

TRAINING TOOLKIT

- pupil adaptation

SKILLS



School Adaptability

as a key to develop a child's potential



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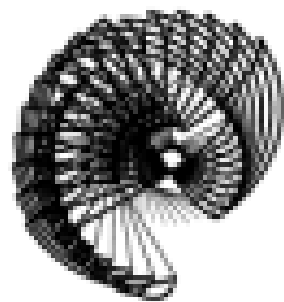


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SKILLS

The aim of this section is to recall which are the most important transversal competences, necessary to carry out the various steps of the models with awareness and effectiveness. Although these competences are indispensable, they do not always find an adequate place in teachers' curricula.

Among the different competences that come into play during the adaptation process, four have been chosen. The first three are fundamental competences of the teacher's role: the ability to observe, the ability to listen and the ability to relate. The fourth, on the other hand, is a competence not always associated with the teaching profession but particularly important for those who decide to apply the two Models: it is the ability to network, to exchange information and make decisions within the network of people who, at different levels of responsibility, revolve around the child.

Each of these competences is presented with a summary sheet containing:

- A brief theoretical introduction;
- Why is important for the teaching profession;
- Practical advice on how to use it in the best way;
- The most common mistakes;
- In which parts of the model it comes into play;
- An exercise to train it.

It is suggested to work in groups, giving yourself a few weeks to try out the suggested training exercises.



TYPES OF MATERIALS

The Toolkit's main goal is to provide a practical integration to the two models in terms of tools, study materials and guidelines. It provides the possibility to practice with the tools included in the Models and new materials provided in this document, in order to serve as a training for the teachers and also a training for trainers, that is, those teachers who will be spokespersons for the Models in their school.

The Toolkit materials include:



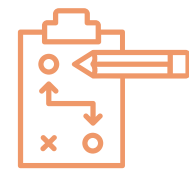
Factsheets:

theoretical and practical contents for the development of specific skills/mindset.



Case Studies:

contents to give teachers the possibility to learn from different experiences and actions and to reflect on how they could use or change them in their real circumstances.



Learning scenarios:

they provide the teachers with the possibility to interact with a possible situation and imagine how they could apply the tools and knowledge of the Models.



Activities:

specific materials to achieve goals with the class.



Monitoring and Evaluation tools:

questionnaires, checklists, evaluation tools and methods to check the progress and measure the effectiveness of the actions taken.



1. Ability to observe



Theoretical introduction

Observation is a very important skill needed among teachers. Observation gives them the first-hand knowledge about the student- behavior, mind-set, attitude and interests (EdTechReview, 2017).

To understand, categorize and direct the students towards the process of learning becomes a challenge until the teacher is a good observer.

'Observation plays a fundamental role in the improvement of teaching and learning. It is the most exciting and dynamic engine for whole school renewal and change, and it's a powerful way to inspire and motivate. Unfortunately, for many teachers, observation is about as welcome as a poke in the eye with a sharp stick' (Watson-Davies, 2009:5).



Why is it important for the specialists in the educational relationship?

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Observation is not only important for understanding behavior, attitude or gauge active learning in the class. Observation also helps to identify and build up socio-emotional skills among student-teacher and between student-student. Observation helps teacher to build this ability in the class. Wrong words or actions can be corrected after a good observation (EdTechReview, 2017).

The act of noticing or monitoring as defined for the word 'observation' is an essential quality to be developed among teachers. Today, with the advent of technology, hoping that camera will do what is needed is not a wise decision. Teachers need to employ their time and energy in observing the students in their class

One of the key research findings about classroom observation (Howard, 2010; Willems 2019) is that observer training is often missing. This probably happens because, in many contexts, supervisors responsible for evaluation have been recruited from the ranks of teachers and have received little or no formal instruction in this area. However, it does suggest that organizations and individuals should be more proactive in their provision of necessary training.



Tips on how to apply it

Observing is a crucial and very necessary technique. You must observe your students' actions and behaviors, do not let anything slip away that rings a bell. Create the right conditions for observing and prepare yourself to observe and analyze the students' behaviors.

When you observe you slow down, listen more carefully, and pause to reflect before stepping in to offer direction or help. You see and respond to who a child is and what a child needs. Observing helps you build relationships by revealing the uniqueness of every child, including the child's temperament, strengths, personality, work style and preferred mode of expression.



The most common mistakes

- You don't know what exactly you are looking for: Sometimes, you are more than happy to help a child but you don't know exactly on what behaviors or actions to look for. Prepare an observation grid in advance.
- Take the time to study the student, how he/she behaves around other classmates or any behavior that is questionable or rings a bell must to be taken under consideration.
- You don't really have the time to observe every child: observation is a skill that becomes a habit through intentional training. You can observe your students when you are delivering a lesson, when you are playing a game or even you are on the school yard supervising the students,
- You are too focused on the student's classroom performance: even when a student gets straight A's or he/she seems to be adapting perfectly fine, still there are certain behaviors that ring a bell.
- Try to "study" your students outside of their classroom performance. Look how they are behaving around their classmates, are they playing games? For example: Are they alone most of the time?



Where you can use it in the models

Taking into consideration the models, observation needs to happen in all the steps of adaptation of a student. From the very first time you welcome the student into the school until he/she is fully adapted to the new education system!



What can you do to train it (one exercise)

Write down ten (10) important behaviors or actions that ring a bell according to your years of experience. Make them as a list and tick boxes when a student performs a certain way. You can have that list on your everyday notebook and have it checked daily.





2. Ability to listen



Theoretical introduction

The ability to listen represents a fundamental and pivotal aspect of interpersonal relationships; it means not only understanding what the speaker is saying with words, but also being able to grasp additional aspects, such as an emotional distress or a need, that are not expressed directly.

Listening is a social skill that implies cognitive and emotional abilities: listening to a person leads to the creation of a relationship of trust, of understanding, leading to the formation of a meaningful bond.

Listening is an active process, in that we need to pay close attention to all the verbal (words) and non-verbal (gestures) messages that the person speaking sends us, the one who listens attentively does not only do so with their ears, but also with their heart, mind and eyes.

However, we should not underestimate that deep listening is very tiring when there is an emotional and meaningful connection with the person speaking.



Why is it important for the specialists in the educational relationship?

Listening is one of the fundamental skills of anyone working in relational situations for at least 3 reasons:

1. It immediately creates trust
2. It allows us to detect important data about the person speaking on both a logical and emotional level. Such data are fundamental for setting up or evaluating educational and didactic proposals
3. It predisposes the other person to listening



Tips on how to apply it

Listening is a fundamental technique. Don't let haste eat away at your listening opportunities! Create the right conditions for listening and prepare yourself for listening by cultivating curiosity for each of your listeners.





The most common mistakes

Thomas Gordon highlights 12 barriers to deep listening, i.e. attitudes that delineate non-listening and limit the ability to communicate. This is why it is desirable to try to avoid them as much as possible or limit them. Here are the barriers to be broken down:

- Ordering, demanding and commanding: ("You must do your homework", "You must do it!"), demanding something without taking into account the needs of the other person who does not feel understood
- Threatening: ("You'd better behave yourself!!", "If you don't do as I say, you'll look bad"), this communicative style can make the student feel scared and cause submission. Threats can cause anger, rebellion and hostility.
- Lecture: ('You should...', 'You should not...'), distrust or moral judgement is communicated.

- Giving ready-made solutions: ('It is clear that in this situation you should act this way...'), the person fails to reflect on their problem and consequently to look for alternatives; furthermore, they may experience dependency or resistance.
- Persuading with logical arguments: ('I know you think this is the right way to handle the situation, but you won't be able to finish the project; maybe you should change the way'), this communication style often leads the other to stop listening and makes them feel inferior or inadequate.
- Judging, disapproving, criticising: ('That's the way you are, you can't do it...'), the person feels judged, disapproved and criticised, so much so that he/she stops communicating for fear of negative judgement.
- Complimenting and undeservedly approving: ('I think you are doing a great job', 'Only you can do it', 'You are very good'), these messages can be interpreted as manipulative, causing the other person anxiety.
- Humiliating, ridiculing: ("You are slow", "You don't feel like doing anything", "You are a failure"), these are all labels and evaluations that can make the other feel inadequate and incapable.
- Interpreting, analysing the behaviour of others: ('You're just tired...', 'You know perfectly well why...'), these messages communicate that the speaker has understood the situation in a hasty manner, without delving deeper.
- Consoling, minimising: ('Nothing happened', 'You'll see it will all work out'), the person does not feel heard and understood.
- Changing the subject: the problem is avoided and not addressed, the other is discouraged and does not open up further, he/she feels their difficulties are minimised.
- Investigating, questioning: ('Why?', 'What happened?', 'Who were you with?'), the person may feel under interrogation.



Where you can use it in the models

You need this skill when you talk with almost everyone involved in the process of adaptation.



What can you do to train it (one exercise)

Write down on a piece of paper the 12 barriers to listening of the Gordon model. Keep the leaflet in your hand so that you can refer to it if necessary. Observe for a few weeks which barriers you use the most. Keep a diary where you note down your observations. Gradually you will find that it will be easier and easier not to fall into the traps and maintain a more neutral listening.



3. Ability to network



Theoretical introduction

The human, physical and natural sciences have been enriched in the 21st century by a powerful and fruitful paradigm: the systemic approach with reference authors such as Gregory Bateson, Paul Watzlawick, etc. In an oversimplified way, we could say that in a given interacting social system (such as, for example, the classroom, or the school, or the pupils and their families, etc.) the focus shifts from each separate component to the relationship that binds them, to the network. Even without delving into the subject (but we strongly suggest it!) it is important that whoever operates in complex situations such as those described in Models 1 and 2, does so with an awareness of the whole, where the individual parts are connected and influence each other in a way that is often unpredictable.



Why is it important for the specialists in the educational relationship?

Very often the teachers find themselves working alone, so to speak, with their class group, perhaps assisted by another teacher. When it comes to implementing Model 1 and Model 2, the work involved is very different. It involves coordinating a multidisciplinary team for the purpose of the educational and social integration of the child. The ability to network is therefore based on the lucid awareness that the proposed adaptation process is a team effort. The ability to network involves a clear idea of the people and roles involved in the project, their competencies and the borderline areas of these competencies. It involves the ability to build professional relationships with very different figures and the ability to coordinate their efforts. It then requires knowing how to gather the different perspectives that each professional brings and compose them with the perspectives and needs of the family and the child. The systemic approach could be a valid theoretical foundation to build this kind of skill.



Tips on how to apply it

- Whenever you find yourself in difficulty just "network!", involve the most appropriate stakeholders: they will give you valuable insights into the situation;
- Remember not to make decisions alone: any change has repercussions on the whole system. Before any decision, involve the system (the student, the family, colleagues, etc. etc.)



The most common mistakes

The most common mistake that education professionals and teachers make is to forget that the system exists: being identified with personal dynamics and problems, it is easy to lose sight of the awareness that we are part of a network and therefore have responsibilities but also allies.



Where you can use it in the models

Networking skills are crucial in this context, especially in all parts of the models that have to do with relationships outside the classroom, i.e. with family, class colleagues, the headmaster, etc. etc.



What can you do to train it (one exercise)

Whenever dealing with a system, it is of paramount importance to start 'seeing' this system. A very useful tool for doing this is called the 'stakeholder map'.

1. Take a fairly large white sheet of paper (A4 or even better A3).
2. Write in the centre of the sheet the name of the pupil you are considering.
3. Write on the remaining part of the sheet the names of the most important people who have a relationship with this pupil (including you!), at school and elsewhere. You can give generic names such as 'classmates', but if there is someone among them who stands out enough, for better or worse, give precise names.
4. Link each stakeholder with the name of the pupil by writing and possibly some brief notes on the type of relationship that exists.
5. You can possibly also link the stakeholders by writing notes that you consider important regarding the relationship between them.
6. Hang up this map whenever you want to reflect, alone or even better in a group, on what is happening or on the decisions to be taken: ask yourself questions with respect to the communication between the different stakeholders, the relationship between them, how they can be affected by decisions, etc.



4. Ability to relate



Theoretical introduction

Relationship is at the basis of any didactic and pedagogical process. Knowing how to build an affective dimension with pupils is of fundamental importance in order to guide them to achieve didactic and educational objectives. Very often, however, teacher preparation programmes leave out this emotional dimension in favour of practical instructions on what to do in the classroom. In order to improve one's ability to build a relationship, in addition to the aforementioned observation and listening skills, it is fundamental to seek deep attention to others and the ability to take care of communication.



Why is it important for the specialists in the educational relationship?

We have always known that the new generations learn and adapt thanks to their relationship with adults, starting with parents and then teachers and all the reference adults they meet on their path: even the mere association of children with adult figures is 'pedagogical' as Albert Bandura showed us with the idea of social learning.

Thanks to neuroscience studies (see, for example, the work of Stanley Greenspan summarised in the book 'The growth of the mind') we now know that, from the earliest days of life, we build our cognitive architecture (from the first cognitions of space and time onwards) within an emotional structure.

The most effective teaching therefore takes place within a perimeter of solid relational trust ("I see you and respect you as an individual") within which the teacher knows how to show rules and limits and at the same time spur his pupils on to improvement.



Tips on how to apply it

Listening (see listening Factsheet) is an extraordinary tool for building relationships: when a person feels listened to carefully, they produce oxytocin, which is the relationship hormone. Make sure that you always pay close attention to your pupils and remember the information they give you. If you cannot get a sufficient level of attention, it is better to postpone the interview to a more favourable time



What can you do to train it (one exercise)

The most common mistakes

The most common mistake that teachers make with respect to creating a good relationship with their pupils is to believe that the process should happen spontaneously: if it happens well, if it does not, that's ok. Instead, the education professional must try to be deliberate with respect to building the relationship, and try to build and maintain it with precise actions.



Where you can use it in the models

All the steps of the Models are based on the ability to build relationships.

Set out to get to know your pupils better: for example, you could organise a series of mini-interviews (15 minutes might be enough) to find out how they are organised for their homework. During these interviews simply listen to them with the maximum of your attention! do not give suggestions, advice unless they ask for it.