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Cooperation parental home and school- no illusion

Communication is the essential element of cooperation

In a great measure good school subsists on cooperation of its participants. In this relation and in the face of current issues like the initiation of full- time schools or the demand for schools' opening towards their regional environment the cooperation between parents and school has attached more and more importance in the last years. But how can parents really be partners for scholar concerns? This article points out the relevance and the difficulties of parents' cooperation as well as concrete possibilities for the interaction of parental home and school.

Great demand and great relevance- cooperation of parents and teachers

As a place for learning and living, school contributes in high measure to the respect and realisation of our value order. Thereby schools comply with the order to educate children to accept ethic basic rules, be interested in political questions, and be tolerant and respectful towards religious feelings. To fulfil this order, good cooperation relations between parents and teachers are eminently desirable and important, because in the ideal case education consists of a common concept of upbringing and education and a functioning allocation of tasks. That parents and teachers get in exchange about educational questions and the child's educational potentials is an important condition for the ability to make them "dockable" offers at school and to avoid confusing them by very different and incompatible styles of education resp. block their development of identity. This is especially relevant in multicultural contexts; the inclusion of parents in scholar development represents an eminently important supporting frame condition for school quality. (Truninger, 2005)

More probably “adequate”- cooperation between parental home and school often doesn’t work well

In reality this cooperation demand is realised very different. At some schools even in the last few years these possibilities have been thought out and realised. Thereby ideas are taken up that already work well at other schools (i.e. “Fair Play”- rules at primary schools under inclusion of parents, Münz & Münz, 2005; parent evenings on the subject of “Learn to learn”, Jansen, 2003)

But often activities between school and parents are confined to one specific thing (i.e. attendance at class expeditions) and don’t have a general character of cooperation in the sense of constant corporation in the interest of the education of children and youngsters. In too many cases teachers’ contact to parents still concern only the usual consultations and parent evenings. But practically teachers and parents are concerned of the relevance of parents’ cooperation at school. Why haven’t already such sustainable and lasting structures occurred? Kowalczyk & Ottich (2005) mean in this relation that parents and teachers haven’t developed dialogue facilities which are important for cooperation. So there is dissatisfaction at both sides because the expectations to each other are not fulfilled: In many cases teachers moan that children get not enough support by their parents, on the other side parents moan that schools are institution today which realise themselves just as educating not upbringing.

A dialogue about appropriate expectations and about real possibilities takes rarely place. Dialogue essentially subsists of mutual esteem (comp. Seydel, 2005). If this does not exist, clearings of expectations between parents and teachers could very quickly become concreted conflicts- because each other doesn’t feel taken seriously or overloaded. That parents and teachers usually only get in contact because of unpleasant concerns, shows up the relevance of implicit, often unexpressed expectations as more important.

In principal it must be assumed that parents are interested in school’s influence of their child’s development (comp. Ulber & Lenzen, 2004). They want to be able to estimate how scholar works effort on the education the future chances of their child. Researches show that 79% of asked parents want to get in contact with teachers more often. 70% would like to know from teachers how they can help their child with homework. Furthermore parents are willing to spend 60 minutes a normal day with their children (comp. Krumm, 1995).

But a lot of parents are embarrassed to contribute their concerns. In cases of problems they experience teachers and headship as community against them. They feel misunderstood and rarely taken seriously. On the other side school behaves in cooperation with parents very reserved. Teachers are often afraid that parents come with too high expectations to school and that they want to interfere in didactic or methodical issues. Mutual fears of contact and bad experiences avoid in many cases that parents and school approach each other.

So which possibilities are there, to let parents and school become lasting cooperation partners that esteem each other? In Brandenburg have been gone different ways to this.

Brandenburg ways to the support of a strengthened corporation of parents at school

Alliance for education and upbringing

An important step in direction of better cooperation between parents and school was the alliance for education and upbringing established in 2002. This alliance was contracted between the minister for education, youth and sports and the country council of parents and provoked many discussions in Brandenburg about forms of cooperation between parents and school like educational agreements, contracts for behaviour, behavioural- resp. goal agreements. Teachers, pupils and parents have been and are now motivated to consecrate oneself more to questions of the common educational- and upbringing order of school and parental home. In alliance's text many ways for schools have been pointed out about how the improvement of cooperation could happen (i.e. home visits).

In front of this background the ministry for education, youth and sports initiated two competitions about good practise related to cooperation of school and parents, that besides others was related to behavioural agreements/ contracts (to this subject comp. Krumm, 2003). The competitions caused that at a lot of schools cooperation has been improved.

Advanced education: Corporation with efforts

If parents and school want to cooperate more, this needs better structures of occasions. Often parents aren't aware of their corporative rights- and possibilities. Due to this since 1997 parents have offered other parents occasions for advanced education (the content wise attendance is task of the Country's Institute for School and Media Brandenburg). Advanced education foremost has the subject of using the possibilities and practice of scholar corporation, comprehensively described in Brandenburg's education act. If parents can get motivated to take part in these advanced educations, they not only feel better informed but also often immediately plan first steps of realisation at school. For the purpose that such parents' initiatives attract interest from school the corporation's advanced educations are holistic conceived: There are also educations for teachers and pupils. Furthermore the Country's Institute for School and Media Brandenburg has educated pedagogic parent consuler since 2004. Especially content wise interest show parents in pedagogic-psychological questions and concepts. With financial support and legal advising by the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports there have been already two booklets worked out referring to cooperation; these have been written by parents and pupils by themselves. By these, parents can inform themselves about possibilities of cooperation.

Learn from other countries

With funding providing by the DGB Berlin/ Brandenburg the appropriate Brandenburg Ministry initiated an international project with the aim to improve cooperation between parents and school. 19 institutions, including the parents' council of Brandenburg and the parents' council of Germany, take part in this project. Also take part schools from England, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Austria and Germany. The initial meeting took place at the beginning of 2006 in Potsdam. It pointed out that all schools in Europe have the same current problems: How can cooperation with parents be improved in spite of limited budgets of time? How can I reach problematic parents? Where and how can parents be included at school? It was realised together in this first meeting: Communication is the essential element of cooperation.

This communication between parents and school requires a high measure of sensitivity. With the school psychologist Dr. Kuban, who deceased in the meantime, it have been worked out two booklets about the improvement of communication between parental home and school for all schools of Brandenburg, so that teachers and parents if necessary approach each other with changed perspectives. Dr. Kuban stresses that schools and parental homes must be supported by advising in the process of finding possibilities of cooperation which are really long- run and productive for each side. His booklets give appropriate resumes about possible counsels.

Model program “Learning and Living democracy”

Since 2002 Brandenburg has taken part in the BLK- program “Learning and Living Democracy” with two purposes under the title “New corporative possibilities for pupils by the constitution of their school”. The focus of pupils’ contribution includes parents’ corporation, because the model program shall be holistic approach. In such an approach the changed contribution of one group causes changed structures and spaces for the arrangement by other groups. The model schools handle the opening of wiggle rooms for arrangement very different. At most of the schools this happens by small steps: Parents are included in self-evaluations, are participants of scholar direct groups or place contact with extracurricular partners. Parents take part in the outward shaping of school or support school by booster clubs. Every individual action supports school, but there is rarely a long- run and foremost a systematic cooperation of school and parental homes. So the potential of parents who offer their help is not full taped. In the following it is dwelled on an example that has taken up these points of criticism and shows a way that gets parents and school closer really in the long run and successfully.

A new approach: Possibilities of systematisation of cooperation and dialogue between parents and school

At some schools in Brandenburg mutual feedbacks by teachers, pupils and parents become essential components of school life at the present. Friedrich & Witt report in the edition of SchulVerwaltung Bayern 1/2006 about the establishment of such a “Feedback Culture”. In a systematic process of school development teachers evaluate headship’s and pupils’ work, and pupils evaluate teachers’ work (comp. to this comprehensively www.blk-demokratie.de/praxisbausteine), this feedback processes is completed by an inquiry of parents to scholar concerns. To this purpose every individual parent get a letter by which they are informed about their possibility of giving feedback. Thereby esteem gets obvious- parents realise that their opinion is important for school and especially for the class teacher (on whose work to convince and whose own attitude parents’ contribution incidentally depends on). Inquiries of parents in scholar concerns of course aren’t very special any more; a lot of schools include parents in their self- evaluations. The valuable at these inquiries is, that they are the beginning of a lasting cooperation between parents and school. By the inquiry parents are motivated to give their evaluation about cooperation school- parents, lessons and general strong and weak points of school (all this by concrete questions). Thereby in many cases parents’ satisfaction gets clear, but also things get obvious, which point out the school its potentials for improvement of communication. Such potentials are in the following discussed in rounds and solutions are tried to be found.

Additive to the anonymous web- based parents’ feedback every parent is asked about his/her definite offers to support school. For this purpose there are examples for support listed on a

form sheet (i.e. support in the provision of traineeships, acceptance of small handcraft works, contributions for shaping the lessons like own professional experiences, company visits etc; EDV- support like computer working groups, supervision in pc- pools, tutoring in a subject, supervision in the library). Each parent can define his/her form of support decidedly. It is also asked, who can help by the constitution and organisation of a parents' data base, so that the high number of parents' offers are available for school in a clear form. Already by this group a direct parents- school- relation develops, because parents work out a tool usable for teachers: All offers are available for teachers in the internet in a password- saved data base. The parents group takes then the responsibility for the database. The innovative in this approach is, that parents' offers for cooperation not only are systematically added and usable for teachers, but also that parents take care that every teachers is informed about the handle and that this database is filled up with life, which means that the offers are also used. All in all this points out that this form of recurrent (one- or two year- long parent inquiry and constantly actualised data base) and systematic inclusion of parents at school benefits all sides (more information about the constitution of a parents' data base at *net- anschluss.de*).

Conclusion: Schools should approach parents- Parents need concrete occasions

All in all the remarks point out the following: Parents and schools can contribute to scholar development by a purposeful cooperation based on mutual esteem. Parents have much that they could give to their child's school (and they also want this); it is important that this is prompted by schools. Parents must be addressed directly and related to the special support. The explained parents' feedback or the other mentioned steps to increased parents corporation are thereby not alone the way to success. To this belongs the consequent treatment of the question: What exactly do we want and who is involved in this which way? Common purposes, definite responsibilities with clear tasks and dates indispensably belong to the recipe for success- as well as confidence and esteem at both sides.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.