VOICES INTO ACTION: GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING ACTIVITIES WITH FAMILIES

Ground rules

Before beginning activities with families, it is important to collaboratively set some 'ground rules' for an effective dialogue. It would also help if facilitators made them visible (e.g. write them on a whiteboard).

Some examples of ground rules are:

- Confidentiality: we will not talk about what is said to anyone outside this group. The organisers can use the information anonymously.

- Respect and non-judgement: keep an open mind and show appreciation for everyone and their contributions. Give others the benefit of the doubt.

- Listen well: everyone deserves an opportunity to share and be heard.

- Build on the ideas of others.

- Silence mobile phones.

- Any other rules the group would like to add?

(Source: Playing to Learn and Learning to Play Interactive Parent Workshop (Collaborative for Educational Services))

Collaborative mind mapping

Mind mapping is a popular team-building activity that can be used in workshops with families. It is a collaborative, visual version of *brainstorming*, where members take a subject and jot down anything connected to it.

For example, 'mind mapping' can relate to words like 'creativity', 'productivity' and 'collaboration'. Small groups or independent participants can group similar words and work together to come up with themes. These may lead to further associations, new ideas and exploring angles of a problem.

Workshops can also use sticky notes for brainstorming purposes, where one sticky note represents one idea. Sticky notes are useful because they allow people to pick up an idea, bucket it with other similar ideas and move it around. Teams can simulate this activity on a whiteboard or on a wall.
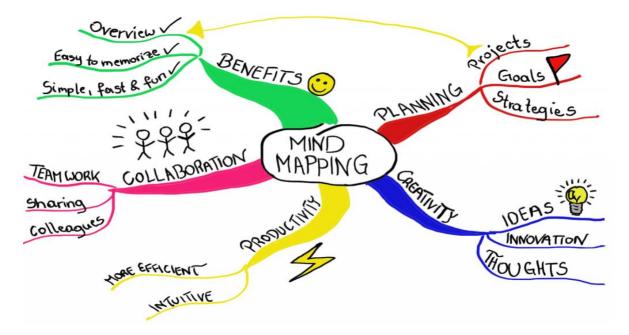
Figure 1. A mind map of the concept of 'mind mapping'

Figure 2. Learners participating in a mind mapping activity

The world café method

The 'world café' approach makes use of an informal café setting for participants to explore an issue by discussing it in small groups around tables.

Participants are split into round tables/conversation clusters. Each table has a 'table host', who is responsible for facilitating the round table discussions. The hosts are people who have experience in the topic under discussion.

Discussions can be held in two rounds of 30 minutes, to allow for relaxed and open conversations to take place. Each table can have a 'slogan' from the experience of each

host. Hosts can start by explaining the slogan. They can then use topic-related questions to facilitate the discussion.

The hosts should encourage participants to write down key ideas on flip chart papers or large index cards (these could be placed in the centre of the table, along with pens or coloured markers). Participants can also draw graphics to illustrate the patterns of the conversation. They can also note a single key insight on a large post-it and place it on a flip chart so that everyone can review the ideas during the second round.

Upon completing the first round of conversation, the host can remain for the next round, while the others are 'travellers' and move to new tables. The travellers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations, while the host welcomes the new set of travellers. At the end of the second round, all tables or conversation clusters in the room will have insights from each conversation.

One designated participant can act as the 'rapporteur' of the table discussions. This person can move among the tables to gather ideas and feedback.

A 'dialogic' workshop structure

The workshop discussions should strengthen opportunities for an in-depth dialogue around the topic of interest, following a 'dialogic' structure (please refer to pages 23–24 of *Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education: Final Synthesis Report* for more details). With this structure, all participants are assigned a role and get the opportunity to contribute to the discussions.

Organisers should send a detailed workshop programme in advance and explain the participants' roles in each session. Participants should have the chance to prepare in advance to respond to specific questions and contribute to the discussions.

During the workshops, facilitators can structure the exchanges as follows:

1. Introduce each topic for discussion and the particular question (orally or in a display).

2. Invite two participants to present their experiences related to the topic.

3. Ask three participants to discuss the question for a few minutes, also linking it to their own experiences. Participants could be from the same or different stakeholder groups, e.g. parent, Ministry, professional.

4. Ask two or three other people to comment on what was heard for a few minutes and to provide additional input.

5. Facilitate open discussion.
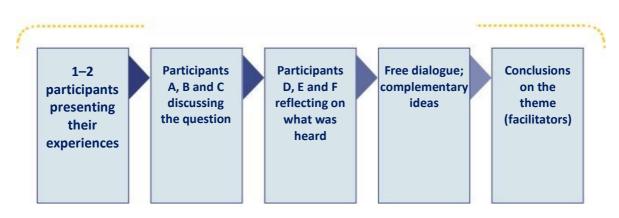
6. Provide conclusions and move on to the next question.

Figure 3. Dialogic structure

Eco-maps

At the end of each workshop, participants can share an 'eco-map'. The eco-maps are designed to provide additional information about everyday life in school for teachers and learners, as well as details of parent and family networks.

The eco-maps show relationships and personal/professional connections between different stakeholders and the range of teaching approaches used in schools. The eco-maps ask a question designed to be answered with one word or a short phrase to provide information about contacts made/approaches used in the last year, during the current school term, in the past month, or during the current week.

These maps help visualise support networks – both formal and informal – and the frequency of use. They can be used for families, parents, learners, teaching staff or other stakeholders.

Figure 4 shows an example of an eco-map for parents.

'Who have you talked to about your child's education …?'
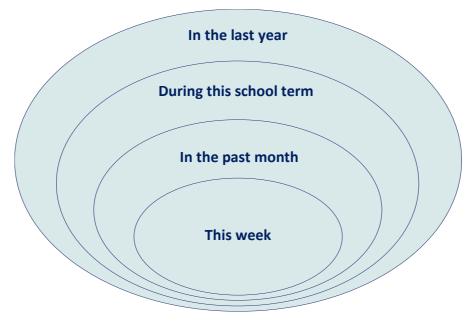
In the last year

During this school term

In the past month

This week

Figure 4. Eco-map for parents