Skills for partnerships

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The idea of "skills for partnerships" is an American concept where different schools have contributed with their ideas about "skills for partnerships" between parents and teachers.

An example of a partnership is the following list of skills for partnership in mathematics: - Communicate with parents about how to contact the math teacher; conduct parent-teacher conferences; and provide information to parents about students' math progress between report cards;
-    Conduct workshops on math skills and school expectations; and
-    Invite parents to assemblies to celebrate math achievements.
-    The study suggests that elementary and secondary schools that involve families in students' math learning in a variety of ways are likely to produce higher student performance on standardized math tests.
Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2001).

Epstein works with six types of involvement which are necessary to relate to gain successful partnerships:
-    Parenting: assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also assist schools to better understand families
-    Communication: Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.
-    Volunteering: Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and various times.
-    Learning at Home: Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
-    Decision making: Include families as participants in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives - Collaborating with the community: coordinate resources and service

from the community for families, students and the school, and provide services to the community. (Epstein et. Al. 2002) The six types of involvement could be used to reflect upon and to create ones own list of skills for partnership.
Where "skills for partnership" is related to parental support in general, it could be equally relevant to look at the skills for participating in an intercultural context. Byram (1997) divides what he refers to as intercultural competence in three dimensions: Knowledge, attitudes and skills. All three dimensions can again be divided in a linguistic and a cultural part. Here I will only look at the cultural part.
 The following list presents some of the most important elements of the cultural dimensions of the intercultural competence:

Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend belief about other cultures and belief in one's own
Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction
Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own
Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under constraints of real-time communication and interaction
Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries
Skills of asking relevant questions Skills of comparing relations in different societies Skills to make contact with people:

Talk to them and learn about there habitus (Byram, 2001 p. 231 (It is Byram's conclusion in Roberts et.al 2001) and Risager 2004) There are in my opinion several important issues in this list. First of all it brings into focus how many aspects are related to cultural competence and the importance in training these competencies. Secondly, it is a crucial point that some of the skills are easier learned at school e.g. "skills of interpreting and relating". Other skills, on the other hand, are easier learned in natural environments e.g. "skills of discovery and interaction" and "skills to make contact with people". If we transfer this to parental support, one could question the effect of a normal dialogue between teacher and parents in the school context. (Normally in Denmark the dialogue takes place in a classroom around a table with one or two teachers and the parents). Maybe we can only reach an equal partnership in another context outside school which could be in pupils' homes, or in a more neutral environment. Kofoed (2005) points out that it is important to make contact with the parents in other environments than in the classroom: "Parental support is no longer a question of informing parents about the school but a question of creating activities and environments where students, parents and teachers have the possibility to get in contact and dialogue with each other, and where students and parents get to know the school culture (Kofoed 2005, p.96)