school based teacher development II: transforming maths teaching and learning practices

maths

module 6: engaging parents in raising achievement
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module 6: engaging parents in raising achievement
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Introduction to the School Based Teacher Development II (SBTD II) programme for teachers of Grades 7–12

The School Based Teacher Development II (SBTD II) programme is key to UNRWA's Education Reform Strategy. The programme seeks to improve teaching and learning practices in UNRWA classrooms through developing interactive pedagogies (ways of teaching) that will engage students of Grades 7–12 more effectively in their learning. Together, the SBTD II programme for teachers of higher grades and SBTD for teachers of Grades 1–6, are paving the way for comprehensive in-service training for all UNRWA teachers. There are six Open and Distance Learning Modules in the SBTD II programme. Each Module focuses on a different aspect of teaching and learning with a specific focus on the teaching of Maths, English, Science and Arabic for Grades 7–12. Together, the Modules, Units, Activities and Case Studies in the SBTD II programme provide an overview of many different approaches and ways of developing quality teaching and learning in all classrooms in UNRWA schools.

The SBTD II Modules are interactive and ask you, the teacher, to reflect on your practices, to try new approaches and to consider the impact of these approaches and practices on your students' learning and motivation.
Introduction to Module 6: Engaging parents in raising achievement

Unit 21: Strategies for engaging and working with parents in the learning process

Working with parents is increasingly seen as crucial in helping students achieve more. This Unit, through a range of activities focusing on the Maths classroom, aims to develop your knowledge and understanding of the importance of parents’/carers’ engagement and involvement in the schooling of their children. It examines some of the barriers that teachers and schools may face when engaging parents/carers in education and provides examples from Maths classrooms showing ways that may help overcome these.

Unit 22: Establishing an achievement dialogue with parents

Having explored ways that parents could be involved in the education of their children, this Unit extends these ideas further and, through the Case Studies and Activities, provides you, the teacher, with new ideas and the opportunities to try these out. These first steps could make a significant difference to student outcomes and their impact is considered. For example, the use of a range of tools and strategies to maintain a positive and regular contact with parents is examined, as are suggestions for how to engage all parents in their children’s learning.

Units 23–24: Professional development and moving forward (double Unit)

The final Unit in this SBTD II programme provides you with the opportunity to reflect on your own learning through your study of the whole programme. It begins by exploring the nature of professionalism and what is meant by professional learning as a teacher. The second part of the Unit then asks you to reflect on your own learning and what impact the programme has had on you as a Maths teacher and finally asks you to build on what you have learned.
Module 6 Unit 21: Strategies for engaging and working with parents in the learning process

Introduction

Involving parents/carers in school-based activities and engaging them actively in supporting their children’s learning can have a significant impact on schooling. However, this is not always an easy task for teachers of students in the higher grades – particularly where school-home communication is difficult. Nonetheless, since students are more likely to achieve more, attend school regularly, show improved behaviour, and have better social skills when parents are actively involved, it is a goal worth pursuing. This Unit investigates the main reasons why it is important to try to engage parents in their children’s education, and suggests possible ways to overcome barriers that could prevent closer involvement between home and school.

Teacher Development Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you will have:
• developed your knowledge and understanding of the importance of parental engagement and involvement in the schooling of their sons and daughters;
• developed your skills in raising awareness and involving parents/carers in supporting their children's involvement in mathematical activities and projects in schools to enhance learning;
• identified the barriers to engaging parents/carers in the schooling of their children;
• developed strategies for overcoming barriers to parental engagement.

Before you read the rest of this Unit, it is important to reflect on your own attitudes to parents and their involvement in the education of their children. Are they, in your view, a help or a hindrance? Does it matter if they are involved or not? Are their views sought in terms of planning for the year ahead? Do they, or could they, have a role to play in the education of their children or is that the job of the school? What role do you play, as a Maths teacher, in developing relationships with parents and the community in which they live?

The first Activity in this Module asks you to consider different aspects of your relationship with the parents/carers of the students you teach.
Reflection on ways to support parental engagement could be a good starting point for developing constructive relationships.

Activity 54

Look at the questionnaire below. Its purpose is simply to get you thinking about your views, as they stand at the moment, of the role of parents in the schooling of their children. Read it through once before you complete the questions quickly and honestly. Doing this quickly is important because it will be more useful if you are able to record your instinctive response rather than a considered response. Tick or circle all appropriate answers for you in each question.

After you have finished, look at your answers and reflect whether they suggest that you are a positive supporter of parental involvement in school, are more neutral, or negative about parental involvement.

Self-reflection questionnaire

1. For this school year, I know (and have already met):
   10% of the parents
   25% of the parents
   50% of the parents                             of the students I am teaching.
   70% of the parents
   100% of the parents

2. For me, it is:
   very difficult
   difficult                                                   to work with parents.
   easy
   very easy
3. In general, I feel:

- respected
- listened to by parents.
- not respected
- denigrated

4. In my experience, most of the parents in the school I am teaching are:

- very cooperative.
- supportive.
- caring for their children.
- caring for their children, but don’t know how to support them in their education.
- not interested in the life of the school.
- not aware of their sons'/daughters' progress in Maths or other subjects.

5. When I call parents for meetings:

- most of the parents do their best to attend.
- only the parents of the good learners attend.
- most of the parents are not interested in attending.

6. If parents are not attending meetings, I think it is because:

- they are too busy and don't have time.
- they don't understand the importance of education.
- they are not interested in collaborating with the school/teachers.
- they are not educated themselves.
- they don't want to hear bad things about their children.

7. When I call parents in for a meeting, in general I talk about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>their son's/daughter's performance.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their son's/daughter's behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>my teaching approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>my expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ways for parents to support their son/daughter at home.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ways to solve identified issues together.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. I see parents in the community I’m teaching:

- as partners.
- as judges.
- as detractors.
- as opponents.

9. I contact parents in writing or by phone about their sons/daughters:

- often.
- sometimes.
- never.
10. When I contact parents in this way, it is mainly because:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to comment on good behaviour.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to comment on poor behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a suggestion for how they can help their son/daughter with Maths.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I want to highlight academic achievement.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I want to highlight a lack of progress.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

11. During the last three years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have asked parents to prepare material for the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have asked parents to co-facilitate an activity with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have asked parents to do a presentation in my class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Comment

We sometimes feel that school is a place that operates in a parallel world to the world outside. This is certainly the way some young people view schools. They often are surprised to see their Maths teacher shopping or engaged in normal everyday activities! Yet research indicates that one of the significant predictors of a young person’s achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that young person’s family is able to:

- create a home environment that encourages and supports learning;
- express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their son’s/daughter’s achievements and future career;
- become involved in their son’s/daughter’s education at school and in the community.

Out of the three mentioned above, involving parents/carers in education is something that schools and teachers can do something about, and this may impact on the other two.

Why involve parents/carers in education?

Although involving parents/carers can be a challenge, teachers can do a great deal to promote greater parental involvement. One problem for teachers in higher grades may be that they are dealing with adolescents. This can be challenging wherever in the world you teach, but where there is external conflict and uncertainty, as for Palestinians, it can be even more difficult. The role of adolescents in the world seems to be to present an opposing view to that of the establishment. As a result, significant behaviour problems may occur for the first time when students reach the age groups you are teaching sometimes and so communication with parents can seem focused on bad news about behaviour or progress in learning. But research indicates that parents who receive frequent and positive messages about their children from teachers tend
to become more involved in their son's/daughter's education than parents who do not. Research also indicates that many parents respond to encouragement from teachers to share knowledge about their children and to support their learning at home. In predicting whether a parent/carer would be involved in a school, the attitudes and actions of the school towards the parent/carer matter much more than the parent’s income, educational level, race or previous school-volunteering experience.

Despite this, not all schools ask for parental involvement and not all parents participate in school activities even if they are asked – maybe because they are busy or because they do not see the value of being involved. Also, for some parents, particularly if they had a limited education or bad experiences at school, involvement in their son's/daughter's schooling may be intimidating. The same may apply to helping their children at home because of a lack of confidence in or fear of learning. These parents – who are often the hardest to contact and include in any educational partnership between school and home – will need more encouragement to support their son's/daughter's learning. This will require more effort on your part. This Unit explores ways to involve parents in school-based activities and considers some of the barriers to engaging parents/carers in schooling.

There are many different ways for parents to be involved in school-based or school-related activities, and these can help to build relationships of different kinds between school, parents, families and the local community. Such relationships will acknowledge the importance of the shared responsibility towards the education of all students.
Case Study 41

Ghada was a new Maths teacher at Galilee School, Beir Hasan, Beirut, Lebanon. Ghada came to the school – indeed went into teaching – eager to help the students in her Maths classes achieve good academic results, but also to help them develop problem-solving skills. She wanted to teach through a problem-solving approach and show students that Maths is much more than practising textbook exercises.

She wanted to make parents aware of what she was trying to do. She felt that this might not only help allay some of the parents’ concerns about what their children were doing, but that it might enable them to help in showing her students the importance of learning Maths in this way. She thought that, as a starting point, it might be an idea to introduce herself to the parents. Of course this was not something she could do alone and without the approval of the School Principal. Ghada started by talking to her about the school’s relationship with parents and carers. The Principal told her that the school usually calls parents when there are problems, but that few parents respond positively to this and those who do come tend to be aggressive. Apart from calling them to address problems, the school did not have any other contact with parents at all.

Ghada proposed inviting the parents of her Grade 7 and 8 students into school to talk to her about her plans for the upcoming year and to hear about ways they could help their children with Maths at home. The Principal took some time to think about her ideas but then decided to expand this to other subjects in the school. She decided to set up an Open Day to which parents were invited into school to see how the different subjects were taught. A group of teachers were brought together with representatives from the School Parliament to plan the event. The invitation was designed and sent out by the student representatives with a programme of events which included demonstration lessons, discussions run by students about what it was like to learn the various subjects and how they were relevant to the wider world outside school. The involvement of the students in communicating news of the event was crucial. The School Counsellor got involved too, enthused by the reaction of the students. She got a group of interested parents from the community to provide food and some drinks for the event.

In the Maths session, Ghada included some tasks for parents and their children to work on together. One example was, ‘guess my number’. She told parents to ask their child to think of a number within a stated range. The parents then had to find the number by asking questions which could only be answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’. For example:

Child: I am thinking of a number between 1 and 100.
Parent: Is it more than 50?
Child: No.
Parent: Is it an even number?
Child: No.
Parent: Is it more than 20 but less than 40?
Child: Yes.
Parent: Can you reach it by starting at zero and counting by 3s?
Child: Yes.

(At this stage, your child could be thinking of 21, 27, 33, or 39.)
Later in the session, Ghada asked some students to come to the front to tell the assembled parents what they liked about doing Maths in problem-solving classrooms.

Because sometimes I find Maths difficult, I feel really proud of myself when I am able to figure out an equation. I feel even better when I can explain how I did it to my friends!

I really like how Maths lets me focus on something with all my effort – like solving a question in algebra, I can really feel my brain working.

At the end, the parents were asked to provide feedback. Most parents said they had found the session very interesting and that it had raised their awareness of how Maths was taught and how their children learn the subject.

Ten parents came to the Maths part of the event, which was a very good start. Ghada’s relationships with her students improved but, more importantly, the day had shown that parents were interested in becoming involved in the life of the school.

Comment

Ghada wanted to engage parents in what their sons/daughters were learning so they had a better understanding of what they were doing and so they would encourage students to take more interest. She began with a small, interested group of parents, but was sure this would rise as she planned for the next event the following year. She knew positive reports would get around the community and others would be influenced to come next time. She was convinced this would have an impact on the attitude of the adolescents she taught.
Parents are likely to find it interesting and informative to observe a Maths lesson.

The next Activity asks you to begin making contact with parents in some small way.

**Activity 55**

Choose one class you teach, possibly the most challenging class. Think how you could make contact with the parents of the students in this class in a non-threatening way – it’s important that the communication you prepare has a positive message to give about Maths teaching and learning and that it is worth communicating. Parents don’t have a great deal of time and some don’t have a great deal of interest in individual teachers and their subjects, but Maths could be immensely important in the lives of these young Palestinian students. Do not try to be too ambitious, but aim for something you feel comfortable with.

Here are a couple of examples of things you could do, or you may have your own idea of how to start.

1. You might want to draft a letter to the parents introducing yourself to them and explaining briefly what your expectations of the students are and how you see your role in teaching them. You might explain clearly what you will be teaching the students in the forthcoming semester. You could also highlight the areas that students often find difficult and tell the parents what they could do if this happens. (This may mean only simple things, such as encouraging the students to do their homework, noting any difficulties they have and reminding them to ask for help at school.)

2. You could ask parents to come in to watch small presentations by the class at the end of the school session. When they come in, greet them and thank them for coming, explaining how much the students appreciate it and how much it helps to motivate them.
Parents and the wider community are the first educators of students. They influence the behaviour, knowledge and ways of thinking of students throughout their lives. So it is important for you, as a teacher, to consider them as an important resource and partner in the young people’s education.

Barriers to parental involvement

Most parents care a great deal about their children, but many may lack understanding of the importance of their own role in the learning process, both at home and within the school. Sometimes the challenges parents face in their day-to-day lives make it more difficult for them to engage with the school.

Parents’/carers’ feelings of responsibility towards their child’s schooling and the school may vary. If, for example, parents had a bad experience at school themselves, they are less likely to want to come to school and be involved. And sometimes schools and teachers see parents as a nuisance and do not feel they should be involved in what happens in the classroom. Other barriers to parents taking an interest or participating more in school life are varied – as indeed is the parental body. These barriers could include:

- time constraints due to work or other responsibilities;
- lack of trust in or negative feelings towards teachers arising from bad personal experiences;
- lack of understanding of the school system and the jargon often used by schools;
- social problems arising from such issues as divorce;
- feelings of inferiority or inhibition;
- gender issues such as male and female segregation and division of roles;
- unreasonable expectations about what the school can and cannot do;
- mistrust arising from invitations to attend meetings for negative reasons such as their child’s bad behaviour;
- low educational levels, so they feel they have nothing to offer;
- illiteracy, so they cannot read any communication or reports about their child;
- not feeling welcome in school.

There are also barriers that schools themselves may put up to discourage parental engagement. These include:

- teachers’ and School Principal’s attitudes to parental engagement, for example seeing involving parents as a chore rather than a benefit that makes their work easier and raises achievement;
- lack of time from pressure of work and large classes (full timetables, double sessions, pressures due to double- or triple-shift schools and lots of marking);
- limited time available for each set of parents due to large classes.
Working to overcome these barriers can take time. However, recent research in many countries has suggested that a good starting point is to strengthen communication between the school, parents and family. You began that process when you carried out Activity 55, exchanging information about the school and the teaching of Maths. The language you use is critical if it is to motivate parents and make them feel confident about coming into school. Make sure any letter you send home is short and clear.

Making parents/carers feel welcome

The attitude of the school and staff is crucial to establishing good relations with parents/carers. Everyone who works in the school should agree that the parents and community are important and they need to work collectively to improve the atmosphere in school and welcome all visitors. Too often, parents do not feel welcome in school. So, how do you start to change this?

One place to start is to make the school entrance pleasant, clean and welcoming.

An attractive school entrance says a lot about the ethos of the school and its attitude towards visitors.

There could be students’ work or posters illustrating modern ways of teaching and learning different subjects on display, chairs for parents to sit and wait, clear signposting about where the classrooms or school offices are. Ensure that everybody who works in the school is welcoming and asks any visitor if they can help. First impressions are very important and these often set the tone for any meetings, so it is wise for the staff as a whole to look at the main school entrance and think how it can be enhanced.

Doing some or all of the following could extend a welcoming and friendly climate in school:
• Invite parents more frequently to be involved in their children’s schooling.
• Improve parents’ perceptions of being welcome at the school, through having
open days and communicating positively with parents (perhaps through a regular newsletter).

- Encourage students to welcome visitors to the school – perhaps the school parliament could take responsibility for this so that there is a regular programme of input exploring the expertise you have in your community.
- Have social events for the parents and community.

Breaking patterns – such as parents only ever coming in to complain – is easier if the whole school is committed to the change and agrees to participate fully on all levels. Samira, in the Case Study you are about to read, made links with her students’ parents in a different way.

**Case Study 42**

Maths teacher Samira was teaching at Banat Askar UNRWA School, Askar Camp, Nablus, West Bank, and very much believed that parents could contribute to the academic achievement of her students. However, she had experienced difficulty in the past in getting many of the parents of her classes to come into school to discuss their children’s progress. Samira was unsure why this was the case, but knew she had to try to get closer to the parents of her students. She felt this would help progress but also would help her to get to know the students better. She had previously written in students’ diaries, but this had usually been when there was a problem such as when they had not completed homework in a satisfactory manner. Some parents signed the diaries to show they had read the message, but she wanted to find another way to communicate positive messages.

Then one day she was talking to one of the English teachers who said that she had just taught a very successful lesson in which she got students to write imaginary holiday postcards to their friends in order to get them dreaming of happy times. Samira had a brainwave. When she had something good to say about a student she would write a short message to the parents on a blank piece of card the same size as a postcard. The postcard format was useful in that messages could be brief and were easy to read.

She had a very successful lesson the next week with her Grade 10 class. In particular, a group of three girls had worked together to solve a number of difficult problems on trigonometry and had then taken time to help other students in the class. She wrote a postcard to the three sets of parents:

Dear Mr and Mrs Amenah:

I am Hannan’s Maths teacher. I just wanted to let you know that today she worked very well in a lesson on trigonometry. She solved a number of difficult problems and then spent time helping other students who were finding the work difficult. I was delighted with her work and her attitude in this class.

Best wishes

Mrs Kawash
Two days later, Samira met two of the girls in the corridor, who ran up to her and told her how pleased the parents were to receive such an unexpected positive message from school. She decided to continue with the idea whenever she was impressed with a student’s work. Of course, the students heard all about it and began to change their attitude towards her. They were eager to impress but they knew she would only write a postcard to their parents for exceptional work or effort. This became a part of Samira’s regular practice.

**Comment**

Parental involvement will not happen overnight, and Samira realised this. But she knew that people thrive when they are appreciated and noticed. Parents began to write back to her occasionally and gradually she felt that the barriers which had been there between school and home were breaking down. It was a small but sure step she had taken.

![Image](image_url)

*A positive message to parents can help them feel connected to the school and the teacher.*

**Inviting parents in to share their experience**

Another way to involve parents and local community in the life of the school is to invite into school those who are experts in their own field or have jobs that are interesting and related to the Maths curriculum. They can share their experience with students of any age.

The next Activity asks you to try inviting a parent in to talk to, or work with, a class you teach in Maths.
Activity 56

Among the parents or the wider community there may be someone who has a job that is related to an area of the Maths curriculum, for example in accountancy, architecture, business or engineering. Alternatively, there might be someone who has a keen interest in a topic such as mathematical games or probability.

Once you have identified someone who would be willing to do this, you will need to inform your School Principal about your plan. You will then need to plan their visit. Ideally you would hold a joint planning session with the person, but if this is not possible, you will need to brief them carefully and think about the activities you will use to build on this experience. Tell the parent/community member that the students will also prepare questions to ask them at the end of the session. Agree to share these with the guest if they require this – it is not an easy task to address a class of adolescents and you want the guest to feel confident and welcome.

Agree a date and time, and explain that two students will meet the visitor when they arrive and show them to the classroom. Make sure you select another two students to prepare to thank the visitor at the end.

Prepare your students for the visit and help them prepare questions relevant to the speaker. Select the two students to meet and greet the visitor on the day. Make sure the classroom is organised in the best possible way for what is to happen, for example if the visitor wishes to display pictures or charts, make sure there is space on the walls and appropriate adhesive. Seat the students in an appropriate way, for example in groups if they are going to do practical activities or in a horseshoe shape if they are to listen and interact.

You will act as the facilitator of the session and help the visitor if they are a little nervous or shy. Do all you can to make sure that everybody enjoys the session.

After the session, make sure the students thank the visitor. If possible, get some feedback from the visitor. Ask them what they thought of the experience and how you could make it better for visitors to come into school like this.

Plan to evaluate the visit with the class after the visitor has left:
- Did your students enjoy the visit?
- What did they learn? How do you know this?
- How can you use what they have learned in your topic?

Write a short reflection on what happened in your Programme Notebook. Did the visit match your expectations, and what impact did it have on the students’ learning? How well did you think the session went? Why do you say this? What would you change next time?
Comment

Having a visitor in school will create a great deal of excitement with the students and, as such, should motivate them. However, it is also important not to overdo the number of visitors, as – like all things – this approach will lose its appeal if it is overused. What it does remind us, is the importance of using a variety of ways of working to stimulate students’ interest and learning.

Experts from the community who have relevant expertise can motivate students and help in showing that Maths is a subject that goes beyond the classroom.

Summary

The Case Studies and Activities in this Unit illustrate a range of ways that you, as a Maths teacher, could employ to encourage more active involvement of parents and the local community into the life of the school. You may also have thought about other ways that the school can involve parents and community members – perhaps by encouraging them to do volunteer work, such as cleaning the playground or the mosque, organising some key local festivities together or involving them in preparing teaching aids or helping with co-curricular activities such as a Maths club.

Most parents and carers have the same priorities for their child’s education, namely:
- how well their child is being supported at school in terms of their general welfare;
- how well their child is learning;
- what their child is learning;
- how their child is being taught.

As discussed earlier, the first step in improving communication with your students’ families is to determine exactly how to communicate with them. The first and most simple way to do this is to ask parents to let you know the most convenient way to contact them and to proceed from there.
There are two types of communication. One-way communication, when the communication is sent out, has a value, but no reply or response is expected. Two-way communication, where messages and responses are expected from both sides, is more fruitful. It is the latter that you are trying to develop, and you can start by making the first move and introducing yourself. It will take time to establish a real partnership and interaction, but it is well worth the effort.
Module 6 Unit 22: Establishing an achievement dialogue with parents

Introduction

The first Unit of this Module explored ways that parents and the local community could be involved in the life of the school to enhance the education of the students.

This Unit extends this idea so that together with parents and the local community you can help students achieve their educational potential. Parents have a great influence on the achievement of young people through supporting their learning at home and their activities in school, and ensuring links between the two. You may have had a student who did not seem happy or was not working well in your Maths lessons, yet you knew they could do better, if only you could have talked to the parents to see how you could help in school. You may also have faced many challenges in trying to meet some parents to discuss ways of helping and supporting such a student. In order to fully support the students you teach, it is crucial to open up a constructive dialogue between all parties, including the students themselves.

Building a two-way relationship with parents, one that is based on mutual trust, respect and commitment to improving learning outcomes, is not easy and takes time to establish. But it is worth opening up this dialogue: research has shown that students whose parents play an active part in their schooling make better progress.

What is dialogue?

What do we mean here when we use the word ‘dialogue’? The dictionary suggests dialogue is a conversation between two or more people, but others have expanded this notion. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian education specialist, claimed that dialogue is a type of pedagogy (Freire, 1983). He believed that dialogued communication – talking between parents and teachers and between teachers and students – allows students, parents and teachers to learn from one another.

Dialogued communication is not only about deepening understanding, it is also about making positive changes in the world: to make it better. Freire’s idea is that ‘the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is taught in dialogue with the [parents], who in turn while being taught also [teach]’ (Freire, 1983, p. 67).

The emphasis here is on both sides learning from each other, through interacting and listening.

To achieve such a relationship with your students’ parents will take time, sensitivity and professionalism. Dialogue is not about judging, weighing, or making decisions; it is about understanding and learning. Dialogue between people helps to dispel stereotypes, builds trust, and enables people to be open to other perspectives that may be very different from their own. Key to the success of such an approach is being clear about what you are trying to achieve for the students. This Unit is focused on you, the teacher, trying to help parents develop their children’s understanding of the
importance of education and their role in this process. This includes taking an interest in their schooling, helping with homework, keeping track of their progress and being constructive when their son or daughter experiences difficulties with a subject or topic even though they may not have the subject knowledge. This Unit explores ways to develop a positive and active partnership with parents.

Establishing a dialogue is a process, so it is important to be aware of some of the common obstacles to the success of the process. These include fear, the display or exercise of power, mistrust, distractions, background, culture differences, and poor communication. Given, as we said in Unit 21, that some teachers may have negative perceptions of parental involvement and some parents may be intimidated by school or believe that teachers do not really care about their students, it is important to work sensitively. Understanding all these dimensions is crucial to establishing a successful dialogue, but this should not deter you from making a start to challenge and change such perceptions.

Establishing a dialogue between teachers, students and parents is critical for building trust and understanding.

Teacher Development Outcomes

By the end of this Unit, you will have:
- developed your knowledge and understanding of the importance of establishing effective communication between you and parents/carers about their children’s learning;
- identified and begun to use a range of strategies to maintain a positive and regular dialogue with parents about their children’s progress and achievements;
- developed the ability to promote effective cooperation among parents, for example through group work or parents’ councils.
This Unit looks at ways of working together with parents specifically to support their children’s learning. The first Case Study in this Unit explores how one teacher began the process of establishing a dialogue with the parents of the students in her class. The dialogue, which can take many forms, should take account of the family situation and the young person’s personality and ability. Parents can be your most powerful and valuable allies, as nearly all parents are interested in their children’s progress, even if the pressures of just living make it hard to think and act in the best interests of their children’s education. Read what Nisreen did.

Case Study 43

Nisreen was teaching Maths in Shu’afat Preparatory School for Girls in the West Bank. After reading about raising achievement in schools in other countries, Nisreen began to understand that there was a great need to establish and sustain communication with families for the sake of the students’ overall achievement.

At the start of the year, Nisreen was concerned that some students were not in the habit of doing and hand ing in homework. This had been a challenge the year before, but no amount of reminding or reprimanding had made any difference. She had tried to rethink her approach to homework setting so that it always built on the lesson, was as interesting as she could make it and sometimes included researching on the internet. The response from students improved but not all students had responded. She decided to approach the problem this year by trying to get the parents involved—maybe they could make the students see the point of doing homework. She began to think about ways of setting up regular communication with individual parents that would enable her to work with them to support the students’ learning.

First, she thought about making regular phone calls to each parent, but she realised that this would be impossible to sustain in terms of time and cost. She also realised that establishing such communication habits with older students might be more difficult than beginning with classes new to her.

Her idea was to set up a system whereby she gave all of her new Grade 7 students a small notebook—a ‘homework diary’. She would write to their parents to tell them that the students were to use this book to record the homework she set. More importantly, in terms of setting up a communications link, she asked the parents to sign the homework diary to say that their daughter had completed the homework. In this way she could be sure that, if she wrote in the homework diary—positive comments, for example about their work and progress—the parents would read it. Her hope was that they would also write messages to her.

Nisreen sent out a letter explaining her plans to all of the parents of her Grade 7 students. Then, on the first day of using the notebook system, she gave the students an outline of the homework, which they copied into their notebooks. She explained that she had written to their parents to ask them to sign the diary to signal that they had seen the students’ completed homework. She explained that on some occasions, she would also use the notebook to write a comment about good work or about something that was concerning her about their Maths.
Progress was slow at first and she devoted much time to checking for signatures in the homework diaries. But it very gradually took off. She encouraged parents to write back their own comments and questions. Sometimes parents asked simple questions about when work had to be completed and sometimes they just wrote a simple thank you, but Nisreen felt this was an important step. She would reply to the parents’ comments as quickly as she could in the homework diary – these were very short notes which usually took a matter of seconds to write.

Nisreen found that the more she used the homework diaries the easier and quicker it became, and soon she was able to write briefly, but sensitively, about different matters. Most parents appreciated the information and, even if they did not comment much, if at all, some of the students reported positively how much their parents liked the system of communication. By the third semester, she felt that she had made good contact with over three-quarters of the parents and even the most reluctant ones did at least occasionally read the information.

Dear Mrs Kabani

I just wanted to let you know that Yasmeen participated particularly well in her Maths lesson today. She was very proactive in the group discussion and shared various ways to solve the problems. I’m delighted with the effort she is putting in at the moment.

Mrs Kamal

A student notebook with a message from a teacher to the student’s parent.

Comment

The hardest part of the task of involving parents is taking that first step and then persevering in the early stages if only a small number of people respond and participate. The benefits will be great if you persist, but do be open to changing and modifying how you communicate so that more constructive communication or dialogue is achieved.
Building constructive and effective communication with parents is a crucial part of positive parental involvement.

The first Activity of this Unit asks you to take that first step, or – if you are already communicating with parents and carers – to build on what you already do and develop a more meaningful dialogue.

Activity 57

First, make notes in your Programme Notebook on what you know in relation to two particular students you have concerns about, in terms of how:

• the family do or do not support the child at home;
• you and the school do or do not involve the parents in school in any way.

Think of reasons why these parents have different levels of involvement in school activities and engagement in their son’s/daughter’s schooling.

Now devise an activity that will involve all the students doing some research and work at home, hopefully with the help of their parents or the wider family and community. Getting the parents of older students involved in school when they are not in the habit is difficult. It is a long-term strategy and a whole-school strategy so it may be wise to begin with a Grade 7 or 8 class you teach. It might be an idea to ask the School Principal’s permission to write to parents or send a SMS message to announce that you are working on a particular Maths project with a particular class and would appreciate their contribution and help. This will give the idea, and indeed the specific project, status and may encourage the parents to contribute by supporting their son or daughter. It might also be an idea to do this with another Maths teacher also studying SBTD II.

There are many projects you could set up to start this communication strategy. One example might be to set a task involving looking at game strategy. The task
would be to play a game repeatedly with their parents until both student and parent had a good idea of how to win. They would discuss their strategy and plan together a presentation that the student can give back in class. They would describe the game and how to play it, then challenge other students in the class to play against them. They should always be able to win, because of their superior understanding of the strategy. It would best if students use a simple strategy game that they already played at home, but to be sure that everyone had some ideas here are some games that would work well:

1. ‘20’. Two players take turns. The first player says a number 1, 2 or 3. The second player then adds 1, 2 or 3 to the number said and says the result. The first player then does the same and play continues. The winner is the player who is able to say ‘20’. For example:
   - Player 1: 2
   - Player 2: 5
   - Player 1: 8
   - Player 2: 11
   - Player 1: 12
   - Player 2: 14
   - Player 1: 16
   - Player 2: 17
   - Player 1: 20
   - Player 1 wins.

2. ‘Nim’. Takes three handfuls of pebbles and place them in three separate piles. (It doesn't matter how many are in each pile.) Players take turns. Each player can take as many pebbles as they like away from any one pile, but they must take at least one. The winner is the player to take the last pebble. For example: Player 1 takes all the pebbles from pile 1. Player 2 takes all but one pebble from pile 2. Player 1 takes all but one pebble from pile 3. Player 2 must take one of the remaining pebbles e.g. from pile 2. So, Player 1 takes the last pebble which is in pile 3 and wins.

But remember that your aim is to get a response from the two students you have concerns about. So make sure you check that the letter/message has been received and try to talk to the students to see how they are progressing. Help the students to succeed by providing guidance on describing their strategy and suggest they talk it through at home. You may not succeed with these parents, but you will with some. The main thing is that you do not give up. It is not easy to get busy, nervous or uninterested parents involved in school when there is no history of involvement, but if you do succeed it may well be the catalyst to helping these two students to make better progress.

Finally, in your Programme Notebook, reflect on where you think the approach worked well and what could be improved, particularly in terms of making contact with parents of students for whom you have concerns. Think also which other students could benefit from this intervention. Note down how you might do this.
Building good working relationships takes time, patience and effort and is not easy for individual teachers in higher grades to do. Working with a group of colleagues might encourage greater success. You need a focus – a good activity that definitely needs the support of parents (something that only they have the information for or expertise to do). It is best to start with small steps. Often it is easiest to talk first to the whole group of parents you are trying to work with to give them all a common message about what you are doing and why. Unlike in lower grades (where regular contact with parents is more normal), bringing parents together in higher grades is a challenge, so think of using technology to help where you can – text messages, Facebook, Twitter or whatever is most used by adults in your area.

Putting in place a regular system for keeping parents informed about what’s going on in school is a first step, but is a one-way form of communication. It could, however, be one strand of more rewarding two-way communication or dialogue. Creating opportunities for teachers and parents to exchange information, share concerns and work out strategies to help students, is an important element of student support.

The benefits of dialogue

An open, regular and positive dialogue with parents/carers can:

- contribute to improving parents’ engagement in their children’s learning at school and at home;
- develop parents’ understanding of the different but equal roles of both parties in their children’s education;
- help you to have more information about the family context of your students and thus to better understand strengths, weaknesses and needs;
- have a positive impact on students’ academic achievement and behaviour.

Planning a range of dialogues with parents is an important element of student support.
If you plan carefully to institute such approaches, you will develop a range of dialogues with parents. Not all parents will be able – or want – to give great amounts of time to helping in school, but most parents want to support their child’s education at home at least.

**Making contact with hard-to-reach parents**

However, there will always be hard-to-reach parents. These parents may never respond to any communication, may resent any intrusion, avoid contact and even be aggressive. How do you bring them into the circle of support for their children’s learning in school and home in a way that they are happy with? It is important not to give up, but seek the support and help of your School Principal and colleagues, who may have had similar experiences and can share what they learned with you. More often than not, making individual contact with those parents who are difficult to encourage to come to meetings is the only way forward, as you will see in the next Case Study. The teacher in this case had a positive response, but if you are not so fortunate, do not give up. Think of different ways you can send supportive messages.

Now read how one Maths teacher tackled a particular problem.

**Case Study 44**

Warda was teaching in al-Maghazi Preparatory Girls School in Gaza. She was concerned about one girl in her Grade 7 Maths class, Salma, as she was not progressing as well as expected.

Warda had never met any member of Salma’s family, as her parents did not attend the parents’ meeting earlier in the year. This was a new event that the School Principal had introduced and took place at the end of the first six weeks of the new school year. It was a time for parents to hear how their child was progressing and find out how they could help support students’ academic work. Parents also had the opportunity to ask questions and seek support from teachers. The School Principal organised for the teachers to be in subject areas and parents from different year groups came at set times to see their child’s subject teachers, in turn, for a few minutes at a time.

Warda asked a colleague who had taught Salma’s sister, Ryhah, whether he had the same problem seeing the parents. Together the teachers discussed the problem and remembered that they had met the parents at school during Ryhah’s graduation last year. Both teachers remembered the parents appearing shy and reserved, and looking uncomfortable. After much discussion about what to do, it was agreed with the School Principal that they would hold a celebration at the end of the next semester and make awards to different year groups. A letter was sent home to invite the parents to school and told them of the awards being given out, which included one to Salma for her work in Art.

As part of this whole school celebration, Warda organised for her Grade 7 Maths class to present some of their recent work in Maths to parents at the event. They had been studying a unit on rational and irrational numbers. Warda wanted the students to do a role play showing their understanding of the numbers. Prior to introducing the role play, she first did an activity with the students. Warda randomly handed out one
rational or irrational number card to each student, and asked each of them individually to imagine their position on a number line.

Next Warda introduced a giant number line (she had created one by drawing on a big piece of paper and laying it on the classroom floor) and told the class that they would be ordering themselves along the number line according to the number they had been given, from least value number to greatest value number.

The students began arranging themselves on the number line, discussing and comparing their numbers each time to determine where they should stand. When all students were certain that they had reached the correct order, Warda asked them to separate and to make two separate lines, one line for rational, and one for irrational numbers.

Later Warda asked her students to consider how they would demonstrate and explain the concept of rational and irrational numbers to a group of parents who would be visiting. The class prepared a demonstration and explanations for parents so that they could show a comparison of rational and irrational numbers on a number line, and constructing two number lines.

The teachers were delighted when Salma’s mother turned up to the celebration and sat at the back, smiling as Salma performed to demonstrate irrational and rational numbers with her friends and received her award. As refreshments were being served at the end, Warda made sure that she spoke first to Salma’s mother. She said how motivated Salma had been because she knew that parents were to be invited in for the celebration. Then Warda very sensitively explained how she felt that Salma was not doing as well as she could in Maths and asked the mother if there were any problems that might affect Salma. She spoke about how, perhaps with a little help from both her parents and school, she could progress faster. Salma’s mother said that Salma had lots of chores to do at home and she did not think about homework for her but made sure her son did his homework. Warda suggested possible strategies, such as setting a time for Salma to do her chores and time for her homework, and then asked Salma to join them as they explored the best way forward.

It was agreed that Salma would go home after school and do her chores before she sat down to do her homework. Salma usually helped to make the meal too, but it was agreed that in future she would be excused this during school days and instead would wash the dishes after the meal. Salma was to tell Warda if this was working and if not they would work out another plan.

Warda helped Salma in class and was careful about sending home the relevant information with her homework. Over the next few weeks, she saw a change in Salma’s attitude to her work. She seemed more confident. A few weeks later, when the semester school report was sent, Warda received it back signed. Salma’s mother had also written on it how much happier Salma was about going to school. Warda was even more surprised and delighted when her mother came a few months later to attend a presentation and puppet show written and organised by Salma’s Grade 7 Maths class. The first steps towards real involvement had been made!
Comment

Warda’s first steps to helping Salma were slow, and there were times when it seemed as though little or no progress was being made. However, with tactful discussion, a way forward was devised together. Warda was lucky because Salma’s mother attended the celebration. If she had not attended, what do you think Warda could have done to make face-to-face contact? Perhaps she could have made a visit home to talk or maybe she could have involved her School Principal to intervene. While it is disappointing if invitations to visit the school or attend a meeting are not taken up, it is best not to be downhearted, but to think creatively. Try to involve parents first in general events in school before talking more about their own son’s/daughter’s progress.

School events can help develop parental engagement in school life.

The next Activity explores the steps you might take to develop a dialogue about achievement and progress with a student’s parents.

Activity 58

Choose a class you have a particular concern about. Think about the students in this class. Who is not progressing as well as they should and who could be excelling, given what you know about their ability and aptitude?

To augment your knowledge about these students you may choose to give them a short questionnaire about their attitudes to Maths. The box below gives examples of the sort of questions you might ask:

- What is your first or strongest memory of learning or doing Maths?
- Have you ever been embarrassed or especially proud of your mathematical ability?
- Do you like/dislike all areas of Maths equally? If not, which areas do you like/dislike the most? Why?
Who or what influenced (either positively or negatively) your feelings about Maths?

How do you feel about the Maths lessons you had last week?

How do you think your attitude about Maths has affected your Maths learning?

Based upon the students’ responses, your records and observations, make a list of the students whose progress and/or attitude causes you concern. For each student, list the areas of particular concern. Next, list possible ways to help the student.

Now select one student and work through the rest of this Activity, focusing on their particular needs.

Think about how the parents might be able to help their son or daughter with their studies.

Think about the kind of relationship and dialogue you have with this student’s parents, if any. Is it positive and constructive? If not, why not?

Reflect on what you could do to improve the dialogue. Talk with colleagues about possible strategies you could use. Plan what you will do first of all to improve the situation. Will it be a phone call, a letter or a meeting in school?

Think carefully about the purpose of any meeting with the parents of this student. If you are trying to help the young person engage more with their learning and achieve more, be clear where you are going to start and what steps you could take together. Try to be positive as you talk with the parents about the progress and achievements of their son/daughter.

Think carefully about what you actually want to say to the parents. Use language that they will understand and explain any terms they may not be familiar with.

What other support could you offer to the parents and student?

Having planned carefully what you want to do, contact the parent in the easiest way and agree a time and place to meet for the first time to discuss the student’s achievements and ways forward.

After the meeting with the parents, make notes in your Programme Notebook about what happened and the action agreed to help the young person progress. Put these in your records. Make sure you follow up the meeting and implement any decisions as quickly as possible and support the student as much as you can. Send home words of praise and encouragement whenever you see an improvement in attention and motivation and progress in Maths.

Finally, in your Programme Notebook, write your own reflection on how well the meeting went, and what you could do to make your meetings with parents even more effective.
Comment

Just sharing small successes about their sons or daughters can change the perception of parents towards school and improve overall communication with the family. Activity 58 gives you the opportunity to tell the parents what their child can do well and then you can suggest how, with some support from them, their child can progress further and faster. Always emphasise how you would like to work with parents in real partnership so that each of you is working towards the same end.

Summary

Developing good relationships with parents/carers and the local community is important, but helping parents understand the vital role that they play in students’ success at school is demanding and needs to be sensitively handled. Most parents will have the same common aims as you, but perhaps do not realise what the impact of working together can have on school achievement. You are trying to work together with parents to:

• develop a good model of positive social and educational values related to personal fulfilment and good citizenship;
• help all students’ understanding of the importance of education and being an independent learner;
• celebrate progress and achievements;
• understand the need to support the young person if they are not doing well, and encourage the young person, no matter how small their achievement;
• show interest in the young person’s learning and give time on a regular basis at home to assist with homework.

The rewards for successful partnerships with parents/carers are profound. Students do better, parents understand more and have a better relationship with school, and schools that actively involve parents and the community will benefit from that support and tend to establish a better reputation in the community.
Module 6 Units 23–24: Professional development and moving forward

Introduction

Congratulations! You have now completed 22 Units of the SBTD II programme, which has introduced you to current thinking about teaching and learning, helped you to develop your own teaching and learning practices in school and supported you in trying out some of these ideas in your classroom. We hope that you have enjoyed the programme and that you feel it has helped you develop and extend your skills in planning and using interactive teaching and learning strategies to the benefit of all your students. The undertaking of professional development such as this will have enhanced your work as a teacher so that you can better meet the needs of all the students you teach. Hopefully, it has also reinvigorated your love of teaching and inspired you to explore ways to engage your students to realise their full potential.

This last double Unit reflects on the overall impact of this SBTD II programme on your teaching and on your continuing development as a teaching professional. The Unit begins by exploring what it means to be professional and the changing nature of professionalism within teaching. Secondly, it asks you to reflect on what you have learned and the impact of this learning both on you as a Maths teacher and on your students. Finally, it asks you to think about and begin to plan your continuing professional development needs.

Teacher Development Outcomes

By the end of this double Unit, you will have developed your knowledge, understanding and skills with regard to:

- what it means to be professional;
- reflecting on your own professional development;
- identifying your continuing professional development goals.

What does it mean to be professional?

People often say that someone is ‘very professional’, or ‘they are a hard-working professional’. What do they mean by this? Many would say it implies a person who is organised, efficient, knowledgeable, and works well with other people. Defining professionalism is not easy, but we recognise it when we see it. For example, we recognise that a nurse, bank clerk, teacher or doctor is acting professionally when they provide a service that enables their customer, student or patient to achieve an outcome that is most appropriate for them.

Sometimes, being professional is confused with being a member of a profession. Belonging to a profession means belonging to an occupation that requires specialist training with regard to knowledge and ways of working that inform the profession and give the profession its status and ethos. Such professions are often controlled by a Code of Conduct that regulates the way that people behave. The Code details the duties and standards of behaviour that are expected of all who belong to each profession. In many countries teaching is one such
profession that has a Code that details the duties of the teacher and the expected standards of behaviour it expects teachers to abide by. (Please note this is not to be confused with the code of conduct UNRWA recommends that schools set up for the conduct of students.) As members of the teaching profession, teachers accept these expectations and standards as core to their ways of working and behaving while working.

But simply having the Code does not mean that all teachers will follow it or operate and behave professionally – although it is expected that they will. To be a teacher you have to comply with the Code and to be professional you have to work by the Code to the best of your ability, acknowledging the importance of all the roles and responsibilities a job such as teaching demands of you. The Code of Conduct does not specify the detail of methods that a teacher should use, as these are dynamic and change according to students’ different needs, and as research informs practice about how students learn best. But the Code does highlight the teacher’s responsibility to conduct themselves in a manner fitting to their post, to working professionally and to the best of their ability to meet the learning needs of their students.

This responsibility is highlighted in the UNESCO recommendations on the status of teachers: ‘all teachers should seek to achieve the highest possible standards in all their professional work’. This means keeping up to date with current research and developing and extending their range of skills, strategies and understanding of the different ways of working to enhance the learning of all students. This is the professional behaviour expected of teachers. The term ‘professional’ implies that individuals are:

- accountable for what they do;
- honest, open and caring;
- competent, efficient and effective;
- able to relate well to others;
- thorough, flexible and respectful;
- knowledgeable and understanding about teaching and learning and what they do and why.

The quality of interactions between adults and students, and adults and adults in the workplace is at the heart of good professional practice. Through such interactions it is possible for you as a teacher to reflect and learn more about different ways of working that will enhance the learning of all students. This SBTD II programme has placed ‘working with others’ as one of its main aims and has suggested in many Activities in the Modules and Units sharing ideas and experiences with colleagues. We see such ‘professional learning’ as central to your professional working life.
Quality interactions enable you to reflect and learn more about different ways of working that will enhance the learning of all students.

Now read the next Case Study, which shows two Maths teachers exploring ways of working within their classrooms and reflecting on their learning together.

Case Study 45

Raghda was in her seventh year of teaching and had a Grade Nine class who had always found working on algebra difficult. If she tried to get the class to do word problems on solving equations, they lacked confidence and would easily give up. She felt she had not managed to overcome their fear of failure or to find ways of helping them to solve this type of problem. She shared her concerns with Hasana, a colleague in the Maths department who was also completing the SBTD II programme.

Raghda had always taught how to solve simultaneous equations by setting out a method for the students to follow. Inspired by the SBTD II programme contents on approaching problems through storytelling and problem-solving, Raghda and Hasana had been discussing how they might encourage the students to use problem-solving skills to comprehend and solve word problems on equations. They both felt that an active approach which required students to be creative and use their powers of exploration and investigation might help to overcome some of their difficulties in this area. Together they devised a series of tasks around familiar and interesting situations, along with visual images, to capture students' interest in solving a problem, but they decided to take slightly different approaches, to observe each other's lessons and to compare the results.
The first problem they gave their students was as follows:

On a busy day, a shopkeeper selling only buckets and spades lost track of how many items he had sold. He remembered that he had sold 40 items in total and his takings for the day was 224 Dinar.

Raghda discussed this problem with the whole class, eliciting answers to her questions:
Which items was the shopkeeper selling and how much did they cost?
• We don’t know how many he sold, so we will need a variable name for each. Let’s call the number of spades ‘s’ and the number of buckets ‘b’.
• We know how many items he sold in total. Make an equation with ‘b’ and ‘s’ using that information. (Raghda then gave the class one minute to discuss this in pairs before asking for an answer).
• We know how much money he took in total. Make an equation with ‘b’ and ‘s’ using that information … remember how much each one costs. (Again Raghda gave the class thinking time before asking for a response).

At this stage Raghda had written the two simultaneous equations on the board:

\[ b + s = 40 \]
\[ 5b + 7s = 224 \]

She then gave the class 5 minutes to work in pairs and find a solution, before letting one pair share their solution and method with the class.

Hasana’s approach was to give them the same problem with the accompanying questions on a worksheet. She divided the class into groups of three or four and asked them to discuss the questions on the worksheet. As Hasana circulated, she used questions to prompt the students’ thinking. After ten minutes, she asked groups to share their ideas with the rest of the class. She found that while some groups had made little progress, two groups had managed to solve the problem and were able to explain their thinking to the rest of the class.
Having used different approaches to start the lesson, both Raghda and Hasana both gave their class some more problems to solve in pairs. These problems all used real-life situations and were accompanied by pictures. When pairs had solved the problems, the teachers asked individuals to devise their own illustrated problems and to swap them with their partners.

When they discussed the two lessons, both teachers agreed that using real-life situations along with supporting images/pictures and allowing students to work cooperatively had been a success. Hasana was pleased that two groups had solved the problem independently, but Raghda was concerned that the others had not. So, Hasana reviewed the wording of the questions on her worksheet and thought again about the way that she prompted students to support them. She devised a key bridging question: ‘How much money would I take if I had sold just 4 spades and how could I write that in algebra (4s=28)?’ Raghda was pleased that all students had seen a complete method and participated in it. However, Hasana wondered if all of the students had been able to solve the simultaneous equations given that only one pair had presented. Raghda decided that next time, she would make sure to quickly get round the class while all the pairs were working on the solution, so that she could identify pairs who were not successful and come back to work with them later.

**Comment**

Whatever you think about the two approaches and the conclusions that Raghda and Hasana drew from the two lessons, the two colleagues had been engaged in ‘professional learning’. They had carried out a small-scale piece of classroom research with the aim of directly benefiting their students (this is sometimes called action research). Through their evaluation of the two lessons, they demonstrated their ability to learn based on what was actually happening in their classrooms.
Think about your teaching before SBTD II:
• What tasks did you do regularly?
• What knowledge and skills did you draw upon to help you carry out your work?
• How did you keep abreast of new education policies and practice?
• How did you resolve any teaching and learning problems or dilemmas you encountered?
• Who did you talk to about your Maths teaching approaches?

Use your Programme Notebook to note down your responses to what you did before this SBTD II programme.

Then consider each question again and think of new ways of supporting and developing your own teaching that you have been introduced to through studying this programme. Consider how these new ways of working have helped you to work differently. The list below is a summary of the key approaches that you might think of:
• trying new activities and strategies in the classroom;
• reading about research;
• reading material from books and online to add to your ‘professional tool kit’;
• reading or studying Case Studies;
• sharing ideas with colleagues;
• reflecting on your practice;
• interacting with parents and students;
• observing and commenting on your practice;
• gathering evidence of the impact of your practice on your students’ learning to evaluate and review.

In your Programme Notebook, list those approaches that you feel have had most impact on you. For each approach, write your own reflections on the changes that have occurred in your teaching and on your role as a teacher as a result of trying these new ideas.

The next Activity asks you to reflect on your practice before you started studying the SBTD II programme. It also asks you about the different interactions and activities that you have engaged in while studying the programme and which you have found most helpful in thinking differently about your own teaching and learning.

Activity 59

Comment

There are many ways of extending your professional learning, and the SBTD II programme has used several different approaches to try to accommodate everyone’s favoured ways of learning. The different ways of developing yourself professionally that the SBTD II programme has introduced you to through the Units – and particularly through the Case Studies and Activities – were designed to stimulate and reinvigorate your interest in teaching and learning.
You may have tried several of these approaches and maybe prefer certain ways of working. This is good, as we are all different and understanding yourself as a professional is crucial in trying to extend and develop your professional skills. Being involved in such activities and changing practices and approaches as a result are what professional learning is all about. The development of professionalism is a dynamic process that evolves as professional learning expands, but knowing which ways work for you is a good starting point for further development.

The methodology and practices of the SBTD II programme can help you in developing your own style and practice.

As you know, at the heart of UNRWA’s Education Reform is the student. This is in order to ensure that we provide the best education possible to help all students to develop their potential. The continuing professional development of teachers is, of course, a key factor in realising this objective. As new research and investigations into teaching and learning emerge, it is therefore imperative that teachers keep up to date with such changes and can develop and extend their professional learning. There are six main areas of professional development namely:

1. personal and professional qualities (such as reflecting on your practice);
2. team-working qualities (such as listening to and sharing ideas with others);
3. professionalism in practice (such as lesson preparation and marking);
Think about each of the six main areas of professional development listed above and what each of them means to you. Which area or areas do you feel you have developed most through this SBTD II programme?

In your Programme Notebook write a short paragraph on your reflections and responses to the question above.

Activity 60

Think about each of the six main areas of professional development listed above and what each of them means to you. Which area or areas do you feel you have developed most through this SBTD II programme?

In your Programme Notebook write a short paragraph on your reflections and responses to the question above.

Comment

The development of professionalism is a dynamic process that changes as professional learning expands. The more you think about what you do as a teacher, the more you learn about yourself both as a teacher and as a person. Of course, not all reflections result in change in practice or behaviour and may, in fact, confirm that what you are already doing is right, effective and successful. As knowledge and research increases about the effectiveness of different ways of teaching, so will the need for teachers to reflect continually on their skills and knowledge about teaching and learning.

One of the team who wrote the programme materials described a teacher she knew, who was always analysing, undertaking training, reading about teaching and modifying what she did in her work for the benefit of her students. This teacher had once said to our colleague that when she thought she really knew how to teach it would be time for her to retire, as this would suggest that she would not be thinking about her students’ needs enough and had become complacent. This anecdote about professional development strongly reflects the need to keep up to date with the increasing knowledge and understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning.

What impact has the SBTD II programme had on you?

This idea of the concept of professional development being a dynamic and continuous process leads us to the next step in this Unit – that of looking at the impact of this SBTD II continuing professional development programme on you as a teacher and as a person. This means helping you to reflect on the learning that has occurred during this programme and to identify the next steps in your professional development. It will also assist you in completing your Portfolio.
As you know, to obtain your Certificate of Completion, you have to submit a Portfolio that requires you to discuss different Activities and Units that have made an impact on you as a teacher and brought about change in the way you teach. Although the Handbook requires you to only submit seven activities in the Portfolio, it is hoped that you, and your students will have benefited from your engagement with them all. The next Activity asks you to consider what you have gained overall in terms of professional learning through studying this programme. What questions about your work have been raised? How much have these been answered through studying the materials? The reflections that you have undertaken in your Portfolio so far will have confirmed and extended some of your ideas and understanding of your strengths as a teacher that you identified at the start of the programme.

You will have gathered evidence for your Portfolio using the Activities to affirm these strengths, but the programme may also have raised questions about other ways of working, roles and responsibilities for you to explore further. The next two Activities and the Case Study explore these aspects.

First try Activities 61 and 62. After you have completed them, read Case Study 46, which describes one teacher’s reaction to the SBTD II programme.

**Activity 61**

To do this Activity, you will need to have your up-to-date Portfolio with you.

Look at the seven Activities that you identified in your Portfolio as being most significant for you as you have worked through the Modules and Units. Read through your reflections on each Activity:

- Do you still agree with the comments that you wrote?
- Are there any common issues across each of the seven activities? If so, what are they?

You may see that you have highlighted issues that relate to classroom organisation across the Modules. For instance, when looking at issues of inclusive education or working with parents, classroom organisation may be central to all your reflections. Even if there is no theme or issue running through your reflections, the Activities in your Portfolio should highlight areas of teaching and learning that have stimulated your interest and imagination.

In your Programme Notebook, now write a short paragraph critically analysing what you think you have learned from the Activities in the Portfolio. Add any questions you still want to answer in relation to these.

**Comment**

It is normal for us all, as teachers, to think about what has happened during the day, whatever we were doing. This is how we make sense of our world and organise our thoughts, feelings and understanding of situations, people and consequences. The SBTD II programme helps you to shape your reflections and take them further, so that...
you better understand what they mean for you as a professional and for future action. But this has been from your own perspective only. The next Activity asks you to talk with your students about their perceptions of what you did in any, or all, of these Activities.

The SBTD II programme helps you shape your reflections and understand what they mean for future action.

Activity 62

Choose one class of students that you teach (a class you think will respond well) and where you tried out one or two of the Activities you have chosen for your Portfolio. You are going to ask them about their experience of these Activities. You need to think what it is you would like to know from them. It may be that you want to explore how the different ways of working you introduced helped the students to concentrate, or to better participate in the lesson. Be sure to remind them clearly and in some detail about the actual lessons you are focusing on because they may not remember individual lessons. Prepare three or four questions to ask them. Do not ask too many questions, otherwise they will lose interest.

You might include:

• Why did you like this activity/way of working/strategy?
• How did it help you learn Maths better?
• Were there any aspects of this activity that you thought were not useful in helping you as a learner of Maths?

Explain to the students that you want their own ideas and responses, and that you want to know what they liked and why it helped them to learn. You also want to know what they did not like and, crucially, why not.
You may need to emphasise that you want their true feedback whether negative or positive but that you are interested in knowing why they think what they think. You may want to ask them for any suggestions about how to improve the ideas you have been experimenting with. This may best be done in pairs and they will need time to think this through. Sometimes students are very perceptive about both themselves and others as learners and can provide useful support and guidance.

You may wish the students to talk in groups as they reflect on the questions you have asked and then each group can give you a sheet of paper with their thoughts so that no one is embarrassed in class. Or you could ask each student to answer the questions on their own. Whichever you decide to do, make sure you give the class time to respond before gathering in the feedback.

At the end of the day, go through the information they have provided and sift out the positive comments and consider whether they collate with your own ideas about the impact of what you did in that particular lesson or sequence of lessons. Make a note in your Programme Notebook of any significant comments and suggestions that the students have made. Secondly, look at any negative comments they have made and again reflect on whether they accord with your own ideas. If they do, consider how you could modify or adapt what you did to address the issue.

Next time you teach this class, talk to them about your thoughts having read their feedback.

Comment

Asking your students for comments on your teaching may not be something you have thought of doing and it may have made you nervous, but successful teaching and learning involves both the student and teacher.
Receiving feedback from your students on your teaching practice is crucial for your professional growth and development.

The final Case Study describes how one teacher undertook a similar task to that in Activity 62 and it describes some of the outcomes and what the implications were for that teacher.

**Case Study 46**

Abed was in his seventh year of teaching Maths and was participating in SBTD II for Grades 7–12. Abed was nearing the end of the course, which he had found really interesting and at times challenging. Now he wanted to ask some of his students about their perceptions of the changes he had introduced.

He chose a Grade 8 class, with whom he had tried out some of the new methodology he had been introduced to. He decided to use some simple questions for them to answer. He organised the students into groups, with each group having a chosen scribe to write down their agreed responses. The activity was anonymous to allow the students to feel more comfortable in giving honest responses.

He then wrote the following questions on the board and asked each group to discuss their answers and write down a summary of the main points about the strategies that had been introduced:

Obviously, using such an approach on a regular basis is not possible and as you become more adept at reflecting on your work it will be less necessary. You will be able to judge by the way the students respond in the classroom, and the impact the strategy is having on their learning, whether they are more engaged in their learning and making progress. You will recognise when a strategy is not working or is inappropriate. Your assessment of their progress through your marking will give you an idea as to whether or not your ideas are having an impact on learning.
• What new ways of working did you like most?
• Why did you like each of these?
• How do you think they helped you learn Maths better?
• What ways of working did you not like as much? Why was this?
• What could be done to improve some of these ways of working that you did not like as much?

Abed gave the students most of the lesson to talk in their groups. About five minutes before the end of the lesson, he collected the completed questionnaires in and at the end of the school day he read through them.

When he looked at their responses, he was pleased to see that most of the class felt that the new strategies that he had introduced (working and talking in groups and pairs for example) had helped them think about the Maths he had taught them more deeply. They talked a lot about how, through this approach, they had learned from each other. However, some students said that at first they found the organisation of the groups confusing and that moving into groups was noisy and took too much time out of the lesson. What these students suggested was having a fixed group or pair to work with as this helped them move more easily. They suggested that if Abed did need to change groups he should put the group lists on the wall, so that they would remember the new groups in the next lesson. Abed found the students’ insights helpful and he noted them down to remind himself to implement them.

Abed noted that working in pairs was popular and the students reported how they liked working with different students in the pairs. The class felt they had got to know each other better through this strategy and they could help each other without embarrassment.

One aspect the students were not so happy with was when they were asked to give answers in front of the whole class and give presentations in front of everyone. Abed decided that in future he would try a system whereby pairs presented to another pair rather than to the whole class.

In the very next Maths lesson, he asked each pair to explain to another pair how they had solved a particular geometry problem. He used two different problems finding missing angles in polygons, using a combination of rules of geometry. Each pair was given a different problem to their neighbouring pair.
He gave them this structure to support them in their presentation:

- Explain the order of the steps you will take, finding each next angle in turn, until the solution is found.
- For each step explain the geometric rule you are using.
- For each step describe the calculation you have done.

When they were ready each pair then gave their presentation to the neighbouring pair to explain their solution. At the end of the lesson, Abed asked his students whether they preferred this approach. Noting that they were a lot happier to discuss in smaller groups, he said he would also build into future lessons, opportunities for them to present to the class, as being able to speak confidently in group settings was also an important skill.

Comment

Abed showed both that not only was he willing to reflect on his own practice, but that he was willing to listen to his students’ views. He showed an ability to identify suggestions could be implemented straight away and also to reflect further on comments to develop new strategies.

Asking for feedback from your students in the way that Abed did may be something you have not considered doing before, but if you set it up carefully you may be pleasantly surprised at how helpful students can be. However, there are also other ways to gather feedback that are more informal and will still help you to reflect on the learning going on in your classroom. For example, asking at the end of a lesson what students have learned and what they found most and least useful will give you some idea of where to go next in your planning.

Informal feedback from students will help you reflect on the learning going on in your classroom.

Striving to achieve more effective ways of teaching through professional learning will help you become a better teacher and is likely to raise your students’ achievements greatly. The next and final Activity is to identify the next steps in your continuing professional development. This will help you to complete the Professional Development Needs template in your Portfolio.
Pause for a few minutes and think what has been the most positive outcome overall for you from studying the SBTD II programme. It may be a change in attitude to the job of teaching; it may be a reinvigoration for the job you do; it may be the enthusiasm you have developed for different ways of working. Whatever it is, write a short comment in your Programme Notebook about the impact of this key outcome on you as a teacher and, more widely, as a person.

Next, look at your responses to Activities 59 - 62 and think about which aspects and areas of your learning from this programme you would like to develop further. List all the areas you would like to pursue, and then prioritise your list. Select the three areas you want to develop further first. For example, you may want to explore the different ways of asking questions and how these help students think more deeply about the Maths they are learning or you may want to explore more about how to plan, organise and use pair or group work in your teaching. Next you need to think about and plan how you might do this. For each area you need to identify:

- what exactly you want to find out or be able to do better and how long these goals will take to achieve;
- how you will do this;
- what help or support you will need.

Write your responses in your Programme Notebook. What do you see as important in helping you achieve the goals you have set yourself?

Finally, think where, as a teacher, you would like to be in five years’ time in terms of developing your teaching. How do you plan to get there? Again, write these thoughts in your Programme Notebook so that you can refer to these later, even well after the programme has finished. You can then reflect on whether these goals were realised or whether your career took a different path.

Comment

Your goals will be different from those of other colleagues in your school but you may find one or two colleagues who have similar aims, so that working together and sharing experiences will help you all. There will be other ways to enhance your knowledge and skills, such as further study and continuing professional courses that focus on particular aspects of teaching and learning. It is important to keep an open mind to changes in our understanding as professionals of what research tells us works best in teaching and learning. Our role and responsibility as teachers is to give each student the best education that we can provide.
Summary

Changing the way in which teachers interact with their learners, and what happens in the classroom and school as a whole, is central to the UNRWA Education Reform. It is the key to achieving quality education for all.

The SBTD II programme has been the initiator of developing a more interactive and focused approach to teaching and learning, which acknowledges the different interests, needs and abilities of the students. We hope that you have learned much about yourself as a teacher and yourself as a person and feel motivated to continue your professional development so that you become a more efficient and effective teacher. We hope you are energised by the programme and that you have reawakened or extended your love for the profession you have chosen.

Congratulations on completing the SBTD II programme! We wish you well in your ongoing career and professional development.
References

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Module 3

Module 4
Module 5


UNRWA (2013a), Inclusive Education Strategy. Amman: UNRWA Education Department.


UNRWA (2013c), Inclusive Education Tool Kit. Amman: UNRWA Education Department.

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Module 6

School Based Teacher Development II: transforming maths teaching and learning practices

The School-Based Teacher Development II (SBTD II) programme is key to UNRWA's Education Reform Strategy. The programme seeks to improve teaching and learning practices in UNRWA classrooms through developing interactive pedagogies (ways of teaching) that will engage students of Grades 7–12 more effectively in their learning. Together, the SBTD II programme for teachers of higher grades and SBTD for teachers of Grades 1–6, are paving the way for comprehensive in-service training for all UNRWA teachers. There are six Self-Learning Modules in the SBTD II programme. Each Module focuses on a different aspect of Maths teaching and learning with a specific focus on the teaching of Grades 7–12. Together, the Modules, Units, Activities and Case Studies in the SBTD II programme provide an overview of many different approaches and ways of developing quality teaching and learning in all classrooms in UNRWA schools.

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