C 1.1 Working with parents

Verena Plutzar

In partnerships between educational institutions and parents, the institutions need to consider the following aspects[[1]](#footnote-1):

1. Building trust
2. Maintaining contact
3. Sharing information
4. Discussing expectations and reaching agreements
5. Reflecting on prejudices that exclude

# 1. Building trust

Gaining the trust of the parents is important even at nursery. If the parents have a relationship of trust with the nursery, it will be much easier for the next institution – school – to engage with the parents. What happens at registration can be key. If parents experience openness and respect, receive support and advice, and are given the opportunity to raise concerns and ask questions, this lays a solid foundation for future work together. It can be useful to take a close look at the registration situation at your own institution and examine whether it allows parents a start based on trust.[[2]](#footnote-2)

# 2. Maintaining contact

Alongside creating low-threshold options, it is important here to remain in touch with parents. This means creating space for informal discussions, for example at events, and making a standard practice of providing information not just in writing but also in conversation groups, for example at a "parents' café". Parents can also be invited on designated days to get a picture of everyday school life and teaching practice, and subsequently to ask any questions.

A key role in maintaining contact with parents is played by persons from the institution who are able to communicate with parents in a language with which they are comfortable and who can, if necessary, act as interpreters or translators. Such persons can maintain very low-threshold contact with parents, learning any important information about the family circumstances and passing on information provided by the institution more easily because the parents trust them.

# 3. Sharing information

Parents who have migrated to Austria are not naturally familiar with the educational objectives of the Austrian education system, nor with the many opportunities it offers for children. If information is to reach and be understood by parents, it must be provided more than once and in a range of different ways. There are various ways of passing on information in everyday education practice, for example internal information events, large meetings, parent-teacher days, notices and conversations or one-on-one meetings. It is good when parents also get talking to each other and discuss whether they have understood everything. It is important to choose a language that the parents understand. The view that they need to learn German first because they are in Austria is counter-productive in work with parents. Parents are often already under psychological and/or social pressure[[3]](#footnote-3), which is made worse by such expectations. Information notices should be as clear and concise as possible, and preferably in "Leichte Sprache" (simple German). The task of translation will then also be easier. Leichte Sprache is a version of German that avoids technical terms and subordinate clauses.[[4]](#footnote-4)

At the same time, educational staff may not necessarily know about families' circumstances and may not be aware of the many challenges that migration, poverty, violence or even a patchwork family can pose, as they have not had these experiences themselves. Understanding such circumstances not only helps staff to be respectful and genuine with parents, but is also important if staff are to support children in their everyday education with an anti-bias approach.[[5]](#footnote-5) It can also be useful for educational staff to work with information and advisory centres to find out about the specific challenges facing parents and, if necessary, to put parents in touch with those centres.

# 4. Discussing expectations and reaching agreements

Only once a relationship of trust has been established can parents be given guidance on the requirements and expectations of the school. It is important to bear in mind that expectations are not always conscious. They arise from more or less clear objectives and ideals, comprising previous experiences, which form what could loosely be termed as an understanding of normality, and instinctive hopes. The education system is highly coded, in other words it is based on a multitude of spoken and unspoken rules and norms. The fact that those rules and norms are not self-evident often only becomes clear when expectations are not fulfilled. One teacher puts it like this:

*"Wir Lehrkräfte gehen noch viel zu sehr davon aus, dass es Selbstverständlichkeiten gibt in dem, was Eltern wissen oder tun müssten. Das Einzige, was wir für selbstverständlich halten sollten, ist, dass Eltern das Beste für ihr Kind wollen. Wir müssen herausfinden, was das für sie bedeutet. Was erwarten sie und was ist für sie selbstverständlich im Umgang mit Schule? Wir müssen mehr von ihnen und über sie erfahren, damit wir unsere Ansprüche und Anforderungen an sie verständlich machen und auf ihre Voraussetzungen und Bedingungen beziehen."  
"We teachers still make far too great an assumption that there are certain things that parents should automatically know or do. The only thing we should take as read is that parents want the best for their child. We need to work out what that means to them. What do they expect and what do they assume when dealing with school? We must learn more from them and about them so that we can make our requirements and needs clear and relate these to their requirements and conditions." (Lubig-Fohsel/Mueller-Böhm 2010, 28)*

Educational institutions need to enter into conversation with parents – a conversation in which expectations are shared and compared, a synthesis is found and, on that basis, the partnership is continued. Agreements can help, but they may be part of a school culture with which parents are not familiar. The question of what counts as an agreement is also something that needs to be explored in the negotiation process. Ultimately, what matters is establishing a clear mutual commitment. Here, too, it helps to be familiar with both the circumstances and the experiences of parents and with the rules of the educational institution. In schools, for example, this can be a task for native-language teachers.

# 5. Reflecting on prejudices that exclude

In work with parents, it is important to address prejudices and institutional communication situations, as well as the fact that these can lead to exclusion and discrimination in educational institutions.[[6]](#footnote-6) Targeted information on the situation of families itself helps to counteract discriminatory prejudices and stereotypes. However, it may be useful for the entire staff team to attend a workshop on this subject.[[7]](#footnote-7)

# Bibliography and suggested reading[[8]](#footnote-8)

Arnhold, Heidemarie (2010), *Gemeinsam stark: Perspektiven der partizipativen Elternarbeit von Migrantenorganisationen,* Der Paritätische Gesamtverband, Available online at: <https://www.der-paritaetische.de/publikation/gemeinsam-stark-perspektiven-der-partizipativen-elternarbeit-von-migrantenorganisationen/>

*A theory section is followed by a description of projects and experiences of migrant organisations in Germany and an overview of sources of information.*

Goltz, Jutta (2011), *So kann's gehen: Impulse für eine gelingende Zusammenarbeit von Eltern und Schule in der Migrationsgesellschaft*, Reutlingen: BruderhausDiakonie, Available online at: <https://www.vielfalt-mediathek.de/mediathek/4520/so-kann-s-gehen-impulse-f-r-eine-gelingende-zusammenarbeit-von-eltern-und-schule.html>

*Tips for staff/institutions: what practical steps can I take to reach parents more successfully? What methods can I use to organise a parents' evening or a "parents' café"? What topics are important to parents?*

Hendrich, Andrea/Rita Offinger-Gaube (2018), *Kultur- und migrationssensible Familienarbeit in der Kita,* München Basel: Reinhardt.

*In addition to practical tips for nursery work with families such as a professional attitude, parent-teacher meetings and participation opportunities, the book also contains a wide range of practical advice for difficult situations.*

Höhme, Evelyne/Anke Kraus (2016), *Die Zusammenarbeit mit Eltern vorurteilsbewusst gestalten.* Inklusion in der Kitapraxis 1, Berlin: Wamiki.

*Key topics with factual information, questions for reflection and examples from practice: parental participation; dialogue on questions of education and upbringing; appreciating family cultures and avoiding categorisations; conflicts between nursery culture and family cultures; recognising the diversity of languages spoken at home; family structures and gender relations; empowering parents; prejudices of parents.*

Leitner, Barbara/Jutta Gruber (Hrsg.) (2016), *Ankommen. Willkommenskultur in der Kita.* Weimar: Verlag das Netz.

*Covers: working with parents; trust; attachment and language; inclusion; anti-bias education, and networking in social spaces – with examples from practice.*

Lubig-Fohsel, Evelin/Eva Müller-Boehm (2010), *Kooperation von Schule und Eltern mit Migrationshintergrund. Wie kann sie gelingen? Eine Handreichung für Schulen in sozial benachteiligten Quartieren.* Berlin: FörMig. <http://www.foermig-berlin.de/materialien/Kooperation.pdf>

*Experience and practical examples*

### Picture templates and translation aids

Heiligensetzer, Christina (2015), *Bildvorlagen für multikulturelle Elterngespräche: Visualisierte Verständigungshilfen mit Textbausteinen in Türkisch, Arabisch, Russisch und Rumänisch*, Hamburg: Persen.

*Material with picture templates and texts in Turkish, Arabic, Romanian, Russian and German on important aspects of work with parents at primary schools. In addition to general and organisational aspects such as absence excuse letters or Übergangsempfehlungen [teacher recommendations on the type of school a child should attend], the book also has images on topics such as children's behaviour, problems relating to family circumstances, etc.*

Osuji, Wilma (2016), *Flucht und Migration: Themenkarten für Teamarbeit, Elternabende und Seminare,* München: Don Bosco.

*The image cards for teamwork, parents' evenings and seminars offer a resource for reflections and discussions on flight and migration by nursery and school teachers in the group and on professional development courses.*

### Useful websites

[www.okay-line.at/okay-programme/elternratgeber/](http://www.okay-line.at/okay-programme/elternratgeber/)

[www.sikjm.ch/literale-foerderung/handreichungen/elternratgeber/](http://www.sikjm.ch/literale-foerderung/handreichungen/elternratgeber/)

[www.ifp.bayern.de/veroeffentlichungen/elternbriefe/index.php](http://www.ifp.bayern.de/veroeffentlichungen/elternbriefe/index.php)

Parental guide to literacy and multilingual language acquisition in various languages

[www.bimm.at/themenplattform/thema/kommunikation-und-kooperation-mit-eltern-einer-schule-der-vielfalt/](https://www.bimm.at/themenplattform/thema/kommunikation-und-kooperation-mit-eltern-einer-schule-der-vielfalt/)

Suggestions for work with parents with a section on parental literacy

[www.sikjm.ch/medias/sikjm/literale-foerderung/projekte/family-literacy/family-literacy-projektbeschrieb-2017.pdf](http://www.sikjm.ch/medias/sikjm/literale-foerderung/projekte/family-literacy/family-literacy-projektbeschrieb-2017.pdf)

A project to promote literacy in the family in a multilingual context

[www.kinderfreunde.at/Bundeslaender/Wien/EU-Projekte/Informationen/Mehrsprachiger-Elternratgeber](http://www.kinderfreunde.at/Bundeslaender/Wien/EU-Projekte/Informationen/Mehrsprachiger-Elternratgeber)

Parental guide in 7 languages (German, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, BCS, Turkish and English)

1. Based on Lubig-Fohsel & Müller-Boehm 2010 with modifications [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. cf. Checklist B 3.4 and situation analyses B 2.3 and B 2.4 on school enrolment [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. cf. C 1.2 Basic knowledge C 1.2 The situation of parents [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One example of Leichte Sprache is the explanation from Anti-Bias Werkstatt. <http://www.anti-bias-werkstatt.de/?q=de/leichte-sprache-uebersicht> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. cf. Basic knowledge D 1.3 Anti-bias education [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. cf. Tools under topic D, prejudices, discrimination and racism (basic text, checklist, situation analysis and reflection sheet) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. cf. Bibliography and suggested reading for basic knowledge on "Prejudice, discrimination and racism" [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This list and the brief descriptions were produced with the generous assistance of Hildegard Hefel (Baobab Vienna). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)