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"CHATTING" WITH THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

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Abstract

In the educational systems, inter-personal communication is one of the central factors for the success of professional conduct and cooperation between all the stakeholders in the field: kindergarten teachers, administrators, parents, supervisors and sometimes, even paramedical health care providers. The purpose of this article is to focus on the interpersonal communication in the technological and digital era, and how it is reflected in the relationship between kindergarten teachers and parents and affects these relations. Today, in the technological era, interpersonal communication has received a new face. Through digital communications, emails and social networks (WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.) one can see a significant change that affects many factors in the educational systems. The uniqueness of the digital media is that communication is not done face-to-face and therefore many times there can be failures in interpersonal communication, and as a result it can affect the quality of relationships between kindergarten teachers and parents. Poor communication and the tension created between these parties will also affect the child's functioning and wellbeing. This article, will discuss the interpersonal relationships between kindergarten teachers and parents in the technological era, on a theoretical level. To date, there is no answer and guidance to kindergarten teachers or parents on how to communicate more effectively and benefit from the digital media, which has advanced greatly in recent years. I hope that this article will shed some light on the problems existing in interpersonal communication in kindergarten settings and ways that this conflict can be resolved.

Keywords: Interpersonal communication, kindergarten teacher, parents, technological era, digital communication.

1. Introduction

This article addresses interpersonal communication in the digital age with an emphasis on communication between parents and kindergarten teachers. After years of work in the field with many kindergarten teachers, an understanding has developed that digital communication brings with it many problems alongside many positive and beneficial aspects. Interpersonal communication has existed in the lives of people for all time and has been much explored by researchers all over the world.

To begin with, the work of kindergarten teachers is challenging and complex and they need to be in charge of a lot during the day. I will focus on communication that exists between the educational staff in kindergartens and parents and not between educational staff and themselves or with children. This article will discuss the interpersonal relationships between kindergarten teachers and parents in the technological era, on a theoretical level.

There are many definitions of the term 'communication', many researchers have tried to decipher the question what communication is and what are its characteristics, but until now, there is no single unequivocal answer. Of all the definitions appearing in professional literature I have chosen one that is most correct for the issue addressed in this article: "communication is the transmission of information, communication is transmitted but not necessarily understood or received" (Berelson & Steiner, 1964, p. 254). Sometimes, a message is indeed transmitted but is misunderstood or misinterpreted wrongly. Communication surrounds us in all areas of life, but this articlewe will focus on interpersonal communication existing between two and more people (Foss & Littlejohn, 2008).

2. Main Body

2.1. Interpersonal Communication

Research about interpersonal communication began, principally, after World War II, when researchers became interested in the influences of mass communication and mainly how its influences before the war. Hovland (as cited in Berger, 2014), was one of the first researchers who influenced research in the field on interpersonal communication and researchers who continued his work later or tried to refute his ideas. Hovland (as cited in Berger, 2014), focused particularly on the roles of factors participating in communication, the differences between them and their ability to influence and persuade one another.

So, what, in fact, is interpersonal communication?

Interpersonal communication is communication between two or more people that produces an interaction between them. There are differences between interactions that take place between people who come from backgrounds of different cultural norms, socio-demographic norms such as gender, race or age. In such relationships, interaction occurs without previous personal acquaintance of the participating factors and they tend to general be non-interpersonal (Berger, 2014).

According to Cappela (1987), when interpersonal communication occurs, participating factors influence each communicator regarding fundamental behaviour and they must be reciprocal in their effect: smile, voice loudness, rate of speech etc. Every person involved in social interaction brings his/her own personal parameters such as: personality traits, emotional states, genetic features and cognitive

processes. All these can affect the basic behaviour of a person involved in interaction and even affect the behaviour of those standing in front of him/her.

So how can interpersonal communication be influenced by the technological age? Have definitions changed as a result of different communication channels?

2.2. Interpersonal Communication in the Technological Era

Until the 2000's, when we were introduced to cellular telephones and the internet, interpersonal communication focused mainly on face to face interaction. Diverse theories and definitions for the concept 'interpersonal communication' remained the same and researchers have found no reason over the years to change it. However, a new dimension has entered that needs to be considered and that is digital communication. Throughout the word today, it is possible to connect to the internet and other electronic instruments and create digital communication very easily. Everyone, from any socio-economic status, can allow themselves some sort of internet connection today. Media availability automatically changes our communication and leads us to communicate differently from what we had known until now. The main difference resulting from technological development is the absence of face to face conversations. There's now alternative ways of interpersonal communication including social networks, text messages and "emojis"(icons transmitting personal feelings) all which effect the means and style of interpersonal communication.

Another significant change to which we have been exposed as a result of using digital instruments is instant messaging. People's relationships are becoming more inferior and superficial, in contrast to past deeper and longer-term connections. As a result, many people feel alone or depressed, although in practice they have friends who connect with them through digital instruments (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

As a result, many have opposed using technology and digital instruments as an integral part of interpersonal communication, the main argument for this opposition, being that the absence of face to face meetings during interactions reduces trust that should exist between participants. In addition, the anonymity that can exist in digital communication can lead to incompatibility during interactions and even to concealing information and inappropriate behaviour. Today, we know that cyber bullying exists around the world, in every area and the war against it is continuous (Pastae, 2016). In face to face communication it is possible to see and feel nuances in the person's interpersonal behaviour, such as body language, face expressions, etc., which do not, however, appear in digital communication. An example of such behaviour being that it is possible to sit behind a screen in a different place and give false information, regarding: age, gender, physical attributes.

Another disadvantage of digital communication is the absence of feedback and reaction that exist in regular interpersonal communication. When we receive direct feedback from the person with whom we communicate face to face, we can react in that moment, receive message and see his/her body language. Feedback and reaction are extremely important to the success of interpersonal communication and social interaction.

As a result, the question is asked, is it possible to make a connection between interpersonal communication and digital communication? It appears that alongside the disadvantages presented so far, there are also advantages and therefore this should not be rejected out of hand.

The first advantage of digital interpersonal communication is the ability to maintain communication even from a distance. Today one can participate in meetings taking place in faraway places without having to be there physically, and to organize certain actions without being present. In addition, digital communication can help find new friends, a partner or organizations that interest one as an individual. People who struggle with interpersonal communication are helped by digital communication to communicate and thus feel comfortable with themselves during an interaction (Pastae, 2016).

Digital communication takes place today everywhere and fulfils an important part of our lives. It is used in many organizations and at a personal level including in the world of education at various levels.

How do educational staff cope with these changes?

2.3. Digital Interpersonal Communication in an Educational System

Communication is an important part of the education system and even more so interpersonal communication. One of the important roles of communication within the educational system is to help different people gain higher achievements and only to create social interactions as mentioned previously. The more efficient communication is, results are quicker and better (Natale &Lubnuewski, 2018).

Interpersonal communication in the educational system, take place between specific factors: parents-family; educational institution-educational staff; caregivers-education staff and more. Principles of these factors that meet in certain circumstances are not always aligned, they do not see the process or results they wish to achieve from the same point of view and thus, communication can be more complex and challenging. In addition, interpersonal communication between friends is mostly done by choice, in contrast to communication in the educational system, which is forced on communicating parties (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013).

As mentioned above, the significant change that came with digital communication is an absence of face to face encounter. In the various educational frameworks, this absence is felt particularly in communication with parents who receive information about their children and the educational system via various media (emails, text messages, internet sites, etc.). Personal meetings with educational staff take place less frequently than was previously acceptable (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013).

The main interpersonal communication between education staff and parents occurs generally around updates about everything happening to children within the educational framework: lessons, tasks, special events, etc. In the past, it was customary to send parents letters and arrange personal meetings. Today, these means are becoming less and less used and we find more and more messages being transmitted through digital channels available to educational staff (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013).

Educational staff exploit the media for general messages transmitted, rather than individual messages. Parents, in contrast, are more interested in personal information about their children and are unable to acquire information as required or at the level they usually need.

The definition of interpersonal communication at the beginning of this article refers to a message passing between people, but that is not always received or understood appropriately. In the educational system, this problem often arises when one side does not properly interpretant what the other means and gives it an incorrect meaning (Kosaretskii & Chernyshova, 2013).

Communicating parties, both parents and educational staff, must not forget that it is the good of children facing them and it is what be the major consideration in communication between them. Communication does not have to be negative and one needs to know how to channel it, translate it and react to it correctly. Many studies have shown that good and efficient communication between parents and educational staff directly helps children's success in their learning processes and development (Natale & Lubnuewski, 2018).

Most studies on the topic of digital interpersonal communication in the educational system refer to the school system and less research has been done on the topic in kindergartens.

2.4. Digital Interpersonal Communication in Kindergartens

One of the characteristics of kindergartens is that the kindergarten teacher acts autonomously, they do not have the same structure as the school system, where there is a principle, advisers, class coordinators etc. Therefore, they are on the frontline in communication with parents. Kindergartens, in most world countries, are different in their conduct and the connection between kindergarten teachers and parents, therefore this needs to be addressed. Kindergarten teachers, can meet the parents twice a day, in the morning, when the parents bring the children and at the end of the day when they come to pick them up. Two meeting points that are problematic. In the morning the parents are in a hurry to get to work and the kindergarten teacher is busy receiving all the children, and at the end of the day when everyone is tired after a day's work and wish just to go home.

Every year, kindergarten teachers need to learn to work with a new group of parents who must get used to the teacher, get to know her and build up their mutual trust.

From my experience and my colleagues, kindergarten teachers maintain that digital communication causes parents to interfere more in what happens at kindergarten, both pedagogically and administratively. The media, internet and social networks lead parents to cross the border between the desire to be involved in kindergarten life, their children's lives and negative and disruptive interference. They read information that is not always correct and anchored in research on internets sites or consult on social networks with uncertified people and as a result, believe that they can "advise" kindergarten teachers how they should act, how and what they should teach and how to design a kindergarten and many other examples. Kindergarten teachers find themselves facing with a group of parents who are rely on and are empowered by social networks and thus accumulate power to influence kindergarten life and even the private lives of kindergarten teachers.

Kindergarten teachers, and mainly young ones, are not assertive enough to confront these parents and the boundaries between roles become blurred and disrupt the running of a kindergarten, kindergarten teachers' communication with the children and the general atmosphere for the kindergarten community.

2.5. Kindergarten Teacher's Training

In many countries around the world it is customary during kindergarten teachers' training to teach them how to act and communicate correctly with parents. In the U.S.A. (NAEYC, 2011), there is a program to train students how to create respectful relationships, reciprocal relations and how to make families involved in the development of their children. In New Zealand (NZTC, 2007), the standard for teaching early childhood teachers is that the knowledge they acquire during their studies will help them to work efficiently with parents, caregivers, families and complaints.

Kindergarten teachers' professionalism is placed in doubt because they are seen in many countries as less professional than school teachers because they educate young children. People do not truly understand the demands of the role, its complexity, and the level of responsibility existing in preschool education. All this leads parents and the community to doubt the abilities and professionalism of kindergarten teacher and kindergarten teachers start their relationships with parents from a position of weakness and the need to prove themselves (Mahmood, 2013).

In recent decades, families have changed their view of digital media use and use television, computers, cellular instruments more and more in their daily lives and they are available to all. Therefore, communication with families' service providers has also moved to the media and acquires a different dimension, which must be given great consideration (Clark, 2011).

3. Methodology

The methodology used during the writing of the article is an analysis and comparison of research literature. The analysis and the comparison between the sources of literature enabled the researcher to conclude that there is a gap in knowledge about the subjects of the article and there is a need for further research and depth on the subject of the interrogee.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the literature and studies do not provide enough information on the issue of the relationship between parents and kindergarten educational staff with emphasis on digital communication. From my experience, Kindergarten teachers find themselves learning and gaining experience every day how to work correctly with parents so that they are satisfied with kindergarten performance. As previously mentioned, digital communication can benefit interpersonal communication, but it also has many negative sides that need to be limited to reduce the damage they cause. Kindergarten teachers need to be assisted and trained on the issue of communication with parents, already during their academic studies, when they go out into the field and during their years of work.

As we see in all areas of life, digital communication is only growing stronger and brings with it new things every day. We must not forget that children are the most important aspect of the abovementioned relationships and therefore we must look at what is good for them and act accordingly.

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