Germany's School-Based Parent Cafés: A new Hype or a Sustainable Way to Update Home-School Policies?

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The following contribution examines a socio-cultural phenomenon that has been emerging in Germany in the recent years – school-based '*Elterncafés*' (parent cafés). Meanwhile, this term is accustomed by school development practitioners. Therefore, it still raises the question of definition. Parent cafés seem to be a promising format of cooperation between parents and schools, an attempt to attract more foreign-born parents through establishing an institutionalized but at the same time low-threshold setting that combines both Oriental and Occidental traditions of coffee houses and tea rooms. It is too early to claim the school-based parent cafés would manage to evolve a long-awaited breakthrough in home-school policies and replace out-of-date structures of school-parent communication in this country.Nevertheless, the fact is that nationwide the parent café model finds more and more advocates across all school types. One of them is the Europe School Gymnasium Hamm in Hamburg, Germany. The paper gives a vivid example how the school managed to establish its parent café in cooperation with parents, parent facilitators and BQM, a Hamburg-based think-tank. The author reflects this experience from a practitioner's point of view and proposes some principles of a school-based parent café.

Keywords: Parents, immigrants, school development, café, co-operation, stakeholders.

Background of the situation in the international, national and regional context

The recently published book "Exceptional People" concludes that *in general, migrants improve their (...) education by moving. Most are better off than if they had stayed put* (Goldin et al. 2011: 202). This conclusion refers to time-series data and research on large-scale immigration in the United States and other countries. One can agree with this statement using the absolute scale of measurement. But looking at PISA and other assessment findings regarding school performance and the outcome of children from immigrant families in comparison with non-migrant children we cannot be so confident. More than this: the fact of being born in an EU country, having an EUnationality, the (near)-native command of the majority language does not necessarily make the chances equal. The TIES studies showed that second-generation students perform in different ways in European countries, in some countries even worse than the first generation (Crul & Schneider 2009).

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Field experiments among the highly qualified from the second and third generation, for example that by Kaas and Manger (2010) proved that even the "non-native" sounding name of an applicant may influence his or her callback chances. The current situation of immigrant children within the triangle migration, education outcome and labor market access in most European counties is not acceptable. According to Migrant Integration Policy Index *few education systems in Europe are adapting to the realities of immigration*. Only 4 out of EU27 countries (Sweden, Belgium, Finland and Portugal) perform in a slightly favorable way, EU average is slightly unfavorable with 39 points out of 100 (MIPEX 2011: 16-17). In the press conference on the occasion of the OECD 2011 International Migration Outlook release on 12 July 2011 in Brussels, the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, László Andor, highlighted two issues that Europe is facing at the moment: shortages of skills needed in specific sectors of economy and integration of migrant youth, stating that the threat of social alienation would still be an issue for the next generation of immigrant youth in the EU.

In the recent decade a number of large-scale surveys managed to transport to the public mind, at least in Germany, the fact that a better co-operation between (immigrant) families and

educational institutions contributes to students' better school performance. From the first PISA 2000 results we know that the family-related effects on student's performance are almost twice as strong as those of educational institutions (OECD 2001: 312f.). Besides, the results of nationwide and regional surveys affirm that parents still play the key role in the career planning of their children. Depending on the particular survey, between 50 and 89 per cent of the youth interviewees indicate their parents to be the most influential career choice guides (cf. EINSTIEG psychonomics, 2006: 10/ Haspa Bildungs barometer, 2011: 15). Another promising impetus can be given by the following observation: The Hamburg branch of the UniCredit Bank reduced the annual number of contract cancellations among successful apprenticeship applicants by approx. 75 per cent thanks to parent involvement during the period of signing the training contracts (Medvedev & Wazinski, 2012: 19).

As for immigrant families, they remain in a way 'chief advisers', co-educators and career planners, even when experiencing a lack of knowledge on the functioning of institutions and particularly of education systems. That is why the Council of Europe (2009) advocates development of partnerships with local communities, including the families of pupils with a migrant background and migrant associations, thereby contributing to the development of schools as learning communities. A NESSE report (2008: 83) recommends above all to improve the general quality of the school via measures that include good management of the school, good cooperation among teaching staff, high expectations of teachers with readiness to give support, good quality of teaching, good discipline, good equipment of the school, and a strong parent involvement as well as to act proactively toward immigrant parents.

Another important finding of the studies to become known outside academia is a direct interdependence between students' school performance and the socioeconomic status of their families (cf. the PISA studies from 2000 on, TIMSS & PIRLS assessments et al.). In the EU comparison the aforementioned finding is applicable to Germany's system of formal education to a very considerable extent. It should be mentioned in this regard that we are not talking about a statistically marginal group. Immigrant students amount to 10 to 20% of the student population in many OECD countries

(OECD 2010). In the big cities like Hamburg these figures are almost three times as high: between 40 and 50 percent (DESTATIS 2010).

Looking at the German context, it should be mentioned that each of the 16 German provinces ('*Bundesländer*') is responsible for its school system. Hence, home-school policies are part of the corresponding provincial Education Act ('*Schulgesetz*'). These policies basically range from a regular participation in parent meetings ('*Elternabend*') of the class up to mandatory elections of parent representatives ('´*Elternvertreter*') as well as establishing parents' councils at schools. Those who know the everyday school practice in Germany would confirm that most instruments and policies are tailored to and reach rather German-born middle and upper class populations. School-based family involvement runs more or less continuously at pre-school age and in the primary school phase. It decreases rapidly in secondary schools, breaks completely down or is carried out irregularly, depending on the school type. The actual situation of parent involvement among foreign-born families is, except some ´good-practice islands', rather insufficient, especially in the secondary school reaching its negative climax by the end of compulsory schooling and dominates the so-called school-to-work transition. A great number of different measures are being taken in order to help with this situation. In fact, schools permanently deal with a patchwork of overlapping projects, programs, initiatives, organizations, et cetera. Many of such measures are aimed at establishing school-based parent cafés. The latter is a very remarkable socio-cultural phenomenon that has been emerging in Germany in the recent years and deserves a closer examination.

School-based parent cafés between facts and hypotheses

Searching the term '*Elterncafé*' on German websites today, we find at once numerous examples, covering at first glance the complete repertoire of parenting: from nursery to university, from cafés for young parents to cross-cultural services for migrant mums. Describing the situation in Germany we can say the parent café as an idea and a tool of parental involvement seems to have found its dissemination all over this country. Though, up close observed the phenomenon would lead us to the conclusion that most parent cafes in schools

were established just a couple of years ago: the oldest are about five, the majority are not even three years old. In 2007 Brater et al. advocated claims of parents in the Waldorf schools for more informal ways of parent-teacher communication and parent evenings with coffee and cake (Brater, 2007: 209).

Now in the year of 2013 these informal ways become more and more state-of-the-art or, at least, part of the agenda. Despite all challenges parent cafés seem to have become an attractive format of cooperation between parents and schools. Along with workshops, school events and project days, parent cafés appear in the draft version of the "Common Declaration on educational partnerships between school and families" of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the 'Länder' in Germany ('*Kultusministerkonferenz*') and representatives of immigrant communities to be approved in the next future. In spring 2013 the Vodafone Foundation Germany presented a policy paper on quality standards of parental involvement in schools, based very much on practices of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the USA. A short cartoon was produced on this occasion. One of the visual symbols of 'newly refurbished' home-school policies was, again, the parent café (Vodafone Stiftung, 2013).

How can this popularity be explained? In the author's opinion there are some approaches to this issue that should be adapted by further research. One of the possible explanations refers to the sphere ofpsychologyand has to do with the appeal of the word 'café' and its connotations: warm, cozy place, feeling secure, well-being, pleasant pastime, etc. In comparison with traditional forms of parent involvement, such as 'parent chamber', 'parent conference day' or 'parent advisory board', a parent café sounds rather relaxing and tentative. Another plausible explanation can be provided using the socio-cultural approach. The parent café would probably be the only legitimate participation niche for traditionalist or socially disadvantaged populations (or both), especially women, who have no regular opportunities to take part in the social life outside their homes. The structuralapproach puts the focus on schools as 'teacher republics' and the part played by them in societies or, to be more specific, in local communities. Supposedly, the school-based parent café is therefore an attempt to bring everyday life to school and open this institution to the outside world.

Meanwhile, the term '*Elterncafé*' seems to be accustomed by school development practitioners in this country. Nevertheless, it still raises the question of definition, i.e. whether the "parent café prototype" with its specific features corresponds to the "normal street café" the way it has existed in the last 350 years in the Western hemisphere. Usual mini-definitions of the café or coffee house to be found in various dictionaries – like "a place where coffees and cakes are served" – are apparently not enough for a profound comparison. To answer this question we have to deal with the cultural history of the café as an institution: brought to Europe by the Ottomans, it started an incredible career in Europe and became an important public space, a crucial element of the Western urban public culture.

Dealing with the European coffee house as a socio-cultural phenomenon one should keep in mind two facts. First, the coffee house is not an urban prerogative: It also plays an important part in the social life of rural areas in Europe (cf. Photiadis, 1965). Second, in European cities along with coffee houses there exist(ed) other genres of social get-together like salons or table societies (cf. Habermas, 1989: 30). The waves of 20th century migration to Europe enriched this canvas and created such post-modern hybrids as the '*TadschikischeTeestube*', a traditional CentralAsian tea house which used to be located on the premises of the noble '*Palais am Festungsgraben*' in Berlin-'*Mitte*' or the '*Burg am See*' in Berlin-'*Kreuzberg*', a mixture of a German beer garden, a Turkish tea house and an Oriental '*shisha*'-lounge. Despite these fusion trends a city café still preserves its characteristics. What makes a café?

1. Though, the initial and actual destination of the café as a place for coffee consumption was extended in the course of the centuries, and still cannot be diminished. Without this centerpiece the café would lose its purpose (and name!). Today, of course, we have to do with a much wider variety of consumer goods making the café repertoire.

2. The function of a socializing spacebecame more important over time. In this regard, the café still plays its role as a place of discussion, exchanging or just consuming news and expressing private views in public, also when being transformed into virtual spaces of internet cafés.

3. Another facet of the café is the option of collective leisure or social get-together, which does not necessarily include a must of group

activities. In contrast to the clubs, political and other associations the café offers the opportunity to find an individual balance between participation and non-participation without the thread of exclusion.

4. Probably, the crucial feature of the café is its physical existence within a regular time and place setting, which makes participation possible.

5. This characteristic is connected with what Habermas calls the principle of universal access (*ibid*.: 85) considering coffee houses to be open institutions. The claim to being open, in terms of inclusive, is rather controversial, regarding the fact that different social groups traditionally used to gather in 'their' cafés. In this context Philo assumes that today's "coffee-houses are much more straightforwardly inclusive, with less of a penchant for excluding certain groupings (…) and fewer barriers, formal or informal, to entry and, in effect, to 'membership'". (Philo, 2004: 17)

There is no universal definition of the parent café yet. However, we need a starting point in order to describe the parent café as a type. The following description can be found on the website of the Johannes Diakonie in the town of Mosbach: "The parent café is a regular forum for parents and relatives, which facilitates mutual exchange and dialogue with professionals". (Johannes Diakonie 2012) A further step towards systematization and reflection of the school café practices was made by four projects on intercultural parent involvement at school-to-work transition in Hamburg (Engst et al. 2011). Their recommendations include among other things a parent café overview (see *table 1*).At first glance, all aforementioned features of the traditional coffee house are valid in the case of the school-based parent café, too. If we take a closer look, some special features become visible. These relate primarily to the temporal and spatial organization. Compared to street cafés, open every day, school-based parent cafés have a lower frequency: weekly, monthly or quarterly. Unlike a street café, which is part of the streetscape and therefore is available "on the spot", the parent café is spatially and institutionally part of the school institution. Both features may be a barrier to potential visitors, which can successfully be resolved by matching

communication ways, incentives and target groups. The crucial difference between a school-based parent café and a regular café is the role supposed to be played by the café personnel. As indicated above, the parent café aims at mutual exchange and dialogue with professionals, meeting other parents, teachers and administrative staff on an informal level. This objective requires special educational and organizational skills of the team involved into launching and running such a café in a school. Krummacher (2004: 286) considers local communities to be the essential level of integration and identity building in the socialspace. One can agree, taking into consideration that the local community is not the lowest level of the social space. At this point it should be emphasized that the social space is not only geographical in terms of a territorial unit (a district, neighborhood, etc.) but also corporative in the sense of an institution such as school. This broader understanding of the social space would be an appropriate tool in achieving the goal: parents feel they belong to their children's school as "their place", which rather corresponds to the statement by Klus: "In terms of social infrastructure collaboration between the stakeholders of public social work and thetraditional pillars of the community (clubs, churches, political parties, neighborhood associations, etc.) is of particular relevance for the integration. (…) School, kindergarten and local community are central axes, where integration processes can be localized" (Klus, 2006: 140-142). However, the usual triad *family - school - community* excludes schools from the (local) community paradigm and considers it as a quasi parallel system to the systems community and family, which contradicts the notion of the policy-makers to transform schools into focal points of integration. Taking all this intoconsideration, the system *community* can be visualized as a socio-geographical space, a meta-system where the systems school, family and school partners (individuals, groups and organizations) interact. This approach would lead us to the conclusion that community is a framework that enables inter-relations among the three aforementioned stakeholders.

Table 1 - School-based parent cafés

Objectives of the parent café	Parents ... - 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 such issues as school life, education, parents-children-interrelations, communication, career guidance, etc. - 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 being 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 place to take advantage of it. 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" player, have access to information, maintain contact with the teaching staff and have a profound knowledge of school life.

The *Elterncafé* at the *Europa Schule Gymnasium Hamm* in Hamburg, Germany

To get from abstract hypotheses to more practice-oriented matters, we should refer to authentic experiences of schools. The core of the following contribution is dedicated to a long-standing cooperation between the Europe School Gymnasium Hamm and BQM Consulting Qualification Migration, a Hamburg-based think tank. Its program ranges from practical activities such as training units for different target groups to consulting authorities and enterprises as well as developing concepts. Five years ago BQM launched a pilot project which aims to improve the involvement of parents with other than German cultural and linguistic background into school affairs. Among others BQM started a peer-to-peer training program for active migrant parents. The successful participants of this program become so-called '*Moderatoren'* (facilitators) and disseminate their knowledge on school-to-work transition issues to migrant communities and to their neighborhood.

Here is the voice of our protagonist, AyferSengül-Loof, a teacher at the Europe School Gymnasium

Hamm in Hamburg, one of the facilitators and initiators of the parent café[1]:

"Our school decided one day to set up a parent café. This decision resulted from the idea to create a pleasant atmosphere for parents by giving them opportunities to meet other parents, not only teachers. The exchange among parents is particularly valuable because they believe they would play 'in the same team', unlike the school teachers who play 'in the other one'. To break up with this idea was a precondition of any good cooperation between parents and schools.

During the first meeting in the cafe, we asked parents to explain the reason for their participation. Without that we would not have been able to find out why they came. Astonishingly, the majority of parents would have been ready to support the school before that day; however, either because of language barriers or other obstacles, they had not been able to fulfill this. Before the first meeting we tried to resolve the language barriers by sending out invitations to parents in their first languages. The majority languages chosen were German, Turkish, Russian, Persian, and Chinese.

Since the start four years ago the parent café in our school is being run by a core team, which combines a whole range of backgrounds, biographies, motivations, etc. We have a father, who is a parent board representative in his daughter's class and meanwhile was elected to the City Parent Advisory Board. There is a mother, who was a teacher in her home country and knows both perspectives. There are other mothers who discovered a new role for themselves through a regular participation in the café: they improved their confidence and motivation for the interests of their children and learnt to shape everyday life at their school.

Our experience of the last years has shown that even simple things matter. A good example would be the welcome barbecue for the families of the 5th grade. The idea behind it was just to help the newcomers and their families get first orientation in our school in a different way. It turned out that the parents experienced the beginning of the school year as an exciting and unsettling period at the same time. The barbecue evening organized by the parent café members gave new parents opportunities to get to know each other and the school. To start the first parent meeting at the new school with introducing parents to each other can create a relaxing atmosphere and make the parents and children feel welcomed from the very beginning. The feedback from the parents during the enrolment for the 5th grade, also their question 'Are we going to have the barbecue evening this year?' - motivated us and showed how easy it is sometimes to establish things. Another important aspect to be mentioned in this regard: the positive reaction of the parents who made this event happen with the support of the school administration. They were apparently proud to represent the school and tried in personal conversations with their peers not only to promote their network but also to take away the anxiety of the newcomers by talking about their experiences at school.

Our basic idea was to use facilitators among parents as a first contact point for parents who need counseling on their children's school career opportunities. One of their main tasks would be to mediate among schools, parents and school authorities. According to this idea our school started involving parents who attended the BQM peer-to-peer training program. The complexity of the part played by the trained parent facilitators is about the double perspective they represent. On the one hand, they are parents themselves and may have similar experiences. On the other hand, they represent the school with all its obligations, but also demands. So they have to respect the perspective of parents and schools alike to provide a basis for an amicable solution. Doing this job the multipliers can always* count on the support of teachers, who established the café together with them.

It is encouraging to see the parents' efforts rewarded by successful actions. The network, growing by individual backgrounds and biographies, contributes to the fact that parents' concerns can be spoken out loud to the school administration as well as to the School Authority. In such situations, parents learn how much they can move and how meaningful their voice is. Those, who initially had language barriers, begin to adopt the German language, because it is definitely more fun to be able to discuss things without having to get the contents translated by

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[1]Quoted and translated into English from the German original paper: Medvedev, A., & Sengül-Loof, A. (2013). Vom Elterncafé zur Elterncmoderation – zwischen Modell und Alltag. In R. Hartung, K. Nöllenburg, & Ö. Devecı (Eds.).*Interkulturelles Lernen. Ein Praxisbuch*. Schwalbach/Ts: Debus PädagogikVerlag, 146-154.

others all the time. We give them time and support them in uttering their oral contributions. Multilingualism does not mean in this context teachers must speak many languages. It is what parents can do, if insufficient command of German would become a conversation hurdle.

Looking at our experience with the parent café we realize that first of all, it's all about the school that parents perceive as a place of wellbeing. Shall we, however, consider the parent café as a workshop, the focus automatically will be shifted to results to be achieved in teamwork. Though, this should not become a streak of successes, at least not as the main product. The school should rather accompany the parents, show them ways how the school can be addressed with all the parents' requests and troubles. During our discussions we try to stay as practice-oriented as possible by drawing conclusions from an individual case and applying it universally. So, the café can serve as a place of (self)-reflection. In our everyday life, also in our café we experience how differently people interact. This experience should be appreciated. We learn to confront conflict situations adequately and keep an eye on communication rules. Therefore, the parent café can be looked at as a place of learning and participation, where parents have a voice and see themselves as part of the school institution. Besides, the parent café can also be viewed as a place of emancipation. Parents, who have their say in the organization of school life, become more and more aware of their duties and responsibilities, feel needed and can transfer these skills to other areas".

Implementation of promising practices

Within the scope of this contribution taking into consideration the lack of research-based data it would be erroneous to give any far-reaching practical recommendations. The issue of transfer and reproducibility of the so-called best practices in new socio-cultural contexts remains, in our opinion, the biggest challenge. Kalev et al. (2006: 590) remark concerning approaches to promoting diversity: "at best, 'best practices' are best guesses. We know a lot about the disease of workplace inequality, but not much about the cure". When recommending practices there is always on one hand a threat of overestimation of the general, of the pattern (sample, recipe, know-how, etc.), and on the other hand a risk of underestimation of the specific person-, time- and place-related constellation. The success

preconditions of any project should be defined as variables depending on the given social context, which does not necessarily have anything in common with the original project. Without realizing it we may have to deal with frustration of the project team, when all efforts undertaken are not fruitful enough or even fail.

The issue of parent involvement is anything but new. Schools look for new ideas for parent cooperation and take inspiration from good experiences of other schools. No school needs to reinvent the wheel. There are numerous opportunities to exchange ideas with other schools and to pick up any new know-how. Nevertheless, it is essential to keep in mind that adopting best practices needs a reflection of both the abstract model (project theory) and its variants in individual time and place settings (project practice). In our specific case: the conditions for successful implementation of a parent café depend on the specific school situation and school environment, that may have nothing or little to do with those of the best practice school. Success in one school does not necessarily mean the same in any other school just because of the best practice label.

In addition to promising practices from schools, there are always those who have had rather bad experiences and failed in their opinion, because of the lack of parents willing to participate. In such cases we all need to understand that the success of collaboration and having a good school concept of parental involvement is not always measurable by the number of participants. The goal should be to overcome the fear of failure and the *We-have-already-tried-it-all* philosophy. One should give new visions a chance to grow and not just capitulate at the first hurdle. Thus, organizing a parent café is not a conjuring trick. It may be considered that one needs time. For example, it took the Gymnasium Hamm nearly two years to establish the parent café.

All in all: There is no universal recipe for a successful parent café, but single experiences, ideas, methods and principles to be customized by each school depending on own requirements and, above all, the needs of the parents. Along with common standards schools should be encouraged to define the scope and way of measuring success or failure of their extra curriculum activities such as the parent café by themselves. Such variables as time, place, advertizing, involving key persons as well as personality features of parent café facilitators, not to forget the famous x-factor like forgotten

keys or low outside temperatures: all this can be decisive for success or failure of the project. There are settings that just take a longer time before they start functioning due to personal inter-relations or need more than just one try. Other settings have a cyclical nature (i.e. school holidays vs. school term, the spell of Ramadan or Christmas time vs. holiday-free time, warm vs. cold season, etc.), should be promoted by word of mouth rather than by printing advertisements to achieve better results in cross-cultural / gender mixed groups (or vice versa), et cetera, et cetera.

There is a high demand for information across all groupings of migrant parents. The substantive demands of the parents depend on the age of their children. Despite this fact all parents want to know how the school system works. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, the formats and methods of addressing parents with other than German cultural and linguistic background practiced by schools such as parent letters or parent evenings do not reach the target group to a satisfying extent. 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.

Looking at the school-based parent' café as part of the agenda, how to bring everyday life from outside into school and as a result to open the school to the outside, the following question is still to be resolved: Are schools in a position to open up towards the outside world? We believe that nowadays schools are increasingly dependent on cooperation with non-school institutions (or individuals) like institutions of vocational education and training, enterprises, (parent) associations, specialized projects such as counseling centers, training agencies, single supporters, etc. Depending on the specific school situation, this list would differ.

A well-functioning parental involvement needs suitable facilitators. Their personal networks and social skills are key factors for achieving the target audiences. The challenges of parent involvement are far from being merely language-dependant. Single events are not sufficient enough to meet existing needs and empower parents to take their own actions. Information should always be coupled with real opportunities for the parents to act on. At the same time it is also about schools that should learn to give this issue more space, commitment and regularity. From our experience we know that parents also choose school venues for meeting other parents outside official school parent involvement activities. This phenomenon got the name "parent engagement undercover", which apparently means, parents have no fear of the school as a location. This observation refutes a widespread opinion existing in educational institutions that claim parents would have a *threshold fear* in regard to schools.

Conclusion

Every agenda has to decide itself what exactly success or failure means. Both categories are not absolute either: The same outcome could be success in one and mean failure in another project. The fact is that despite the strong interest of the stakeholders to implement this format throughout the school system it is not a success in every single school at all! Various factors may play a part and contribute to success or failure: time and place, communication strategies, involving multipliers, last but not least personal features of each team member responsible for the project. Some initiatives just need some more time to be kicked off or have a special life cycle, are driven by the oral propaganda rather than printed advertisements, function better in linguistically or gender homogeneous groups, etc. There are no ready-to-go recipes or ever-best practices. It is about promising formats, technologies, or techniques as ingredients to be blended in an individual mix based on always special local (regional, national, etc.) needs. More than changing techniques and methods it is about changing discriminatory structures and human attitudes. Mutual respect, options for open dialogue as well as thorough preparation work are essential for a successful long-term implementation of such a project, regardless of the aforementioned framework preconditions.

One of the conclusions could be the insight that designing programs for certain population groups requires policy-makers and practitioners to consider in-group diversity for better meeting the demands of people, realizing eventual threats or backlash effects and enhancing the impact of the programs as we know from longitudinal studies in the United States (Kalev et al. 2006). There have been no reliable long-term studies on parent involvement impacts on students' performance in school-to-work transition yet, at least in the

German-speaking countries. Nevertheless, in the recent time some positive trends towards a better evaluation and a more systematic analysis of measures taken by the stake-holders at all system-relevant levels from ministries and nationwide foundations to local practitioners and their networks are emerging.

It is too early to claim the school-based parent cafés can evolve a long-awaited breakthrough in home-school policies and replace out-of-date structures of formal school-parent communication in this country.Nevertheless, the fact is that the parent cafés find more and more advocates across all school types nationwide and becomes normative. The parent café as a model has it all to become a new interaction and communication platform for school stakeholders, first of all, teachers and parents. To prove (or to disapprove) this statement one definitely needs evidence-based research and, of course, years of project practice.

In conclusion, we propose *7 principles for the school-based parent café*:

1. The focus of any cooperation between parents and schools is the child. It does not mean, however, such cooperation can have no other effects!

2. The possible impact of the parent café is complex. If the school truly seeks to use the skills of every single parent, the parent café can become a place of wellbeing, (self-) reflection, empowerment, participation and learning with and by other parents.

3. In addition to the questions of "how often" and "where" there is still a difference between a school-based parent café and a street café, especially regarding the role of café facilitators. A parent café is about the mutual exchange, meeting parents, teachers and school administration on an informal level.

4. The parents' café in school can be considered as a project to bring everyday life into school and to open it up to the world outside.

5. To carry out this project, the school needs cooperation with non-school institutions or individuals.

6. There is no universal recipe for a successful parent café but many single experiences, ideas, methods and principles to be customized by each school depending on own requirements and, above all, the needs of the parents.

Along with certain common standards schools define the scope and way of measuring success or failure of their extra curriculum activities such as the parent café by themselves.

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