

VISUAL REMAINDERS AS A PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS

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Abstract. *When conversation takes place, especially when the conversation impacts one's whole life, it is crucial that all participants can speak 'the same language'. Teachers should understand students and their parents, students should understand their parents and teachers, but parents should understand their children and also the teachers in order to reach a common goal, which is to provide the best possible education to the students. Therefore, it is important that when conversation is raised about a student's learning process, all participants maintain focus on the content of the conversation. The aim of this study is to explore how the application of visual remainders can improve communication between teachers, students, and parents. To reach this goal and determine if a visual remainder is a useful tool in pedagogical conversations, the scientific literature and normative documents were analysed, and a survey was conducted at a rural basic education school in Latvia. To analyse the obtained data, the Mann-Whitney correlation coefficients were calculated. This study proves that the participants emphasize different aspects of pedagogical conversations, therefore it is important to find a common solution on how to maintain the focus between all parties involved.*

Keywords: *Basic school, education, pedagogical communication, visual remainder*

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Introduction

Whenever teaching and learning is considered, as well as when looking for answers on how to improve the learning process, often teachers, students and school environment get mentioned, but it is important to remember that learning starts at home – with parents. The teachers have rich knowledge on learning content and curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, assessment practices, but parents have the knowledge of the context such as home environment, family dynamics, cultural influences as well as individual needs and preferences of the child. Teachers and administrators “walk alongside” with parents in their lifelong work to educate their children, it is a process of “caring for” and “caring about” the children (Pushor, 2023). Therefore, both home and school have a huge impact on students' learning process.

When teachers communicate with their students or when parents (in this publication ‘parents’ include all caretakers/guardians who make decisions about students' education) talk to their children, they should remember that every person, and so every child and every adolescent, has the right to express his/her opinion, especially when important decisions are made that have a direct influence on their lives (Calaprice & Nuzzaci, 2018). Sometimes it comes naturally, but there are times when students, parents and teachers need the reminders on how to talk, how to communicate and what to say to each other. The basic principle of communication is the exchange of information – any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about one's needs, desires, perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, or affective states (Mehrabian, 1972).

J. H. Stronge and X. Xu (2021) suggest that good and qualitative communication is the foundation for building positive relationships with parents, families, and the community in general. Parents' involvement in educational process of their children is crucial, and it has long

term benefits. It is especially important at the early childhood, because the first years at school is a critical period for building psychological, social and cognitive resilience in a dynamic society, and the research suggests that children of involved parents do better at school (Cole, 2021). G.N.Yoga, S.Ketut and S.M. Hery (2017) emphasizes positive pedagogical relationships stating that in a definite community, like classroom, politeness must be implemented because rudeness creates a conflict and misunderstandings between the teacher and the students (Yoga, Ketut & Hery, 2017). This implies that creating a supportive and polite classroom environment is crucial not only to enhance students' positive beliefs about their scholastic skills, such as literacy, communication, study skills, creativity, etc., but also gives them constructive feedback concerning their performance (Gruman, Schneider, & Coutts, 2017).

Part of communication is talking; therefore, teachers should consider when and how they talk to students and parents and *vice versa*, especially if the goal of communication is to improve the students' learning process. There are six basic talk repertoires for effective teaching and learning – talk settings, everyday talk, learning talk, teaching talk, questioning, and extending (Quigley, Muijs, & Stringer, 2019). But verbal expression is only one way of communication; there are teachers, students and parents who perceive information better in other modes. There are three basic ways of learning – visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Willingham, 2005), followed by alternative communication or alternative information exchange types. Alternative communication includes symbols, movements, drawings, graphics etc., starting from simple communication aids to complicated computer programs (Bela et al., 2023).

The aim of this study is to explore how the usage of visual remainders can improve communication between teachers, students and parents in a rural basic education school. To better understand the correlations and to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the responses of the groups of respondents, the data were collected in tables using Microsoft Excel and data processing program SPSS. The Mann-Whitney U test was performed to determine statistically significant differences between the respondents' ratings. The theoretical basis of this study, as well as data analysis, is grounded in the work of S. M. Cole (2021), S. Calaprice and A. Nuzzaci (2018), K. L. Mapp (2003), D. Pushor (2023), as well as previous research of the author (Pavulena & Pavulens, 2023).

Methodology

To achieve the aim of this study, a following research question was put forward: How does the usage of visual remainders improve communication between teachers, students and parents. After analysing the normative documents on communication and the principles of communication in the learning process, a Visual Remainder was developed – a visual guide containing main principles of a qualitative conversation. Then a survey was developed in order to explore how the application of this visual remainder improve communication between teachers, students and parents. Data was summarized in charts, Microsoft Excel and SPSS software was used for data processing. To analyse the differences between subgroups of respondents Mann-Whitney U was calculated.

The research was conducted in a rural basic education school, which employs 24 teachers and accommodates 153 students, located in Latvia, Dienvidkurzeme region. This school provides two educational programmes – basic education programme and the special education programme (Cabinet Regulation No. 747, 2018), Grades 1 to 9. The students who participated in the survey all are from Grades 5 to 9 (age 10 – 15). The research on the characteristics of the particular age group suggests that in this stage youngsters develop logical thinking forming the ability to analyse one's actions (Kalvāns, 2018; Dhanasekhar, Ponselkar, & Kumari, 2021).

After the Visual reminder (see Figure 1) was developed, it was handed out to all the teachers of the rural school with request to expose it in a well-visible place in their classrooms, so that the students could see it when they enter the classroom.

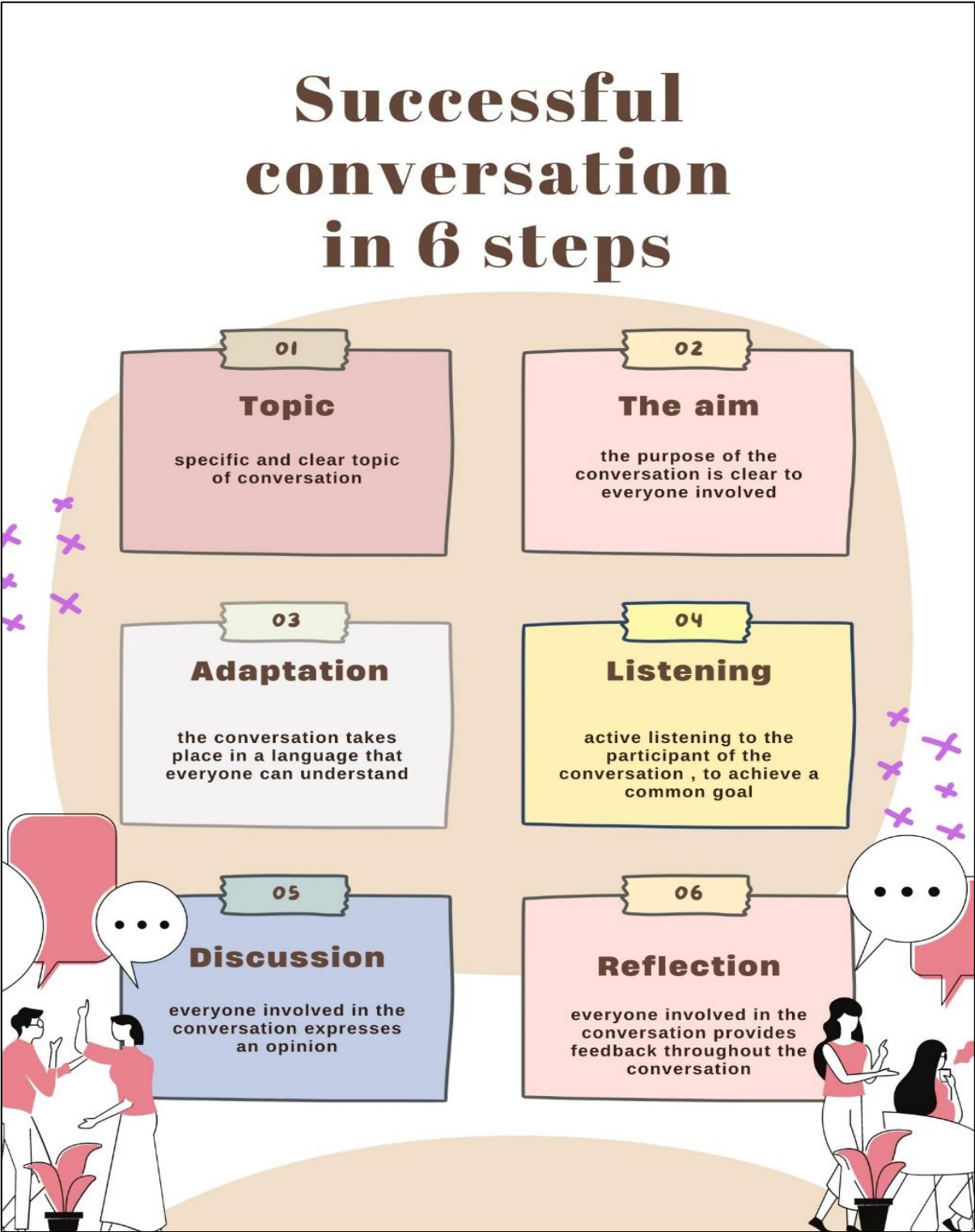


Figure 1 Visual reminder “Successful conversation in 6 steps”

The Visual reminder is meant also for the teachers as a reminder of how to talk to their students and parents, as well as for parents when they come to school to discuss their children's

learning progress. Reminders were sent out to all 230 parents using *e-klase* (Latvian education systems portal designed for monitoring learning process and communication between teachers, students, parents and school administration (E-klase, 2024)), but only 116 of them opened the letter containing the Visual reminder and read the information about the date when the survey is going to take place.

The actual survey was also conducted in *e-klase* as it is a secure and authentic e-environment for data collection, where every teacher, student and parent can log in using a unique username (personal ID number) and password. The participation in the survey was open for one week in April 2024. 24 teachers, 80 students and 230 parents (from all class groups) were invited to participate, but only 99 parents opened the letter containing the survey. The overall number of participants: 45 students (57% of those invited) in the age group from 11 - 16 years (the average age of students is 14 years, the most commonly reported is 15 years of those 48,9% male and 51,1 % female students), 11 teachers (46% of those invited) and 22 parents (23% of those who opened the letters). The semi-structured survey contained of 6 questions: 4 open-ended and 2 structured questions. The participants were asked to rate different steps of the Visual reminder presented, rating them from least important to most important in the scale from 1 to 6. Open ended questions were related to visual remainders' impact on conversations between the teachers, students and parents.

Research results and Discussion

The numbers of survey participants show a low involvement on the parents' side. As previously stated, the parent involvement in education process is crucial, and there are high expectations towards parents from the schools and the teachers, but in reality, the parent involvement is often lower than expected, which may suggest that school might not be enough welcoming or paying too little attention for nurturing relationships between the parents and the school staff (Mapp, 2003). Parents' involvement in the school correlates with the school programmes which encourage their involvement and participation (Chavkin, 1993). The low activity of parents in terms of reacting to the information sent could be related to low involvement in formal school activities. Formal education is developed to instruct children outside of mature community activities (Rogoff, 2003), and this raises a question – why parents should get involved if the system as such does not provide the opportunity. Some changes are required in school procedures in order to encourage parents to participate in school activities. For example, “Learning by Observing and Pitching In” (LOPI) can be introduced in formal education, which opens opportunities to incorporate, collaborate, share and also support the contributions of families and communities in education (Rogoff, 2014).

One of the aspects that impacts communication is perception – how the given information is understood. If the receiver of information is not interested in the message (or is insufficiently focused or does not give a full attention to decoding), this may reduce the amount of information received or the accuracy of the information transmitted to them (Barnard, 1955). That can open a space for “jumping to conclusions” or subjective interpretation of given information. That's why it is crucial to clearly formulate the topic, set achievable common goals, and come to an agreement about place and time where conversation will take place, accessible for all parties involved (Pāvilēna & Pāvilēns, 2023).

The Visual reminder was developed containing 6 steps (Topic, The aim, Adaptation, Listening, Discussion, Reflection) for modelling a qualitative conversation (see Figure 1):

The data analysis was conducted for each group of respondents separately, keeping in mind that if someone has seen the Visual reminder, that does not mean he/she has read it. Therefore, a question was asked: “Have you seen the visual remainder?” with a follow up question “Did you read the information contained in the Visual remainder?” (see Figure 2).

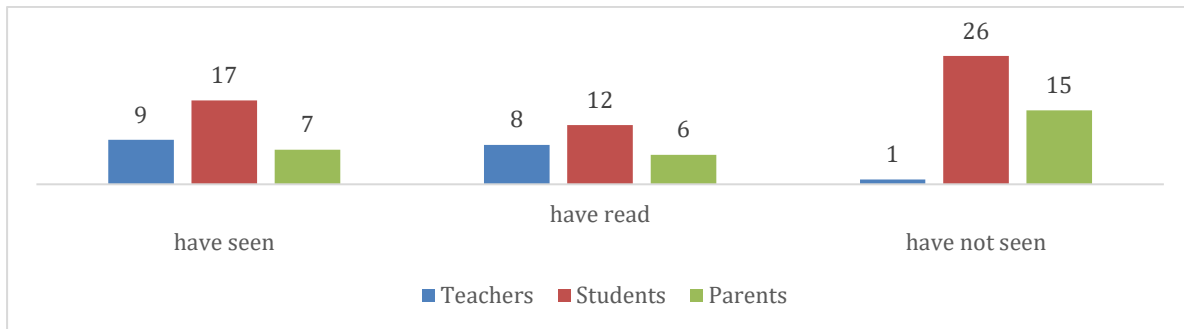


Figure 2. Awareness about the Visual reminder

Before the survey was conducted, teachers were specifically asked to place the Remainder in a clearly visible place in their classrooms. Most of the teachers put the Reminder on the classroom door, so that the students can see it when they enter or leave the classroom. Some teachers put the Visual reminders on their newsstands. However, the survey data proved that more than a half of the students (62%) had not seen the Visual reminder. When the respondents were asked “what was the reason why you did not read the visual reminder, if you saw it?”, the following responses were obtained: “There was too much information on the newsstand, so the Visual reminder just blended in, and I did not perceive it’s message” (female, 14 y/o); or “It was too boring to read!” (male, 16 y/o) or “The letters were too small, I need bigger ones to better understand and to make it easier to read” (male, 13 y/o). Several parents and also teachers stated “lack of time” as the main reason for not reading the Visual reminder.

All three of the respondent groups were asked to rate the six steps of the Visual reminder, with the aim to understand which of these steps they consider as most important. The obtained data was collected and processed, so the average answer could be determined for each of the respondent groups. To determine if there is a difference between male and female student ratings, the data was analysed separately for each group (see Figure 3).

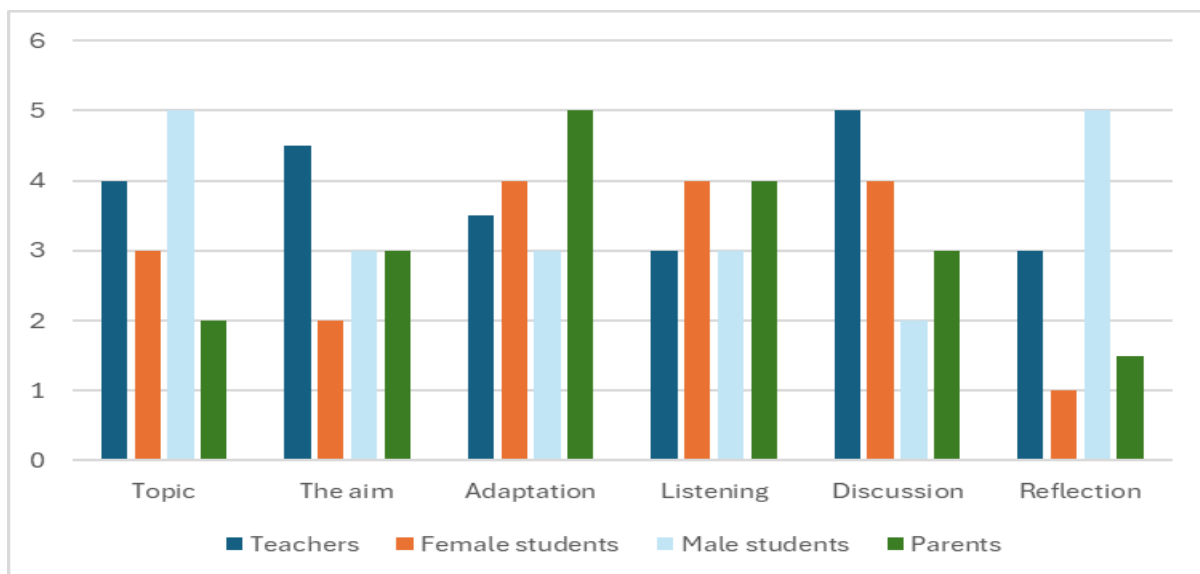


Figure 3 Importance of conversation steps

The obtained data show that for male students the most important steps are “Topic” and “Reflection”. While filling the survey, a discussion emerged between two 9th grade students. They were discussing the importance of knowing the topic of conversation and being able to reflect on conversation, as well as the importance of knowing what they understood in

conversation. When asked to assess the importance of each step stating the reason (why?), the student (male, 16 y/o) answered: *"It's less stressful to talk, when I know the topic of conversation"*. "The aim" in male and female groups of students was rated similarly, but "The aim" and "Discussion" got higher scores from the teachers as in the context of pedagogical communication, a common goal is raising awareness about students' education. In an open-ended question, the teachers also acknowledged that the most important steps are "The aim" and "Discussion". Analysing the data for the step "Adaptation", the biggest difference is shown in ratings between male students and parents. Male students' lowest score (min) = 1, highest (max) = 5, Mo = 3 (Mo - the value of a variable which occurs most frequently), but for parents min = 4, max = 6, Mo = 5. To determine if there are statistically significant differences, the Mann-Whitney criterion was calculated between male students and parents with regards to how important it is to adapt to each other in conversation, and the difference was determined (p - value = 0.047). "Listening" was rated similarly in all respondent groups. As data clearly states, in each of the respondent groups there are different priorities in conversation, so it is important to find a way, how these priorities are addressed, so everyone can be heard and understood.

To better understand how the Visual reminder improves communication in each of sub-groups (teacher - student, teacher - parent, parent - student), two open ended questions were raised for each group of respondents. For example, the teachers were asked "How has the Visual reminder affected your communication with parents about the student's learning process?" and "How has the visual reminder affected your communication with students about their learning process?" The same questions were raised for other two respondent groups, just changing to who the question is being addressed.

56% of students replayed that there are no changes in communication between them and the teachers (*"I have not noticed any differences"*) (female, 13 y/o). The rest of the student respondents stated that the Visual reminder has helped, and it is easier to talk to the teachers now. All the teachers, who have used the Visual reminder, found some aspects that need to be improved in their communication. 30% stated *"Now I am thinking more about adaptation, when I talk to students"*, 20% said that: *"We set a common goal before talking"*. When teachers responded about communication with parents, 50% of teachers stated that there is no improvement observed. Several teachers emphasized that communication is getting more specific *"I think about the topic, so conversation is more specific"*, five parents acknowledged that conversing with teachers is getting better, but only one parent said: *"I don't have problems communicating"*. Only ¼ of all student respondents saw the improvement in communication between them and their parents, for example, *"Now we will be more understanding of each other"* (female, 14 y/o). Rest of the students did not detect any difference. One parent stated *"I have my principle, and I hold to that"*, but the rest of parents said that everything works well in conversation between them and their children, and visual reminder improved communication only *"a little"*.

In the authors' opinion, there are other aspects with regards to pedagogical communication, which can be explored in future and could impact the obtained data, such as lack of guidelines for proper usage of visual reminders, accessibility of visual reminder and the time frame for research.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of scientific literature and obtained empirical data, several conclusions can be drawn:

- Communication between teachers, students and parents on students' learning process is more effective, when teachers discuss the problems immediately, right after the problem issue has occurred. If the problem can be solved within the

school, then in most cases the parents do not get informed about the problem, which leaves them more in the role of observers rather than active participants.

- In order to understand why all parents don't engage in communication and do not read the messages sent from school, it is important to look at the family as a microsystem, where in many cases just one parent reads the messages and then discusses the content with the other parent, but then both make the decision.
- Male students rate "Adaptation" lower than parents ($p=0.047$), but they prioritize the steps "Topic" and "Reflection", so it opens up a question for further research on the differences of perception of information, communication and mutual understanding.
- When visual reminders are developed, the students' opinion on design should be considered, so that it would be more interesting, attractive and easier to read, using simpler ways of expression.
- Teachers should be encouraged to discuss the steps with their students, in order to better understand the importance of good communication, because it can impact students' academic achievements in the future.
- Visual reminders should be more approachable for parents, not only in digital format on *e-klase* environment, but also available in different formats, so that the parents can use it as a reminder at home as well, when talking to their children about the learning process.

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