

Stay@School
Workshop on Module 2 “Communication”
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Minutes

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School failure at school is produced under different circumstances. One of them is caused by school absenteeism. After reading the chapter devoted to this issue, and to deal with it, we decided to use our own experience, so that, as an starting point, we can analyse what we have lived in our classrooms and accomplish new conclusions.

The most important step is the early detection of repeated absences from the student, or delays that might later result in an absence. For this purpose, the educational board must be fully coordinated and have adequate means which enable fast communication; in that way the tutor can report the family as soon as possible. At our school, we upload absences or delays on the net, getting them registered every single hour. By doing this, it is extremely easy for the tutor to be aware of any incidence that has happened along every lesson.

Once absenteeism is detected, we report to the student's parents or legal representative by phone call or sending a certified letter. It is the tutor's task to carry out this work. If parents are unrelated to the situation, an appointment is arranged in order to deduce the causes of absences. Most of the cases have to do with family problems or some traumatic experiences which have produced this situation. Other reasons which cause a receding attitude are disorders of attention, or the awareness

of the student who knows that he has limited abilities compared to the rest of classmates. Since they are not able to accept the fact that they have problems or feel unable to ask for help, they start skipping classes.

To avoid these facts, close communication among teachers, tutor and management board has to be established. The principal as well as the the deputy head must know the problem and actions which are being taken.

Teachers must show an empathetic attitude towards the student. We must *create* a kind of complicity and create some *links* with him/her to find out the reason of his/her actions without judging him/her. We should try to make a connection between the lack / deficiencies the student shows and the expectations we think he/she could accomplish. The best thing we can do is to provide him/her self-esteem with positive reinforcement. At our school, we have produced 'behaviour tables' and daily work to be done. Students fill them and are shown to each teacher. Later, and briefly, they have to describe how the class has going on or make any comments. The purpose of these tables is make them feel responsible and assess their behaviour as a means to make the dynamics of class work. Drawing plans and objectives in a short term is the best. If it is not done in this way, the final objective becomes unattainable and they soon don't follow the programm and throw in the towel(lose interest or abandon school)

The student is more receptive if he/she is present at the meeting together with parents and the management board. He/She feels that there is a concern to him or her and his/her attitude is more receptive to address the issue. Signing a contract which involves all parts work, only if those ones who are involved act in the same and in coherent way. A serious attitude without counteracting that empathy towards the student must be showed. Setting limits should not give us fear, as they are needed in teenagers.

It is also good to find '*allies*' within the class. Peers can become a crucial link to joint this chain. As equals, it is much easier to connect. The help of a partner, either both personal or academic level, can improve and reduce tension caused by these situations. It reduces anxiety and makes the student feel more comfortable in the group. Therefore, under our own expesience, we encourage you to follow cooperative learning techniques as we are doing at our school as a teaching practice.

When the student has to face up the learning process on his/her own resources, unless he/she has extensive knowledge and good strategies to manage them, he/she can easily take the minimum profit, repeat mistakes or, what it is worse, consider he/she is doing his / her best when the truth is just the opposite. Peer education can help resolve this conflict. Who provides help better than a classmate who is closer to his/her knowledge, interests, strategies and even in the language? With an adequate

training in different techniques or skills, they can provide them more direct and significant help. Often, the information given by teachers is not clearly understood or so quickly as when a partner makes it because they use other types of resources and a closer and simplified language.

The possibility that students work in pairs or even in groups within the classroom, helping each other, is a learning technique which can help us to incorporate progressively return to the classrooms of those students who have experienced school absenteeism. Thus, they will not feel they are alone in the face of danger and with fear or insecurity before returning to classes; this feeling is very common in students who have been absent for an extended time or who begin to be absent from classes, so soon they feel lost in classes experiencing an academic gap according to their peers. Through this practice of learning we try to make the student feel comfortable in classes instead of seeing him/herself as a useless person. An individualistic learning may result in the return to absenteeism.

At our school we believe that with cooperative learning we can reduce school failure and more specifically school absenteeism. Trying that students come back to classes and feel comfortable it is a difficult task, but let's not forget that we are educators and we have to try, and if it involves a change in the learning model, we must venture to try .