

## school based teacher development programme transforming classroom practices

### Transforming Classroom Practices Programme

The School Based Teacher Development (SBTD): Transforming Classroom Practices (TCP) is one of the dimensions UNRWA's Reform Strategy. The programme aims at improving the teaching and learning practices of teachers in the classroom by developing active learning pedagogies that will support effective engagement of the students. It will be the basis for an in-service training programme for all UNRWA teachers.

The programme adopts a blended learning approach and consists of 6 modules. Each module focuses on one of the aspects of the teaching-learning process. Collectively, the programme materials are the backbone of providing quality teaching and learning practices in UNRWA schools.

The modules are built interactively where the teacher is requested to reflect on his/her practices and to try the use of a variety of learner-focused strategies.



**engaging parents in  
raising achievement**



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# **Introduction to the School Based Teacher Development programme (SBTD)- Transforming Classroom Practices (TCP)**

School Based Teacher Development programme (SBTD)- Transforming Classroom Practices (TCP) is a key dimension of UNRWA's Education Reform Strategy. The programme seeks to improve teaching and learning practices in the UNRWA classroom through developing interactive pedagogies or ways of teaching that will engage children more effectively in their learning. The SBTD is paving the way for comprehensive in-service training for all UNRWA teachers. There are six Open and Distance Learning modules and each of these focus on different aspects of teaching and learning that together provide an overview of many different approaches and ways to develop quality teaching and learning in UNRWA Schools. The text modules are interactive and ask the teacher to reflect on their practices, try new approaches and consider the impact they have on the children's learning and motivation.



## **Intro 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 being crucial in helping students achieve more. This Unit, through a range of activities, aims to develop the teachers' 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 the schooling of their children and provides examples and suggestions of ways which 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 teachers with new ideas the opportunity 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 are examined, as are suggestions for how to engage all parents in their children's learning.

### **Unit 23–24: Professional Development and Moving Forward (double Unit)**

The final Unit in this School Based Teacher Development Programme provides the teacher with the opportunity to reflect on their own learning through their 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 the teachers to reflect on their own learning and the impact of the programme on themselves as a teacher and finally asks them to build on what they 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. Children are more likely to achieve more, attend school regularly, show improved behaviour, adapt well to school, and have better social skills. 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 parents/carers' engagement and involvement in the schooling of their children;
- developed your skills in raising awareness and involving parents/carers in school activities/projects 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. The first Activity asks you to briefly consider different aspects of your relationship with the parents/carers of the children you teach.

### Activity 48

Look at the questionnaire below. Read it through once and pause to think about the answers before you complete the questions quickly and honestly. Tick or circle all appropriate answers for you in each question.



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



Figure 88: Reflecting on your attitudes to parental involvement can assist you in developing new and better ways to encourage parents to participate in their child's learning.

*Self-reflection questionnaire*

*For this school year, I know (and have already met):*  
*(Put a tick ✓ in the box that you feel reflects your position)*

<input type="checkbox"/> 10% of the parents	}	<i>of the students I am teaching.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> 25% of the parents		
<input type="checkbox"/> 50% of the parents		
<input type="checkbox"/> 70% of the parents		
<input type="checkbox"/> 100% of the parents		

*For me, it is:*

<input type="checkbox"/> very difficult	}	<i>to work with parents.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> difficult		
<input type="checkbox"/> easy		
<input type="checkbox"/> very easy		

## Self-reflection questionnaire

In general, I feel:

- respected  
 listened to  
 not respected  
 denigrated

by parents.

According to 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 school life.  
 not following their children's education up.

When I call parents for meetings:

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

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.



*Self-reflection questionnaire*

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

	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>their child's performance.</i>	.....	.....	.....	.....
<i>their child's behaviour.</i>	.....	.....	.....	.....
<i>my teaching practices.</i>	.....	.....	.....	.....
<i>my expectations.</i>	.....	.....	.....	.....
<i>ways for parents to support their child at home.</i>	.....	.....	.....	.....
<i>ways to solve identified issues together.</i>	.....	.....	.....	.....

*The way I see parents in the community I'm teaching is:*

- as partners.*
- as people who are not there.*
- as judges.*
- as detractors.*
- as opponents.*

*During my last three years of teaching, I:*

	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Never</i>
<i>asked parents to prepare material for the school.</i>	.....	.....	.....
<i>asked parents to co-facilitate an activity with me</i>	.....	.....	.....
<i>asked parents to do a presentation in my class.</i>	.....	.....	.....

## Comment

Research indicates that one of the significant predictors of a child's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that child's family is able to:

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

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

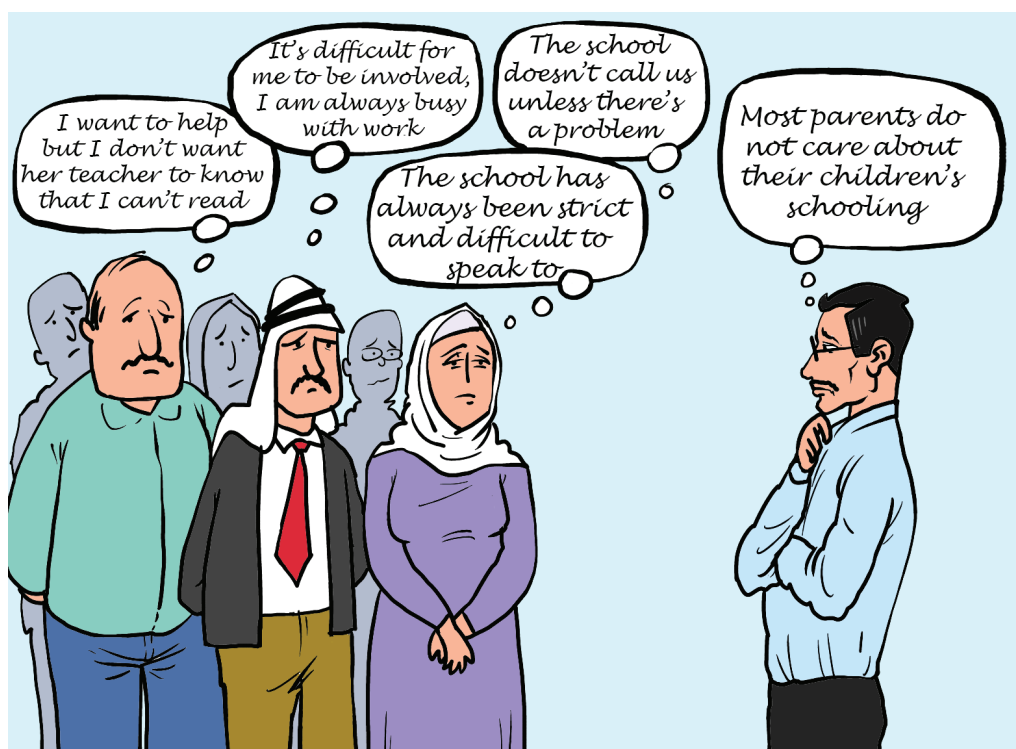


Figure 89: When considering engaging parents and others it is important to consider what their experience of learning might be.

Although involving parents/carers can be a challenge for teachers, research shows that teachers can do a great deal to promote greater parental involvement. Research indicates that parents who receive frequent and positive messages about their children from teachers tend to become more involved in their children's education than parents who do not. Research also found 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.

But not all schools ask for parental involvement and not all parents participate in the school activities even if they are asked – maybe because they are busy or because they do not know the value of being involved. Also, for some parents, particularly if they had a limited education or bad experiences at school, involvement in their children's schooling may be intimidating. The same may apply to helping their children at home because of a lack of confidence or even fear. 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 children'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 children.

Now read the first Case Study, which shows how one teacher began to try involving parents in her classroom.

### Case study 41

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Ghada is a new lower elementary teacher at Naquora School in Shatila Camp, Lebanon. Ghada came to the school eager to help the children in her class achieve good academic results, as well as develop a range of life skills. When she first met the 40 children in Grade 3, she was aware that many of the children in her class suffered from poor nutrition and came from poorer homes. It also appeared that the parents did not take much interest in their children's education.

As an experienced teacher, Ghada realised immediately that there was a lot of work to do to engage the parents in their children's education. She started by talking to her Head Teacher and she asked him about the school's relationship with parents and carers. He told her that the school only calls parents when there are problems, but that few parents respond positively to this and those who do come tend to be very aggressive. Apart from calling them to address problems, the school did not have any other contact with parents at all.

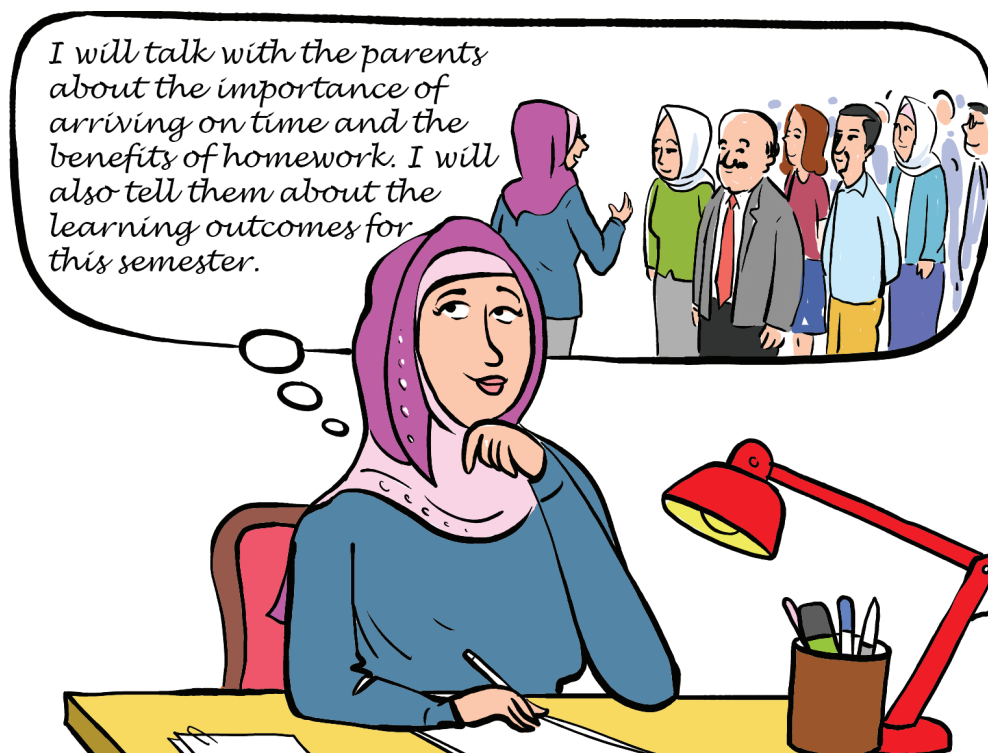


Figure 90: Always plan for discussions with parents and work with them to establish positive and proactive ways for them to participate.

Ghada, with her Head Teacher's permission, started planning ways to contact parents. She wanted to begin in a positive way and so wrote a letter to the parents introducing herself and asking them to attend a meeting at the start of term so that they could all meet each other. She also wrote that she wanted to explain her ways of working and how together they could influence the children's achievements for the better.

Ghada then set about planning the meeting, thinking first about what she wanted to say. As well as showing how much she valued the opportunity to meet the parents, she identified two key points she wanted to make. These related to her expectations of the children and the work for the term.

At the meeting, Ghada began by thanking the 15 families who turned up for their time. She introduced herself and asked the parents to introduce themselves too. She then explained how she worked as a teacher and what her expectations of the children were, such as children arriving punctually with their books, being kind towards and supportive of each other, doing their homework, being polite, behaving sensibly, trying their best and working hard. After a few questions from the parents, she went on to talk about what the children would be studying during the coming semester and the upcoming challenges, especially within the curriculum, which some children might find hard. She asked for their support in making

sure the children attended regularly and tried to do any homework that was set. She encouraged the parents to tell her if they noticed that their child seemed to be having difficulty. She explained how she would assess their children's progress and how she would inform them of any concerns she had, so that help and support could be given as needed.

The news of the meeting and the issues discussed caused much interest among the parents of children in other classes and also among some of the parents who did not attend Ghada's meeting. Ghada wrote a summary of the meeting and sent a copy to all the parents of her class.

### Comment

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*Ghada took a big step because she believed that it would help the children. The turnout to this meeting – while not huge – was encouraging, and she had made a start by showing parents how they could be involved in their children's education. Her next task would be to maintain the contact made, try to engage with more of the parents, and keep parents informed about what the children were doing and sharing their successes and any concerns.*

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

### Activity 49

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Think how you could make contact with the parents of the children in your class. Do not try to be too ambitious, but aim for something you feel comfortable with.

Here are some ideas to choose from, 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 children are and how you see your role in teaching them. You might explain clearly what you will be teaching the children in the forthcoming semester. You could also highlight the areas that children often find difficult and tell the parents what they could do if this happens. (This may mean only simple things, such as encouraging the children to do their homework, note any difficulties they have and remind them to ask for help at school.)
2. You could ask if any parent has time to come in and hear children read, not just their own child but others too, or if they could help repair textbooks or put up displays in the classroom. You may have other urgent jobs that you would like help with. Have your letter approved by the Head Teacher/School Principal and then send it home to all the children's families. Monitor the reactions and

responses to your letter and then think about next steps. Developing good relationships with parents/carers takes time and patience, so do not give up if the response is not as good as you would wish. Keep persevering – it is worth the effort for the positive impact involving parents can have on children’s learning.

3. Ask parents to come in to watch a small presentation or show by the class at the end of the school session. When they come in, greet them and thank them for coming, and explain how much the children appreciate it and how much it helps to motivate them.

Whichever approach you decide to take, use your Programme Notebook to record the whole experience, including any letters you sent or presentations you made, and finish by writing your own thoughts on what happened. Write down your thoughts about the parents’ commitment and your feelings about the impact of their involvement so far. Think about and write down what your next steps will be.

Parents and the wider community are the first educators of children. They influence the behaviour, knowledge and ways of thinking of children throughout their very early lives. So it is important for you, as a teacher, to show them respect and consider them as an important resource and partner in their children’s education.

Most parents do care 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 the parents face in their day-to-day lives makes it more difficult for them to engage with the school.

Parents/carers’ feelings of responsibility towards their children’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 their children’s schooling include:

- lack of time because they are working or have other caring responsibilities;
- lack of understanding of the school system and the jargon often used by schools;
- low awareness of child care and education issues;
- feelings of inferiority or inhibition;
- low educational levels, so feel they have nothing to offer;
- illiteracy, so cannot read any communications or reports about their children;
- not feeling welcome in school.

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

- teachers' and Head Teachers' attitudes to parental engagement, which see involving parents as more of a chore than a benefit that makes their work easier and raises achievement;
- lack of time from pressure of work (full timetables, double sessions and lots of marking), size of classes and other jobs that have to be completed;
- large classes make it hard for teachers to see every child's parents and limit the time available for each set of parents.

Working to overcome these barriers can take time. However, the recent research in many countries has suggested that a good starting point is to strengthen communication between the school, parents and family. Activity 49 began that process by suggesting one way to increase the exchange of information about school. But simple things, such as displaying on your classroom door what you are going to teach this term, week or day, will start the exchange. This, of course, will only work if parents bring their children to the classroom each day. If not, you could send out a short note about what you are planning to do over the next week or two and suggest ways they might support their children at home. 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. Use diagrams if it helps to explain the ideas better.

The attitude of the school and staff is crucial to establishing good relations with parents. 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. Perhaps there could be children's work 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 to look at your 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 letter).
- Encourage students to welcome visitors to the school – perhaps one class could have responsibility for this for a week or fortnight.
- Have set times when parents can come in without an appointment to see the Head Teacher, for example every Tuesday from 10 to 11.
- Have social events for the parents and community.

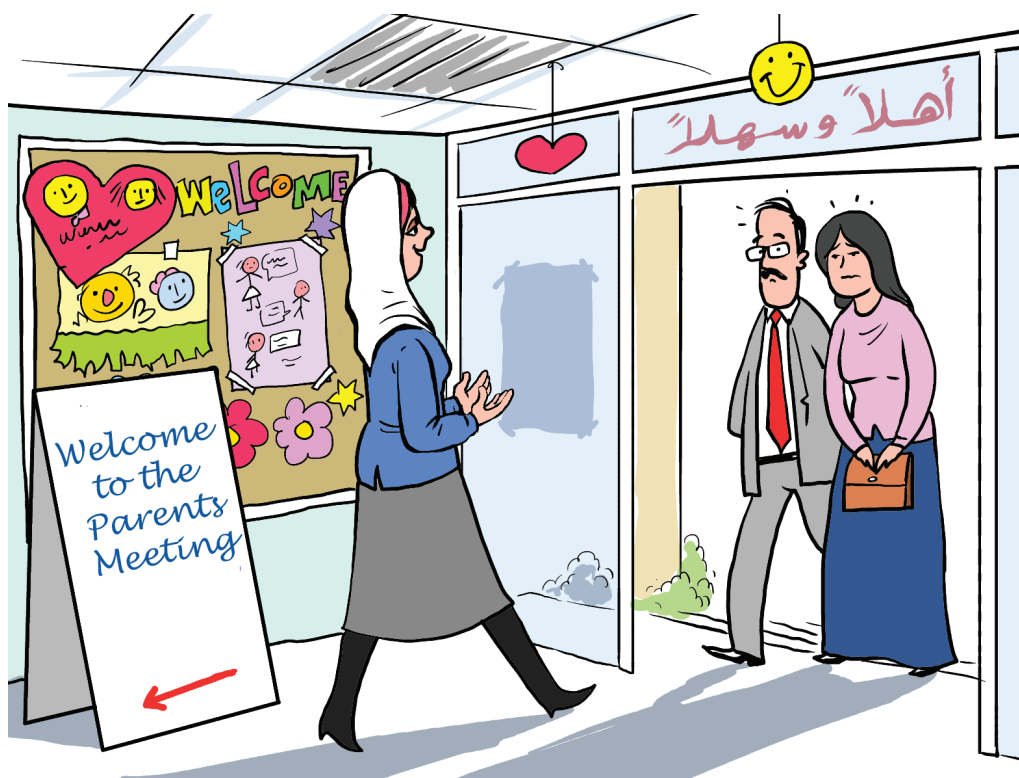


Figure 91: A positive and welcoming school environment can encourage parents to become engaged in their child's learning.

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

Elementary teacher Samira teaches at Talbiyah UNRWA school in South Amman and very much believes that parents can contribute to the academic achievement of children, especially in schools operating on the double-shift system where the school time is short.





Samira was planning to teach the children in her class how to write Arabic letters and decided to invite the parents/carers to a meeting to explain how the school taught letter writing.

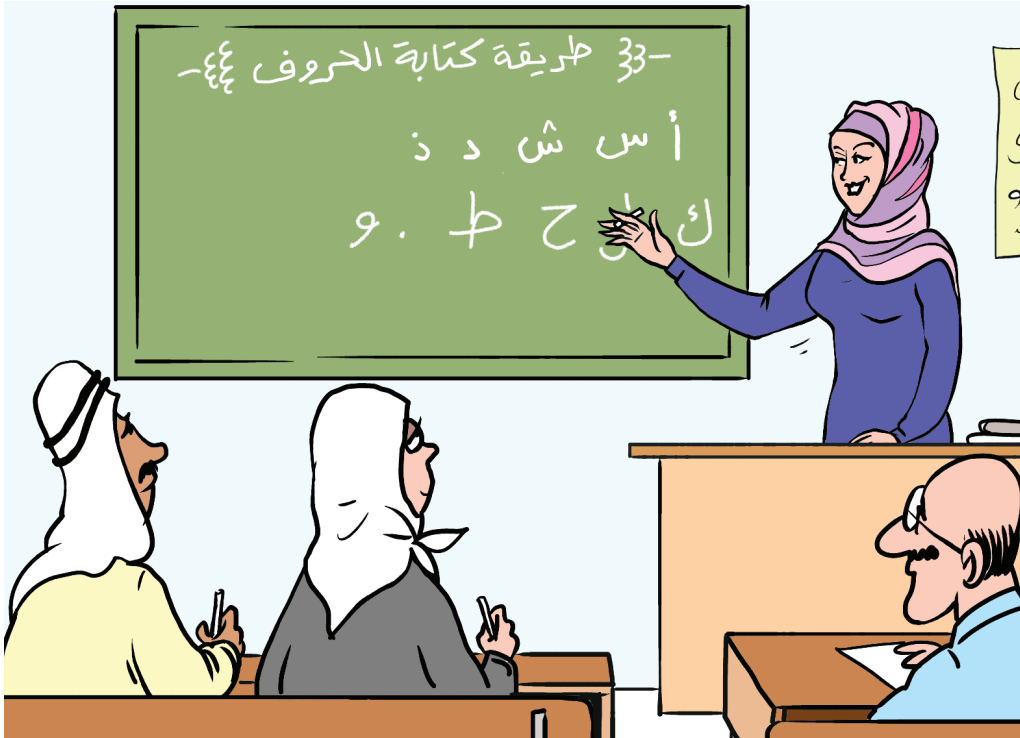


Figure 92: Sharing learning activities and classroom content with parents can help them to be more involved with their child's education and to assist with learning at home.

At the meeting, she showed the parents how the children would need to hold their pens and how she would help them to structure a letter. Samira had made a series of diagrams that she displayed on the classroom wall so that she could talk through each stage, highlight some of the difficulties children may have with letter writing and suggest how parents could help them. Those parents that attended were very supportive and interested and were delighted to have been included in their children's schooling in this way. At the end of the meeting, Samira gave each parent a sheet to take home with a copy of the diagrams that she had used. She also sent a copy of this sheet to those parents who had not attended, so that everyone had a copy.

When Samira began to teach letter writing in class, she told the children that their parents had the same sheet that they had, and that this would mean they could help with the homework. She followed up informally with the students about whether their parents were helping them and was pleased to find that many of them were. The cooperation and coordination between the parents and the teacher helped the children improve their handwriting. Also, because they had been practising at home, they had more time in school to focus on other skills.

## Comment

*Parental involvement will not happen overnight, and Samira realised this, as not all parents had come to the meeting and other parents did not help the children with their letter writing much. However, Samira felt encouraged by the response of those who did attend the meeting and by the improvement that many of her students made. She was motivated to continue, but knew it would take time.*



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 curriculum. They can share their experience with children of any age. The next Activity asks you to try inviting a parent in to talk with a class you teach.

## Activity 50

First, you will need to inform your Head Teacher/School Principal about your plan.



Among the parents or the wider community there may be someone who has an interesting and relevant job – for example an artist, potter, sculptor or someone who has expertise in science or woodwork. They could be a specialist within the community, such as the physician from the local health centre, a dentist, a religious leader, a musician or a traffic specialist.

You can begin the process by asking your class about what jobs and hobbies their parents/carers have, or you could send a letter home to parents asking if any of them have a job or hobby that they would like to tell the children about. You could also ask your colleagues if they have any ideas.

When you receive a response, contact the parent/community member and arrange a meeting to talk to them about the purpose of their coming to the class. Next, you will need to plan the session together. Tell the parent/community member that the children will also prepare questions to ask them at the end of the session. Agree a date and time, and explain that two children will meet the visitor when they arrive and show them to the classroom. (Make sure you select another two children to thank the visitor at the end.)

Prepare your students for the visit and help them write questions about the subject that will be presented. Select the two children 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 e.g. if the visitor wishes to display pictures or charts, make sure there is space on the walls. Seat the children 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.

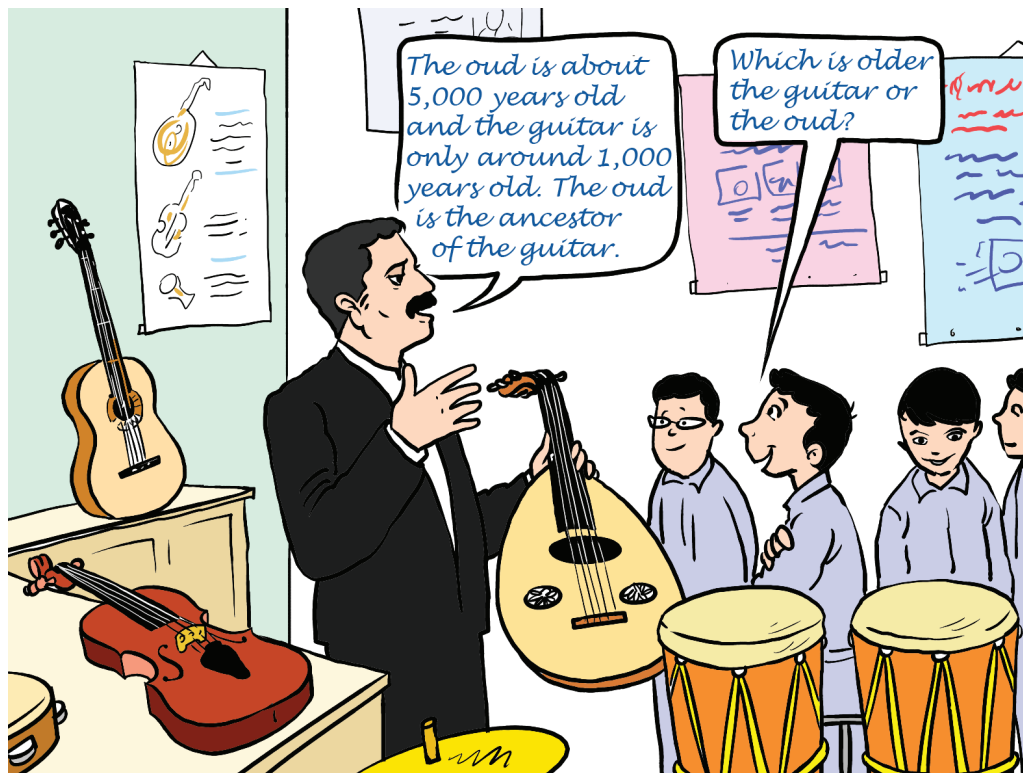


Figure 93: Parents can be involved in the classroom through the sharing of their own expertise.

After the visitor has left, plan with the class how you will follow up the visit.

- Did the children enjoy the visit?
- What did they learn from it? How do you know this?
- How can you use what they have learned in your topic?

Do not forget to write and thank the visitor for their time. Also, ask them what they thought of the experience and how you could make it better for visitors to come into school like this.

Write a short reflection on what happened in your Programme Notebook. Did the visit match your expectations, and how do you think it impacted on the children's 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 children and, as such, should motivate them. However, it is also important to not 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 how important it is to use variety of ways of working to stimulate children’s interest and learning.*



## Summary

The Case Studies and Activities in this Unit illustrate a range of ways that you 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 to involve parents in the wider community by encouraging them to do volunteer work, such as cleaning the playground or the mosque, or organising some key local festivities together.



Yet another way would be to engage parents and children in campaigns such as traffic safety, environmental issues and citizenship. The children will begin to recognise the role of parents and other helpers in helping them realise their ambitions in life.

Most parents/carers have the same priorities for their child’s education, namely:

- how well their child is being cared for;
- 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 telling parents who you are and what you are doing. 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 children. 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 their children 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 at school yet you knew they could do better, if only you could have talked to the parents to see how you could help them. 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 it: research has shown that students whose parents play an active part in their schooling make better progress.

What do we mean here when we use the word 'dialogue'? The dictionary suggests dialogue is having a conversation with one person or a group of 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 children, 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 [themselves] 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, as a teacher, trying to help parents to develop their children's understanding of the importance of education and their role in this process. This includes taking an interest in their child's schooling, helping with homework, keeping track of their progress and being constructive when their child experiences difficulties with a subject or topic. 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 communications. 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 give enough care to their children, 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.



*Figure 94: 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 child's learning;
- identified and begun to use a range of tools and strategies to maintain a positive and regular dialogue with parents about their child's progress and achievement;
- developed different strategies to deal with different groups of parents (difficult, parents of children with disabilities, poor, illiterate, overprotecting, too busy...);
- 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 the learning of their children. 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 child's personality and ability. Parents can be your most powerful and valuable allies, as nearly all parents are interested in what their child is doing and their progress, even if the pressures of just living make it hard to think and act for their children. Read what Nisreen did.

### Case study 43

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Nisreen is a teacher in Biddo Prep School in the West Bank.

After reading a chapter in a book about raising achievement, Nisreen realised that there was a great need to establish and sustain communication with families for the sake of the children's overall achievement.

At the start of the year, Nisreen was worried about some children in her class, as she heard from their previous teacher that they did not do their homework regularly or appear to have the same support as others did at home. She wondered if the parents even knew that the children had homework, and began to think about a good way to set up a regular communication with parents that would enable her to work with them to support the children's learning.

First, she thought about making regular phone calls with each parent, but she soon realised that many of the parents would not have a phone. Moreover, calling

each family would take time and cost a lot of money, even assuming that people answered her call.

She then decided to ask the advice of an experienced teacher, who suggested several ways to start, including using a follow-up notebook as a daily or weekly two-way communication avenue, easy to use for both parents and teachers.

She decided to begin by writing a note to invite all the parents to a short meeting to explain her ways of working in the classroom and suggest the use of a follow-up notebook to share information and concerns about their children's work and happiness at school.

At the meeting, which was attended by a third of the parents, she explained how the notebook would work. She would let them know regularly, through the notebook, about the work children were doing and, specifically, what the parents could do to help. Most parents were supportive of the initiative, but one or two voiced concerns about the workload and expectations it might put on them. Nisreen responded by asking them to do what they could, and said that they would see whether it had any impact later on. This was agreed by all but one parent.

After the meeting, Nisreen sent a summary of what they had discussed to all parents, including those who could not attend the meeting. This way, they all had the same information about the use of the follow-up notebook.

On the first day of using the notebook system, Nisreen gave the children an outline of the work for the topic, which they copied into their notebooks. She then explained how they would give this to their parents to keep. She went on to explain that the children would write in their notebook what their homework was and their parents would sign it to say they had seen the finished homework.

In some cases, Nisreen also used the notebook to write about the kind of help a particular child might need. Parents could write back their own comments and questions, and these ranged from simple questions about when work had to be completed as to how to teach long division. Nisreen would reply to the parents' comments as quickly as she could. She did not read all the notebooks each day, but made sure she read them all over the week. In fact, over time, she tended to look at particular children's notebooks on set days so that the children knew when to have their books with them. Even so, some children's books were looked at more regularly if they were having problems with an area of their work and Nisreen would give examples for the parents to do with the child as further practice. If parents could not read, and she had concerns about their child's progress, Nisreen put a red spot in the book. It was a way of asking the parent to come and



see her so they could talk about the issue. Some parents were still not convinced or interested, but pressure from the children and some other parents eventually drew more reluctant parents into the exchanges.

Nisreen found that the more she used the notebooks 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, many of their children said how much their parents liked getting this update. 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 read the information.



Figure 95: Consider ways you can establish regular communication with parents, like a notebook signed by parents weekly, regular emails or phone calls to share success.

### Comment



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

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

## Activity 51



First, think about each of the students in your class and make notes in your Programme Notebook on what you know in relation to two 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.

Can you think of reasons why these parents have different levels of involvement in school activities and engagement in their children's schooling?

Now think about an area of the curriculum that you are about to teach and devise an activity that will involve all the students doing some research and work at home, hopefully with the help of their parents and/or the wider family and community. For example, this could be looking at family structures or finding out about local history or geography. Think how you could organise the students to gather the information and include parents and/or the community in the work.

It may be helpful to send a letter home about this work to prepare the parents to help their children. Tell the students what is in the letter, so they can explain it to their parents if they are not able to read.

Make sure you check that the two particular students you are concerned about understand what they have to do. If there are problems, think how you could help them. Could you:

- give them a note, from you personally, to explain how the parents could help support their children's work at home?
- give the students extra support at school (with their parents' agreement)?
- speak to the parent quietly at the end of school (if they collect their child)?
- contact the parent at home to see if you could help?
- seek the support of your Head Teacher/School Principal?

During the week, when students are doing the research, make sure you look carefully at the two students' work and help them if you can. You could send messages home in a follow-up notebook (as Nisreen did in Case Study 43), explaining how the parents could assist or what next steps they could do together.

At the end of the week, assess how well all the students have done, but look particularly at the two you have chosen to focus on to see how they have done in

comparison to previous work. Give the work back to all the class with encouraging comments on what they have achieved and suggest ways to improve their work more next time. Ask the whole class if they are pleased with the results. Were they happy to have the interest and support of their parents?

Finish by affirming with all your class how much you and their parents care about their education and how you both want to help them to do well. Find time to talk with the two students about how they found this approach.

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 children for whom you have concerns. Think also which other students could benefit from this intervention. Note down how you might do this.

## Comment

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*Building good working relationships takes time and patience to establish and it is best to start with small steps. Often it is easiest to first talk 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 (as Nisreen did in Case Study 43).*

Putting in place a regular system for keeping parents informed about topics being studied and aims and objectives within these 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 key.

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

- contribute to improving parents' engagement in their children's learning process at school and at home;
- develop parents' understanding of the different but equal roles of both parties in the child'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 children's academic achievement and behaviour.

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 children's education at home at least.

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 Head Teacher/School Principal and colleagues, who may have had similar experiences and can share what they learnt with you. More often than not, making individual contact with those parents who are difficult to get to meetings is the only way forward, as Shakala shows in the next Case Study. Shakala had a positive response, but if you are not so fortunate, do not give up. Think of different ways you can send supportive messages. For example, when you send home an outline of the topics the students will learn, put in a personal note to ask if they could help their child with a precise area where you know the child would welcome support. When the child has done the work, look at what they have achieved. Ask if they had help at home and, if so, from whom. If they did have help, comment on how good that was and that your letter was read and acted upon. This is a first small step.

Now read Case Study 44, which shows how one teacher tackled a particular problem.

### Case study 44

Shakala teaches Grade 3 in the Khalil Ewaida Prep School in Gaza.

Shakala was worried about one girl in her class, Salma, as she was not progressing as well as expected. Shakala had never met any member of Salma's family, as she came to school by herself and her parents did not attend her first parents' meeting earlier in the year. This was a new event that the Head Teacher 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 their child with their work. Parents also had the opportunity to ask questions and seek support from the teacher. The Head Teacher organised for the teachers to be in subject areas and parents from different years came at set times to see their child's subject teachers, in turn, for a few minutes at a time. Shakala asked a colleague who had taught Salma's brother, Mustapha, 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 Mustapha'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 Head Teacher that they would hold a celebration at the end of the next topic and make awards to



the class. A letter was sent home to invite the parents to school and told them of the rewards being given out, which included one to Salma.

At the celebration, after introducing herself and explaining what the students had studied, saying also how well behaved and polite they were, Shakala began the presentations and the whole class were very excited about this. The teachers were delighted that Salma's mother turned up to the celebration and sat at the back, smiling as Salma collected her award.



*Figure 96: Inviting parents to share in the celebration of student achievements, in and outside the classroom, can help to build positive relationships with the school.*

As refreshments were being served at the end, Shakala made sure that she spoke first to Salma's mother. She said how well Salma was doing in this topic and how motivated she had been because she knew that parents were to be invited in for the celebration. Shakala also said it was wonderful to see how pleased Salma was to have her mother there today. Then she very sensitively explained how she felt that Salma was not doing as well as she could in all subjects, particularly in Arabic, mathematics and science, 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. Shakala 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 would have a note of what she had to do in each subject for homework that night and some suggestions of how her mother could help. Salma would tell Shakala if this was working and if not they would work out another plan.

Shakala 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 at tackling new work and, as a result, she was making better progress across the subjects. Science and mathematics still needed more support and Shakala talked with the two teachers who taught Salma, to ask them to give her some extra support.

A few weeks later, when the semester school report was sent, Shakala received it back signed. Salma's mother had also written on it how much happier Salma was about going to school. Shakala was even more surprised and delighted when both of her parents came a few months later to attend a presentation and puppet show written and organised by Salma's class. The first steps towards a real involvement had been made!

### Comment

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*Shakala's first steps into 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. Shakala was lucky because Salma's mother attended the celebration, but if she had not what could Shakala have done to make face-to-face contact? Perhaps she could have made a visit home to give Salma her certificate and seized the chance to talk then or maybe she could have involved her Head Teacher to help her. 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 just general events in school before talking more about their own child's progress.*

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

### Activity 52

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Think about the students in your class. Who is not progressing as well as they should, given what you know about their ability and aptitude?



- Based upon your records and observations, make a list of these students. For each student, list the areas that are causing you 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 child with their schoolwork.
- 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, a meeting in school or maybe a home visit?
- Think carefully about the purpose of any meeting with the parents of this student. If you are trying to help the child, engage more with their learning and achieve more, be clear where you are going to start and what little steps you could take together. Try to be positive as you talk with them about the progress and achievements of their child. 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. For example, you may suggest starting with the student's skills in reading and writing and want the parents to help the child break down words into parts to be able to apply this skill to reading new words. Explain carefully and show the parents how to do this before you send home tasks to be done two or three times a week.
- What other support could you offer to the parents and child?

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 child'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 child progress and put these on the child's file. Make sure you follow up the meeting and implement any decisions as quickly as possible and support the child as much as you can.

Send home words of praise and encouragement in the student's follow-up notebook as they make progress.

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

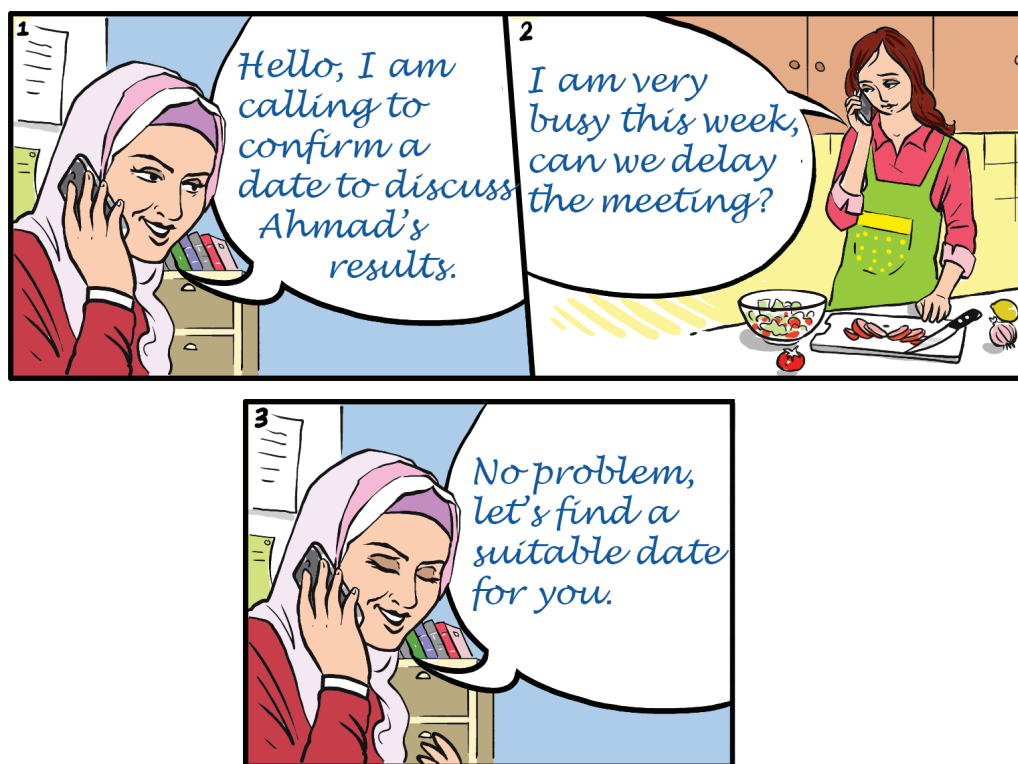


Figure 97: Arranging a home visit can be an effective way to reach out to parents. Be sure to coordinate with parents and caregivers to ensure a mutually convenient time.

### Comment

Just sharing small successes about their children can change the perception of parents towards school and improve overall communication with the family. Activity 52 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 have in their child's 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 their child's achievements. What you are trying to do is to help parents:





- develop a good model of positive social and educational values related to personal fulfilment and good citizenship;
- develop their children's understanding of the importance of education and being a good citizen;
- develop their ability to question their child about what they did at school and follow up projects they are doing at school;
- celebrate their child's progress and achievements;
- understand the need not to threaten or punish their child if they are not doing well, and encourage their child, no matter how small and simple their achievement;
- show interest in the child's learning and give time on a regular basis at home to assist their child with their homework.

The rewards for successful partnerships with parents/carers are profound. Students do better, parents understand more and have a better relationship with their child's 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: TC 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 in your classroom 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 your interest in children as learners, and inspired you to explore ways to engage them in learning to realise their full potential.

This last double Unit reflects on the overall impact of this SBTD 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 learnt and the impact of this learning both on you as a 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 developments goals.

## What does it mean to be professional?

People often say that someone is 'very professional', or 'she/he is 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 person, such as 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 an agreed body of knowledge and defined 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. 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. 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 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. Now let's explore this idea further.

Describing someone as being 'professional', as was highlighted earlier, relates to the qualities and ways of working that individuals bring to their work. The term 'professional' implies that those who are following the Code of Conduct are:

- accountable for what they do;

- honest and open;
- competent, efficient and effective;
- able to relate well to others;
- thorough;
- knowledgeable 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 (Anning & Edwards, 1999). 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 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 a colleague. We see such 'professional learning' as central to your professional working life. The Case Study below shows two teachers exploring ways of working within their classrooms and reflecting on their learning together following input from all the staff.

### Case study 45

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Hasana is in her eighth year of teaching and has a Grade 4 class in Naqora School, where a new Head Teacher, Mr Salheh, is introducing professional development inputs and courses within the school for all teachers.



The first session Mr Salheh organised was about different ways to gain students' attention and make lessons more interesting. The session made Hasana think about a group of students in her class who did not seem to participate in any lessons and how she usually gave them work and left them to work on their own. She began to think differently about her role as a teacher. She felt concerned that until now she had only focused on the students who wanted to work, rather than thinking about those who were not interested or involved in learning. She talked privately with her friend and colleague Salema about the training session. Both of them had enjoyed the input and both admitted to each other that they had not bothered with some particular students in their class. The session had awakened in them a concern for all the students in their class and they wanted to try out some of the ideas to see what worked best for them. Together, they decided to use a picture to stimulate interest as a strategy to try first, and they agreed they would share all that happened in their lesson even if it was not good. They planned their lessons and agreed a time to meet after teaching to discuss outcomes.



*Figure 98: Trying new approaches to capture the imagination of your students is excellent teacher practice, be sure to consider visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners.*

At the start of the lesson, Hasana showed the class a picture of a person riding a horse along a beach towards a house set on the sand dunes. She put the students into groups and asked them to develop a list of words that they felt described the picture. They then reported back and Hasana wrote the words on the board. Next, she asked them to think how they could use these words to write a story based around the picture. She found that the students liked looking at the picture and even some of her quieter students talked to each other and shared ideas. One student who had never spoken in class before acted as the reporter for her group and gave the group's list of words for Hasana to write on the board. Several of the students said thank you as they left the lesson – something that had not happened to Hasana before.

When they met the next day, Hasana and Salema both expressed delight at how well the students had responded to their approach. They also discussed other ways to use a picture or pictures in their lesson and expressed their dismay at how much they had previously ignored some of the students in their class. They thought the training sessions were a good way to help them think more about their responsibilities as a teacher. But it was through planning and then sharing their ways of working together that they found to be the most helpful. Being able to talk together about experiences in the classroom where the lesson had not gone as expected made them feel more confident about trying new ways of working.



Figure 99: Discussing teaching approaches with a colleague can help you to learn new practices and refine existing ones. Collaboration and discussion with peers also builds trust between you and your colleagues.

### Comment

Following the training session, Hasana and Salema were beginning to question their current practice and to think more deeply about their responsibilities as a teacher. Sharing both successes and problems helped them to develop their understanding and skills in using a range of activities. It also enabled them to ask questions, suggest and explore ideas and refine them to try again. Such processes contribute to professional understanding of the role and responsibilities of a teacher.

The first Activity below asks you to reflect on your practices before studying the SBTD 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 53

Think about your teaching work before SBTD.

- 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, if anyone, about your teaching approaches?



*Figure 100: Use your Programme Notebook to record the ways in which your teaching practice has changed and evolved throughout the SBTD programme.*

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

Then consider each question again and think of new ways of working that you have been introduced to through studying this SBTD 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 or studying case studies;
- sharing ideas with colleagues;
- reflecting on your practice;
- interacting with parents and students;
- engaging with the kind of language found in official documents;
- observing and commenting on your practice;
- gathering evidence of your practice to evaluate and review.

In your Programme Notebook, list those approaches that 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.

## Comment

*There are many ways of extending your professional learning, and the SBTD programme has used several different approaches to try to accommodate everyone's favoured ways of learning. The different ways of working that the SBTD 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 ways 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.



*Figure 101: Different approaches to teaching are natural, you need to find your own style. The methodology and practices of the SBTD programme can help you in developing your practice.*

As you know, at the heart of UNRWA's Education Reform is the student. This is to ensure that we provide the best education possible to help all students achieve their full 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 are





kept up to date with such changes and can develop and extend their professional learning. There are five main areas of professional development namely:

- personal and professional qualities (such as always wanting to do your best and reflect on your practice);
- team-working qualities (such as listening to and sharing ideas with each other);
- professionalism in practice (such as always being prepared for lessons);
- understanding students as learners and supporting that learning (such as differentiating activities to help those students who are at different stages);
- partnership with parents (such as sharing successes and asking for help with students' learning).

But there needs to be an openness to change and a willingness to reflect on and evaluate your own practice. The next Activity asks you briefly to reflect on what these areas mean to you.

### Activity 54



Think about each of the five 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 programme?

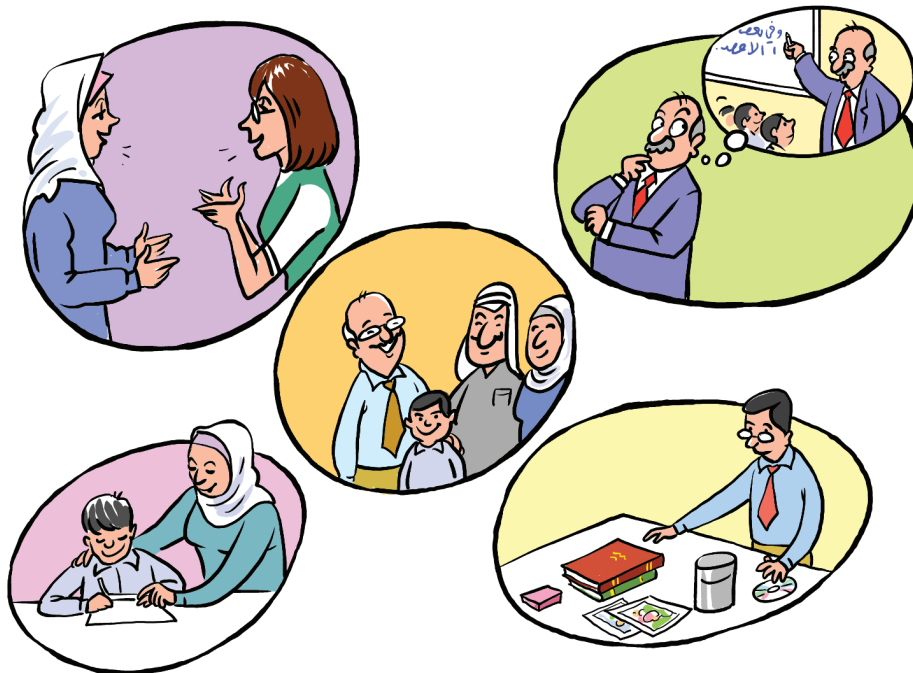


Figure 102: Professional development is crucial to your overall development as a teacher and for ensuring quality education in every classroom.

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 continually reflect on their skills and knowledge about teaching and learning.*

*One of the team who wrote the SBTD 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 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 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 journey. 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 identify different Activities and Units that have made an impact on you as a teacher and brought about change in the way you teach. This 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 Activity 55. After you have completed it, read Case Study 46, which describes one teacher's reaction to a similar programme.

## Activity 55

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

First look at the Professional Development Needs identification page where you set out your strengths at the very beginning of the programme, the areas you said you would like to explore further and your hopes for the programme to remind yourself of what you wrote.

Now look at the six Activities that you identified in your Portfolio as being 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 and thoughts that you wrote?
- Are there any common issues across each of the six activities? If so, what are they? For example you may see that you have highlighted Activities that relate to classroom organisation across the Modules. For instance, when looking at issues of inclusive education, literacy and numeracy, 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 you have chosen for 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 on what you think you have learnt from the six Activities you have selected. Add any questions you still want to answer in relation to these or to any issue about your teaching.

## Comment

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*It is very normal for us all to think about what has happened during the day, whatever we were doing. It is how we make sense of our world and organise our thoughts, feelings and understanding of situations, people and consequences. The SBTD 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 six Activities.*

## Activity 56



Choose one class of students that you teach and where you tried out one or two of the six 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 really like to know from them. It may be that you want to explore how any different ways of working you introduced helped the students to concentrate, or to better participate in the lesson. Prepare three or four questions to ask them. Do not ask too many questions, as they will lose interest. Key questions should include:

- Why did you like this activity/way of working/strategy?
- Did it help you learn more? If so, how and why?
- How could it be used again in other topics and subjects?

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 learn, and what they did not like. You may want to explain to them that they will not get into trouble for saying what they did not like! Most students may feel uncomfortable if they thought they were criticising the teacher, but you need to reassure them that you want their useful and constructive feedback. This will help you to help them do better as students. You may want to ask them for any suggestions about how to improve things next time. 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 them time to respond before gathering in the feedback. This time, do not go around the class listening, but allow them to work on their own or in their groups. Thank them at the end for their time and collect in any papers.

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 positive impact of what you did in that particular lesson. Make a note in your Programme Notebook of any significant comments and suggestions that the students have made. Secondly, look at any less constructive comments students might 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 make it better next time.

Next time you teach this class, thank them for their comments and say how much they helped you in exploring new ways of working. You can talk with the students about how it is useful for all of us to reflect on how we do things, and what we might need to change and that for teachers as professionals it is very important to do this regularly in order to become even better teachers.



Figure 103: Students are an invaluable source of feedback. Asking for, and receiving, feedback on your teaching practice is crucial for your professional growth and development.

## Comment



Asking your students for comments on your teaching may not be something you have ever thought of doing and it may have made you nervous, but successful teaching and learning involves both the student and teacher.

Obviously, using such an approach on a regular basis is not always 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 whether they are more engaged in their learning and making progress. You will recognise when a strategy is not working or is inappropriate.

The next Case Study describes how one teacher undertook a similar task to that in Activity 56 and it describes some of the outcomes and what the implications were for that teacher.

## Case study 46



Abdi is in his seventh year of teaching and is participating in a school-based in-service course for teachers.

The course focused on different ways of working in the classroom to make teaching more interactive. Abdi was nearing the end of the course, which he had found really interesting and at times challenging, and now he wanted to ask some of his students about their perceptions of the changes he had introduced.

He chose a Grade 5 class he taught, with whom he had tried out more of the strategies. 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 their agreed responses down. They did not have to put names on the pieces of paper as Abdi felt that if he made the activity anonymous, the students would feel more free about giving their 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.

- What new ways of working did you like most?
- Why did you like each of these?
- How do you think they helped you learn better?
- How could these ways of working be made even 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 do not like as much?

Abdi gave the students most of the lesson to talk in their groups and he did some planning for the next day's lessons at his desk while they talked. About five minutes before the end of the lesson, he asked them to make sure they had written down their responses. He then collected these 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 Abdi has introduced of working and talking in groups had helped them think about topics more deeply. They also said 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 best was having a fixed group to work in as this helped them move more easily. They said also that when Abdi changed groups around by reading out names and then putting the list on the wall, this helped them in remembering which group they had worked in.

Abdi noted that working in pairs was also popular and the students reported how they liked working with different students in the pairs. They felt they had made more friends in class because of this and they could help each other without feeling embarrassed.

One aspect the students were not so happy about was when they were asked to give feedback to the whole class on their discussions. Some were nervous that they had to speak in front of the class and worried the rest of the group might not like their feedback. Abdi thought about this and realised that maybe he had not given the students enough help in reporting back to the whole class, especially in the early stages. He had also not considered that some students would find it harder than others. He thought he could help by giving more direction to the groups as they worked, and also support each reporter more by asking relevant questions to help them structure their feedback and also be more encouraging.

Abdi found the students' insights really helpful and he made sure he noted them down to help him develop his practice more. He also felt that the students raised issues for him and he needed to really think about the strategies that he had tried to develop, such as asking questions. He remembered that he had seen an article about asking open-ended questions in a science methodology book in the library and decided he would take it home to read. Abdi also thought he would discuss his concerns with his colleague Hakim, who had often talked about the importance of questions in helping to support thinking. Hakim worked in a teacher-training college and Abdi felt he could help him greatly. He resolved to contact him at the end of the week to arrange a meeting.

## Comment

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*Undertaking an activity such as Abdi did with your class may make you feel nervous, but if you set up the activity carefully you may be pleasantly surprised at how helpful your students can be. However, there are also other ways to gather feedback that are more informal and will still help you to reflect on what happened. For example, just asking at the end of a lesson if the students enjoyed it, and what they liked doing most and least, will give you some idea of their involvement and learning and what it suggests about your planning.*

In Activity 53, you will remember there was a list of key approaches to finding out more about different aspects of teaching and learning. As we have said, some ways will be better for you than others, depending on your circumstances and on the topic you are exploring.

Striving to achieve more effective ways of teaching through professional learning will help to make you become a very effective teacher and will raise your students' achievements greatly. The next and final Activity in this Unit is to identify the next steps for you in your continuing professional development. This will help you to complete the needs assessment form in your Portfolio.

## Activity 57



Pause for a few minutes and think what has been the most positive outcome overall for you from studying this 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 person.

Next, look at your responses to Activities 53, 54 and 55 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 what they are learning or you may want to explore more about how to plan, organise and use pair or group work in their 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. For example the teacher in the example below has identified the following as being important in helping them use pair work in their classroom.. What do you see as important in helping you achieve the goals you have set yourself?

In exploring pair work, a teacher wanted to read more about what research says about how students learn more and think deeper when talking with other before they tried it out in class themselves. Next the teacher wanted to try out using pair work with one class over a month to see what difference it makes to their motivation, participation and progress in learning. To do this the teacher felt they needed help with finding things to read and with planning sessions that help students talk together more about what they are learning.

Finally, think where, as a teacher, you would like to be in five years' time. 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

Asking you to look into the future aims to stimulate further the motivation generated by this programme for you to continue your professional learning. 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.

*The SBTD course has...*



Figure 104: We hope you find the SBTD course rewarding!

## Summary

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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. The SBTD 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 learnt 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 programme! We wish you well in your ongoing career and professional development.





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