



GOOD PRACTICES FOR MIGRANT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Toolkit

COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS FOR MIGRATION PARENT EMPOWERMENT (ALFIRK)

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Introduction

The project 'ALFIRK – Collaborative Networks for Migrant Parent Empowerment' addresses the importance of including parents, and in particular migrant parents in school and educational processes of their children. ALFIRK was initiated by the SIRIUS Network – Policy Network on Migrant Education with the support of the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Program and builds up on the SIRIUS 'Agenda on Migrant Education' (Sirius 2014).

Migrant parents are often found to participate less in the school processes and the education of their children while at the same time many migrant students lag behind in educational achievements. Parental involvement in school and education matters of their children carries the potential to contribute to enhanced educational performance. Furthermore, parents with a migrant background are often not as well connected to local structures and information as parents without a migrant background. Strengthening parental networking and their inclusion in local structures carries the potential to further enhance their involvement in the education of their children.

Against this background, ALFIRK addresses barriers in increased parental empowerment in education processes, particularly among migrant parents, by:

- Analyzing patterns of migrant parental involvement, parental networking, and barriers in parental involvement and empowerment at case study schools in six EU countries;
- Identifying practical tools and good practices for migrant parental involvement and empowerment in order to enable schools to improve their strategies for migrant parental involvement;
- Developing online tools to enable migrant parents to easily access information about school and education systems in EU countries and to network and exchange information among each other.

In the long term, ALFIRK aims to empower migrant parents at three levels:

- The family level, which reflects parents' ability to manage issues of the family within the social context,
- The service system level, which reflects the degree to which parents are able to effectively work with the school system,
- The community/political level, which reflects parents' advocacy for improved services for migrant youth in general.

The collaborative approach is reflected in the project name "ALFIRK," which means "the flock." The project ran from September 2015 to August 2018; it was coordinated by the European Forum for Migration Studies – efms (Germany): The partners were Multi Kulti Collective (Bulgaria), Risbo (the Netherlands), Leeds Beckett University (United Kingdom), Economic and Social Research Institute (Ireland), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), and Migration Policy Group (Belgium).

This toolkit provides you with practical tools and information on the involvement of migrant parents in school and education processes of their children. It addresses common problems, that schools as well as parents face related to engagement at school, and gives practical tips for their solution. The toolkit is structured into seven chapters:

- Welcome Culture
- Language Barriers
- Information Policies
- Community-building Function of Schools
- Communication Strategies Between Parents and Teachers
- Schools-Parents Relations
- Network Concepts on Local Level

Each chapter is organized in three parts. The first part provides the theoretical background and discusses some important aspects of the particular topic. The second part emphasizes practical recommendations and the last one describes one or more Good Practice Examples.

Before starting with the practical part we will give you a brief introduction into the thematic scope of parental engagement in order to ensure a common understanding of what we are talking about.



Theoretical Background

Research has shown that the concept of parental involvement can be understood in different ways:

“It became clear to us within the first months of our research that neither the researchers nor the participants (parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers) share a common understanding of what was meant by parental involvement or, as we have come to label it, ‘parental engagement’” (Carreón et al., 2005: 466).

For a better understanding we will explain briefly some conceptual aspects of parental engagement and discuss some special needs concerning parents with migration background. In theory, there are two approaches to conceptualize parental involvement. The first one is to distinguish between parental involvement and parental participation. In this regard, parental participation is a concept that can be regarded as the active participation of parents in school activities, including communicating with teachers or school officials, attending meetings or events at school and participating in decision-making groups. The second approach distinguishes between home-based and school-based involvement of parents. Parental involvement is an over-arching term which is used in different ways in the literature and in practice (Vogels, 2002; Education Council, 2010; Lusse, 2013).

Parental involvement is a concept which can take different forms including ‘good parenting’ in the home, meaning the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance’ (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). Furthermore, subcategorisations can be formed, for example between cognitive involvement and personal involvement (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994) or quantity and quality of involvement (Marsiglio, 1991; Lamb, et al., 1987; Yemini et al., 2015). Since the concepts of parental involvement and parental participation mean the same in everyday language, they will be used synonymously in the following.

A more explicit categorization of parental involvement is the distinction between home-based and school-based involvement. The first one involves support parents give to their children’s learning at home (Lusse, 2013). This can include discussing school activities or monitoring child’s out-of-school activities. The latter one focuses on involvement in school that corresponds to the aforementioned concept of parental participation. Involvement in school governance and involvement in activities at school are two types of school-based involvement (Education Council, 2010; Lusse, 2013). Home-based as well as school-based involvement are related to the success of children at school (Patall et al., 2008). The case study in the Netherlands further shows that school management and teachers consider parental engagement at home as far more important than engagement at school. Thereby, they assume that home-based involvement of parents has more impact on the cognitive, emotional and social development of children than parents’ participation in school. *Figure 1* demonstrates the logic and effects of these two types of involvement.



Figure 1: Parental involvement and its effect: school-based and home-based involvement strategy

School-based parental involvement strategy		Home-based parental involvement strategy	
Types of approaches			
Communication with the school	Participation in school activities	Discussing school activities	Monitoring child´s out of school activities
↓		↓	
Potential positive effects			
Benefit of student outcomes Prevention of early-school leaving Improvement of underperformance		Benefit of student outcomes Higher rates of homework completion Improvement of academic performance	

Source: efms 2018

In the literature, the missing involvement especially of migrant parents is often addressed. Migrant parents are perceived by school as hard to contact and distanced from school (Sacher 2012). Also teachers complain about the lower involvement of migrant parents in comparison to those without a migrant background (Börner 2011; Jeynes 2007). However, the support given to children at home is often overseen. Research shows that especially groups that are assumed to be 'problematic' like migrants or less educated persons are more often involved in supporting their children at home than participating in school (Boethel 2003). Some studies confirm that the aforementioned assumption, that home-based support is even more important for the educational success of children than involvement in school (Neuenschwander et al., 2005; Hill and Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2011; Redaktion-Pädagogik, 2013). The results of the interviews done for ALFIRK show similar trends. Basically, the interviewed parents seem to see their role as secondary, they offer support just at home e.g. helping with homework. However, this does not mean, that they are not interested in their children's education. Many parents point out that they are very well informed about their children's school progress. Furthermore, they want their children to grow up independently and autonomously. At the same time, the interviews show divers results regarding parents' school-based involvement. Their level of school based involvement seems to depend not only on the commonly acknowledged personal barriers like work, time or missing language skills, but also on the school's approach to parental involvement and the particular type of involvement. For example, informational meetings are attended fairly frequently by migrant parents while they are underrepresented in official school boards.

These examples show that schools, when they are discussing on how to increase parental involvement, have to define clearly for themselves what exactly they want to improve. Do they want to gain more parents to participate in school activities or do they want to increase the parents' interest in their children's education? Different objectives need different solutions. Irrespective of the objectives or problems that differ from country to country and school to school, there are some general recommendations to improve parental participation. Some of them we will provide you in the following chapters.



Welcome Culture

Research has shown that immigrant parents usually do not seek contact with schools (Heckmann, 2008). However, as parental involvement has a positive effect on the performance of children in school, measures need to be taken to **intensify contact**. One way to accomplish this is the improvement of the welcoming process to involve parents right from the start.

The **first impression** a school gives parents is important because it has a long-term effect. Nevertheless, school systems in countries such as Germany are often not fully geared towards migrant parents, although they have long been a country of migration. This is noticeable, for example, in the fact that information is often not presented in the mother tongues of migrant. For instance, letters to parents, signposts in school corridors or the school's website are often only in the national language. As a result, the parents of migrant children are less well informed about school matters and feel excluded from the beginning. If parents do not feel welcome in a school, they are less motivated to get involved and participate in school activities. In addition to a passive attitude, some parents have feelings of a strong rejection of school involvement because they feel excluded from school processes. Hence it is crucial to **establish a welcoming culture** that shows all parents that they are perfectly welcome.

"Schools that are welcoming, positive, respectful and supportive of parents from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience the successful engagement of migrant and refugee families in school activities and thus achieve positive outcomes for students" (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2015: 27).

Furthermore, studies suggest that parents should be considered as **resources**, drawing upon their skills and cultural diversity in order to contribute positively to the life of the school (Ryan et al., 2010). To achieve a welcoming atmosphere, there are a variety of measures that can be taken.

Recommendations 1:

Distribute parent folders during the welcoming interview.

- The folders should contain multilingual information about the school system, the school leadership, and the parent representation (Sacher et al., 2013).

Keep the design of the school building multilingual.

- Multilingual orientation guides in the entrance area are inviting to parents with migration background and create a friendly atmosphere.

Implement an introductory year before school enrollment.

- Once the children have registered at school, the introductory year includes repeated discussions between parents and school management, a monthly after-school parents' discussion group and an exchange of information with school social workers. This enables parents to become very familiar with the respective school concept.
- Before the start of the school year, both the school and the parents sign a contract defining the roles of education. The content of the contract includes, for example, regular questions about school performance or praise for performances (Lokhande et al., 2014).

Implement binding welcome talks facilitate the entry into the school community.

- In welcome talks, the newly arrived parents are welcomed by the school management and informed about the school. In addition, parents and mentors can be brought together through welcome rituals.
- Mentors are parents who have been active in the school for some time, which is why they can inform the new parents about participation opportunities, so that first parent networks can be established.



Good Practice 1:

Strenght Card Method:

The "Strength Card" method is an idea, successfully implemented at the Konrad Duden Werkrealschule in Mannheim (Germany). Cards are distributed to parents at the time of school enrollment on which they can record their strengths, skills or resources that may be relevant for the school. The possibilities are unlimited here. All activities that could enrich the school should be written down by the parents. For example, the parents recorded strengths such as playing music, joining sports festivals, knitting, translating texts in foreign languages, accompanying on excursions or presenting their job. The duration of this project was defined as the whole school career of the child.

Three goals have been set for this method: parents see themselves as co-creators of the school events; Parents are perceived by the school as experts and thereby receive appreciation; From the first day a cooperation between school and parents arises (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2013).

Home visits:

The Hervormd Lyceum West in Amsterdam school is convinced that home visits provide valuable information and that they crease a basis for a relationship of trust between teacher and parents. Parents often feel safer in their home situation to talk about their needs, wishes and problems than when they are at school. During such a home visit, a mentor can - often without explicitly requesting - collect the necessary background information about a pupil and his/her home situation. The mentors receive a clock hour per week for the parent visit. When parents do not sufficiently speak the Dutch language, the school has appointed two non-Dutch pupil counselors who, if necessary, accompany the mentor (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.4 Netherlands).

Parent Seminars

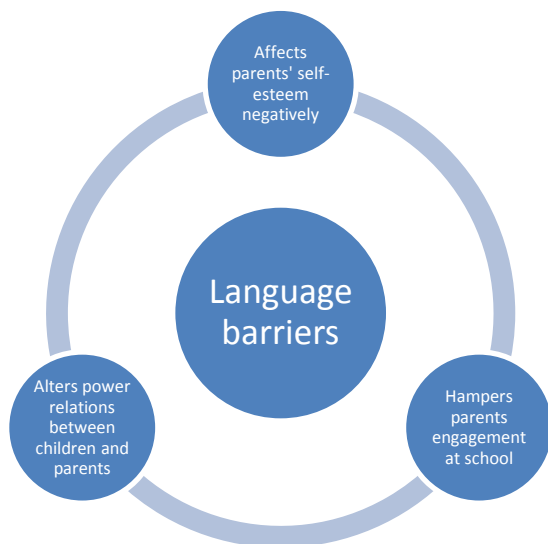
Parent Seminars are successfully implemented at the Hermann-Herzog primary school in Berlin (Lubig-Fohsel 2010: 12). Teachers are trained by attending communication training. The aim is to teach them qualifications so that they can give seminars themselves. The school addresses all parents personally as soon as the child registers at the school. During this conversation, the offer of a parent seminar will be presented. At the beginning of the school year ten events on fixed topics will be offered. The main goal is that parents develop trust in the school. But also the strengthening of parents' own educational competences should be promoted. This also increases the self-confidence of the parents. These events are also perfect for providing different types of information that is relevant for school and education processes.



Language Barriers

Language is an essential factor for **communication** and therefore for **integration** in society. Language enables people not only to participate successfully in the societal institutions of the host country but also to develop private relations with their fellow citizens (Heckmann, 2008). Especially related to education, language is a core factor of successful participation. Missing language skills hamper communication with teachers and school representatives, support of childrens’ homework and integration in school society. In the literature, language barriers are a frequent problem for **parents’ engagement at school**. In the Netherlands, school administrators encountered difficulties in getting migrant parents involved in their children’s school due to language problems (Denessen et al., 2007). In the United Kingdom “the parents’ expectations of their children’s schooling appear to clash with those of the UK school system and this is amplified by perceptions of poor communication, inadequate school-parent cooperation and marginalisation” (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015: 145). Barriers that were identified preventing eastern European parents engaging with their children’s school included “difficulties of communication, struggles to comprehend the British classroom” (ibid: 149). Moreover, insufficient language skills might also affect the **relation between parents and children**. In a research among Portuguese migrants, the parent and student respondents report that:

Figure 2: Consequences of language barriers



Source: efms 2018

parents (Carreon et al., 2005). Without a good knowledge of the language that is spoken at school, parents are not able to support their children’s school work. They are unable to understand schools’ expectations and to express their own views and concerns about the school. This affects the self-esteem of parents negatively (ibid.).

At the same time language is an instrument of identity and power. Immigrants lose this authority “because they lack knowledge of the nuances of language called for in particular situations, such as talking to a teacher or requesting a schedule change” (Trueba, 2004 cited in Carréon et al., 2005: 469).

Three approaches on how to deal with language barriers are presented in the following (**Recommendations 2**):

1) Coming up with the increasing number of migrants since 2015, language classes are by now an established instrument for schools in most countries in order to provide for the needs of migrant children without sufficient knowledge of the national language. For parents, though, these offers are not available. Parents who were interviewed as part of the ALFIRK project mentioned explicitly, that they would appreciate to have “more possibilities to study [the national] language (for both kids and parents). Knowing [the national language] better could stimulate the parents to interact more regularly with the schools

“Unless a translator was available and present, they were unable to communicate with the school a student talked about her anxiety in exposing her mother to a situation of shame for not being able to speak English... and that the two mothers were aware that their daughters only shared the information they wished to share and used their mothers’ limited command of the English language as an excuse” (De Abreu et al., 2003: 88)

Relying on children as translators alters the natural power structure within the family. A direct communication between parents and teachers is not only not feasible, in many cases it even depends on children. Thereby, children are assigned with with power that they can exploit easily. Lastly, missing language skills even might affect the **personal well-being of**

“As [the moms] learned to read, write and improve their communication in Spanish, many of them went through very strong empowerment processes through which, and after more than a year, many of them have improved their self-esteem, the image of themselves and have not only made their husbands accept that they come to school to learn, but also face the greater family nucleus and the social pressure exerted on them. Also, this experience has improved the perception of their own children about them, since instead of looking for the father when they have any questions or issues to solve in school, now they go directly to the mother as they witnessed that she has learned a lot of things.” (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.5 Spain)



“On an individual level, (...)school appears to cope with [the language challenge]. This is explained by a headmaster:“On the individual level we have some first approaches. For example, if we invite a mother who does not speak German we can include a translator. We can also use translated information letters. That means with communication we can deal with this issue for individual cases. [...]” However, only the school seems to be aware and able to involve a translator in the communication with parents. Parents are often either not aware that it is possible to come for a parents-teacher meeting with a translator or do not know have the means to arrange for a translator. This is why the interviewed headmaster continues: “It is difficult with the communication; that parents really realize that they have the opportunity to come to school in company with a translator.” (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.2 Germany)

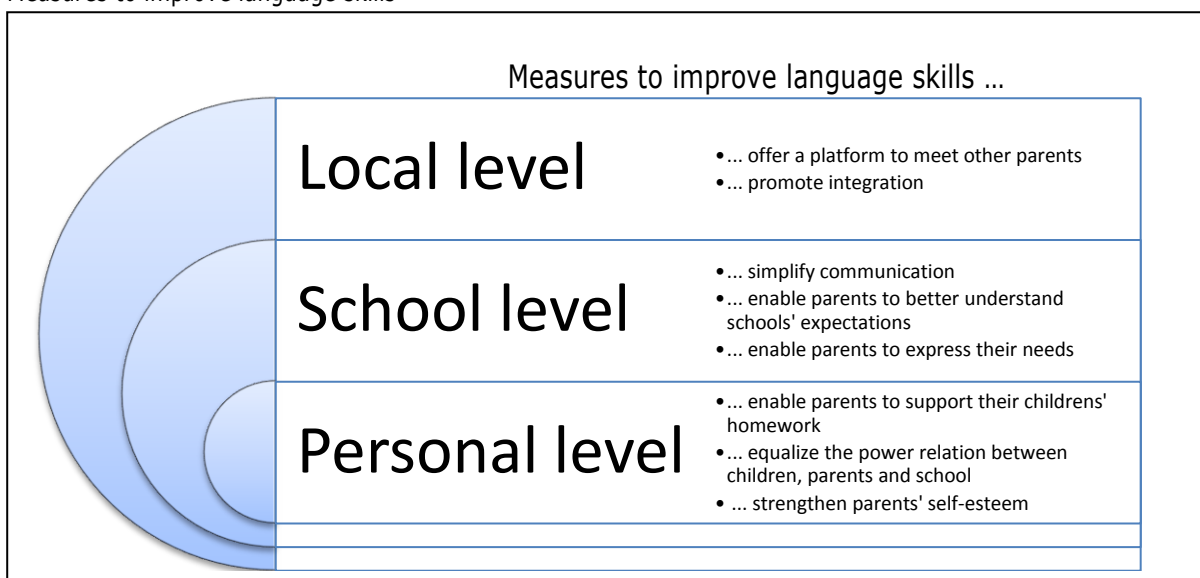
and with other parents as well” (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.1 Bulgaria). **Language classes** are advantageously on three levels. Firstly, language classes might influence parents’ personal well-being. Improved language skills help to correct the intra-family power structure as children are not needed anymore for translations. Also, parents are enabled to provide homework support to their children. Secondly, language classes might improve the parent-school relation. Communication is simplified, expectations can be understood easily and parents get enabled to express their concerns and wished towards school. Lastly, language classes help to create local networks among parents with migration background. They offer a platform where parents can meet, exchange experiences, and support each other. Hence, integration is facilitated.

2) **Multilingual school material** is a practical tool, teachers can use in order to support children with migration background in class. The material explains contents not only in the language that is spoken at school, but also (in the best case) in the mother tongue of the migrant children. This facilitates pupils to learn the new language and at the same time to understand the contents of the class. Not only for pupils but also for parents multilingual material is a benefitting tool. It enables parents to support children with their homework. Through the multilingual character of the material parents are provided with the possibility to explain and discuss schooling contents with their children. This might not only affect the relation of parents to their children positively but also strengthen the parents’ self-esteem.

3) Furthermore, it is a functioning tool to engage **interpreters** for the communication with migrant parents. They simplify not only the personal communication between parents and school but can also serve to bridge

communication gaps at parental evenings. By forming **‘language tables’** parents can sit at linguistically homogeneous tables and have the information translated by an interpreter. The interpreter also collects comments and questions from the parents and passes them on to the school management (Lokhande et al., 2014). Hereby, interpreter and language tables strengthen parents at school as well as on the local level. Interpreters are the bridge between parents and school, they are the voice that enables parents to communicate their needs and concerns towards the school staff. Through the language tables, they get in contact to other parents. This might be a starting point to create a new network.

Figure 3: Measures to improve language skills



Source: efms 2018



Information Policies

Research has shown that one of the greatest motivations for migration is the improvement of living conditions (Heckmann, 2008). As education is a basis for a future perspectives, parents usually have a strong interest in their children's educational opportunities. Nevertheless, migrant parents often do not frequently participate in school. This is often due to the **lack of knowledge about the education system** and their experiences of social distance from schools in the immigration country (ibid.). Moving to a new country can be a daunting process. Lacking 'insider knowledge' parents often find it difficult to navigate the new educational system, especially if they are unsure where to look for information. Surveys in Ireland show that parents often highlight an 'information gap' (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.3 Republic of Ireland). Above all, understanding the education system as a 'bigger picture' was named as a problem by interviewed parents. Although this information was offered on different websites and in different languages, parents did not know how to find them. In addition, a direct contact person for inquiries was considered helpful. In Germany parents mentioned that they do not know how to get involved in school. "There are parents who want to engage and start their own projects but they do not know where to get the information from and whom to ask" (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.2 Germany). This indicates that there seems to be a **lack of communication** between schools and parents. When schools manage to pass information to parents in a way that is accessible to all parents, more parents may feel motivated and able to contribute to school activities and may be able to bring in ideas and resources that the schools are so far not aware of. Often the usual methods, such as parents letters or parents evenings, do not reach the parents with migration background, even though they actually have a high demand for information. "It is absolutely crucial to gain the trust of parents and mobilize them for more participation in school life. The distance between schools and parents is often based on reciprocal stereotypes. Those can be bridged by long-term educational work and building trustful inter-relations only" (Medvedev, 2013: 66).



Source: efms 2018

"Maybe it would be interesting to offer low-threshold opportunities [of communication] in order to transform information in a real communication. So far, the only way is that the school informs parents in written form, maybe the information is not well received by parents. They may not be aware how to respond. How should schools deal with this? How can we transform information into a communication with very low barriers, using easy language and with low expenditure of time?"

Statement of one teacher (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.2 Germany)

The introduction of a **low-threshold information policy** avoids these hurdles.

Recommendations 3:

An **intercultural reflection of information materials** on the education system is highly recommended. This is important to meet the information needs of parents who have not gone through the local education system themselves. It is not enough to translate the information about the education or school system literally into the language of origin. Instead, **a dialogue is needed** in which the concept of the school system is explained, since it often differs greatly from that of the countries of origin. In addition, this conversation should not only be limited to any difficulties that may arise, on the contrary, all relevant areas of the school should be referred to (for example, talent programs or possible secondary schools).



In this context, 'low-threshold' means also **facilitating access to schools**. Through low-threshold offers, teachers should give parents insights into everyday school life and lessons. To achieve this, open activities such as parents' breakfast, parents' involvement in the design of school gardens or the planning of cultural festivals should be developed. These activities lead to a thematic related exchange between parents and between teachers and parents. Trustful relations between the actors and a mutual self-activation of the parents in school matters can build up as a result of such activities. The full spectrum of these activities can be used for educational information offers (Erler et al., 2009). In a relaxed atmosphere it is easier to convey information, offer advice or exchange experiences. Finally, parents can be targeted and asked to assist with lessons or offer activities during breaks. In this way, the parental participation can be increased.

Good Practice 3:

School-based parent cafés

For example, the Europa school Gymnasium Hamm in Hamburg, Germany, set up a parent café.

Figure 4: Parent café in Hamburg

Objectives of the parent café	<p>Parents ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - get barrier-free access to school, - meet other parents and school staff on an informal level, - get informed about all important school events and school life in general, - are encouraged to ask questions and exchange their experiences on issues such as school life, education, parents-children-interrelations, communication, career guidance, - express their needs for counseling, - are present at school, - are motivated to take advantage of further activities.
Considering the target audience and the way it is addressed	The parent café offers a suitable framework especially to those parents who are difficult to address through "traditional" parent involvement. Access is low-threshold, culturally responsive, gender-conscious and voluntary. No language barriers should prevent participation. Special gender- or topic-oriented settings can be provided depending on concrete needs. Oral cultures and language diversity are considered.
Frequency	Weekly to monthly
Activities	Activities depend on wishes and needs of parents. The primary aim is to establish a positive contact with parents and to make them interested in further actions. In the café parents get informed about current events and news of the school and community. Parents get acquainted with relevant educational, social and cultural institutions, also by visiting them in the context of field trips. Thematic meetings and information workshops on relevant topics regularly take place. Parents who need low-threshold counseling or mediation between them and the school have time and a place to make use of. Parents are motivated to attend courses tailored to their needs: i.e. parent-child courses, information sessions, qualification activities.
Structural preconditions of success / Networking	The school-based parent café needs professional, culturally responsive facilitators. They should be integrated into the school system as a "neutral" players, have access to information, maintain contact with the teaching staff and have a profound knowledge of school life.

Source: Medvedev, 2013: 63



Community-building Function of Schools

Research has shown that it is common for immigrant, minority and low-income **parents to feel alienated**, powerless, and culturally estranged from their children's school, which is why they avoid involvement (Schofield, 2006). Invisible parents or hard-to-reach parents are mainly parents with a low socio-economic position. They are significantly less well represented in the formal school bodies. Hard-to-reach parents usually consist of four different groups of parents: minority ethnic (religious and linguistic) groups; travelers; refugees/asylum seekers; migrant workers (Osgood et al., 2013). In schools where highly educated parents are the dominant group, the parents are usually active on all fronts and there is frequent communication between the school and the parents. Schools where parents from disadvantaged groups are the dominant group are less concerned about the influence of parents on the school policy and look for different ways to keep the often difficult lines of communication with parents open (Karsten et al., 2006). Reasons for the isolation could vary, for example, some parents avoid disclosing their ethnic background or illegal immigrants hide their status. Schools have a **community-building function** and therefore play an important role in **overcoming the social isolation of families**. For example, research in Bulgaria shows that parents would be glad to respond to different invitations, rather non-formal (holidays celebrations, excursions, gatherings, where they can present their culture as well), to interact more closely with the other parents, but they have not received such invitations yet (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.1 Bulgaria). In addition, the parents with a migration background spoke of 'a big ice' between them and the Bulgarian parents, so that various occasions that support getting to know each other are welcome and important. Interviews in Spain show that sometimes there is a risk that some families associate some schools as centers for the immigrant population, and the locals then, do not enroll in it and instead go to private or concerted schools, when their family income allows (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.5 Spain). In some cases, there are only few native students, "this makes some migrant families perceive this as a big cultural distance, a source of inequities in educational attention by the center and pose many doubts from local families regarding this as an issue that could diminish the educational achievements of their children" (ibid.). Schools should try to bring pupils' parents together to dispel doubts and form a community.

Increase parent involvement through social media

A project was started at the OBS De Dijk in Zaandam in 2011: 'Facebook page for parents and teachers of children in group 8'. Parents can exchange questions and advice with each other in this special Facebook group, register for activities at school, place photos and videos. The purpose of this is to stimulate contact between parents and provide more volunteers for school activities. The result is that the relationship between the parents has become closer, there is more involvement with each other and with the school. Parents sign up for activities more quickly and in greater numbers and nobody needs to miss anything thanks to photos and regular updates (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.4: Netherlands).

Recommendations 4:

School as community center (Bainski et al., 2004)

Provide workshops with social elements like exchange on ideas of education and learning, in addition to parents' evenings. At workshops, there is a practical exchange of experience between the parents. Perhaps some topics can be developed in group work. Create school councils, which serve to connect and integrate the nearby districts. In addition to the parents, the school councils should also consist of representatives of the various groups living in the district. Schools should specifically seek representatives from the catchment area, who then act as mediators between the school and residents of the neighborhood. Create a manual in different languages to introduce parents to the work of the school council. Invite migrants personally to the school council, who are particularly active in parents' evenings and workshops. Send invitations to all parents of the school in all required languages.

Knowledge about local support options

Educators and teachers need to know about community partners and civic engagement agencies, clubs, neighborhood centers, local family alliances, or multi-generational houses. These can provide benefits and information to families who are socially isolated or unfamiliar with the new environment. Ideally, all services can be accessed via one central location.



Parent meetings for newly arrived families

Meetings for newly arrived migrant families are a good opportunity to inform them about the school, the school system, the expectations of parents and school and to start integrating parents into school life. Such meetings are also an opportunity for parents to get in touch with other newly arrived parents, share experiences, network and make new friends, help each other and talk about the school system, possibly in their mother tongue. Language facilitators can support the communication.

Parent Room

Schools should set up parents rooms where parents can catch up on school matters, education and everyday affairs. Parents are welcome one or two days a week. There, parents are offered various courses, for example on information about an exam that is about to be held and how it will affect their child's grade. In addition, parents get to know the subjects taught at school so that they can help their children. Guest speakers may also be invited to discuss various educational matters. The parent room can show parents that they have many things in common, which facilitates contact between them and can lead to networks and friendships.

Good Practice 4:

Elternlotsen (parent-guides), Germany (Behörde für Arbeit, Soziales, Familie und Integration, 2016)

The Hamburg Elternlotsen projects support families with a migration background in their neighbourhood. The projects of the Elternlotsen work under qualified, pedagogical guidance. They are socio-spatially and interculturally networked with trained volunteer mothers and fathers from the districts. Furthermore, they are geared to the socio-spatial conditions and the needs of the target group of parents with a migrant background and young children in need. The families are accompanied by voluntarily committed mothers and fathers in their respective mother tongues, they receive demand-oriented information and are motivated to social participation. The Elternlotsen strengthen the self-help potential of the families as well as their own, they support the integration into the district and serve as bridge builders for the link to education and support offers. They serve as mediators between languages, cultures and information and therefore make an important contribution to equal opportunities and social peace in the district. The Elternlotsen project is supported by the Department of Labor, Social Affairs, Family and Integration (Behörde für Arbeit, Soziales, Familie und Integration, BASFI). The project of the Elternlotsen is often connected to a family support institution, for example an educational counselling centre, a parents' school, a day-care centre or a primary school.

The objectives are: the activation of family self-help potentials with regard to family, integration, education, health and work; Promotion of the educational competence and educational knowledge of the parents; Strengthening the active participation and social participation of families in social life (especially in schools); Supporting the intercultural empowerment of institutions; Contribution to social peace as a cultural mediator; Integration of socially isolated families.

The project is directed at two target groups: Parents with a migrant background (with clarified or unclarified residence status), from socially disadvantaged districts who need information and support and have children aged up to 7 years; Elternlotsen, consisting of already well integrated mothers and fathers with a migration background, from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods who want to volunteer and have a good knowledge of German and the local area. The Elternlotsen must live in the respective district of the parents, speak German as well as the same language as the target group and have knowledge of the residential area. In this way they can provide the parents with information about the district and introduce them to the education and school system. In addition, the Elternlotsen accompany the parents to appointments in institutions such as authorities, doctors and the school.

There is also a quality management which monitors the Elternlotsen project. At the beginning, the Elternlotsen are trained for 60 hours in practical knowledge, skills and methods. This includes these subject areas: Mission and Limits; Upbringing, educational, development support for families; Children's rights and child protection; Rights and duties of parents; Authorities and offices in Hamburg; Social facilities; Inter- and transcultural competence; Communication competence. Once a year, the BASFI evaluates whether the requirements have been met.



Communication Strategies Between Parents and Teachers

Communicating with the teacher is a crucial factor in active parental participation. Both, teachers as well as parents, must be aware of the importance of a **confidential relation** and of **frequent contact**. The Case Studies that were conducted for ALFIRK, showed that the parents' contendedness with school highly depends on the teachers. Parents are classifying teachers in 'good' and 'bad' teachers depending on their conduct towards the children as well as the parents (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.4 Netherlands). Although a good relationship between teachers and parents benefits the childrens' school success, there are various reasons that impede its establishment.

The most obvious problem are **language barriers**. As mentioned above, migrant parents often lack the sufficient language skills. This affects not only the well-being of the parents, it also affects directly the contact to teachers and school staff. Parents might feel intimidated and misunderstood by teachers as they are not able to understand them correctly. However, language is not the only problem that affects the teacher-parents relation. Cultural differences are another important aspect in order to understand the conduct of migrant parents. In more traditional cultures the **power distance** and role divisions are clearly discernible: parents are responsible at home – teachers are responsible at school (Hofstede, 1986). As a consequence, parents from the respective cultural background tend to view teachers as experts (Lopez et al., 2001; Serpell, 1997) and thus do not seek dialogue with the teachers themselves. Often, schools are aware of these cultural differences: "We know there is a clear separation with regard to Turkish families. At home parents are responsible [...] and at school it is the teacher. You do not go to school to get involved" (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.2 Germany). However, the teachers might not be prepared for interculturality at school. Research shows that there is certainly the opinion among teachers that immigrant parents do not live up to their educational duties, that they are not very interested in the educational development of their children, that they adapt too little to the school system and that they are resistant to advices (Lubig-Fohsel, 2012). At the same time, research has shown that migrant parents have high aspirations regarding the education of their children (Denessen et al., 2001; Lopez et al., 2001; Darmody et al., 2016) and that many of them are definitifely highly interested in their childrens' education (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.2 Germany). This shows clearly that the behavior and the actions of parents as well as of teachers are easily misunderstood by the counterpart.

"At the parents-teacher meetings, information is given at ten-minute intervals. Of course, I need more time, but the teacher does not have more, and I want to talk to other teachers as well. There are always bottlenecks, and I often go home unhappy" (Lubig-Fohsel, 2012: 18).

It is, thus, even more important to **prepare teacher students for the interculturality** they will be confronted with as teacher at school. But teachers often explain that they were not prepared for a multicultural class during their studies or training. In a survey in Germany, 91% of teachers stated that they were not sufficiently prepared during their training (Ahlrichs, 2015). "The word is always emphasised: 'multicultural education', but... You know there's a problem, you know you have to take care of it, but actually you've been left alone. That doesn't really play a role in training" (ibid.: 28). For the collaboration with parents, though, it is highly important that students will be trained in intercultural communication and competences. They should be prepared for classrooms with children from all over the world. It is important, that teachers understand the parents' view and do not feel

"Well, I have an arrangement with the teacher: if I should know something or something is wrong with my child, she calls me immediately! And if such a call is not arranged, how are the parents supposed to know what's going on at school. Parents' evenings only take place every six months and there is little information there" (Lubig-Fohsel, 2012: 18).

annoyed by their conduct. For example, teachers often complain, that migrant parents do not show up on parental evenings. However, this might not be caused only by disinterest but by the fact that parent-teacher meetings and parent-teacher evenings are often not appropriate to inform parents sufficiently about the possibilities of supporting their child (Lubig-Fohsel, 2012). Mostly at parental evenings, there is not sufficient time for parents to talk about everything they want to talk about. That is why they might prefer to make an appointment besides the official parental evenings. Furthermore, migrant parents often want more low-threshold offers and personal contact. Their need to talk, to exchange information about individual support or perspectives is much bigger than the opportunities provided. Informal conversations, whether by telephone, at school or spontaneously, are most likely to meet the needs of parents. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that teachers only have a certain amount of time they can invest in the collaboration with parents. Their working focus are still the children and their school education.



Recommendations 5:

The phone call (Graham-Clay, 2005)

Teachers can call each child's parents monthly to answer questions or discuss concerns. This provides them with valuable information about the lives of students, including bullying experiences or extracurricular activities. There is evidence that **telephone conversations** with parents increase students' academic performance. The use of "Good News Calls", in which parents learn of an achievement of their child, also strengthens relationships with parents. These first positive telephone calls can create the conditions for later cooperation, as parents become "allies". (ibid: 120).

Videos for parents

The **use of video technology** has also proven as a medium of communication for parents. Schools can create a welcome video for new families and send them the link to the video by e-mail and also put it on the school website. The about 10-minutes long video should be in all mother tongues that are represented at the school, or at least subtitled. In this video, teachers and school staff can introduce themselves. Also a guided tour through the school can be included as well as parts of a lesson. At the end of the video there should be an invitation to the school and a presentation of the school activities in which parents can participate.

Show a positive attitude towards parents

If teachers want to involve parents in school life, it is not productive to contact parents only in problem situations. Teachers have to perceive **parents as partners** so that regular contact and exchange can occur. Regular conversations without a special occasion have a greater positive influence on a pupil's performance than meetings between parents and teachers after a problem occurred, e.g. because of a bad grade (Lokhande et al., 2014). In order to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and recognition, teachers must work on their communicative and mediative competences. With a basis of trust, conflict-ridden issues can be solved much better and, in addition, parents overcome their uncertainties about contact with the school.

Good Practice 5:

Electronic diary (Blaziene, 2012)

In Lithuania, an e-system called "Your School" has been introduced. With this system, parents can monitor their child's attendance. All relevant information about the school is also easily accessible. But the main purpose of this tool is to simplify communication between teachers, parents and students. Using the tools provided on the website, students, parents, teachers and school staff can exchange information, follow and discuss school events and participate in school community activities. One of the tools is called Electronic Diary (ED), which allows parents to view information about their child's performance. This can be a means to prevent early school leaving in many cases. It is also a great help for communication with different actors in school life. For example, parents can communicate directly with teachers and ask them questions. In addition, there are forums where parents from different classes, schools or even countries can discuss different topics. If desired, the system can also send an e-mail or SMS to inform parents that their child is delayed or missed school.

Parental Involvement Project (PIP) Early Intervention Initiative, Ireland

The PIP initiative is an early intervention programme that supports teachers in providing high quality evidence-based practices in the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy while also enabling them to facilitate the involvement of parents. The initiative provides teachers with the skills and resources needed to involve parents, and offers a model of how to get them involved both in school and in the home. The initiative was piloted in two DEIS (designated disadvantaged) schools over the school year 2012 – 2013. The initiative involves in-school workshops; educative trips; work with target pupil groups offering in-class support (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.3 Republic of Ireland).

Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), Ireland

The HSCL programme in Ireland is open to schools with a socially disadvantaged student base. These schools receive a coordinator, usually a teacher, who is trained beforehand and is then responsible in the school for setting up structures to achieve better parental involvement. The main task is to develop services that enable parents to support their children in learning. Evaluations show that the programme promotes trust between parents and teachers and improves students' attitudes towards school and social behaviour. Positive effects on school performance could also be proven for part of the students (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.3 Republic of Ireland).



Schools – Parents Relations

Not only the personal contact to teachers, also the **atmosphere** within the whole school is of high importance for parents to feel welcome and comfortable at school. Research has shown that many parents are discouraged from engaging with schools because of a perceived **unequal power relation** between parents and schools (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). On the one hand, parents experience a **lack of influence**. Especially migrant parents usually perceive their influence on school policies as minimal while teachers, school management and the school board have significantly more influence (Bekkers et al., 2012). This is also mirrored in surveys among parents which show that the most common answer parents offered when asked about what is missing from involvement in school, was that they want more power in the decision-making process and also improvements about the equal partnership with the school (Williams and Stallworth, 1984). The perceived influence of parents in the (joint) participation council is also minimal. Parents in the (joint) participation council usually feel that parents have an information disadvantage in relation to the staff. Moreover, members of the (joint) participation council are sometimes involved in processes at a late stage. This could create a sense of "discussion after the fact" (Bekkers et al., 2012).

"(...) Yet in spite of her high level of engagement, Celia reported that many times she felt that the school neither respected nor truly valued her presence. When asked by other parents as to why she felt disrespected by the school, Celia talked about her problems communicating with school actors. At the time of our study, the principal and assistant principal at Daniel's school did not speak Spanish. What Celia and other parents found even more troublesome was that none of the personnel in the office were bilingual, even though 60% of the school's parents were Latino. For Celia, the lack of bilingual personnel represented a source of tension and symbolized a lack of respect for parents who had to wait until a translator was available to negotiate both trivial and crucial situations" (Carreón et al. 2005: 474)

On the other hand, parents often feel as if their **engagement at school is not welcome**: parental contacts and school activities are performed in an unattractive manner, invitations are designed impersonally and without the necessary insistence, participation options are insufficient and there is a general impression to be unwelcome in school (Redaktion-Pädagogik, 2013). Migrant parents further feel as if they are expected "to agree with and support the structures and dynamics already in place" (Carreón et al., 2005: 467). This is supported by the school's point of view, that parents who follow what schools demand are regarded as 'good parents' and those who have other ideas as 'problematic parents'. This unequal relationship might lead to a retirement of the parents. However, especially for the integration process of refugees and asylum seeking children at school the possibility of parents to communicate with school authorities is of crucial importance (Nonchev and Tagarov, 2012). Effective school leaders integrate parental involvement into school policy in a structured way, ensuring that the implementation is the responsibility of the entire team and the staff is up to the task. The **whole-school design** for the inclusion of migrant parents is a necessary and successful approach in order to include migrant children and parents.

"(...)Celia's narratives of her experiences of feeling disrespected or devalued within the school were part of a broader conversation with the other participants, all of whom referred to similar situations. At the core of these experiences, parents talked about difficulties in communication with school personnel and how they felt a lack of respect when they attended parent-related events and no translator was available. Some of these situations were witnessed by members of our research team. For instance, we were invited by the parent liaison to observe a workshop she had organized on the topic of health and nutrition. As we arrived at the meeting, we noticed that most mothers were speaking Spanish and that the presenter was not bilingual. At that point, the parent liaison asked one of our researchers whether he could translate. (Carreón et al. 2005: 475)

"We recruit very carefully. Teachers, secretary, caretaker – to make sure the school is very friendly and welcoming, to promote the ethos of the school. We have a very clear vision of how we want the school to be. If we plan anything we look if there is any way that anybody might feel they are excluded from this by the way we are doing it. And we look at it and if we find that there are families and children who cannot take part in this – then we don't do it. /.../ The school is like a community – from the man who meets them at the gate, the caretaker, the secretary... When we recruit we make clear that it is very clear that it is a diverse school, it is very clear how we speak to people, how we treat everybody equally" (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.3 Republic of Ireland).

It is an interesting observations that above cited school does not lack involvement of parents in school boards. "If our Parent Teacher Association would only be made up of white Irish people, I'd be seriously worried", the principal resumes. This shows, that an approach is necessary that is borne by the whole school and not only by single staff.



Integration of teachers with migration background

In contrast to the high numbers of children with migration background, the share of teachers with migration background is quite low (e.g. in Germany, 37% of first grade students have a migration background while only 6% of the teachers have a migrant background). There is evidence that teachers with a migrant or minority background have a positive impact on the achievements of migrants in school (Heckmann, 2008). They can act as a kind of **bridge-builder** between the local school system and parents with a migration background. They can serve as a contact person for other teachers for communication problems or questions related to cultural issues. For schools it would be advantageous to hire more teachers with a migration background and encourage young people with a migration background to become teachers. It is not only advantageous related to cultural and language issues, teachers with migration background are also good role models for pupils with migration background. As such, they can strengthen the self-esteem and aspirations of migrant pupils. Among those people who had to flee their home country there are also teachers who could play a crucial role in the intercultural mediation of schools. They can be enormously helpful, for instance, in communication between parents and school. They are familiar with the school system and culture of the respective country and are therefore well aware of the differences to the local school system. In addition, they can speak the mother tongue of migrants and may share similar experiences.

Recommendations 6:

Qualification measures for teachers and school administration

Support staff through professional development

Employees and structures must be geared to heterogeneity so that migrant students can develop their potential.

Involve all staff in creating a targeted family engagement policy and related strategies.

Although some schools have intercultural projects and dedicated teachers who are interested in diversity, qualification measures and teacher training are needed to develop an overall intercultural concept.

Discuss, decide and share with all school staff the school strategies.

Schools should give teachers and other staff the opportunity to participate in seminars in order to maintain expertise on the development of intercultural schools. The aim should be to develop an integration concept that can be adapted to the school.

Evaluate your strategy

Sometimes schools may have a strong interest in involving migrant parents in school life, which is why concepts and strategies have been developed. Nevertheless, it does not seem as if migrant parents would participate or perhaps the parents came to the meeting and stop coming. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the methods currently used and, if necessary, to replace them with others.

Good Practice 6:

Educate Together Schools, Ireland

These schools are a special type of state funded primary schools in Ireland. Educate Together Schools differ from other schools in their 'ethos'. The objectives and guidelines of the school should reflect the whole school community. The schools are equality-based, which means that every child has the same right of access to the school and every social, religious or cultural background is equally respected. This ethos is realized in many details. E.g. the Educate Together Schools have been the first schools in Ireland to introduce cooks with LGBT families and characters into the school libraries. They were the first schools to officially adhere to a policy of celebration difference and the first ones to teach about difficult social issues like homelessness, migrant rights and the current refugee crises. Furthermore, pupils are taught different worldviews and beliefs, considering ethical dilemmas and the process of ethical decision making. In addition, the schools are run democratically, with parents taking an active part in everyday school life. The schools that follow the Educate Together Ethos are usually set up by volunteer parent groups in a community. For this reason a high participation of the parents is encouraged. For example, parents are involved in teaching activities, educational support activities, the organisation of extracurricular activities or support for artistic, dramatic, linguistic, musical or scientific and technological programmes (Educate Together, 2017).



Network Concepts on Local Level

As mentioned in the above chapters, newly arrived migrant parents often have a **lack of social contacts**. Especially for parents who recently arrived in a new country, it is highly difficult to get in contact with people. Thus, it is not easy for newly arrived parents to integrate in school processes and in society at large. Schools, in general, focus on the integration of children but not on the integration of parents. Surely, there is a first welcome meeting of all parents at the beginning of the school year, but schools mostly do not offer a platform for parents to meet each other during the school year. That is why parents themselves recommend schools to offer "small group-based meetings [that] could facilitate the integration into (...) (school) life, especially for newly arrived parents who face (...) language barriers" (Koehler et al., 2018: ch. 3.2 Germany). The missing contacts to other parents might cause an information gap that is often filled in by migrant networks.

Research shows that obtaining information on the schooling system can often be difficult for newly arrived parents, from the admissions policy to choosing the right school: "All of the key informants agreed that newly arrived families tend to rely for information largely on their own networks of families and friends. This means that they are often relying on other migrants who may also be relatively new to the country or who may have limited knowledge of the [local] educational system" (Ryan et al. 2010: 23). This is also an issue highlighted by the study by De Abreu et al. (2003) which focused on Portuguese parents, and showed that in choosing a school the parents often relied on the Portuguese community for advice, instead of visiting the schools: "Though it is common practice in England for parents to visit the school or more than one school before their children enrol, this does not seem to apply to the present sample. Choice of school was based on advice received from family friends and from a Portuguese teacher in the area" (De Abreu et al. 2003: 83). This is an issue also highlighted in secondary research linking this tendency to a false impression about parents' isolation from the host community pointing out that: "The assumption that the 'hard to reach' are isolated and need to be encouraged and supported to experience social inclusion appeared largely misplaced amongst this group of parents" (Osgood et al. 2013: p.32). This indicates that non-attendance or sporadic attendance at school-based events that is often criticized by school or teachers does not necessarily indicate social exclusion or marginalization. Parents rather tend to build or utilize already existing **networks** or other social or religious services such as church congregations (Poza et al., 2014). Research shows that migrant parents generally prefer services provided by voluntary organisations to those provided by service providers such as schools (Katz et al., 2007).

New ways of addressing target groups must therefore be considered. It needs to be highlighted, however, that while social networks have many supportive characteristics, one should be aware of possible information gaps that may emerge when parents rely on organizations and networks outside the school to mediate their involvement (Poza et al. 2014). Collaboration with non-governmental social services and parents' networks offers the opportunity to reduce parents' inhibitions and access barriers to school. It might enable schools and teachers get access to parents they are not able to reach by other means. They might also benefit from the experience, intercultural competences and expertise of the professionals who are used to work in the field related to migration.

The Multicultural Initiatives and Resource Network is a Norwegian NGO run by immigrant parents. It wants to make schools more conscious about the way they treat parents and also to empower parents to become more aware what they can ask from school. The founder of the Network tells:

"We try to represent those immigrant parents who cannot do so themselves. Schools often approach us with problems of how to engage immigrant parents. But whenever we get into touch with them and talk in their own language it becomes obvious that they are very concerned and would like to become more active. They just don't know how. In that way, we also advise school how to better include parents, for example by providing an interpreter to make sure that non-native speakers can follow school meetings" (Lam interviewed by Degler, 2014).



Recommendations 7:

Strengthen the collaboration between schools and migrant networks, social services and non-governmental organisations

- Benefit from intercultural experiences of the staff members
- Benefit from the contacts and insights, the networks and social services have

Use the connections of social services and networks in order to contact migrant parents and use them as mediator to provide information about the local school system

Offer platforms for parents at school in order to avoid dominating informal networks

Source: efms 2018

Good Practice 7:

Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung (one square kilometre of education)

Within the project "Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung" (one square kilometre of education) the participants try to create a local network of education in order to provide a successful participation in the education system and prospects for individual educational success for all children and young people. The project is implemented in ten districts in Germany. In each district, the multiprofessional team of the project develops together with local actors of educational institutions and parents practical solutions in order to assure the educational success of the children and develop effective and sustainable structures within the district. In the network, a common understanding of quality will be encouraged between daycare facilities for children, facilities for children and young people, and schools. The project is implemented in 10 different regions in Germany that are confronted with especially high social pressure and inequally distributed education opportunities. Different actors and also different founders are involved depending on the particular place - local initiatives of public partners of Bundesländer and municipalities and civil participants (foundations and private agencies). For instance, in NRW the project is funded among others by the municipalities and the regional government of NRW. „Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung“ has ten working areas: inclusive education, language education, individual learning, investigative learning, collaboration with parents, living democracy, transitions, social areas, quality development and transfer.

In NRW "Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung" works in Dortmund, Wuppertal and Herten. The network structures differ slightly. Exemplarily, the network in Wuppertal will be explained in more detail in the following. The network Wuppertal is located in the district "Nordstadt", that is one of the most densely populated districts in Wuppertal. The district is characterised by a high unemployment rate, a low educational level and high poverty. The project started in August 2009 and after several months of initial phase it was officially opened in July 2010. It was established by the municipality of Wuppertal, the Land NRW, the Regionale Arbeitsstellen für Bildung, Integration und Demokratie (Regional Working Group for Education, Integration and Democracy) (RAA) Wuppertal and the Freudenberg Foundation. Locations of implementation are schools, daily care facilities, kindergartens, migrant organisations, the adult education centre and the library. "Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung" in Wuppertal has two central objectives: To extend the opportunities for children to develop 1) their language skills and 2) their personality. The program supports children individually to develop their reading, writing and maths skills; it aims to establish a literacy-culture in the district, provide individual learning support, and foster parental participation, integration and mentoring of the programm implementation in schools. Furthermore, in each district that implements a "Quadratkilometer" there is a pedagogical workshop. That's a place where pedagogical specialists, parents and volunteers meet, talk, exchange experiences and information, etc. (Ein Quadratkilometer Bildung, 2016)



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