is Tough: Active Listening
3. Allow teachers time to work on the pre-video exercise.
4. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.
5. Teachers are given the focus/follow along Notes sheets to assist with notetaking during the actual video.
6. Teachers are permitted to watch Lesson 4’s video either as a group or on individual devices.
7. Teachers should complete the post-video exercise after finishing the video.
8. After allowing everyone to finish, as a class/group, there should be an open discussion based upon answers provided by the teacher. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.
9. Teachers should then be divided into groups of two or allowed to work alone.
10. Each group or individual should be given the practice exercise and allowed to create a dialog which displays active listening and shows an understanding of the content.

11. After working through the scenario, the staff should return to the common area to have one last open discussion. A whiteboard can be used to record specifics of the conversation by the facilitator of the event.

12. To conclude the event, teachers should fill out the personal reflection worksheet to gauge their learning.
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Appendices
Appendix A

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION VIDEO SERIES

Lesson 1: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects

(Video Script; Notes; Supplementary Materials)
Lesson 1 Script: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects

Each bullet represents a cinematic jump cut

Introduction

Morning:

• Thank you for tuning in to another training session in Effective Bidirectional Communication!!! You’ve made the commitment to become a better communicator, so let me not waste your time rambling.
• This video and its supplementary materials will cover the topic of having conversations on difficult subjects with parents.
• Uuuuugh…
• These conversations are some of the most dreaded by teachers. Many feel nervous, anxious or afraid to approach tough issues with parents because they have no clue how they will react.
• Many fear aggressiveness while some fear not being able to answer specific questions. There are some teachers who just feel as if it should not be there responsibility to have really tough conversations.
• The problem with this thought is it weakens teachers’ abilities to build relationships with their students’ parents, closing the door to a way for them to become more successful.
• In the end, the best way to combat these fears is to understand the process, prepare and practice for the real event.
• This video will identify potentially tough subjects to broach, provide tips on how to approach conversations which can be about difficult subjects and provide positive and negative examples of how to handle these events.
• Hold on to your hats, this will be a fun one….

What subjects are difficult?

Different Setting

Morning:

• You might be thinking, “What are some difficult subjects?”
• For some, all subjects involving synchronous bidirectional communication are tough because they do not feel comfortable talking with parents.
• Aside from these individuals, tough conversations often involve…
• Bad Behavior…
• Poor Performance…
• Special Ed. Services…
• Peer Conflicts…
• Hygiene Concerns…
And every teacher’s favorite…
Mental Health Concerns…
Each of these subjects get the label as difficult because there is no telling how parents will react to the initiation of the conversation. These issues put a fork in the road, and parents can take any path they’d like. The teacher has to go along on the trip and has no say of the path to be taken.

There are several difficult reactions parents can take when these subjects are brought up.

(Rapid)
- Confusion
- Frustration
- Sadness
- Anger
- Relief
- Indifference
- Professional
- Questioning
- Defensive

Not knowing how the parent will react is one component of teacher frustration. The other part is actually coping with and reacting to the parental response.

Everyone isn’t nice, and everyone isn’t level headed, but as the professional, the burden lies upon the teacher to respond appropriately and professionally.

Examples and Reactions

Morning:
- Let us take a look at a difficult subject and an unknown response.
- For the sake of “fun”, how about we choose bad behavior and a confused parental response.
- We have all had the student in class who is a constant distraction or behavior problem, right? The kid who cannot help but make a comment, funny statement or interjection during the lesson.
- The kid who calls out the wrong answer purposely, or makes a remark about a student who gets an answer wrong.
- The kid who has a hard time staying in their seat, makes distracting noises and is an overall goof off…
- You know…. Me as a kid…
- Yea, take a moment to imagine the things you would like to say to his parent. Excuse me Mr. or Mrs. Morning… your son is a… distraction. To put it lightly.
• After giving a rundown of the consistently negative behaviors, what would you expect a parent to think, say or do? How would you respond…
• Wait do NOT do this to yourself!
• You are a professional educator and work with students regularly. You are practical, trained in different areas and have to maintain a level of rationality. You went to college! You probably think about the things kids do at school and then go to your kids and say, “if you EVER do this, I will destroy you…”
• In other words, your frame of reference is not the same as most of the parents you work with. This does not make them better or worse parents, but you must expect a response you may not totally understand.
• You have taken the time out to call Jeff Morning’s parents. Now you patiently wait for a response and hear silence on the line

(insert) cricket sound
• The parent then responds, “are you sure you are talking about my son, Jeffery? I’m sure there are a lot of Jeff’s in your school.”
• Now you look like this…

(insert) picture of super confused person
• This can and will happen during your career. I am warning you now.
• “My son does not behave like this” Or “this type of behavior has never been reported to me”, are not uncommon responses. The parent may not have a frame of reference, so they are genuinely confused. How does a teacher go about addressing the situation with the confused parent?
• How does a teacher go about dealing with any parental reaction about a tough subject?
• There is a silver bullet for this problem…
• Just joking… there isn’t.
• Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler’s book “Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High.” Provides some useful tips.
• The book outlines critical subjects like dealing with a rebellious teen, talking to a team member who isn’t keeping commitments and Giving an unfavorable performance review. These are only a few examples difficult subjects, but they directly apply to what teachers deal with.
• Dealing with rebellious students can be difficult, and talking to parents (your team member) about their behavior can be even more challenging. A teacher’s duty is to provide performance reviews and if the teacher cannot competently provide feedback to the student’s stakeholders, the students are forced to rely only on themselves to improve.
• Many students being left to their own devices are not successful.

Effective Communication is Open Dialog

Morning:
What is Dialog?

**Hmmmmm** *(Strokes Beard)*

I GOT IT!

**(Reading from dictionary)** Dialog is “The free flow of meaning between two or more people.”

So if I do this…

**(Universal sign for choking)**

I really hope the meaning gets across… and quickly.

The overall objective of engaging parents in conversation is to share information with them with the hope of the material being useful to the student’s overall success. Talking for talking’s sake is not necessarily productive.

A parent may feel insulted or upset if the teacher communicates in a way which seems meaningless.

Example…

*Short Phone Skit*

**Teacher:** Good afternoon, this is John Doe from Basic Middle School. I was just calling to tell you about your son’s last test.

**Parent:** Hello, go ahead and tell me…

**Teacher:** He failed. He didn’t just fail… he bombed it! Like… epic!

**Parent:** Okaaaaay… sooooo…

**Teacher:** Sooooo…

**Parent:** So why the #beep# are you calling me? Apparently you aren’t doing your job because they are failing. I don’t appreciate you calling to mock my son. He is trying his best. You don’t give him the attention he needs. As a matter of fact, I’ll be speaking to the superintendent about you. #Click#

**Teacher:** Hello… hello…

*Morning:*

- Meaning is an important concept. Context goes along information in order to make a message meaningful.
- The previous skit could be so different with more information added. Do you think the parent would have been upset if the teacher had added in detail about
the students scored? Maybe, maybe not, but the teacher would have been able to open the door for the parent to understand better.

- For example…

**Short Phone Skit**

**Teacher:** Good afternoon, this is John Doe from Basic Middle School. I was calling to discuss your son’s performance on the last test. Do you have a moment to talk?

**Parent:** Yes, sir, please fill me in.

**Teacher:** He did very well on the multiple choice portion of the last text, getting seven out of ten correct, but he did not provide adequate short answer or essay answers.

**Parent:** That isn’t good, I wonder why he didn’t do good?

**Teacher:** Well, the multiple choice portion of the test focused on the knowledge aspect of the content, while the essay portion required analysis and deep thought. His answers on the short answer portions were hit and miss. I, personally don’t think he studied well. During class time he has been sharp, but much of his formative work has been incomplete and he hasn’t seemed to take many notes.

**Parent:** Interesting… I’ll have to have a conversation with him about this...

**Teacher:** He is more than welcome to retake the essay portion to raise his grade on the test. I’m available before school every day, 30 minutes before first period. I’m sure it will be plenty of time for him after he prepares well.

**Parent:** Thank you so much! He will be there to take that test in two days. I really appreciate you calling. Good afternoon. (as phone is taken away from face) BOY GET YOUR NARROW BEHIND DOWN HERE….

**Morning:**

- Obviously these are two extreme differences in the way a phone call can play out, but demonstrating the worst case scenario may help all of you in the future. There are so many variables in the art of dialog, but many times, if careless, the negative result can be the outcome.
- Help parents get to a place where they feel comfortable expressing themselves with you. Leave openings for them to ask questions. Be open to what they have to say.
- All of these actions can be difficult for the untrained teacher. As educators we have so much we are responsible for, and dialog with a bunch of parents is not
only “another” thing we have to do, but a difficult, potentially stressful things to do.

- Dialog is time consuming.
- Dialog requires patience.
- Dialog can feel unsafe.
- Ultimately, allowing for dialog will strengthen relationships between you and the parent for the benefit of the student you are serving.
- Dialog is the foundation of all positive relationships.
- Don’t believe me?
- Imagine trying to maintain a healthy relationship with a significant other without regular dialog…
- Some of the guys and the ladies are thinking “That would be the PERFECT relationship”
- Hardy Har Har…(deadpan)
- Seriously, without dialog, there is no personal touch, there is no trust and there will often be misunderstandings.
- Parents are people just like anyone else. They may seem scary just like you may seem scary to the cashier who keeps screwing up your order at the fast food restaurant.
- In conclusion…
- Your overall goal with all forms of bidirectional communication is to establish a free passing of meaningful information. We shouldn’t be talking to just talk. Parents, like us, do not want their time wasted. We have to assume parents want to help their kids become better as people as much as we do.
- Let us now discuss the importance of finding common ground…

Find Common Ground

Short Desk Skit

**Parent angry:** I don’t care what you say… It is stupid and I don’t agree with you trying to punish my kid over it. He didn’t even realize he was doing anything wrong. I’m tired of the school acting like they can just do whatever they want when it is convenient to y’all.

**Teacher angry:** Well the rules are the rules and this is how it is going to be. If you’ve got a problem with it, take it up with the principal, but you’ll be wasting your time!
Parent furious: I’m sure the superintendent and the news won’t like the way you treat kids around here. We’ll see how much you’re smiling when I’m through!!!

(Stands to leave in a huff)

Morning:

- Things can turn really ugly really quickly if we aren’t careful. Our job is to be professionals and getting angry and responding negatively is not good for students or the parent. Ultimately, it is not good for us as professionals either.
- In order to minimize these types of negative interactions, we have to find a common foundation to begin the conversation.
- Crucial Conversations has a section titled, “Start with the Heart.” This section can be summed up into finding common ground. When both parties have an understanding of what the other is looking to attain, the conversation can become productive.
- One place where parents and teachers can come to a common understanding is the investment toward the child’s future success as a person.
- Parents may need to be reminded, and teacher may need to remind themselves, about the duties of educational institutions. The institutions exist to help students become productive citizens who are capable of taking care of themselves in a world where they need certain specific skills.
- When a tough conversation is coming, it can be paramount to remind parents of this mandate at the beginning of the conversation. It cannot seem like a prepared statement and must come off as organic, but it needs to be expressed. This can lay the foundation for positive interaction.
- Regardless of how we view parents and their parenting styles, all parents like to think of themselves as good parents. Also, majority of parents want to see their children be successful, according to several psychological and educational articles. Knowing this is the opportunity to build a lasting relationship.
- Think about the movie Aliens, staring Sigourney Weaver… (insert Al Sharpton Clip) the sequel to Ridley Scott’s 1979 film, Alien…
- Spoiler Alert
- The mother alien who, by movie standards, is the “bad guy” of the film. She kills wantonly and is hyper aggressive. It is hard to empathize with a killer, but we often forget… she is only doing her best to protect her children.
- As mean and nasty as she is, she just wants her Alien Xenomorph babies to have a chance to grow up and live full lives.
- If we, as educators, can try to put ourselves in the shoes of the parents we work with/ for, many times, we can come to an understanding during tough situations and conversations.
- Empathy is a big part finding common ground.
- Try to put yourself in the parent’s shoes.
Short Desk Skit

**Parent angry:** I don’t care what you say… It is stupid and I don’t agree with you trying to punish my kid over it. He didn’t even realize he was doing anything wrong. I’m tired of the school acting like they can just do whatever they want when it is convenient to y’all.

**Teacher calm:** Please help me to understand why you feel this way. I can tell you are upset and want your child to be treated fairly, and we are trying to do so at this school. I personally know because I see the potential your child has to be great.

**Parent semi-angry:** Well… It seems like my kid is the only kid who gets in trouble for this in your class. I just want things to be fair, ya know? Like, do you like my kid? It seems like you don’t.

**Teacher calm:** Not only do I like your child, I love your child. I want your child to grow up to be whoever and whatever they want to be. I want them to be successful and happy. I want them to make a difference in this world. Your child is special and can be a difference maker in this school and in their lives over time. I hold our kid accountable for actions they take to help them to build the discipline necessary for greatness. Your kid doesn’t have straight A’s. I’m trying to help with that. My class is not the only class where there are behavior issues, but I am the only teacher who is consistent. Notice your child’s grade is higher in my class than any other. I really want your son to be great. I’m sorry if it seems like I don’t. I’m treating your child as I would treat my own.

**Parent calm:** Well, I appreciate you saying that. I didn’t know. My child comes home and tells me there is unfair treatment, and I just feel like I gotta go into papa bear mode. You know how that goes. I’m not the biggest fan of detention, but I guess it will do some good if it was earned fairly. You did get in touch with me the last time there was an incident. If you would, let me know how things are going in class for the next few days. I’ll talk with my kid. There shouldn’t be any more issues and if there are, just call me.

**Teacher calm:** Thank you so much for being understanding. Also, thanks for teaming up with me. As long as we work together, your child will have a great year in this class. If you need anything, you give me a call. My cell number is 777-9311. Do not hesitate to call or text and if I don’t answer, I’ll get back to you quickly. Thanks again for coming in. Have a great afternoon.

**Morning:**
• Finding common ground makes all the difference in the world when working with a parent about a difficult subject. Once you build the bridge, it becomes easier to get over the rough river. There are many different ways to get a message across and finding the right way falls upon the professional.

• It is our job as educators to communicate and find effective methods. It is a part of our job and makes the job easier if we get into good practice.
Listen and Use Wait Time

Morning:
- We have all heard the saying, “god gave you two ears and one mouth so you would listen twice as much as you talked.”
- I know I have….
- The point in of this video is to help educators become better in the area of communication. A major part of our jobs is to talk with people, but sometimes the best way is to say nothing.
- I repeat…
- Say… Nothing…
- Sometimes listening is the major key, and there is a definite positive to the use of wait time. If you have to broach a touchy subject, there will often be a reaction. As we’ve discussed before, we cannot fully predict what the reaction will be, so listening can be a great attribute.
- Many times, a parent will give you more detail about what you are discussing, which may help you help their child.
- Sometimes, you will find out background information and can connect a parent with material or people to help in the situation being faced.
- Sometimes, a parent who is upset will fuss and tire themselves out, making them more open to listening. They may just need to get it all out first.
- There will be times when a parent will lay everything out to you and the temptation to interject will be great. You will have to fight the feeling. Hold your tongue and be patient. It will pay off in the overall scope of the conversation.
- In the end, we want all bidirectional communication to be productive, regardless of how difficult the subject matter is.

Short Phone Skit

Teacher: Good afternoon, this is Benjamin Franklin, your kid’s teacher. Unfortunately, I needed to call you today about your child being in an argument with their classmate. This is the third time this has happened this year, and I witnessed your kid being the instigator.

Parent: Hold on, who is the kid? It was Jeff Morning, let me tell you what, that little #beep# has been a thorn in my kid’s side ever since they came to that school! This turd has been bullying my kid since they got here. They have said stuff on the bus, in the hallway and in class. Just a couple days ago, the little bastard punched my kid at the skating rink. This has been going on for years, and I’m tired of it! Last year the jerk tormented my kid and made school miserable. Hell, it was more like all of elementary school! It all started in third grade…. (insert Tick Tock Effect)
Teacher: I appreciate you sharing all of this. Has there been problems on the bus or in the hallway this year? Have there been any recent incidents outside of this one? I have been completely unaware of this situation, so all the information you shared will really help me to keep an eye on this situation. As a matter of fact, I’ll move their seats and make sure they are not in groups together. How does that sound?

Parent: Well, I guess that’s alright. I’d love for that kid to get kicked out of school, but I know y’all can’t do that. Hey, a girl can dream right.

Teacher: I know you are frustrated. I can tell. I’ll work with you in any way I can to make sure your child is comfortable in my class, and in my hallway. If I can do anything, please let me know.

Parent: Thank you. It really means a lot. The elementary school never listened and acted like it was all my son. I really appreciate you. And thanks for listening.

Morning:

- Sometimes we take on roles we do not expect. With difficult topics, some parents will need to just, let it all out. This will make you an unpaid therapist/counselor.
- It is important to approach a tough conversation with time set aside to listen. If you plan to go in and do all the talking, you are planning for a disaster.
- If a parent gets on a roll, let them. If you choose to be an active listener, they will tell everything you need from their perspective. The parent will also let out any emotion while you listen and it will not require you to respond immediately.
- Once you are done listening, you should give the parent back some of the information they gave you to show an understanding of their side of the conversation. Notice in the previous skit…
- Clip of the parent talking about the bus, hallway and class
- Clip of the teacher asking about the bus and hallway
- Little nuggets from active listening ensures to the parent they are being listened to, which is positive for dialog.
- I mean, who wants to talk and not be understood? How many of us just talk to talk…?
- (insert Morning saying dumb things)
- One liner with rimshot
- Tongue twister
- One liner with rimshot
- “What in the world is JuJu eyeball and spinal clacker?” underneath write (sorry, I like Mike Jackson’s version better… sue me…ok, really don’t)
• One last thing…
• Wait time is a useful tool when it comes to tough conversations.
• How many of us have answered a question too fast and gave an answer we did not feel good about or a nonsensical answer?
• Anyone? Anyone?
• Responding without thinking can make you seem robotic and seem as if you do not care. A part of our jobs as educators is to care. If we do not sound like we do, the perception will become reality to the parent.
• When a parent responds to your question or comment, take time to think before you respond. Six or seven seconds will not be awkward and will give you plenty of time to gather your thoughts.
• Sometimes, you may not have the answer to their question, and it is ok to say, “you know, I’m not sure, but I’ll find you the answer.” A rushed response like, “I don’t know,” or “yes/no,” without thought can be quite detrimental to the conversation.
• Get into the practice of using wait time as a way to prevent “foot in mouth” syndrome. Pause before speaking, not just for dramatic effect, but to truly think about what has been presented to you.

Conclusion

Morning:
• Tough conversations will always be tough conversation. We do not, however, have to feel unprepared for these events. Football games and marathons are tough too. You have to practice and be as prepared for the event as possible.
• This video and the corresponding materials should help you to better prepare for future tough conversations. We all know they will be coming soon. The more prepared we are, the better the outcomes will be.
• Before I cut out of here, let’s quickly review…
• First…
• Take the time to remember, this is not a perfect science. We are in the business of people and people are all different. No one fits into a template perfectly. There is no guarantee of total success. There will be bumps in the road. Michael Jordan missed a lot of shots and a great baseball player hits the ball three out of ten times.
• Also, remember what subjects can be potentially unnerving for parents. They were listed earlier in the video. When having a conversation about any these items, be prepared.
• Second…
• Remember, when entering a phone call which may end up being difficult, it is important to try to establish an open and professional dialog. If messages are
being passed clearly, there is less likelihood of misunderstanding and frustration.

- The goal is to build a partnership with the parent for the benefit of their child. Open dialog will help the chances of building this relationship.
- Third…
- Early in the game, try to find common ground with the parent. Teacher’s should approach parents on the level. Help them to understand the focus of your conversation is for the benefit of their kid. With common ground, they may be more willing to listen and discuss issues.
- Next…
- Use wait time to listen and think before speaking. Do this, especially, if a parent is agitated. Much can be gathered by choosing to wait before speaking and giving the parent the floor, uninterrupted, to express their issues or concerns.
- Before answering questions or responding, think through your statement. There is nothing wrong with wait time. A well thought out response will keep you from becoming emotional during the exchange, as well. We are the professionals, so we must handle it like professionals.
- When it is all said and done with, we can navigate difficult discussions professionally and effectively. It will take practice and a commitment to positive, research based techniques, even when they do not seem successful during some conversations.
- I appreciate your time and your trust. Together, through practice, we can all become great, effective communicators.
- If something wasn’t clear, please check the coinciding PowerPoint and the other documents associated with this video.
- If you have further questions, please, email me so we can schedule a phone conversation.
- Thank you again for your time, I will catch you in the next video.
- Morning… Out…
Lesson 1 Notes: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects
Subjects with potential to be difficult...

- Bad behavior
- Poor performance
- Special Ed. Services
- Peer Conflicts
- Hygiene concerns
- Mental Health concerns

These are not all the difficult subjects, but these are some common subjects which have a track record of being tough.

Potential parental reactions...

- Confusion...
- Frustration...
- Sadness...
- Anger...
- Relief...
- Indifference...
- Professional...
- Questioning...
- Defensive...
Effective Communication is Open Dialog

During the Example...

Do not think about delivering facts to parents in a straight, cold or direct manner. We are professionals who work with children, and most of the parents we work with will not do the same thing. Our frame of reference will most likely be different than a majority of the parents we work with.

Never forget, there is no silver bullet for communicating about difficult subjects. The one way fits all thought is a set up for a monumental disaster.
Deeper Reading...

Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler’s
“Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High.”

This book outlines several difficult situations and provides insight which can help a person become a better communicator.

Open Dialog...

Dialog - The free flow of meaning between two or more people.
Open dialog between teachers and parents can be beneficial for overall student success.
When we talk to parents, we should seek to engage them and work with them for solutions to improve their child’s academic and personal success.
Phone Skits - Notice the differences and Meanings

Skit #1 Notes...

Skit #2 Notes...

Dialog

...is time consuming
...requires patience
...can feel unsafe
...can be difficult
...is the foundation of all positive relationships
Find Common Ground

We cannot get angry… Easier said than done!

Work to minimize negative interactions… “Start with the Heart.”
Work to find what the other is looking to attain.
The foundation of the relationship can easily be the student’s success.
Empathy is a big part of finding common ground
Build a bridge, not a wall!
Desk Skits - Thoughts on the differences?

Where do you see mistakes in the first skit?

Where do you see mistakes and success in the second skit?

Listen and Think
2 ears and 1 mouth = listen twice as much as you speak.

Sometimes the perfect thing to say is nothing.

Parents will tell you a lot if you are willing to give them the floor.

After the parent tells you important information, either ask questions or reiterate (summarize) what they have given you.

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Notes...

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Listening Skit...

Notes (notice the active listening skills)...
BIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION

Wait Time...

Notes

- It is ok to stop and think before answering a question. Better to plot your answer than to speak too quickly and dig a hole.
- Six or seven seconds is not awkward.
- It is ok to say “I’ll have to get back to you.”

Recap

Conclusions

- This will not be a perfect science
- Try to establish dialog and build a partnership
- Find common ground
- Listen and think before speaking
Lesson 1 Supplementary Materials: Having Conversations on Difficult Subjects

Pre-video exercise

These questions are designed to help put you in the frame of mind to accept the upcoming lesson. When seeking to grow, one must be in the right frame of mind to accept an experience. The following worksheet is designed to help you prepare to glean important information from the video which will follow this exercise. Answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

1. In a short paragraph, describe a phone call or parent meeting you would feel uncomfortable going into, subject wise. Example: Meeting with a parent about their child failing a test.

2. Make a quick list of subjects which might be difficult to discuss with a parent.

3. In a short paragraph, explain what emotional responses you “fear” when working with parents.

4. What is your strategy for working with the “angry” parent?
Post-video exercise

Now that the video has been viewed, it is time for reflection. These questions are posed to help you to learn from your past, gauge your learning and mentally prepare for new challenges throughout your career. When answering these questions, be honest with yourself and try to add something to your toolbox. Everyone is capable of picking up a tool from this video.

1. Remember your worst interaction with a parent. After viewing this video, what would you have done, said or prepared differently?

2. What part of this material did you already know, and what part of this material was new to you?

3. What part of dialog is the hardest for you? (time, patience, feeling uneasy)
   Please answer in a short paragraph.

4. What would you add to the content of this video? What did the video miss? Do you have any techniques or viewpoints which have worked for you seem contradictory to the video?
Partner practice exercise

“Practice makes perfect.” A part of the reason we, as educators, have a difficult time having the tough conversations is we go into the “game” without any “practice” time. We get lessons on creating lesson plans, but we get not safe practice when communicating with parents. This exercise is designed to provide educators the opportunity to safely practice their communication techniques.

With a partner, you will use the following worksheet to safely practice having some difficult conversations with parents. Take turns being the teacher and the parent. To add realism, use phones and go into separate rooms. This does not have to be done, but may help you mentally prepare. After each turn, debrief with one another to give feedback. Lastly, remember, you will get out what you put in. If you do not take the exercise seriously, it will not be effective.

Teacher:

Teacher makes a phone call to (inform, ask) a parent information about their child. The subject of the call should be the students…

- Poor academic performance
- Poor classroom/hallway behavior
- Potential learning disabilities/deficiencies/capacities
- Peer conflicts [Student as the victim or student as the aggressor (catalyst)]
- Hygiene concerns
- Mental health concerns

Plan the phone call and deliver the information as best as you can.

Parent:

Answer the teacher’s phone call. Respond to the material accordingly, but you have a range of emotions to use. You may respond in any one of the following fashions (emotions)…

- Confusion
- Sadness
- Relief
- Professional
- Defensive
- Frustration
- Anger
- Indifference
- Questioning/disbelief
- Denial
Reflection

You have now done a pre-video exercise, watched the video presentation, taken notes, done a post-video exercise and done a practice activity. It is now time to reflect on the experience. This activity is meant to help you find stronger meaning in this training. Think through what you have done and answer the following question to completion.

Reflection: Think about this lesson as a whole and write a personal reflection. Think of the who, what, when, where and how of the skills picked up or needed to be successful in this area.
Appendix B

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION VIDEO SERIES

Lesson 2: BE HEARD

(Video Script; Notes; Supplementary Materials)
Lesson 2 Script: BE HEARD

*Each bullet represents a cinematic jump cut*

**Introduction**

**Morning:**
- Thank you for tuning in to another training session in Effective Bidirectional Communication!!! You’ve made the commitment to become a better communicator, so let me not waste your time rambling.
- This video and its supplementary materials will cover the concept of BE HEARD…
- Be heard?
- **BE HEARD (written on screen)**
- The acronym means…
  - Best intentions assumed
  - Emphasis on learning
  - Home-school collaboration
  - Examples and evidence
  - Active listening
  - Respect for all
  - Dedication to follow-up
- The overall goal of bidirectional communication is to build a relationship for cooperation and the clear passing of information. Through these specific actions, a teacher can open doors for cooperation and make deposits for future growth of a relationship.
- The reason why so many teachers in the field of education are not proficient in opening effective avenues for bidirectional communication is an explicit lack of knowledge.
- Teachers do not know about the benefits of BE HEARD and do not typically have access to methods of learning the material. The naturally talented communicators do not tend to write down or record why they are so successful or take the time to work with those who are not proficient in building open lines of communication.
- On top of this, most of the teachers struggling in the area of communication are not asking for assistance. They just tend to shun the duty feeling like, “well, this isn’t my job.”
- **Newsflash teachers…**
- If you want more control in your classroom…
- If you want a more pleasant experience when working with parents…
- If you want your students to perform better…
• If you want an easier time finding volunteers for your school related activities…
• If you want to work with less upset parents…
• …then communicating with parents is your job.
• Imagine if you had children and their teacher felt like it was not their responsibility to communicate with you? How would it make you feel?
• Imagine your child comes home and says something like, “My teacher hates me and treats me unfair.” Then you get phone calls from the counselor and meet with the principal but the entire time, the teacher is not present and unreachable… what would be your next course of action? Ask for your child to change classes? Demand a meeting?
• The teacher should be more present.
• The teacher should communicate.
• It is a part of the teacher’s duty as an educator.

Best Intentions Assumed

Morning:

• Regardless of the situation, we can assume most parents love their children. With love comes certain motivations and feelings.
• Most parents want to see their children be successful.
• Most parents want to see their children happy.
• Most parents feel as if their children can be extraordinary in many different areas.
• How many times have any of you talked to any parent, personally or professionally and the parent said, “You know, my kid is going to be nothing… probably work in retail and not amount to much. He is not smart and probably is going to be forgotten in history.”
• I’d bet my entire salary you’ve never heard this. Parents express disappointment but usually believe in their children to a certain extent. It may be relative, but it is still belief in their child.
• “He really is smart, but…”
• “…If she is just given more time…”
• “They just learn differently…”
• These may sound like excuses, but they show the love and belief parents have in their child.
• As educators, it is important for us to think as if the parent wants what is best for their kid because most times they do. Regardless of how we feel they perform as parents.
• Most parents want their kid to be successful and we should work from the same perspective.
Short Skit

(\textit{parent walks in wearing pajama pants and an “I’m with stupid” shirt})

\textbf{Parent:} What’s up? What’s my boy done now?

\textbf{Teacher:} Before we get started, I want to thank you for coming in on such short notice. You may have been busy, and I know it is tough to get to school in the middle of the day.

\textbf{Parent:} Its ok, I just needed to go pick up my check, but it’s all good. I’ve got the rest of the day to go pick that up. Being disabled isn’t as hard as you think. (\textit{Laughs}) So, what this boy did to get me called up here? He better not be actin up again!

\textbf{Teacher:} Well, it’s not his behavior, per se. I am concerned about your son’s performance in class. He has not been living up to the standard he has set for himself. His aptitude scores say he should be, at least, and 3.0 student. He currently has two F’s. I’m just worried about his future. He could be doing so much better than he is right now.

\textbf{Parent:} Is it because he is acting up? He doesn’t do his work when he is actin a fool. He got in trouble in elementary school and I had to bust his butt to get him on track.

\textbf{Teacher:} His behavior has not been a problem, I assure you, sir. I know you are concerned with his conduct, but he has been a good citizen in school since the first day of school.

\hspace{1cm} I think he should be studying more and seeking help when he does not understand a concept or problem. He is plenty smart and can be one of the top achieving students in his grade if he would give a solid effort.

\textbf{Parent \textit{obviously saddened}:} Well… I wish I could help him, but I dropped out of school in high school and can’t really do his school work with him. I quit school in the 10\textsuperscript{th} grade and then got myself in trouble and had to… pay a debt to society. Since I got out, I’ve been working construction. I did that until I got hurt real bad and now I’m at home. I can come to school for meetings and stuff, but aside from be hard on him, there isn’t anymore help I can give him.

\textbf{Teacher:} We can use your availability to help him become better. If you would, start bringing your son to school or coming to pick him up and spend some time with me while I study with your son. We can all be a study team and grow together. I hope this isn’t too forward or offensive. Your passion for your son’s success is obvious and this can really help him. What are your thoughts?
Parent: You can seriously do that? Can we come two times a week? If we could do Tuesday and Wednesdays, one for his math and the other for his reading it can really make a difference. I can have him at school at 7. Is that a good time? (fade out effect)

Morning:

• It could have been easy for the teacher to write off the parent when they walked in. First impressions really set a bar for us, as human beings.
• Fortunately, we are not hiring for a job. The students, most times, do not get to choose their parents and neither do we as educators. We work with who comes through our door.
• Most parents believe or want to believe in their ability as a parent. Many parents, undeservingly, feel as if they are great parents. It is not too crazy to say, most parent feel as if they give their kids the best they have in effort.
• Who are we as educators to decide if they are good parents or not? Just because it is not how we would approach things, does not mean it is wrong or bad. We have to be more open-minded about the differences between people and their cultures.
• To stereotype or make our beliefs and way of approaching life superior closes the door for effective communication.
• In order for us to be fair, we have to assume the parents we work with care for and want the best for their children. If we assume parents love their children and want the best for them, it puts us in the position to find a common understanding on a fundamental level.
• Think about gun safety…
• Quizzical look on face
• When handling a firearm, it is imperative, for the safety of the handler and all present, for the handler to treat every firearm as if it is loaded at all times.
• We have to treat parents as if they are loaded with caring, love and concern at all times. Unfortunately, there will be some who prove to not be full of these feelings, but we have to give them the benefit of the doubt if we plan to build a foundation for effective communication.
• As educators, our role as caregiver and protector makes us a pseudo-parent. We have to assume the actual parents take the role we fill as seriously or more seriously than we take our job as the daily substitute parent.
• If we assume the parents are caring, the chances of parents reciprocating the assumption is higher than if we do not. We want parents to know we care and help us to help their children, so we must assume they care for and want the best for their children.
• Odds are, they do…
Emphasis on learning

Morning:
- The school building has always been a house of learning. Over time, there have been numerous things added and perspectives have changed some. Still, the school house, generally, is viewed as a place of learning.
- When we, as educators, do our jobs, students should grow academically. Through the rigor and persistence needed to achieve, students should become better people as a byproduct.
- There are some who feel otherwise, but many see this mindset as the standard educational process.
- When speaking with parents, as tempting as it will be to discuss things on an overall personal level, a student’s learning should always be the focus of the conversation.
- Behavior will be the most trying subject when discussing a student’s learning. We are people and sometimes, students…
- …who are people too…
- … will do things which are hard not to take and discuss on a personal level.
- It becomes easier and easier, over time, to leave out learning when talking about a student missing school, misbehaving, what we consider disrespectful behavior and other referral warranting actions.
- Fighting through the urge to just tell a parent how “bad” (air quotes) their child has been will only strengthen the relationship between the school and home.
- Building relationships will help the student, over time, so it is important we focus on the students learning, which we, as educators, are responsible for.

Different Setting

Morning:
- This portion of the video will offer some tips as to how to keep an emphasis on learning when discussing items with parents. Some of the tips may seem self-explanatory, but when the daily grind is in full effect and there are two or three students wearing on your nerves, and you made a great lesson which half of the class missed the point on, and….
- **deep exhale**
- You see where I’m going with this.
- It can become difficult to focus on our professional mandate when we work in such a personal industry.
- These five tips should help an educator keep a focus and emphasis on a student’s learning
• Tip 1: After greetings, quickly discuss the student’s academic progress on a surface perspective.
• Start the game off right by letting parent know their child’s academic progress is your top priority. This should set the tone for a great conversation, regardless of the overall subject of the call.
• Example…

One Sided Skit

Teacher: Good afternoon, this is Jeff Morning, Jerren’s social studies teacher, hopefully I didn’t catch you at a bad time… First off, does your son sing every song on the radio everywhere he goes, like he does at school? It’s amazing to me how he can remember every word, haha. Must be a gift. Anyway, I know you probably check up with your son’s grades often, but I wanted to tell you, before I got started, your son is making a high B in my class, and he would have an A if his last quiz score was higher… The reason for his low score on the quiz, I think, is his new habit of talking during the lesson… (fade out effect)

Morning:
• Tip 2: Interweave specifics about academic progress into the conversation
• It will never hurt to tell a parent which assignments their student did particularly well on or struggled with. Make an outward effort to discuss specifics, even when they have to do with behavior.
• When discussing a student who struggles with talking out of turn discuss their failure to raise their hand whether they are talking out of turn or asking pointed questions about the lesson at hand.
• Something like, Johnathan has been talking out of turn a bunch recently. When he has questions he is blurting them out instead of raising his hand properly, many times he is missing the point of the lesson by blurting out. He is also calling out things which have nothing to do with the lesson, and it is becoming a distraction to him and others.
• the behavior has been addressed, while there has been an academic focus, still.
• Tip 3: When discussing grades, make sure they are not just numbers, but measures of learning and understanding.
• My parents were similar to many other parents. They wanted to see A’s and B’s only on a report card. Unfortunately, my parents were not pushed to understand how letter grades were representative of learning.
• Talk to parents about their student’s grades and how they represent an understanding of the material. Explain to them why a C is ok but an A can be earned through more study and will help in the future because of content, not just because of the high mark.
• When discussing a low math grade, tell the parent your concern is not the letter, but the missing of important concepts which will help the student to grow over time. Tell them how missing this step in their educational process will hinder their learning in future lessons.
• Many teachers, today, have no problem with students redoing assignments in order to increase learning. Help parents to understand this concept and they will be better suited to help their children grow.
• Tip 4: Try to help parents understand where their child is succeeding academically.
• All parents want to know about their children’s success. It is a part of human nature to seek positive feelings and avoid negative. Providing the positives put parents at ease.
• Sometimes it is hard to find positives, but even the little things can go a long way.
• There are always positives to be found, academically. This may come from class preparation, asking questions, expressing frustration with not learning and several other small things.
• Tell a parent about their child’s tendency to come to class prepared, even when they this is the only academically positive thing they are doing. The more positive we can infuse; the more parents will be sensitive to the learning focus.
• The focus is learning, so help parents understand what their child is doing right in order to learn. Parents will be much more supportive when they know what their child is doing right as well as what they are not doing.
• Asking questions is positive, participating is positive, reading out loud and other small things are positive, as well.
• Find something and it will be to the benefit.
• Tip 5: Ask parents for their academic concerns pertaining to their child.
• Parents, typically, spend more time with their children than we do as educators. Parents tend to know their kids pretty well, though we may know them better on an academic level. We may understand their ability to comprehend compound sentences, but the parent has a good understanding of their child’s limitation.
• Ask the parent if they have academic concerns. The parent may say things like, “my daughter seems so frustrated whenever she has to read something.” This information could be extremely beneficial to a teacher looking to help a student grow in certain academic fields. A parent may be able to inform the teacher on their child’s favorite things to read or their concerns after seeing their child struggle working with money and change.
• These items can spur in depth conversations which will, ultimately, effect the student’s academic progress. A parent’s small insight may help a teacher find ways to help the student become better in one area or the other. A small
academic worry may help the teacher find a missing piece in the child’s past educational process. Finding this information is as simple as asking the parent, “Do you have any academic concerns to discuss?”

Intermission (Written on screen)
Continued… (Written on screen)

Different Setting

Morning:
- Sorry you don’t get a break because we have to keep going strong.

Home-School Collaboration

Morning:
- Why is communication with parents important? Take a moment and think about it to yourself…
- (tick tick tick effect)
- Was your answer to strengthen the school home bond and increase the amount of school home collaboration? If it was, you are on your way to greatness.
- If it wasn’t, you are still on the road to greatness because you now know.
- Collaboration is one of our greatest human assets. Most great things created by humans are the product of collaboration. Successful children are a part of these human “creations.”
- It is uncommon for a young person to grow up to be successful without the influence of adults looking to help them. Everybody had a few people invested.
- Often, the invested people are teachers and parents.
- Guardians count as parents.
- Imagine the benefit of putting these two parties on a united front for a child’s success…

Short Phone Skit

**Teacher:** I really appreciate you taking my phone call. There is so much your child can do, and she doesn’t even realize her potential. I see how well she reasons and solves problems. I wonder, though, where her passion is. She seems uninterested, though she has so much ability. What are your thoughts on her lack of interest?

**Parent:** Well, my daughter has a passion for art. You are her science teacher, and she doesn’t get those opportunities to show her artistic side. She says she doesn’t like anything class aside from art. I think she is smart too, but I really worry about how
she will do through school if her teachers don’t get to know her and link things to what she likes while she is young.

Teacher: Well, I appreciate the input. I’m going to look at a few different things in the classroom. It should be really interesting to see how she how well she does. If you don’t mind, talk to her about what we are doing, and please send me a text, email or call and let me know what she thinks. Maybe this will open the door to some greatness.

Morning:
- Working together with parents can be the difference between a student’s success and their failure.
- Home-School collaboration should not hurt a student either. Working with the parent will can add to a student’s educational experience.
- Majority of the time, parents know their kids on a different level than we do as teachers. Their input will always be valuable, if we are willing to make the connection.

Examples and Evidence

Morning:
- This section will not be super long because it focuses more on the face to face conferences.
- Providing examples and evidence is important for parents. Without material for them to reference, they will never truly understand their child’s progress or lack thereof…
- Unless, of course, they work in the field of education or are well read on educational subjects.
- Helping a parent to understand how well or poorly their child is doing can be a difficult process without evidence. Grades don’t mean a whole lot in specific settings.
- If a kid has an A in math, it does not mean they are learning or getting better. The A says they are, but if you are grading on a curve or have given credit for effort, parents do not know this if they only look at the grade.
- Grades cannot be your soul source of educational evidence. Work samples and norm material can do a better job of helping a parent to understand.
- Be specific, when talking about academic matters. If a student is having trouble with diagraming sentences, talk about what they are missing versus saying, “John is having a hard time diagramming sentences.”
- “John does a good job at recognizing the verbs in sentences but still has trouble with nouns.” “Marie is doing a great job dividing single numbers but is struggling with double digit division.”
• Though these things are verbal, they are still specific examples of where the student can improve. In face to face meetings, provide writing and work samples to the parent. This will make explaining the flaws, struggles and successes easier to understand.
• Many conversations will be based on student behavior. And you may be wondering…
• How in the world do I provide evidence and examples of behavioral issues?
• Behavior can be tough because we don’t film kids individually. This is where documentation becomes a teacher’s best friend. Write things down and if referrals have been written, have them handy.
• Let the parent know what was specifically said or done. Reenact things for the parent, in a respectable way. Help the parent understand what the expectations are for their child so the parent can assist the kid in improving.
• Specifics are your friend in this area. Generalities for positive are good, generalities for negatives are bad news.
• Don’t tell a parent their child is “acting up” or “being disrespectful.” Tell them about how their kid is speaking out of turn and said, “I don’t have to listen to you.”
• Generalities open the door for arguments and disagreements as related to meaning. We are looking to be partners with parents, so limit the opportunities for philosophical arguments.
• “just the facts, ma’am.” (insert clip from Dragnet)

Active Listening

Morning:
• Active listening is a skill which will benefit all educators, especially when working with parents. It can benefit all people when interacting socially, but for this training, we will focus on parental interaction.
• Being an active listener can be the difference in making a positive connection which is long lasting and effective.
• If you take the time to listen and focus, parents will give you insight as to why their kid does what they do, performs at a level they perform and inroads to make better connections to the child.
• Active listening is harder than it seems because of our focus on getting things done. We are, unfortunately, in a results based business. We feel a need to call parents and tell them what is going on.
• We don’t, normally, call for insight. Little do we know, the information provided by parents and guardians can be instrumental in us getting the best from their children. Good teachers seek to help, so we should look for all avenues to help our students become better.
• Here are some tips to being an active listener.
• Tip 1: Go into the conversation prepared to listen.
• Tip 2: Focus on what is being said and not who is saying it.
• Tip 3: Take your feelings out of the process. In other words, don’t take anything personally
• I know this can be a tough one, but we have to remember our job as educators and separate our professional selves from our personal selves, sometimes.
• Tip 4: Close the door and cut off distractions, giving the parent your undivided attention, as much as possible.
• Tip 5: Allow yourself to be open minded.
• This can also be tough because of our upbringings and professional trainings. Remember, the goal is to be a listener. Closing out or disregarding parts of the parents input dilutes their message.
• Tip 6: Ask questions to clarify and corroborate thoughts.
• Tip 7: Paraphrase from time to time in order to be sure you are getting every part of what is being said.
• When the teacher makes an effort to perform these things during conversations, parental input can make a difference with the students being served.
• An active listener will pick more up from the parent and will promote comfort with the parent. In the future, conversation with the same parent will be easier and more effective.
• Making an effort to be a good listener will help to build the home school relationship for the benefit of the students.
• Just a reminder, you will not succeed in making all of these things happen in every single conversation. These are tips to help, not instructions for guaranteed success. There will be quick conversations with parents which last one or two minutes.
• There will be conversations where parents have nothing to add and just need information from you.
• Just because you call a parent to deliver information, doesn’t mean you are not an active listener.

Respect for All
Different Setting

Different Person:
• Merriam Webster defines respect as:
  o a relation or reference to a particular thing or situation
  o an act of giving particular attention (Consideration)
  o high or special regard (Esteem)
  o the quality or state of being (esteemed)
Morning:

- As you can see, there are numerous definitions of respect and it can be tough to show respect when you aren’t particularly sure what the other individuals believe respect to be.
- This is a difficult task for people in general, and not just educators.
- We have to make a consorted effort to be respectful in all settings. This includes when we are in a situation where our “back is against a wall” and when we don’t feel as if we are being respected.
- I know this isn’t pleasant, and it is easier said than done. In the end, we are putting the effort in for the children.
- If a parent feels disrespected, they will assume their child is being disrespected. If a student feels disrespected, hold on to your hat!
- When working with a parent there is a big difference between Alright and Yes Ma’am. When working with a student there is a big difference between shut your mouth and hush up, please.
- We all know there are differences, culturally, when dealing with others. We have to be mindful of these things and be receptive when they are brought up to us, too.
- In the end, we have to work to treat others the way we would like to be treated.
- We all wanted to be treated with “Dignity”
- We all want a level of “Empathy” to be applied to each situation
- We all want to be treated with “Patience”
- We all want to feel “Trusted”
- We all want to be treated with a “Healthy dose of Compassion” without being patronized
- Dignity, empathy, patience, trust and a healthy dose of compassion. Think DEPTH when trying to respect all involved.
- Man… I had to do a lot of thinking to come up with a way to make it stick. Healthy dose of compassion was a streeeeeetch… but it works. (insert clip of Michael Scott from the office clip)

Dedication to Follow-up

Morning:

- This might be the easiest part of BE HEARD, but it may be the most crucial.
- We want to build a partnership with the people we are working with. This means there has to be a level of continuous contact. If problems between countries had to be solved in one conversation over a twenty-minute period, we would all live in isolationist/ warring countries.
- Partnerships require time, effort and multiple interactions.
• If we want to work with parents for the sake of their kids, we have to invest in extended contact with our partners in this effort.
• We may be able to get a lot from one conversation, but we are not going to solve all of the problems with one conversations.
• We have to be dedicated to following up with parents. This does not mean make empty promises, either. We have to be willing to make contact and ensure the next contact will be made.
• Follow up conversations do not have to be in the same format as the previous conversation.
• “I’ll send you an email, the next time I see something like this.”
• “Text me the next time your son has a question on a division problem at home.”
• “Do not hesitate to send me a Facebook message to schedule a visit.”
• If we allow ourselves to be open to continuous parental interaction, we can provide a better opportunity for each student to be successful.

Conclusion

Morning:
• BE HEARD is an acronym which can make the communication portion of your job much more successful.
• Each part can greatly increase the chances of building a partnership which can help to a student become more successful academically and in life.
• Again, the acronym stands for…
  (Rapid)
  o Best intentions assumed
  o Emphasis on learning
  o Home-school collaboration
  o Examples and evidence
  o Active listening
  o Respect for all
  o Dedication to follow-up
• I appreciate your time and your trust. Together, through practice, we can all become great, effective communicators.
• If something wasn’t clear, please check the coinciding PowerPoint and the other documents associated with this video.
• If you have further questions, please, email me so we can schedule a phone conversation.
• Thank you again for your time, I will catch you in the next video.
• Morning… Out…
BE HEARD

Major Points and Notetaking...

- Best intentions assumed
- Emphasis on learning
- Home-school collaboration
- Example and evidence
- Active listening
- Respect for all
- Dedication to follow up
Potential positives of BE HEARD...

- More control in the classroom (better classroom management)
- More pleasant experience when working with parents
- Get students to perform better
- Have an easier time finding volunteers for school related activities

Remember: Communicating is a part of your JOB!!!
B: Best Intentions Assumed

Parents, typically, want to see...

- Their children become successful
- Their children happy
- Their children have the opportunity to be extraordinary in different areas

All of these things should be assumed regardless of the parents' appearance or behavior.

Notes...
Skit notes...
What have you observed?

E: Emphasis on Learning
Remember

We cannot forget about our job to educate. It can be easy to get caught up in our love for the kids and their well being. We have to focus on the child’s academic success for their overall wellbeing.

Notes...

5 Tips for Success

1. Quickly discuss the student’s academic progress on a surface perspective.
2. Integrate specifics about academic progress into the conversation.
3. When discussing grades, make sure they are not just numbers, but measures of learning and understanding.
4. Try to help parents understand where their child is succeeding academically.
5. Ask parents for their academic concerns pertaining to their child.

Notes...
H: Home-School Collaboration
Phone Skit...
Notes...
Better for face to face meetings...

Evidence solidifies what is being discussed with the parent

Work samples mean more than letter and number grades

Documentation can greatly help a teacher give evidence for behavioral issues

Remember Dragnet - "Just the facts."
A: Active Listening

Active Listening Tips...

- Go into the conversation prepared to listen
- Focus on what is being said and now who is saying it
- Take your feelings out of the process
- Close the door and cut off distractions, giving the parent your undivided attention
- Allow yourself to be open minded
- Ask questions to clarify and corroborate thoughts
- Paraphrase from time to time in order to be sure you are getting every part of what is being said.

Notes...
Dedication to Follow-up

Follow up!

"I'll send you an email the next time I see something like this…"

"Text me the next time your son has a question on a division problem at home…"

"Do not hesitate to send me a Facebook message to schedule a visit…"

"Here, take my card, and may I have yours…"
Lesson 2 Supplementary Materials: BE HEARD

Pre-video exercise

These questions are designed to help put you in the frame of mind to accept the upcoming lesson. When seeking to grow, one must be in the right frame of mind to accept an experience. The following worksheet is designed to help you prepare to glean important information from the video which will follow this exercise. Answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

1. What, do you think, are the major components of building a partnership with parents for student success? Name, at least, three items and give a brief explanation why it was chosen.

2. In a short passage, explain whose job it is to communicate with parents when student is misbehaving at your school. Why is this in place?

3. What do you think is the biggest barrier to parents cooperating with us, as educators? Please explain your answer.

4. As a customer, recall a time when you felt disrespected and explain why you felt as so.
Post-video exercise

Now that the video has been viewed, it is time for reflection. These questions are posed to help you to learn from your past, gauge your learning and mentally prepare for new challenges throughout your career. When answering these questions, be honest with yourself and try to add something to your toolbox. Everyone is capable of picking up a tool from this video.

1. Do you feel as if parents assume you have good intentions for their children? If so, why and if not, how can you prove you do?

2. What are some of the positive things a teacher can gain from a parent which would be useful to help them grow academically?

3. What is your five sentence definition of active listening?

4. Think back to your time as a disrespected customer. How could the person working with you have used DEPTH to help you both come to an understanding?
Plan building for next parent interaction – Practice Exercise

“Practice makes perfect.” A part of the reason we, as educators, have a difficult time having the tough conversations is we go into the “game” without any “practice” time. We get lessons on creating lesson plans, but we get not safe practice when communicating with parents. This exercise is designed to provide educators the opportunity to safely practice their communication techniques.

Take time out to build a comprehensive plan using BE HEARD. This plan can be used for your next face to face meeting with a parent or your next phone call with a parent.
Reflection

You have now done a pre-video exercise, watched the video presentation, taken notes, done a post-video exercise and done a practice activity. It is now time to reflect on the experience. This activity is meant to help you find stronger meaning in this training. Think through what you have done and answer the following question to completion.

Reflection: Think about this lesson as a whole and write a personal reflection. Think of the who, what, when, where and how of the skills picked up or needed to be successful in this area.
Appendix C

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION VIDEO SERIES

Lesson 3: Disposition and Professional Courtesy

(Video Script; Notes; Supplementary Materials)
Lesson 3 Script: Disposition and Professional Courtesy

*Each indentation is a cinematic jump cut*

**Introduction**

**Morning:**

- Thank you for tuning in to another training session in Effective Bidirectional Communication!!! You’ve made the commitment to become a better communicator, so let me not waste your time rambling.
- This video and its supplementary materials will cover the topic of disposition and courtesy.
- I’m going to be bias, so prepare to be upset with me…
- Is Chickfila not the best restaurant ever?! *(insert pic of bag from restaurant)*
- If another person says Cane’s or Zaxby’s is better, I’m going to tackle them… *(insert big football hit clip)*
- Seriously, the restaurant is a well-run establishment, but the product is not its only draw. Chickfila has great customer service. The associates speak well, put on an air of kindness and consideration.
- They work diligently and efficiently, are always neat and clean and they do their jobs well.
- Another part of The restaurants draw is the employees overall disposition and courteous nature.
- Chickfila’s employees have a specific disposition and everyone who patronizes the establishment expects it as a staple of the company’s foundation. People expect to hear, “My pleasure,” when they say, “Thank you.”
- Regardless of what you think about the owners…
- Chickfila employees are known for their kindness, attention to detail, and quickness. The quickness is not rushed, either. All of these things added up comes to what is known as common courtesy. Chickfila employees are understanding of their customers wanting a positive transaction, quick service, but with the fewest chances of mistakes.

**Disposition**

*Different Setting*

**Morning:**

- I totally understand that we are not fast food employees and what I’m saying is overly simplified. I am not trying to insult your intelligence. I’m simply discussing the importance of disposition and courtesy.
- Let’s discuss the definition of disposition.
- Disposition, according to Merriam-Webster is… (all written on screen)
- A *(close up)*
• Prevailing tendency, mood or inclination
• B (close up)
• Temperamental makeup
• C (close up)
• The tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances
• Let’s break these down… The word tendency comes up twice. When tendencies come to the surface, people can expect a certain level of consistency. Consistency can be good or bad, and it is important for us to take this into consideration.
• We have to strive to have a level of consistency. We want parents to be comfortable with communicating with us on a regular basis. Even if we do not speak with them extremely often, they should feel confident in the conversation being positive.
• Like any other public service job, teachers should be public servants. As educators, our job is a little different because of its personal nature, but it is not impossible to have a great disposition regardless of the situation.
• We aren’t cashiers or food preparers, but we are providing a service and working with people. Being in the people business matters.
• So, you might say…

Different person:
• “What does a good teacher disposition look like?”

Morning:
• I’m glad you asked!
• Good teacher disposition is a complex concept. There are many parts and some are easily missed. It is so difficult, in this business which is so personal, to miss some of the professional aspects of the profession.
• Professionalism is a major part of a good teacher disposition.
• Many times, because of the way we carry ourselves, our positions as trained, educated professionals is forgotten. We must remind parents of this professionalism in several different manners.
• We have to dress the part.
• Too often, we think about all we have to do and take comfort into account when we get dressed in the morning. Most of us do not think about the impromptu meetings we might have with a parent.
• When the parent comes in and we are dressed like what they would consider a “babysitter,” we lose some of the professional stance we should carry ourselves with.
• Being personable is important, but we should be seeking professional presence too.
• The way we present ourselves to parents says numerous things. This does not necessarily always mean the way we talk to them. Our dress says some things. It says things like…
• I take my job seriously…
• I am in the business of seeing your child improve…
• I take you seriously…
• I believe in structure…
• I take the field of education seriously…
• All of these things can and will be assumed just by the way you dress! Remember, we all, as educators, understand what we do. Parents, however, do not always.

**frustrated face**

• Trust me, I know what jeans and casual Fridays mean to an overworked, underpaid teacher who just wants to feel comfortable for a day. I’m a teacher too!
• What I suggest, when it comes to our physical presentation, especially when we plan to meet with parents, is to ensure we are tidy at all times.
• Keep a collar on, even when we are going to be casual… Polos are our friends, especially school logo polos.
• We need to be tucked in and monitor our posture. I know it sounds silly, but our presentation means a lot.
• I am a tie everyday person, but this doesn’t mean you have to be a dress and tie person, every day.
• Remember…
• These are just tips.
• Let’s now talk about speaking the part.
• As a professional educator, we are in the business of passing clear messages. We must be competent in the way we speak with parents.
• We have all run into the person who stumbles through material and doesn’t have a plan for conversation. It can be frustrating and annoying. The person may mean well, but there is a good chance they will turn off the other person’s attentiveness.
• It is important to plan for conversations in the interest of time and clarity.
• Unfortunately, there are individuals who are not respectful of our time, but we must, as the professionals, be respectful of others time. Nobody wants to sit and listen to rambling.
• Trust me on this one, I’m a rambler…
• “Have you seen this rambler”, written on the screen
• We must take time out to get our thoughts and message in order so we clearly help parents get the message we need across.
• An easy way to lay out your plan is to make a physical or mental list of the 5 W’s and the H… Thanks Nick News W5…
• If you remember that show you are old…
• Planning your conversation based upon the basics of communication will streamline the conversation while keeping it meaningful.
• Let’s make an example plan for a conversation with a parent.

Scenario (written on screen):
Assume you have a phone call with a parent scheduled. The reason for the phone call is to discuss a recent change in a student’s overall demeanor and classroom performance. The student has come to school looking exhausted, recently (over the last two weeks). There has been a decrease in the student’s work performance. Assignments are being turned in poorly done or incomplete. The student has stopped asking questions in class and seems dejected. The student used to seem focused and energetic about learning. Now, the student seems to be viewing classroom participation as a chore.

Morning:
• After reading the scenario, we need to figure out the 5 W’s and the H which need to be addressed.
• Who… (different hat)
• The student is the subject of the conversation.
• What… (different hat)
• The student is coming to school tired and is not performing as well as previously.
• When… (different hat)
• This has been notice during the last two weeks.
• Where… (different hat)
• This has been noticed in a specific classroom.
• Why… (different hat)
• The conversation held with the parent is in hopes to discover the problem.
• How… (different hat)
• The focus will be how we, together, will help the child return to their original form.
• Understanding this material will streamline the conversation in respects to time. Now the conversation can sound something like this, on the teacher’s end…

Short Phone Skit
Teacher: Hello this is Jeff Morning from Super Saiyan Middle School, and I am your son’s social studies teacher. I was calling with a concern, and I hope you have a minute to talk…

(pause for response) **fast distant talking**

I am calling because your son has always been an energetic student who shows up every day to learn with excitement and energy. He is a great student. Recently, he has not seemed like himself when he reports to class. He has seemed very tired, disinterested and he has not been performing to his normal level on assignments and assessments. This has been the case for the past two weeks. I’ve only noticed this in my classroom and I’m not sure if anyone else has contacted you about it. Is there any insight you can provide me? I’d like to work with you to help your son return to his normal state of excellence and excitement. I’d hate for him to take steps back and or feel neglected by his teachers.

(pause for response) **fast distant talking**

Deaths in the family are always a big deal. It makes a lot of sense why he’d be struggling. I can remember losing my first pet, but my pet didn’t grow up with me like his did. I could have never imagined how difficult it would be to sleep without your dog who has slept in your bed since you were old enough to remember.

(pause for response) **fast distant talking**

Well, would you have a problem with me giving him a bit of extended time on assignments and assessments for the next two weeks? I’ll also encourage him to copy down notes with a friend, to make sure he doesn’t miss content. I can email his other teachers to let them know what’s going on and what I’m doing. How do you feel about this plan?

(pause for response) **fast distant talking**

I’m glad we can work together. Take down my number and call me with any insight you have. My number is 555-777-9311. Thank you so much for working with me. Have a great afternoon, and I am really sorry for your loss.

**Morning:**

- This phone call could have been long and drawn out, but planning it made it brief. We hit every point and covered all of our bases. Preparation made the teacher sound intuitive and focused on the subject at hand.
• Parents will appreciate the teacher’s approach and it will encourage trust in the teacher.
• Let’s discuss the most complicated part of teacher disposition…
• The teacher’s portrayed mentality toward student ability and success.
• We can all read fake and phony vs. real and genuine. Teachers are in a business where genuine passion, concern and caring will make a difference in the way stakeholders interact and work with them.
• Parents are like children… they are people. If you all can’t tell… people catch vibes, and these vibes can be all the difference when passing a message between teacher and parent.
• We’ve all heard kids say, “…it’s because my teacher doesn’t like me.”
• How often is this the case?
• Hmm face
• I love all of my students and former student…
• Did I always like them… Honestly… N… (fast jump-cut)
• Never forget… your vibe comes off to parents as it comes off to their kids. We have to be mindful of our sincerity in the things we say.
• Your posture, in face to face meetings, says a lot about your consideration for the parent’s concerns. It also can be used as a way to show respect or disrespect for the parent as a person.
• Lean forward into the conversation when talking about their child.
• Your motion will signal to the parent your interest and concern for their kid.
• This is an example of what you should look like when having a conversation with a parent about their kid…

Quick Skit: Leaning forward from side angle

Teacher: Since your son has returned from break, he has shown steady growth in his assessment scores, but his daily work completion has been slowly decreasing. Is he studying at home? I can see him reading over concepts and not doing the practice work… (fade out effect)

Morning:
• Leaning back or having a bad posture can tell parents numerous things like…
• I don’t care…
• This is a waste of my time…
• This is just a formality…
• I am smarter than you…
• I don’t take you seriously…
• I don’t take your kid seriously…
• I don’t take my job seriously…
Quick Skit: Leaning back from front perspective

**Teacher (Morning):** Since your son has returned from break, he has shown steady growth in his assessment scores, but his daily work completion has been slowly decreasing. Is he studying at home? I can see him reading over concepts and not doing the practice work… *(fade out effect)*

*(Fade in effect)* onto angry parent.

**Morning:**

- If you take time to consider these items, you will realize the amount of impact these simple suggestions can have on conversations you have with parents.
- Think of teacher disposition as the oil in a car. A car will run without oil but only has a short time before it breaks down because of friction.
- A good disposition makes things smoother when talking with parents.
- Reputation matters and a good disposition puts people in the position to speak positively about you as an educator. This increases the chances of having positive interactions with other parents.
- Over time, if everyone is buying into improving their teacher dispositions, the school-home/community relationship will improve. When the school is focuses on building a positive community rapport, teacher disposition becomes one of the most important factors.
- We’ve talked disposition, “what a teacher should look like,” when working with a parent. It is important to include a personal piece to this concept.
- The personal piece is called professional courtesy. It is centered on what we say and do to be polite and respectful.
- The next section will focus on professional courtesy. It will include what it is, and how to accomplish the task of achieving a level of it.
- Let’s move into the section on professional courtesy. *(fade out effect)*

**Professional Courtesy**

*Different Setting*

**Morning:**

- We must have a high level of professional courtesy…
- Aka be well mannered and non-patronizing.
- I know what you’re thinking…
- *(Thinking)* Morning, you idiot…. I’ve been polite and mannerly my whole life. I grew up with MY parents and they were all about pleases and thank yous. I can’t believe you would talk about my manners in a professional development. Can you not see I’m a grown up? What in the world is wrong with you… some “expert.”
• Newsflash – (Insert Image)
• Most of us were raised to value manners, but few of us are cognizant of our presentation at all times. When talking to parents there is a lot more to professional politeness than pleases and thank yous.
• Have you ever felt as if someone was distracted while they talked to you about an important item?
• Have you ever felt as if someone talked to you as if you were unintelligent?
• What about someone who talked about things you didn’t know anything about as if you should know?
• These things are both impolite and in a professional setting, can be off putting and unwelcoming. Putting parents in this situation can make for a terrible experience.
• Parents can walk away from the meeting or phone call feeling disrespected. When this happens, building the partnership necessary to improve a student’s success can be compromised.
• Empathize with the parent.
• Imagine you are going to the doctor and the doctor told you about mitochondrial dermatosis with a twist of lime and whatever else doctors say. Then, said doctor took a phone call in the office while you sat in there. You’d be stupefied, overwhelmed and frustrated.
• Parents are in the same boat when they enter meetings and phone calls with us. Unless, of course, they are educators.
• They are, however, not at work. They are the “customers” in our situation and our customer service should be proper and well-practiced.
• I won’t bore you with one million things we should do in order to be the perfect professionally mannered people, but I will provide you with some beginning tips for face to face meetings and phone contact.
• Face to face meetings are not the trickiest to navigate as related to professional courtesy.
• A lot of professional courtesy in the face to face arena is simply treating people the way you would want to be treated. The golden rule applies professionally, believe it or not.
• It is very easy for us to focus on ourselves and the job we have to accomplish as applied to communication. Thinking of others becomes a struggle sometimes. Remember, there will be times when you want to be efficient and effective, but must be personal and considerate.
• Remember these three things and it will definitely help.
• Number 1…
• Imagine you are a medical doctor with great bedside manner.
• Think about what a good doctor does. They make you feel comfortable, safe and cared for.
• Number 2…
• Imagine being on the other end of the situation, aka… Empathy! Try to put
  yourself in the shoes of the parent.
• Number 3…
• Never forget, the focus of all conversation should be the student’s success.
• We are in the kid business and there are so many distractions which can be an
  issue. Parents and teachers can very easily get off track during a conversation.
  Try to keep the focus on the success of the student, even when the
  conversation is about failures and or poor behavior.
• These first three tips are courteous behaviors which will, ultimately, lead to a
  better relationship with parents.
• Now let’s take a look at some does and don’ts… These may seem silly, but
  I’ve screwed them up, several times in the past.
• Do…
• Schedule times for conferences and keep the times unless there is an
  emergency situation. If there is an emergency situation, barring blood, let the
  parent know, apologize for the circumstances and offer to reschedule.
• Don’t…
• Infringe on a parent’s scheduled time because another parent stops in for an
  impromptu meeting. I’ve made this mistake a time or two.
• I’m meeting with one parent and hear another parent raving in the front office
  to see me, and I say, “excuse me for a moment,” to go try to calm down the
  situation and end up leaving that parent in my office for ten minutes. Not only
  is that unprofessional, it is inconsiderate. They scheduled their time to have
  my undivided attention, so they deserve it.
• Do…
• Take time to listen first, before going into a long discussion. If you called the
  meeting, open up with the subject and then ask the parent what their concerns
  are.
• Don’t…
• Spend time talking about the student’s relationship with other students,
  specifically. If you have to discuss issues which pertain to other students,
  focus on the student of the parent. Parents are perceptive as you are. If you
  spend too much time talking about another kid, they will thing, “what is this
  teacher saying about my kid to other parents.”
• Do…
• Greet the parent warmly, regardless of the reason for the meeting.
• Put your best foot forward. A warm handshake is the best way of starting the
  meeting, before heading to the classroom or office.
• Don’t…
Answer the phone, your cell or the office/classroom phone, during a meeting, regardless of the circumstances. I am the guiltiest of this flaw. When meeting in the office, I’ll get a phone call and will say, “excuse me,” and try to answer the phone and say, “I’m in a meeting with a parent. May I, please, call you back?” Most times, the parent will say, “sure no problem.”

There have been times when the parent lingered on the phone because their need, to them, is more important than anything else I might be working on.

This includes responding to texts, emails and other forms of communication.

A parent who is meeting with deserves your undivided attention. Imagine a hair stylist or barber who takes calls during your appointment…

(Insert picture of Furio) Voice over You’d be Furio!

Shout out G (“inside joke” written on the screen)

Face to face professional courtesy is all about empathy and these items should give you a good start to making sure you represent your school and the profession well.

Phone conversations prove a different type of challenge.

Short One Sided Phone Skit

Teacher: Hey!!! Jeff Morning here. I was calling to talk to you about your son getting in trouble again. Man… He just won’t stop! We don’t know WHAT to do with him. Haha. You know how it goes, right? If he doesn’t get it right, he is gonna end up in the alternative school. Maybe that will scare him enough to get him to straighten up. (Turns on speakerphone and leans back in chair with feet up) So what’s our plan? I dunno. He just needs to behave! We’ve done everything we can do. What are you going to do… Screen freezes (Mortal Kombat fatality theme)

Morning:

- Take a few moments to find as many issues you can with this short conversation…
- Prepare yourself… ready… Go!

Short One Sided Phone Skit

Teacher: Hey!!! Jeff Morning here. I was calling to talk to you about your son getting in trouble again. Man… He just won’t stop! We don’t know WHAT to do with him. Haha. You know how it goes, right? If he doesn’t get it right, he is gonna end up in the alternative school. Maybe that will scare him enough to get him to straighten up. (Turns on speakerphone and leans back in chair with feet up) So what’s our plan? I dunno. He just needs to behave! We’ve done everything we can do. What are you going to do…
Morning:
- First off…
- Isn’t this guy a jerk?
- Secondly…
- How many issues did you see during the video?
- If you were close to the ten range, you are in the right ballpark. This teacher was rude, and unprofessional from start to finish.
- The greeting, the introduction, the tone… all of it was so wrong.
- Don’t be this guy!!! Be polite and courteous.
- Be mindful of your speaking volume…
- Let other person know when you have them on speakerphone…
- Speak kindly about other’s children…
- Talk about positives and building plans…
- Prepare for conversation… don’t seem unprepared…
- Lastly… THINK
- This stands for True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary and Kind…
- Is what you are saying True?
- Is what you are saying Helpful?
- Is what you are saying Inspiring?
- Is what you are saying Necessary?
- Is what you are saying Kind?

Conclusion

Morning:
- Teacher disposition and professional courtesy are a large part of the mix to improve relationships between the school and the stakeholders it serves.
- It is important to remember what we would like to see as customers of great establishments. Customer service matters and it matters more than you think.
- A smile and a positive attitude goes a long way when working with the public. Also, when a parent can walk in and expect a specific level of courtesy and professionalism, it makes communication much better.
- Think back to what disposition is. Remember…
- Dress the part
- It is hard for us to be taken seriously when we do not present ourselves as professionals. Again, polo’s are our friend!
- When talking with a parent, focus on the five W’s and the H… Who, what, when, where, why and how.
- When we focus on these items, we can professionally relate with parents and problem solve.
• Lastly, remember your body language and posture. Lean in, have open body language and mirror your clientele.
• All of these things will help present a positive teacher disposition.
• As far as professional courtesy, think of yourself as the doctor meeting with a patient. Empathize as to how you would want your doctor’s bedside manner to be.
• Be mindful of your manners and politeness.
• We listed several professional Do’s and Don’ts which should be useful when preparing for conversations with parents.
• Lastly, THINK.
• This acronym will help you keep all phone calls and meetings positive, on your end.
  
  \[(Briefly\ldots)\]

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• I appreciate your time and your trust. Together, through practice, we can all become great, effective communicators.
• If something wasn’t clear, please check the coinciding PowerPoint and the other documents associated with this video.
• If you have further questions, please, email me so we can schedule a phone conversation.
• Thank you again for your time, I will catch you in the next video.
• Morning… Out…
A HAPPY, CHEERFUL DISPOSITION IS ACTUALLY GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

What is Disposition

A - Prevailing tendency, mood or inclination
B - Temperamental makeup
C - The tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances

Notes...
“What does a good teacher disposition look like?”

Notes...

Professionalism is an important part of a good teacher disposition.

We, as educators, must show it through...

- Professional dress
- Professional speak
- Professional demeanor/ body language/ representation
What does professional dress say about us?

I take my job seriously…
I am in the business of seeing your child improve…
I take you seriously…
I believe in structure…
I take the field of education seriously…

Polos are our friend

Especially with a school logo

We are professionals and want to be treated as such, so be tucked in, tidy and monitor your clothing fit.
Talking tips...

Don’t be a rambler!!! Notes...

Focus on the 5 W’s and the H

Be sure to plan conversations in order to streamline meetings and phone calls.
Scenario

Pause the video after and answer these questions in the space provided…

What is quick plan for a conversation with the parent of this kid?
What does the parent need to know in order to help you fix the issue?

What are the 5 W's and the H?

Who - The student
What - What is the issue
When - Consistency and time
Where - Classroom, hallway, home, Etc.
Why - What is happening
How - How to we proceed together

Notes...
Short Phone Skit

Notes...

Professional Demeanor/
Body Language/
Representation
The hardest aspect of Teacher Disposition

Notes...

We can all read phony versus genuine

People catch vibes - "...it's because my teacher doesn't like me!"

Tone (posture in person)...

Leaning in Vs. Leaning back

Leaning in and leaning back sends messages to parents like...

I care vs. I don't care

This is important vs. This is a waste of time

This will make a difference, vs. This is a formality

We are a partnership vs. I am smarter than you

I take this all very seriously vs. I don't take any of this seriously, including you, your kid and this job
2:22 : 3:15

Compare both skits…
Rewind your video to the numbers above.

Professional Courtesy

RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE’S TIME
The importance of manners and being non-patronizing

Most of us were raised to value manners, but we all do not know how use these professionally at all times.

Put yourself in the mindset of a doctor and think about bedside manner.

Some tips...

Notes...

1. Imagine you are a medical doctor with great bedside manner.
2. Imagine being on the other end of the situation… Empathy
3. Never forget, the focus of all conversation should be the student’s success
### Do's and Don'ts

<table>
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<td>- Schedule times and keep them</td>
<td>- Infringe on a parent's scheduled time because another parent stops</td>
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<td>- Take time to listen first, before going into long discussion</td>
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THINK

Is what you are saying True?
Is what you are saying Helpful?
Is what you are saying Inspiring?
Is what you are saying Necessary?
Is what you are saying Kind?
Lesson 3 Supplementary Materials: Disposition and Professional Courtesy

Pre-video exercise

These questions are designed to help put you in the frame of mind to accept the upcoming lesson. When seeking to grow, one must be in the right frame of mind to accept an experience. The following worksheet is designed to help you prepare to glean important information from the video which will follow this exercise. Answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

1. In your own words, describe what good customer service looks like. Include all aspects you can think of. Also, name a place you feel meets all of these expectations.

2. When told to, “present yourself like a teacher,” what does this mean to you? Explain in a short passage.

3. In a short passage, describe what professional courtesy is in regards to education.

4. Scenario: You are in a scheduled meeting with a parent. Someone knocks on the door to tell you there is a parent waiting who just dropped in to meet with you about something direly important. How would you respond?
Post-video exercise

Now that the video has been viewed, it is time for reflection. These questions are posed to help you to learn from your past, gauge your learning and mentally prepare for new challenges throughout your career. When answering these questions, be honest with yourself and try to add something to your toolbox. Everyone is capable of picking up a tool from this video.

1. Do you feel as though you have a good “bedside manner” for teaching? Why or why not? How can you improve?

2. What is your everyday dress for work? Is it professional enough to be looked at as a licensed professional? Are you going over the top, are you just right or are you not professional enough?

3. After viewing this video, where do you think your professional courtesy falls short? How can you improve?

4. Scenario: You are in a scheduled meeting with a parent. Someone knocks on the door to tell you there is a parent waiting who just dropped in to meet with you about something direly important. How would you respond?
Using THINK to help a parent help their student

Scenario:
A student has been struggling to come to school on time, complete work and stay on task when at school. Over time, through numerous talks, you have discovered the student has been dealing with a messy divorce between their parents. The student’s dad has moved out and the student is living with him. All of his belongings, however, are still at mom’s in the original family dwelling. The student has been getting up early with dad, being driven to the original family dwelling to get dressed for school, then fighting traffic back to school every day.

You are now put into the position where you need to meet with an or both parents to intervene on the behalf of the child’s educational success. You now have both parents in front of you. What will be your message to them?

Remember…

Is it Thoughtful?

Is it Helpful?

Is it Inspiring?

Is it Necessary?

Is it Kind?

After explaining your message, imagine a response and follow up to reiterate your message.
Reflection

You have now done a pre-video exercise, watched the video presentation, taken notes, done a post-video exercise and done a practice activity. It is now time to reflect on the experience. This activity is meant to help you find stronger meaning in this training. Think through what you have done and answer the following question to completion.

Reflection: Think about this lesson as a whole and write a personal reflection. Think of the who, what, when, where and how of the skills picked up or needed to be successful in this area.
Appendix D

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION VIDEO SERIES

Lesson 4: Listening is Tough: Active Listening

(Video Script; Notes; Supplementary Materials)
Lesson 4 Script: Listening is Tough: Active Listening

Each bullet represents a cinematic jump cut

Introduction

Morning:

- Thank you for tuning in to another training session in Effective Bidirectional Communication!!! You’ve made the commitment to become a better communicator, so let me not waste your time rambling.
- This video and its supplementary materials will cover the topic of Listening, why it’s difficult and how we can become better.
- Listening…
- When we listen to music, we are great at listening. When we watch a movie… great at listening.
- When we look something up on YouTube to learn how to reset our dishwasher we got stuck because our friend pushed a shot glass down the drain and didn’t tell anyone because he’s an inconsiderate jerk, who doesn’t respect nothing and…
- Where was I again?
- Oh yea, listening…
- We tend to be good listeners when we are only seeking to absorb information or material for entertainment. Our conversational listening habits are not always the best.
- Be honest with yourself…you don’t have to be honest with me.
- How well do you listen when talking with someone? When there is an open discussion, do you really listen when the other person is talking or do you wait to find a flaw in what they say? In a tough conversation do you just wait for the other person to finish while you are thinking about what to say next?
- I’m guilty of both of these things. I have always wanted to “win” conversations where there were opposing thoughts.
- In education, “winning” isn’t always in the best interest of a child. Consensus and understanding will become key and it is important to take in what the other party has to bring to the table.
- Listening is tough, but it is an important part of effective bidirectional communication.
- This video will focus on the task of becoming a great active listener. The lesson will provide tips for the improvement of one’s listening skills and help you to avoid pitfalls many fall in to when having important conversations.
- Listen to this material with open ears and an open heart!
What do great listeners do?

Morning:

- Think about the best listener you know…
- What are some of the things they do? Are they special or different from any other listener?
- The best listener in my life is my best friend, Jump. He enters every conversation with the intention of coming to an understanding. This is regardless of the conversation’s tone or topic.
- If Jump is being told an anecdotal tale, he is intent on understanding the ins and outs of the narrative and gathering the meaning or lesson meant to be shared.
- If he enters a disagreement, he wants to gain an understanding of where the differences lay and how there can be a true understanding, even if the solution is to agree to disagree.
- Jump is a gifted communicator and his greatest attribute is his ability to listen. He adds to effective communication without saying much at all. He is like Jason Kidd, the basketball player and coach. He works to make the speaker better.
- Great listeners, like Jump, do specific things when they take part in a conversation.
- What are those things, Mr. Morning?!
- Let me tell you…
- Great listeners…
- Ask questions to promote discovery and insight.
- Promote a safe environment and work to build self-esteem in their interactions
- Create a co-operative conversation with free flowing feedback without making the other person defensive.
- Make suggestions skillfully which opens up alternative paths.

Title Bar – Ask Questions

Morning:

- Now… let me explain…
- Asking questions to promote discovery and insight is all about helping the other party get their ideas and feelings out to ensure your understanding as a listener. There is nothing wrong with asking for clarity.
Short Couch Skit

**Person 1 sad and frustrated:** I just don’t know what’s going on or what’s going to happen. I just feel so terrible about it and don’t know what I can do.

**Person 2 even keel and concerned:** You seem so upset, why do you feel that way? Tell me more.

**Person 1 sad and frustrated:** My son…, he just isn’t doing anything! He isn’t trying in school. He isn’t motivated about anything. All he wants to do is play those video games. I’m not even sure if he has any real friends!

**Person 2 even keel and concerned:** How long as this been going on?

**Person 1 collecting themselves:** I’ve seen this setting in since last semester, and I feel like an idiot for not doing or saying anything about it.

**Person 2 even keel and concerned:** What did you start to notice first? Did it jump out at you?

**Person 1 collecting themselves:** Well, I saw little things, first. I noticed he stopped bringing home his book bag, but didn’t think too much about it. I then realized he spent more time in his room than playing with his siblings and dog, which he has ALWAYS done a lot of. I noticed his interactions when he played the video games with his siblings. He seemed angrier and more withdrawn. He seemed to not talk to them as much and just get engrossed into the game.

**Person 2 even keel and concerned:** Do you think anything changed, in his life, around the time he started to change?

**Person 1 even keel and thinking:** Well… His best friend, from kindergarten to seventh grade, did move away. They did everything together when he wasn’t at home with his siblings. They had all the same classes together. They played on the same sports teams together and were constantly playing those games against one another online…

**Person 1 epiphany face close up:** …

Camera zooms out while fading out

**Morning:**
- The listener was a good conversationalist. The questions asked were pointed to help both parties have an understanding of the situation. A good listener
wants to understand. Asking discovery questions both parties to gain from the conversation.

- Both parties can grow from the pointed questions. Notice how the questions asked helped the person with the problem think deeply about the issue they were having.
- The listener did not offer advice or make suggestions. They just asked basic questions to better understand where the speaker was coming from.

**Title Card – Promote a Safe Environment Without Distractions and Self-Esteem**

**Morning:**

- When looking to become a good listener, one must seek to create comfort for the speaker. When the speaker is delivering their message, it is the listeners job to try and absorb the message and interoperate a meaning.
- Sometimes, the speaker is under stress, confused or panicked. It is tough to convey a message when under pressure or when one is unsure if they are being understood.
- The listener can do things to help the speaker better communicate and feel more comfortable being a part of the conversation.
- Believe it or not, the listener has control over the talking environment. The listener sets the stage. Regardless of the speaker’s feelings, the listener tends to be in control of the conversational setting.
- To make this a little clearer, let me give you an example…
- Example…
  - Your friend walks up to you, exasperated, and just starts talking about a problem they are having with their significant other. When they approached, you were working on your school work.
  - If you continue to work while they talk and try to split your time listening, writing and reading, how would they feel?
  - How would you feel if you needed to talk with someone about something you thought was important and they split their attention?
  - Thoughts?
  - On second thought…
  - Let’s say you turn to the friend, close the laptop and give them your undivided attention. How would they feel then?
  - How would you feel?
  - Thoughts?
  - The listener has much more control over the environment than the speaker, typically. Reaction, response and demeanor play a large role in setting up a positive safe environment for a speaker.
• As educators, though there will be tough times, we will have to help parents feel comfortable talking to us. We will have to give them the attention required to help them feel safe speaking with us.
• Eliminate distractions and look them in the eye when they talk with us.
• Close the door and put up a meeting in progress sign.
• Mute the phone and/ or send calls to voicemail.
• We will have to do our best to empower them to say what they think is necessary to help us understand in order to help their children. We must promote their self-esteem in order to promote our partnership in the interest of helping their child succeed.
• Creating an environment where they feel confident speaking with us and working to validate their feelings will, ultimately, help us as listeners. When we make them feel safe and confident we will better understand their feelings and concerns. This will help us to do our jobs better.

Title Bar – Create Co-operative Conversation
Morning:
• Good listeners aren’t sponges… They are trampolines…
• insert picture of Confused face on screen
• I did not misspeak.
• insert GWB clip ‘Did I say those words’
• Hear me out.
• If you are only absorbing the speaker’s words, you are just a sponge or a journal. Conversation is normally a two-way street.
• The listener, to be good, has to provide feedback in a free flowing way.
• The listener must also be willing to respectfully disagree and challenge thoughts without making others defensive.
• An example of this is telling a parent the school policy which their idea or request violates. Telling parents they are wrong creates hostility. It can come off as disrespectful.
• It can be difficult to pick spots when to disagree or challenge thoughts of the other party in a bidirectional conversation…
• Trust me, I know…
• I have a Fiancé… rimshot
• The use of disagreement and challenging statements will help the parent better form a thought or idea. This can be put to practical use in the current and future conversation.
• Ideas and conversation is bounced off one party making the overall idea or subject more clear to both parties. This is the overall goal of communicating.
• Everything we do is for kids, and the parents, normally, are willing to partner with us. This process only makes things better for our kids.
• “Why do you think that?”
• “Where did you get that idea?”
• “Do you have in mind who will make this work?”
• “I didn’t quite understand. What did you mean by that last statement?”
• “When do you see this taking place?”
• These types of questions are not insulting or rude. They work to create clarity. Sometimes parents, or anyone speaking, talks out their thoughts. Most people do not tend to walk into a conversation with a prewritten statement.
• Talking out one’s thoughts is an age old way of communicating, and the listener can add to this process if they dedicate themselves to doing so.

Title Card – Work to Show the Speaker Alternate Paths

Short Couch Skit

Speaker: I just can’t figure out how to talk my son out of going into the military, Mr. Morning. He is dead set on serving his country, and I know it’s a noble thing to do. I know it is a good living and a good way to see the world. I just don’t want to see anything happen to him, you know?

Listener: What do you see happening to him?

Speaker: There are a million things… Him getting blown up, shot, captured, stabbed, captured or left behind in a foreign country. I can see those Saving Private Ryan scenes in my head so vividly with my son’s face on one of the casualties. He calls out to me and I’m a thousand miles away hoping he is ok… It just makes me want to puke when I think about it.

Listener: Has he ever said what he wanted to do?

Speaker: No… not really. We never get past, “Hey mom, I think I want to go into the military.” After this statement, I take over talking and ask him a million different questions about why he would want to risk his life.

Listener: Have you considered sitting down with a recruiter and asking what the military actually does? Or talking to someone you know in the armed forces?

Speaker: I’ve been so scared of my son joining… I haven’t allowed him to speak to a recruiter and I haven’t spoken to anyone in the military.
Listener: Well the military wants college grads, and has several different branches who do different things. Maybe your son can take the college route and end up being a pilot or jet mechanic. There is not telling…

Speaker: I never thought of that…

Morning:
- A good listener works to open different pathways of thinking for the speaker, especially when the speaker has a fixed mindset on things without any rational to back it up.
- While being the trampoline, the listener can open up different pathways for the speaker they never considered.
- This can be done subtly and does not have to be an overt tactic. Just getting individuals to think will make a difference.
- In the example skit, the mother was hung up on her fears and had not considered any of the benefits of her son choosing a career pathway in the armed forces.
- To the mother, armed forces meant dying on the beaches of Normandy in World War Two. This was her full understanding and the entire reason for her not giving her son the blessing to proceed.
- The listener asked pointed questions to help her think through the possibility. There were also subtle suggestions of talking to someone who may have more information.
- If the mother listens, she has gained an avenue to learn about the armed forces. She may be able to persuade her son to attend college with the intention of being a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force and work in the field of logistics. He would serve his country, probably, for twenty years in a relatively safe field and leave with business experience to start his own company.
- The possibilities in the scenario are nearly limitless. The listener did a good job of opening a new path for the mother to consider in the interest of her son.

The LAFF Don’t CRY Strategy

Different Setting

Morning:
- The LAFF Don’t CRY written on screen strategy is designed to remind teachers to use positive active listening steps.
- The listening skills listed within the acronym will help anyone to become a good listener in a professional situation. It also includes things which shouldn’t be done.
• The negatives discredit the listener and makes issues where none originally existed.
• Anyone looking to become a better listener should adhere to LAFF Don’t CRY.
• The acronym means…
Letter zoom out from the middle of the screen
- 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 – you should not…
- C – Criticize people who aren’t present
- R – React hastily and promise something you can’t deliver
- Y – Yakety-Yak-Yak

- All of these tips can make a difference when trying to gather information and an understanding of what parents have to say and can prevent communication landmines for the listener when having to engage the parent.
- Let’s break these down a little more.

L - written on the screen during the entire segment
Different Speaker:
- It’s crazy to think listening would be so complicated, huh. It is not always the easiest thing to do when working in the field of education. The differences in the people you will be working with will make you, as a listener, have to think about a few things while they speak with you.
- Listening and empathizing can be a tough process when someone walks in and seems as if they don’t have it all together. It can also be quite difficult when they person is talking about or wanting something for their child, you don’t necessarily agree with.
- Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes and speaking to them respectfully can be extremely tough, but it is the duty of the listener to ensure the speaker feels safe to discuss their concerns.

A - written on the screen during the entire segment
Different Speaker:
- The previous portion of this video discusses asking questions and being a trampoline listener versus being a sponge listener.
- Taking notes, however, can be an important part of being a listener, especially when there is a true dedication to following up with parents. Ask permission to jot things down. It can go a long way in being courteous to the parent.
- Note taking will also help you in your attempts to ask pointed questions and give feedback which will encourage a deeper understanding of what is being discussed.
Different Speaker:
- It is so (drag out the word) easy to get of subject when having a discussion. Focusing on the issue at hand will make a world of difference when working with a parent.
- Not only is it respectful of their time, but it prevents the conversation from becoming a gripe session. Focusing on the issue will help the issue to become resolved and/or understood by all parties within the conversation.
- There is nothing wrong with telling a parent, “If at all possible, let’s focus on the initial issue at hand, and schedule time to discuss any additional matters.” Majority of parents will understand fully.

Different Speaker:
- Finding a way to take first steps is important in any conversation. Teachers have to work to get to a first step in the conversation. This includes as a listener.
- If a parent comes in rambling, it is ok to ask them what exactly they are here to get accomplished. It is also ok to say you don’t understand what they mean and would like to.
- Finding first steps can be a difficult part of listening. The hardest part of the issue is the impossibility of getting to a real solution or understanding without the first steps.
- Ultimately, an understanding is the goal of every professional conversation, so it is imperative for the first step toward understanding take place. Where the step is, is tough to find.

Morning:
- After looking at these positive “do’s,” let’s look at some “don’ts.” Think of the “don’ts” as booby traps which will sink your battleship.

Don’t Criticize people who aren’t present - written on the screen during the entire segment

Person 1: …if Mr. Morning would have done his job, he would have let you know about these after school programs we offer every week. Leave it to him to leave out some of the most important things we do at this school

Person 2: I think Mr. Morning is a great guy… you know he did donate a kidney to my brother…

Person 1: ... (Oh crap face)
Don’t react hastily and promise something you can’t deliver – written on the screen during the entire segment

Teacher on the phone: Well, we sure will make sure the other kid gets expelled! The language the kid used is unacceptable in the halls of our great school. Who cares about this kid never getting in trouble before. Your child had to hear the F word, and we will not tolerate it. I know his parents from way back, and they did the same types of things. They ended up in alternative school and he is a chip off the ole block…

Principal now in principal’s office: Morning… what in the hell possessed you to say something like that!!!

Teacher now in principal’s office: … (Oh crap face)

Don’t Yakety-Yak-Yak – written on the screen during the entire segment

Morning on the phone: (Talking but inaudible) (Talks and talks without breathing until looking light he is going to faint as the screen dims) Yakety Yak song playing over the scene

Conclusion

Morning:

- Good listeners do a wealth of different things which encourage speakers to talk openly. They also help speakers better formulate their expression by asking pointed questions and providing feedback.
- There are several different things to keep in mind when talking to parents in order to provide a safe, respectful environment for conversation. Teachers can also improve the atmosphere for great communication.
- LAFF Don’t CRY can help any teacher looking to further develop their listening skills and avoid pitfalls when talking to parents about important and unimportant issues.
- I personally need to work on the Don’t Yakety-Yak-Yak portion of this acronym.
- As always, I appreciate your time and your trust. Together, through practice, we can all become great, effective communicators.
- If something wasn’t clear, please check the coinciding PowerPoint and the other documents associated with this video.
- If you have further questions, please, email me so we can schedule a phone conversation.
- Thank you again for your time, I will catch you in the next video.
- Morning… Out…
Lesson 4 Notes: Listening is Tough: Active Listening

Listening is Tough:
Active Listening

Major Points and Notetaking...

When it’s easy to listen...

Notes...

It is easy to listen to music
It is easy to listen to movies
It is easy to listen to YouTube videos and other entertainment.
It is much more difficult to talk listen to a person than absorb what someone says.

What do Great Listeners do?
What Jump does when listening...

- Enters every conversation looking to understand.
- Seeks the lesson and meaning.
- Listens the same way during a disagreement.
- Adds to conversation to promote his understanding.
- Notes...

Ask Questions...

Ask questions to promote discovery and insight.

Questions should help the other party better communicate their feelings, wants and needs.

Notes...
Promote a Safe Environment

Make the speaker feel comfortable speaking...
Have an open demeanor
Make eye contact without staring.
Close the door and turn down the phone.

Promote Self Esteem

Lean in to the conversation
Watch your body language... stay neutral
Acknowledge points being made.
Ask for a repeat to ensure you got what was being said.

Notes...
Create Co-operative Conversation

Be a trampoline, not a sponge
Feedback should be free flowing
There are ways to say things which do not sting
Work to not be defensive or make someone feel defensive
Notes...

Work to Show the Speaker Alternate Paths

The objective of a conversation is to find the right solution, not just a solution
As a listener working with the speaker, there is a chance to find new or different avenues for every situation.
The LAFF Don’t CRY Strategy

The acronym:

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
Notes...

Listen, empathize and communicate respect

Empathizing, or putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, is tough to do, but is very necessary when listening to people who don’t come from the same background as you.

Respect helps the to grease the wheels of communication. When people feel respected, they do a better job explaining themselves.

Notes…
Ask questions and ask permission to take notes

Notes...

Taking notes can make all the difference in the world when talking to a parent. It makes parents more comfortable and helps them understand you take what they say seriously.

Focus on the issues + Find a first step

Notes...

Respect for the parent’s time requires each conversation to stay focused on each issue.

Don’t let the conversation wander if possible.

Work to get the conversation started. Take the first step as a listener.

The hardest part of the issue is the impossibility of getting to a real solution or understanding without the first step.
Don't... Skits

- Criticize people who aren't present: Notes...
- React hastily and promise something you can't deliver: Notes...
- Yakety-Yak-Yak: Notes...
Listening is Tough: Active Listening  
Pre-video exercise

These questions are designed to help put you in the frame of mind to accept the upcoming lesson. When seeking to grow, one must be in the right frame of mind to accept an experience. The following worksheet is designed to help you prepare to glean important information from the video which will follow this exercise. Answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

5. In your own words, describe if you think you are a good listener and why.

6. In your opinion, what are three keys to being a great listener? Explain each answer.

7. In a short passage, describe the person you go to when you need someone to listen. Why do you go to them?

8. Do you think listening should involve some level of talking, or should one just listen silently while the other party talks?
Listening is Tough: Active Listening
Post-video exercise

Now that the video has been viewed, it is time for reflection. These questions are posed to help you learn from your past, gauge your learning, and mentally prepare for new challenges throughout your career. When answering these questions, be honest with yourself and try to add something to your toolbox. Everyone is capable of picking up a tool from this video.

5. Explain the trampoline vs. sponge concept of listening, in your own words.

6. What are some questions you are likely to use when listening with parents in the future? Be specific.

7. What are the best ways of communicating respect to parents when you are listening to them? Be specific in your answers.

8. Share your thoughts on the “Don’t CRY” part of this training. Speak on each part and why you think it is negative.
Listening is Tough: Active Listening
Write your own dialog

A parent comes into a conference with several concerns. You have never met the parent, but have had a singular conversation with them. The parent has numerous concerns about their child and has asked you to hear their concerns. Grades and behavior are the parent’s concern, but there may be an underlying issue going on at home.

The objective of this exercise is to create a dialog which exemplifies what you have learned. Think back to old conversations with parents and remember the tips from this lesson to create your dialog.

Parent (Speaker):

Teacher (Listener):

Parent (Speaker):

Teacher (Listener):

Parent (Speaker):

Teacher (Listener):
Listening is Tough: Active Listening
Reflection

You have now done a pre-video exercise, watched the video presentation, taken notes, done a post-video exercise and done a practice activity. It is now time to reflect on the experience. This activity is meant to help you find stronger meaning in this training. Think through what you have done and answer the following question to completion.

Reflection: Think about this lesson as a whole and write a personal reflection. Think of the who, what, when, where and how of the skills picked up or needed to be successful in this area.
VITA

JEFFERY E. MORNING II

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