

Work Aid 08

It's all about the children: When parents and school work hand in hand...

A work aid in favor of a feedback orientated school culture

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1 Preface

„Es ist nicht genug zu wissen, man muss auch anwenden;
es ist nicht genug zu wollen – man muss auch tun.“

(“It's not enough to know, you ought to make it work;
It's not enough to want, you ought to do it too”)

This quote from Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749 – 1832) describes from our point of view the major problems of our time and society.

When we break it down, it too does describe how parents interact with their children as well as teachers with parents.

We all know how much better things would work out if we only practiced what we preach, like:

- cooperation between parents and school, in order to care together for the good of our children
- frequent exchange of information at eye level between schools and parents
- complement parents questions on education together with the school
- intensifying contacts between parents and teachers to be better able to respond to the strengths and weaknesses of the students
- sharing parental professional knowledge in schools (e.g. adopt workshops or give presentations)

Since we are aware of the good of those actions why do we only rarely act accordingly?

Why don't we take charge? Why don't we get involved – whether as a parent or as teacher?

For which reason are always the same few parents involved and take an honest interest in their children's educational career – from kindergarten to graduation?

Maybe it's a lack of courage or know-how, but with this working sheet we would like to offer some of both.

Take action, interfere, change things that should be improved.

Have courage to contribute and take the risk to possibly become distressing.

Hang in there, ask and talk to other parents or colleagues and take care of change in a positively constructive manner.

If after reading this aid still help didn't crop up please don't hesitate to contact us.

Together we search for alternatives that suit you and your situation right.

2 Living space school

Change of school – missing discipline – responsibility of parents – learning attitude of students

– quality improvement – PISA results – quality inspection – responsibility of teachers – responsibility of students – poor classes – teacher education – weary teachers – discouraged students

With buzzwords like these we find more and more often our school landscape described and being part of public discussions where the actors within the system become downright villainized.

How do schools define their own successful profile in between expectations and accusations?

How is it possible to get out of the gridlock of old habits?

How can we change the current situation by engaging all involved parties change the situation?

How can the development toward the better be triggered?

2.1 Orientation toward competence

A step in the right direction is the amendment of the core curriculum of the federal states.

Here change has already set in – steering away from simply focusing on learning, leaning toward building competences. Carried by the belief that education and personality development depend on each other.

„Kompetenzen bezeichnen ein vermögen des einzelnen menschen, das ihn befähigt, sein persönliches, berufliches und gesellschaftliches leben verantwortlich und persönlich befriedigend zu führen und seine umwelt mit zu gestalten. Kompetenzen werden im individuellen Entwicklungsprozess aufgebaut und immer weiter entwickelt. Die Schule kann diesen Prozess fördern und unterstützen. Deshalb muss sie sich in unterricht und Erziehung auf die Förderung der Kompetenzen hin orientieren.“¹

(“Competences characterize an ability to live ones personal, professional and social life in a satisfied way and allow the individual to form its own living reality.

Competences are grown in an individual process and will be developed further. The School has the ability to support this development. That is why it should focus in class as well as education on the expansion of those competences.”)

What kinds of competences are referred to? Here are some excerpts from definitions of the four fields of competences from the mutual core syllabuses of German for primary schools in Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (competence fields for secondary school are, as regards content, the same)

¹ ministerium für bildung, Jugend und Sport des landes brandenburg (hrsg.): rahmenlehrplan Deutsch, Sekundarstufe i. berlin 2002, S. 9.

² ministerium für bildung, Jugend und Sport des landes brandenburg/Senatsverwaltung für bildung, Jugend und Sport berlin/Senator für bildung und Wissenschaft bremen/ministerium für bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur mecklenburg-vorpommern (hrsg.): rahmenlehrplan grundschule Deutsch. berlin 2004. lebensraum Schule

Es geht doch um die Kinder

Professional competences

„Professional competences are developed by students in working with contents, tasks and problems. Knowledge, skills and abilities are to be systematically established and are extended by various correlating actions. Students increasingly understand structures and systems in different fields of study. Here they learn to conquer knowledge and to distinguish the important from the unimportant. They have the ability to name actual situations and phenomena with professional terms. The students are capable to link already established knowledge with new compiled issues and ask questions that they can dissolve by themselves. They are able to criticize and voice their concerns.
(a. a. o., S. 9)

Methods competence

“Methods competence includes learning strategies that are interdisciplinary as well as subject-related. Students know how to recognize and produce links. They are able to increasingly deal with different mediums and find, gather, process and bring order to information autonomously. They apply subject typical methods targeted. Students are capable of reasoning preconceptions and to verify them, they are able to discover, form and check arguments. They use reading strategies for an wholesome learning.” (ibid.)

Soft Skills

„Soft skills are a competence of the individual to adapt accordingly to changing social situations and to pursue personal aims in consistency with others. Increasingly students are capable to empathize with others in order to valuating arguments and solve conflicts. They are able to arrange and agree on mutual rules and therefore take over responsibility for the common cause.
(ibid.)

Interpersonal skills

„Interpersonal skills are footed in self-confidence and self-esteem, in emotional independence and trust in ones own strength. Growingly students know their personal strengths and weaknesses, acknowledge and enjoy their successes but are also able to overcome failure and anxieties. Better and better they succeed in changing perspectives and accept in varying situation being the stronger or weaker link the younger or older person. Students working independently, plan their own actions and examine them closely. They reason and answer their decisions and take over responsibility for their own health.” (ibid.)

2.2 Necessary change of roles

To let the acquisition of skills and competences become a true part of an interdisciplinary education, certain roles of the involved actors have to change:

- the teachers role: from an “one-man-show” to an active support of learning – teacher become coaches that accompany learning. They support their students along the way to independent learning and working.
- the students role: from consumer to a responsible self-learner – students develop their own interests and go their own way in how and when to study. Students need relations on eye-level and attractive choices.
- the parents role: from being a grouching audience to becoming a partner – overcoming the big hurdle. Parents have to understand that they are along with the school responsible for education of their children and teens.

2.3 How to make change happen?

Change is possible through:

- openness and transparency
- target agreement
- supervision of the agreement
- clarification and development of skills and authorities
- improvement of communication and internal relations
- frequent internal and external evaluation

These terms are instruments of professionalizing that are already known and practiced in the international education system, unfortunately not in Germany.

The introduction and implication of a feedback culture opens up a big deal chances for parents, educators and students to work together and succeed together.

3 Feedback as a facilitator for change

3.1 What is feedback?

The term feedback has originated from cybernetics. The centrifugal governor invented by Maxwell in 1869 for the development of the steam engine was the first automated feedback.

One could say that the governor is informed through its pace of rotation of the machine and surveys information due to its careful adjustment. Therefore pace increases or decreases.

A little metaphor displays the necessity of this control circuit in another relation:

A captain of a ship then orientates with the stars and lighthouses, today it's satellites in order to keep the ship on track. The officer of navigation directly submits deviations to the command-bridge, so the Cox can intervene immediately.

Therefore there is a constant feedback, does an action not aim for the right direction there is an immediate reaction that results in correction.

After this scheme our daily-life communication should work the same, since it is likewise important to know where we are standing or if we are even heading into the right direction.

We achieve this with feedback to our fellow men.

Generally we understand in our context feedback as a confirmation about perceiving, understanding and experiencing of behavior.

Feedback has a broad influence on behavior and is one of the most essential and effective ways of communication. Through concrete illustration of the perceived image it is crucial for the receiver to be able to adapt and assess his or her behavior.

Feedback helps to understand and explain arguments and helps to solve conflicts.

3.2 Why we need feedback in our schools

Good education mostly fails because of conservative teaching-and-school-methods that don't have answers to changing social demands. Teachers that are still hanging onto those conservative systems often cause this situation. A personal evaluation of the adequacy of ones own actions in reference to new social demands happens rarely. But change is often only approached with outline directives, general pleas, and external evaluation. However, Individual changes of mind need individual feedback and subsequent coaching. It is not to be expected that just general support will effect individual change of behavior.

Concerning their children's education parents are in a diffuse situation: On the one hand, they have a cardinal right of co determination in schools. On the other hand are goals and intentions of this co-determination are barely differentiated. What leads to an important loss of potential.

Due to a severe change in society caused by poverty, missing perspectives for children and juveniles from disadvantaged families, increasing xenophobia and violence among children and juveniles as well as globalisation an alteration of actors in school and school administration is necessary.

Research and education programs are generally not in the position to reach out to the individual in order to change behavioral routines.

Meanwhile there exists in some federal states a school inspection, where after certain criteria inspectors inspect schools.

However, solely the schools get inspected not the individual. Students, teachers, head teachers or parents are again in the comfortable situation to point fingers at others.

Therefore the direct attribution of responsibility is not workable, for possible bad results always the others are accountable.

With feedback culture a self-dependent arrangement of learning and teaching is accessible to students, school board members, teachers and parents.

Actions of the individual become reflected in a communication process therefore individual feedback is facilitated. Consequently the search for constructive solutions benefits the individual and progress is accompanied in a step by step fashion.

The innovation is that schools, teachers, students and parents are called on their responsibility to apply changed to their own behavior as well as to the system in order to innovate school life in a whole.

Feedback

- encourages
- motivates
- improves troubleshooting
- ministers behavior
- improves communication
- broadens self-perception
- strengthens and improves positive behavior
- supports individual learning
- clears relationships
- helps to work focused
- allows to learn from each other
- trains to handle criticism
- increases commitment as well as for the receiver as much as for the sender

- effects a closer relation/identification with the immediate environment.

3.3 Different approaches toward feedback

In order to engage everybody involved in improved communication over the targeted goals and to stay motivated along the way Democaris developed feedback building blocks on bases of self-perception vs. outsider's perception on all levels:

Performance feedback

To take care of responsibility for performance at schools is confrontation with many heterogeneous expectations. Feedback from coworkers is essential if one's own performance is perceived as innovative and supportive. By getting feedback from the head of the school to the following questions, it creates the base for efficient leadership and systematically school development.

With these questions teachers evaluate the head of the schools leadership qualities. The criteria for the evaluation are aligned with the head of the school, school conference and the teacher's council. Through individual and group meetings along with workshops, clues and feedback results are evaluated and acted upon accordingly. Via transparent procedures fears and resistances among the teachers body are diminished. Teachers immediately understand the benefit of feedback: That is why a feedback culture should be established right at the start of a process of change.

Examples for criteria of performance feedback:

Head of the school

- has an open ear for problems and worries in the teacher's body
- cares for an organized schooling
- cares for differentiated competences
- includes the concerned people in his/her decisions
- aims for a transparent concept
- informs comprehensively and in a timely manner about important events and
- feels responsible for organizational procedures
- acts determined and committed
- keeps up with agreements
- recognizes outstanding performances
- creates a trustworthy environment
- pays attention to application of decisions
- supports innovations e.g. students, teachers
- allows enough space for creativity
- solves conflicts among colleagues constructive

Is my professional performance successful?

What strengths and potentials can I bring in?

How do I effectively broaden my professional performance?

- Supports an pedagogic exchange of ideas among colleagues
- gives constructive feedback for improving classes
- supports extra-curricular activities
- has an idea for continuing education
- has my back when problems occur (professionally/in school/in private life)
- supervises a friendly and factual communication among colleagues
- initiates work meetings
- executes his/hers responsibilities

Other examples for open wording:

- I wish for (more.../ less.../ ...) from the head of the school.
- What changes should be approaches by the head of the school?
- What else I wanted to say...(praise/critique/tips)

In a leadership feedback significant importance falls to the comments of the teacher's council.

The members of the school board get an individual evaluation of their actions and performances by the teacher's council and requests for change can be made verbal.

Solutions are subsequently analyzed in individual as well as group meetings.

Feedback resolutions and their outcomes are presented and discussed in feedback workshops.

Examples of a action plan after a leadership:

Solution of a leadership feedback (summary of first actions of the head of the school):

- Mr. J. Doe will spend the first intermission in the teachers' room (from XX.XX.XXXX) in order to be available for short personal talks (from 9:20 a.m. to 9:35 a.m)
- Mrs. J. Doe will spend the second intermission in the teachers' room (from XX.XX.XXXX) in order to be available for short personal talks (from 11:20 a.m to 11:40 a.m)
- There will be an improved transparency over responsibilities to identify:
 - who is in charge for extra-curricular-activities
 - how responsibilities are allotted within the head of the school

Graphical analyses of the leadership feedback

- frequent school board talks (every Friday from 9:30 a.m 11:30 a.m)
(from XX.XX.XXXX: Mrs. Doe is in charge of ...)
 - Mr. Doe is going to frequently sit in classes from November on (once a month) including post procession. Dates will be fixed on the beginning of every new term.
Initial dates until the beginning of the month of ... (responsible: Mr. J. Doe)
 - Mrs. J. Doe and Mr. J. Doe are going to frequently provide from XX.XX.XXXX staff talks once a month. Die Dates are fixed on the beginning of every new term.
Initial dates until the beginning of ... (responsible: Mrs. J. Doe)
- It is important to check every six to nine month on the action plan: What is feasible? What has been applied? What has to be adjusted, what to be supported?

Student-teacher feedback

Classes are in the focus of all schooling. The perception on what is good education is varying by the individual judgement. Therefore in a student-teacher feedback students as well as teachers evaluate under certain criteria their classes with each other.

Through a methodical exchange on the quality of classes between students and teachers, the student-teacher feedback faces the following questions.

It is an exchange about how classes can be improved and how it is perceived from both sides.

Students are taking into account and they are listened to. They talk with teachers and gain influence on how the classes are designed and can reflect on their own learning skills.

Suggestions for Students-teacher feedback:

- I have the impression that the teachers respect us
- if I have any troubles I feel comfortable to consult my teacher
- I feel fairly evaluated by my teacher
- the teacher refers to connections of other subjects
- the teacher connects already learned knowledge to new knowledge.
- if we don't understand something, it is explained again
- our teacher talk to us about what and why we should learn certain things
- the teacher teaches coherently and clearly
- it is important to do my homework since they are checked on regularly
- the teacher is responsive to ideas of us

How do students and teachers develop the classes together?

How does evaluation change the attitudes of students and teachers permanently?

How do students take over responsibility for their own learning?

- the teacher is interested in my progress
- we are taught to learn
- we are asked to present our own solutions that we have worked out autonomously in class
- there is an comfortable atmosphere in class
- there are distinctive rules that we have to keep up with in class.
- the teacher uses different types of teaching (group study, partner study, circle time)
- the teacher gives us different tasks – according to our individual level
- I feel comfortable in my class
- in my class we support each other

Suggestions for subjects, for teachers:

An additional part of the student-teacher feedback is a feedback on all aspects of school culture.

There is a great chance to methodically change school life in favor of all involved.

Following questions are asked equally students and teachers.

It is necessary to act on needs for change prompt and noticeable, in order to not let it fizzle out:

- Have you ever been bullied in school? If so: By who or what?
- What do you like in school?
- What might be improved?

- What would you change if you could?
- Are there any questions that are missing?
- How often should evaluations like this take place within three years?

After returning their evaluations the results are analyzed by experts and advisors and are filtered on social compatibility (scatology, indignities).

Only after that teachers get their evaluations in group sessions of max. 8 people or individual sessions.

In this event of about 4 hours (that is validated as a school internal advanced training) the results are talked over as much as the follow ups on the results.

Examples on results of student-teacher feedbacks:

In this training feedback talks with students is trained also.

Topics like: which things I would like to change are communicable to the students – what is not?

What chances for change are there, what responsibilities would I like to take over?

How do I know if I act appropriately? What aberrations of my self-perception are normal? What kind of personal change is possible and desirable?

Students, teachers and parents get informed over the results of the evaluation (answers about violence at school, things that are positive and negative, change requests). These results get delegated to already existing or new work groups. It is important to inform all of the concerned about concrete effects of the results, that is who is responsible for what.

3.4 How to make feedback work?

Motivation/Information/To have a say

A continuing inclusion to the school program is crucial. That is why first and foremost it has to be asked if everybody is ready to establish a feedback culture as an important quality feature within the school.

An introduction to a feedback culture is only effective when there is enough motivation to bring change on the way.

It is crucial to inform all of the concerned about chances, benefits, possible progressions and conflicts or problems. There also has to be room for discussion in order to voice reservations.

The mutual creation of feedback questions as much as the discovery of feedback rules and training of constructive feedback messages are important in preposition of the evaluation.

Voluntariness

Taking part in feedback should only be voluntary. But if a council decides by the majority in favor for a feedback culture, those disagreeing are seen as active non-participants.

Sometimes the reservations against such processes are simply too big or the current life situation makes this intensive process too difficult. Everybody then should have the option to declare his/her active nonparticipation.

In many cases we have experienced that alone by this possibility trust into the process develops.

Anonymity and privacy

A further important factor which must be clarified before the introduction by feedback is how to handle the results. It has to be clear that neither the school board nor the school supervision are informed about the feedback results, which individual teachers and teachers received from the classes.

It should be preceded with mindfulness – it is of no use only to declare anonymity but there has to be a certain amount of trust how the process is designed, who is handling the results how and when.

It is particularly important that only the feedback takers decide on how the results are dealt with.

Likewise do the feedback givers need a protected space where they dare to express their opinion.

They too have to be sure of the anonymity of their statements. Only a total feedback is given without naming individual statements.

External Consultation and support

For the introduction of feedback processes the evaluation as well as the feedback results to the instructors is an accompanying consultation (e.g. by consultants for democracy pedagogic, school development consultants, etc.) indispensably.

On the one hand, because schools have under normal conditions few experiences and know-how in these fields and here professional guidance is needed, on the other hand because all feedback processes enjoy a larger acceptance if the data acquisitions - analyses and feedbacks are somewhat „protected“ by the expertise of an outsider.

Financial means

For the consultation, the external data evaluation as well as for materials (which are necessary for the feedback process) financial means are necessary.

Advanced training funds of the school can be likewise used as well as prize moneys or lotto means that could be requested from the ministry of education.

Besides, means of promotion associations can be assigned or sponsors can be won. Our experience clearly showed that those schools that were truly committed to a feedback process never really had a real problem in the procurement of the necessary means. (The concrete costs are exactly classified in the 7.2-7.4.)

Periods for the execution and evaluation of feedback

Feedback processes need time. Preparation classes as well as the execution of the feedback should be granted in class. Evaluation talks should as well be added.

Altogether the introduction of a feedback culture presupposes that the school realizes that a feedback culture is a part of the school and thus a part of the hourly volume of the school.

It is crucial that the school board regards the feedback process not as an addition to classes but understands it as an element of class.

Web-based evaluations / PC equipment

A surface covering feedback should not only be a unique venture, but a regular instrument, with which one can also measure changes of school culture and classes then this has to be practicable and simple.

This is only feasible by a computer-based evaluation.

If the last pupil entered his evaluation the final values are faster accessible. Here a computer and/or internet access is crucial for everybody.

Evaluation talks

Evaluation talks to the feedback should be credited as advanced training hours.

In small groups a lively pedagogic exchange is desirable.

It is common after such sessions that we hear things like: "We should do this more often, we talk way too less about our classes..."

In these discussions the participants gain knowledge on how they can present their results to the pupils, how to deal with them, which measures are possible and how they can be implemented.

Considerably is that the respective receiver of the feedback decides which results he/she likes to present and in what form.

3.5 Bumps along the way

With the introduction/execution and establishment of a feedback culture in school there are some dangers along the way that could challenge the whole project:

- School board does not come along
- lack of information/integration of all involved
- no clear, scheduled aims
- too few „active carer“ which steer the process
- lack of control over agreed upon steps and milestones
- too few information about results
- no visible consequences

4 Feedback and parents

4.1 Breaking the habit:

„cooperation“ is the magic word

Parents and school experience their co-operation today very differently.

Some schools established already a form of cooperation, in other schools initiatives remain unused to large extends because of lacking interest or mutual fears. Fundamentally parents are very interested in the influence of schools to their kids' development. They want to be able to assess how school affects the education and future chances of their child.

Many parents have however inhibitions to bring in their requests.

When problems occur parents often feel that the school board and teachers are against them.

They feel misunderstood or not taken serious. On the other side the school is rather reserved when it comes to co-operation with parents. It is often feared that parents come with exaggerated expectations to the school or interfere into didactical or methodical issues.

Mutual fears and bad experiences prevent parents and teacher from approaching each other. A conversation is only initiated if discontent has already set in and leads to a conflict or the child has problems at school.

Parents want an improved communication between home and school. They want to know about school matters.

Many parents are made uncertain by what changes take place in school, whilst others find fault that nothing does change.

Both parents and school are overtaxed with coping alone with the consequences that the change of our society has on the children and teenager. Parents and school want the same in the end: Promoting children and teenagers optimally so that they develop their abilities and are able to consist in professional life and in society.

However, the opinion on how these aims are reached does understandably differ from each other. Parents and teachers experience the children and teenager in very different environments. Therefore it is important to address problems and questions frankly and to search the dialog with each other and to explain different opinions.

A mutual start is possible when school and parents understand these differences and are open to constructive conversation. With web-based parents feedback from Democaris it is all about getting to know wishes, opinions and resources of the parents. Parents have a special point of view on schools and parent have a right to open up about their opinions on the school of their children.

So it would be wrong in the both sense not to include parents in the quality evaluation. Important knowledge and points of view would be missing and parents would be taken from their rights and responsibilities for the success of their children's education. However, when interpreting parents feedback it is crucial to be aware that the position of the parents is quite special: they are strongly biased, focused alone on their child and influenced by their own experiences with school or leadership encounters in their professional life.

The knowledge of the parents about the school is not an immediate. It is purchased mostly by hearsay, told by sporadic stories of the children, which makes it a very subjective knowledge. Therefore parents can be questioned only about what they notice in their own child, how conditions and the daily routine in school reflect on their child and how they experience the cooperation with teachers.

What they can't judge about from our point of view are single individuals or the general situation in class. However, concerning communication and cooperation between school and parents they are indeed capable of giving useful feedback.

4.2 Restate clear goals

We build a practicable instrument with a web-based input and evaluation possibility with low additional effort for parents and school.

Major goals are:

- transparency of mutual expectations
- support of mutual understanding
- improvement in the communication and information
- general improvement in the school climate
- role-model function based on partnership
- consciousness fortifying: "To act in concert."

4.3 The tools

To a considerable degree good school lives from the cooperation of all concerned.

In this connection and due to current topics like the introduction of fulltime schools or the demand for opening of schools into their regional surroundings, the cooperation between parents and schools is becoming even more important.

How then is it possible for parents to become real partners for schools?

The parent feedback allows parents to have a say and takes parents in addition, into the responsibility to analyze the school of their children and to reflect on and their own role within the system.

Parents Feedback:

What are parents really thinking about their children school?

Where do parents see room for cooperation?

How do parents experience the cooperation with teacher and school board - what is encouraging what is inconvenient in their view?

It presents itself to ask parents how they perceive the school of their children and whether they see vacancies for remodeling regarding school issues. It is not sufficient to just send simply a questionnaire to the parents.

Parents feedback is a rather a process with many single steps.

Existing forms of co-operation and communication have to be forced open in order to establish new perspectives and changes.

This process has to be accompanied by advisors in order to facilitate a friendly communication among teachers and parents.

Central ideas of parents feedback

Cooperation

- is there a good cooperation between parents and school?
- are parents taken seriously?
- are parents involved in finding solution to their kids problems?
- are decisions concerning students being aligned with parents?
- does the school inform parents on important issues?
- do I receive helpful information regarding my kids performance?

Well-being

- there is a comfortable atmosphere in school
- besides freedom there are clear rules and breach of rules aren't tolerated
- we treat each other respectfully
- my child feels safe in school
- my child enjoys school

Classes

- Students are supported individually
- Students are well prepared for going on the next higher level of education (e.g. from 10th grade to 11th grade)
- classes are used effectively (few not worked hour, etc)
- Parents are informed in time about problems in learning
- I have the impression it is important to the teacher that the students feel comfortable

Additional ideas on possible parents feedback:

- What I like about the school – a special strength is ...
- I dislike about the school – a certain weakness about school is ...
- What has to be improved from your point of view - in what way?

Every school should mutually work on such center ideas. It work best in clearly defined steps:

1. For information purposes a sample book with the questions and suggestions go to the school board and the entire teachers council as well as to the parents board. A possible event would be a general information meeting with a pep rally for feedback culture.
2. All teachers then have the possibility to ask additional questions or propose changes in a defined time.
3. Afterwards parents have the opportunity to do the same.
4. The final approval is carried out by the school conference

It is crucial to be as transparent as possible in order to have a big resonance and anticipation of parents as well as acceptance of the results.

A schedule works best for all concerned:

Sample-schedule parents feedback

What? Who?

(responsible)

When?

(till when?)

check/support

parents feedback

voting on questions of parents feedback

forward questions to Democaris

School board / Democaris

Editing/modulation of parents information

School board

Parents representative / Democaris

Programming question for parents feedback / Democaris

School board

Delivery of transaction number to contact persons (e. g. teacher rep. or parents);

Every child get a envelop with two other envelops and an information in it:

a) transaction number or sheet of paper

b) evaluation of parents cooperation

Democaris parents cooperation

Delivery of envelops to head teacher – transfer of envelops to students of certain classes

(missing pupils - message and envelopes to the secretariat, through secretariat by post office to appropriate parents' houses)

Home-room teacher

Secretariat

School board

Collecting the answers:

a) Receipt for questionnaire

b) Evaluation of co-operation

c) Questionnaire (paper), which were not evaluated by Internet (closed envelopes) check off all returns on class list. Home-room teacher parents board
Delivery of the receipts and the cooperation evaluations to secretariat
Forwarding to Democaris
Home-room teacher
Secretary
School Board

Input of the paper returns from parents which do not have Internet connection
Democaris

Parent's board
Analysis and production of presentation of results
Democaris
Meeting with school board/ parents board/ teachers
Democaris

School board/ parents board
Information note to all parents about purpose and use of feedback process and development

Sample information sheet

To all parents, XX.XX.XXXX

Dear Sir or Madam,

Xxx – school is about to include teachers, parents and students in a feedback process.

Mutual reservation and bad experiences are often the reason for not approaching one another.

On the other hand there are examples where cooperation worked well. With this parents feedback it is all about understanding and knowing your opinions and ideas about our school.

It is our goal to strengthen and improve with minor expenditures cooperation between you and the school.

The questionnaire is available online (see attachment). There you can give us your opinions, praise or critique anonymously.

In case you don't have Internet, we ask you politely to fill out the paper questionnaire and send it back to us through your child (without placin your name on the envelop).

Your anonymity is safe here too, since we sent it back to Democaris e.V. where it also get evaluated.

In addition we would like to know, whether and if so, in what way you could imagine to support the school (colored cooperation questionnaire, which has to be returned to us - please return separate from the feedback sheet).

Please don't hesitate to ask any question (phone: 001234/5678, parents representative). The results of this parents questioning is announced to you after the evaluation.

We thank you for their participation.

Yours sincerely

Head master parents representative

\$ ----- cut off here please ----- \$

Please sign section and hand in to the teacher together with the coloured cooperation questionnaire to XX.XX.XXXX at the latest.

The Internet questionnaire was filled out o yes o no,

We had technical difficulties o yes o no

We would like to receive a paper copy of the questionnaire (because of e. g. technical problems, no Internet connection,...) o

(signature of the parents) (class, child.)

The results

In this phase it depends substantially on how the homeroom teacher supports the process.

There are big differences during the returns. With committed teachers who get back to the parents, returns up to 90% are to be registered. With teachers that regard the questionnaire as rather useless and express their concerns as much as they lack enthusiasm only receive return rates of 10- 15% from parents.

Therefore it becomes clear how important it is right at the beginning of the process to explain the use and chances of that project.

The questionnaires that were filled on paper because of lacking Internet connection or knowledge were later entered by Democaris.

The results of the parents questioning are available all at the same time when the process is done, i.e., when the last evaluation was entered and/or the defined period for the input elapsed. The results are available on print outs.

Example of graphical analysis

Parents feedback

Analysis parents feedback – February 2007 part 1

Analysis parent feedback – February 2007 part 2

Exemplary reasons as helpful bridges to the parents feedback

- announcement of inspection/inspection
- discontent of parents
- conflicts with the school board
- search for a substantial school program
- Discipline difficulties
- Bad image of the school
- mutual accusations
- own feedback approaches are stuck
- unsatisfactory result of the inspection

Examples of parents comments:

What I like at XXX school

It is a special strength if the school), ...

Nice teachers, committed teachers (active), fair teachers;

Fair treatment of students, teacher teach well 36

Mutual problem solving (student-teacher); teacher-student-relationship;

Social-Pedagogic 28

Student care outside of class; great extra-curricular activities 25

Great atmosphere; students feel comfortable; seeing the students personalities 24

great team-work between parents and teachers, frequent talks 18

School is nicely decorated 14

Support of students; students learn a lot; work with computer 12

School partnerships; school exchanges; educational trips; events; parties;

Open house 8

Up to date ideas 7

Consequences of school board 6

Smoking prohibition 6

What I dislike

(A special weakness of the school)

Not worked hours; many free periods 42

Negative tone toward students from teachers; bad forms of some teachers; negative thinking of some teachers;

Lack of trust toward students; missing respect for students from some;

Unfairness of teachers; lack of motivation of some teachers; lack of

Assertiveness of some teachers; unfair treatment of weaker students; some teachers aren't role models 39

General insecurity in school; frequent change of teachers;

Reducing teachers 34

Teachers smoke despite smoking ban; something has to change about; smoking of students on; respect smoking ban 30

Disturbance of class by pupils;

Unfriendly handling with one another;

Vandalism by some students;

Students unwilling to learn;

29 lack of information; too late or no information when problems in learning occur; too little communication

between teachers and parents, only with persistent inquiry 29 untended toilets; untended outdoor facilities 24 too

few communication possibilities for the students with the teachers 20 free time space is missing, lack of interest of

parents; lacking participation in parents meetings

5 Databases for parents

After the parent feedback initiated a dialogue between parents and school over the quality of the school and over possible forms of co-operation, it is time to get into long-term cooperation between parents and school that is

beyond accompanying school trips.

Gradually parent's co-operations will be developed in order to let parents become a well-received partner of the school.

Usually there is already a cooperation between school and parents:

Through parents meetings, a participation in the school conference, or actual co-organization like finding goals and aims for school and school cooperation.

Through a database for parents parental resources become seized by an inquiry and then uploaded to the schools intranet/internet. With this concrete resources become visible and available and the following questions are answered: teachers have the possibility to check e.g. on support for their class, the school back can reach out to parents which offered to take over library duty by the hour. Parents maintain the database independently. This sort of support and way of cooperation reduces reservations toward school and parents.

One finds out that parents or teachers are only humans too. Parents get another feeling for the school of their children and a higher level of identification with the school sets place. Teachers too change their attitude toward parents – both can discover that there is actual progress and that parents can quite improve school life.

Sample cooperation evaluation:

I could support the school, e.g. through

- supporting class events/school celebrations etc.
- accompanying class trips
- offering internships
- sponsoring - e.g. materials such as paint, paper, sport equipment etc.
- engaging in mending jobs like.....

What can parents really provide of their resources?

How does a long-term co-operation, which supports the school effectively, succeed?

How is cooperation with parents retrievable for teachers?

35

- contributing to class - e.g. own vocational experiences, company trips, field trips etc.
- EDP support - e.g. computer work shop, internet work shop, supervision of pc pool
- tutoring, support in with approx.... hr. per week
- helping to build parent cooperations with approx.... hr. per week/month/year
- library duty with approx.... hr. per week/month/year
- addiction counseling with approx.... hr. per week/month/year
- legal advice with approx.... hr. per week/month/year
- or through
- I am expert for..... (e.g. naturopathy, geology etc.).

The parallel inquiry of parents resources during parents feedback is regarded after initial skepticism of the schools as very useful. Especially when it turns out that the work is actually taken over by constructive parents.

Parents are in charge of tasks that they were actually offering. Reservations are put aside very fast.

Teachers too changing their attitude in no time when they work as interfaces between the school board, parents and teachers.

With astonishment they notice that there is an actual improvement for teachers in the school. Those parents can have a real impact to the school with their skills and knowledge. Cooperation is growing to a considerable degree - and becomes a constantly developing constant.

Parents become caregiver too, they do not only care for content and techniques of the database but call other parents, present the database to other classes, develop new concepts and are in direct contact with the school, the teachers, to the school board and other parents. Parents resources data base It concerns nevertheless the children

6 After the feedback?

Chances/Consequences/Changes

Such a feedback process could

- contribute to a change of role perception of teachers
- initiate a change/improvement of existing class room practice
- introduce new ways of teaching
- make constraints in communication visible
- help to formulate mutual educational principles
- to develop tools of evaluation for particular educational acting.

Through the results of the group sessions with teachers and school board cooperative processes are initiated.

The individual teacher understands that he or she isn't alone and other teachers share the same problems.

Other teachers with better evaluations can be consulted and asked for advice that could lead to advanced trainings. Students appreciate the attention they get through the feedback and feel taken seriously and are more likely to take over responsibility. They notice the openness of the teachers in a positive way and take part in problem solving in cooperation with the teacher.

Parents who experienced school so far predominantly as hostile, now experience school as a direct cooperation partner, that enables them to change things for the better in teamwork.

By now Democaris advised and accompanied such feedback processes at many schools – here is a selection of

„strong“ organizational/methodical measures and consequences that were introduced during the process:

- need-driven advanced training (referred to feedback results)
- Establish grade teams
 - concentration of subject teachers on few teachers in a grade
 - strengthened cooperation (also on educational topics)
 - regular meetings (1 x per week)
 - coordination of the educational work and contents of curriculum
- regular method trainings for students
 - general training to learning methods in the grade 7th grade
 - specialized method trainings in 11th grade
 - weekend seminar for students 37

- establishing „students council“
 - preparation of the teens to the rules of society
 - take over responsibility for their class life
 - Experiencing forms of democratic decision-building and decision-making
 - taking over turning duties (leading discussions, writing the protocol etc.)
 - working on conflicts that occur in class and which disturb class climate
 - same right to vote for all participants
- regular meetings of parents cooperation groups in order to maintain parents resources database and managing the following tasks:
 - Publishing and establishing the parents data base
 - regular actualizations
 - lectures in the parents meetings of new classes
- Introduction of regular, clearly structured school board discussions
- Introduction of coworker discussions
- Introduction of regular (helpful) sit ins
- transparent task distribution between teachers and school board.

7 Appendix

7.1 FAQs – Frequently Asked Questions

We devote the end of our sheet to some returning questions that we are asked frequently in our talks and lectures.

Which costs do arise?

The costs vary depending upon size of the school and the number of teachers and students.

For four modules (leadership feedback, student-teacher feedback, parents feedback and establishment of the parents data base) we charge to average between 4.500,-- and 6.000,-- Euro.

At the beginning of the process Democaris compiles a project plan in cooperation with the school.

In this project plan aims, milestones, steps and tasks are seized, scheduled and an estimation of costs is set.

On the following pages you find samples for project plans as well as cost plans.

Will schools be able to afford it?

Who finances such a thing? Generally the costs are not accepted from just one side; in most cases the costs are shared between e.g. School authority, education authority, parents association, friends of the school and local sponsors.

Democaris can help finding financial sources. Our experiences show that lacking financial means is not really a problem.

Each school that wanted to take part in the process has so far always been able to come up with the means.

What is the difference between this kind of feedback and the school inspection?

The quality of the school gets usually measured and inspected in a whole. Democaris rather looks at individual responsibilities of each person.

In addition, after the work of the inspectors ends there will be no in-depth analysis and consultation with the delivery of the results to the school.

Also the direct cooperation with parents is not part of the evaluation by the school authority.

The feedback modules of Democaris do not only help schools before the inspection to match with the demanded quality standards but are suitable also for disposing uncovered deficits after the inspection

How do you reach out to colleagues who have reservations?

How does one overcome collective reservations among colleagues?

The transparent presentation of the individual feedback modules, an open discussion about the purpose of a feedback culture are cumbersome but worth it.

The school board feedback is very useful in order to overcome those reservations.

The positive and encouraging approach is a distinct way of convincing colleagues to put themselves up for a similar procedure with their students.

It is hereby crucial to provide clear informations about the entire method and the handling of the results.

Who receives the results?

The clear philosophy of our feedback processes is: the results belong exclusively to the feedback taker.

Democaris consults feedback takers and helps with analyzing as well as compiles a road map on how a feedback to colleagues, students or even parents could look like.

However, the decision how and to what extent the results are published is reserved to the individual.

Can students be really entrusted with an evaluation of classes?

Students are quite capable of evaluating teaching – they are so to speak experts.

How is a class supposed to be like where much can be learned and how does it feel?

In the course of the preparation for the feedback students should already be included.

What are relevant questions to them? What is important?

In addition they have to learn what constructional feedback is and in what way it is perceived best.

Again it is important that everybody knows what happens when and with what purpose.

Besides organizational basic conditions should work for the students too: I am familiar with an additional (sic!) feedback lesson on a hot summer friday in a 9th grade – I know what it means to have an increase around 100% of lacking motivation.

Isn't that again too much of additional work for our school?

It is additional work - all other statements would not be fair. But it is worthwhile to think about what benefits could be brought via such a cooperation to the school by introducing a feedback culture.

Discuss with one another whether there is room for improvement regarding teamwork, reorganization of work routines and knowledge databases that could lead on the long run to ease the work burden.

What will be the outcome?

Here are some examples of changes in schools, that went through such a feedback process:

- leadership feedback change of work routines (introduction of weekly school board discussions with turning presentation and fixed items on the agenda, inclusion of secretariat and generator, installation of an extended school board)

- student-teacher feedback

Introduction of grade teams, regular team meetings, trainings/workshops for students on the issue „how to learn how to learn“, introduction of „students council“ obligatory to all classes from 7th to 10th grade

- parents feedback and parents data base

Inclusion of many offers of parents as addition to classes, workshops of parents for students, establishment of parents cooperation groups with clear stated goals. The most important result we see along the process is a mutual dedication toward a quality-oriented school. Many recognize thereby their personal responsibility and learn that it is all about the question: „How am I concerned with the outcome – and how can I contribute?“

Thus there is a rethinking happening – steering away from passiveness, leaning toward responsibility. This is true for students, parents, teachers and school board likewise.

7.2 Sample: Student-Teacher feedback procedure, schedule and cost planning

dates* activities/topics/person in charge consulting units (1 consulting unit = 250,- Euro) (plus travel costs)
Wednesday, 22.03.09 lecture for entire school body (see school board feedback planning) -/- Discussion of the model, working on the questions in committees, Specify the students/teachers involved and announcing to Democaris by mail (responsible: A. XXX/head mistress) school internal programming of the school specific questionnaire, Short briefings with tAn to students and teachers (by mail as pdf document) (responsible: D.

XXX/Democar) 1.00 euros per tAn approx. 440,00
workshop for facilitators, in order to learn how to prepare classes/students for the feedback (what is feedback?
What purpose serves it? How to give efficient feedback? etc.).
Maybe parents and students could work as tandems for each other together with teachers

(responsible: XXX) (consulting unit) (maybe competences present in the house?) 250,00 Execution
student-teacher feedback at pc-pool of the school: - strict defined periods of at least 90 min. - supporting EDP
staff - the small ones need additional assistance (responsible: A. xxx) school internal evaluation/analysis and
providing results, graphical representation for the individual feedback takers = teachers
incl. allocation of information material and results for everyone (responsible: XXX/Democar) 5.00 euros per tn

200,00

4 group discussions regarding results - max. 10 persons
in each case 3.5 - 4 hr. as SchilF-veranstaltg. (responsible: XXX/Democar)
4 consulting units 1.000,00

1 school board evaluation in total regarding cultural feedback part (responsible: XXX)
1 consulting unit 250,00

€ 2,140,00

* dates are fixed and completed depending on school board vote

7.3 Sample: parents feedback und parent database procedure, schedule and cost planning

consulting units (1 CU = 250,-- Euro) (plus travel costs)

Wednesday, 22.03.09 lecture for entire school body (see school board feedback planning) -/-
working on the questions in committees, Specify the students/teachers involved and announcing to Democar by
mail (responsible: A. XXX/head mistress) school internal programming of the school specific parents
questionnaire

sample information sheet for teachers and for parents as well as short briefings with tAn at school (on the basis of
400 parents' houses) - by mail as PDF document (responsible: XXX/Democar)

1.00 euros per tAn approx. 400,00

copy and distributing information sheet, with short briefings to the parents (incl. resources inquiry)

(responsible: XXX/head mistress)

school internal supply of results, graphical representation of each questions (pie charts)

discussion/analysis with school board and..... (e.g. parents representative)

(responsible: XXX/Democar) 1 CU

250,00

preparation/execution/presentation of the first parents meeting „cooperative parents“

(responsible: XXX /Democar)

1 CU 250,00

allocation/establishment of a web based parent database if necessary

(responsible: XXX/Democar)

per year 150,00

150,00

€ 1,050, 00

* dates are fixed and completed depending on school board vote

(Parents feedback can be parallel to the student-teacher feedback)

7.4 Sample: school board feedback – procedure, schedule and cost planning

consulting units (1 CU = 250,-- Euro) (plus travel costs)

Wednesday,

22.02.2009

preliminary talks with Mrs. Anna XXX/head mistress

information over all three feedback modules

-/-

until Wednesday,

01.03.2009 procedure/cost planning and list of questions for school board
for information by mail to A. XXX/head mistress
(responsible: Democaris/XXX)

-/-

till 10.03.09 adjustments to the list of questions within the school board

Result = selected, schoolspecific questions by mail to Democaris
(responsible: A. XXX)

school internal

Wednesday,

22.03.09

preparation:

14:15

start: 14:45

lecture for entire school body, student representative, parent representatives, school supervision (D. XXX)

1 CU 250,00

- invitation Ø A. XXX

- organization

- conference room, beamer, screen

- laptop Ø D. XXX

- masters lecture

until 23.03.09 programming of the questionnaire,

short briefings with tAn in PDF format by email to school (per tAn 1.00 euro) (responsible: D. XXX)

100,00

50,00

24. - 31.03.09 execution school board feedback at the schools pc-pool,

favorable conditions:

- strict defined timeframe (e.g. 2 x 3 hr.)

- EDP supporting staff

- teacher-list for checking off completion (responsible: A. XXX)

school internal

01. /02.04.09 evaluation/analysis of the results,

graphical representation for the particulars school board members = feedback taker (responsible: D. XXX)

20,00

per Evaluation 60,00

Monday, 03.04.09

3 single discussions regarding results (8: 30 - 11:00 /11: 30 - 14:00 /14: 30 - 17:00) (responsible: D. XXX)

2 CU 500,00

* dates are fixed and completed depending on school board vote

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Tuesday,

04.04.09

1 school board team discussion = formulation of first consequences and procedure of the result workshop
with entire school body (responsible: XXX) 1

1 CU 250,00

Wednesday,

05.04.09 result workshop with entire school body = feedback to the results and first consequences

(in two groups, adjustment with the entire school board of the final design) (responsible D. XXX)

1 CU 250,00

€ 1,460,00

45

7.5 Democaris e.V.

Democaris e. v. was founded in August 2006 as a non-profit association for the promotion of education.

The association works conceptually and practically on the development and execution of innovative, democracy-educational organization forms and structures within all educational ranges.

Democaris develops feedback processes (Internet-supported) for all levels of the education system, advises and accompanies schools/institutions in concrete execution of the processes as well as the development/implementation of the measures resulting from the outcome:

- leadership feedback: colleagues → school board
- team feedback: colleagues → cooperation between colleagues
- student-teacher feedback: students → teacher

- parents feedback: parents → school

The personal strengths and weaknesses are analyzed, in order to derive necessary changes. This intensive process is planned, accomplished, steered and supported by Democariss in close co-operation with all concerned.

On the basis of the results from the feedback processes Democariss offers need-based support, e.g. workshops/advanced training/accompanying the process

- fostering parental engagement through a parent cooperation database (cooperation parents-school)
- development of a school program
- methods of teaching/social learning
- cooperation between teachers and students (positives communication/motivation/improving learning atmosphere)
- cooperation between colleagues (positives communication/ work with one another/ basic mutual core values among teachers - educational consent)
- interdisciplinary teaching
- method training (students learn how to learn)
- Project management (e.g. for tax brackets, school board...)
- Guidance for school board (communication, information, coworker discussions...)

Democariss enters the stage as and outsider is not connected to the school authority. That helps to break open hardened structures.

Depending upon the nature of the program the costs are accepted The costs are taken over depending upon the nature of the program by friends of the institutions, by foundations or by sponsors from the economy.

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