



European Network
Cooperation-Parents-School
- COPASCH -

**Analysis of the current status of the cooperation
between parents and school**
With models of good cooperation
**and recommendations for the network's further
activities**

Presented by:
M.A. Corinne Waldbach

**A project in line with the European Union's Socrates
Programme**

- Comenius 3 Project -

225937-CP-1-2005-1-DE-COMENIUS-C3

**Under the project management of
DGB Bildungswerk Berlin-Brandenburg
„Wilhelm Leuschner“ e.V.**

Berlin, 01.12.2006

Table of contents

1. Analysis of the contents of school legislations and school-development programmes concerning the position of parent representatives or the parent association at the school	2
2. Comparison of the current status of the cooperation between parents and school in the partner countries	6
2.1 Forms of cooperation – information and guidance	
2.1.1 formal-statutory forms of cooperation.....	8
2.1.2 informal-voluntary forms of cooperation.....	11
2.2 Parent associations	17
2.3. Forms of cooperation – involvement.....	18
2.3.1 Participation and shaping of lesson content.....	19
2.3.2 Participation and shaping of school life.....	20
2.4 Digression – forms of cooperation at schools not participating in the project.....	24
3. Models and good practices of cooperation between parents and school with recommendations for further activities.....	26
3.1 Requirements / criteria for good cooperation	26
3.2 Practices of good cooperation.....	29
3.2.1 Communication – occasions for contact and exchange...	29
3.2.2 Information – diverse knowledge and experiences.....	32
3.2.3 Information – transparency and openness.....	34
3.2.4 Cooperation – parent involvement	36
3.2.5 Continuity and sustained yield.....	38
3.3 Transferability.....	40
3.4 Recommendation for further activities and events	42
4. Appendix.....	44

The following analysis refers to the written investigation and survey respectively which was conducted by the governing team of the COPASCH project. The results are to be understood as a first overview that should be further deepened and specified by the expansion of materials and statements of the participating schools in the course of the project.

1. Analysis of the contents of school legislations and school-development programmes concerning the position of parent representatives or the parent board at the school

This section focuses on the statutory and administrative premises regarding the cooperation between parents and school. A first attempt is made to highlight the position of the parents by closely examining the relevant statutory texts, ordinances or school programmes of the participating partner countries.

The parents' rights and duties concerning their involvement with the school and their corresponding position receive different levels of attention and regulation in *Germany's* school legislations. In principle, the school legislations of each federal state decide on the authority of the parents and the parents association for the different types of school. In general, due to the work and effect of the parent representatives in the past years, parents' rights have been more closely specified and the possibilities of co-determination have been extended to various areas. For instance, parents' associations give their opinion on important subjects in teachers' conferences and the school forum's competencies have been extended too. Furthermore, parent representatives are able to participate in curriculum and education committees, where they have active possibilities of involvement.

In *Brandenburg*, parents' participation is part of the school legislation in which the participation on different levels – school, administrative district, and federal state – is precisely defined. All parents of one class elect 2 class parent representatives to the parents' conference of the school, which then elects 5 members to the school conference and 2 members to the 'Kreiselternrat' (district parent council). The district parent council elects 8 members to the 'Kreisschulbeirat' (district school advisory council) and 2 members to the 'Landeselternrat' (the federal state's parent council). The federal states parent council elects 1 spokesperson and 8

Analysis concerning the parent representatives' position in the school legislation

members to the 'Landesschulbeirat' (the federal state's school council), which is the ministry's advisory board.

Furthermore, in separate sections of the school legislation the responsibilities regarding the provision of guidance and information for parents are mentioned. The school legislation therewith mentions following parents' rights at school-level: Right to information concerning the child's level of proficiency and development and possible courses of education/training; guidance rights, organised on class level (class conference) and on school level (school conference); participation rights in teacher, pupil and subject conferences; as well as rights of co-determination in the school conference.

In addition, the position of the parents regarding their duties and possibilities is increasingly regulated within the separate school programmes of each school. Parents' involvement and possibilities of participation are, for example, part of the school programmes at the Fontane -Gymnasiums Rangsdorf and the Europagrundschule Ortrand.

A statutorily fixed co-determination right – (Schulgemeinschaftsausschuss (SGA)) – in the school legislation regulates the co-determination of parents in *Austria*. The co-determination of the SGA takes place on school-level and includes consultation and decision rights. The decision rights refer mainly to aspects of school life, i.e. school festivals, timetable arrangements but also 'Schulversuchsanträge' (proposals for school experiments). Consultation rights refer on one hand to pedagogic aspects and aspects relevant to the lessons, but also to organisational aspects, i.e. budget assignment or civil works.

Furthermore there are – similar to Germany- clearly defined duties the school has to fulfil regarding guidance and information for parents (child's achievement, office hours and parent - teacher evenings).

Next to the SGA's decision and consultation rights, the law also determines the possibility of founding a parent association that is to be supported by the school direction. This association represents the interests and complaints vis-à-vis the school direction or individual teachers and is open to all parents. It functions as a medium of communication and the spokespeople and leading posts are determined by elections.

Denmark's school legislation contains no statutory regulations whatsoever regarding the position of parents or their co-determination rights.

Analysis concerning the parent representatives' position in the school legislation

In *Finland*, the terms of involvement and the rules of cooperation are based on the law and verdict of 'Grundbildung' (basic education) respectively. Furthermore, the position of the parent representatives – including their duties – is determined in the school programme and the yearly school work plan.

Greece fixes the parents' role within the school in the school legislation 1566/85 in article 53. There, one parent from each class has to belong to the school committee. The parents take part in teacher meetings, take on advisory roles in cases of severe punishment and also decide on the travel agency that arranges the 5-day excursion.

In *Hungary*, the parents' position is on one hand regulated by tuition law in § 13-14 as well as in § 59-61. Also, agreements are made in the government regulation about the work of education facilities (R) 30/A in § R. 3 §. These agreements refer to the school-level and comprise parents' consultation rights vis à vis the school and the school's information rights vis à vis the parents. § 59 – 61 defines the association of parents, whereas parents are able to organise themselves in various forms of associations. There the most common form is the parent association, which organises and represents the parents' interests. The parent association is the advisory board concerning house rule issues, education and the pedagogic agenda. In addition, it supports the implementation of pupils' rights. Next to their participation in the parent association, parents are also active in the school authority, the school chair. This chair is composed, in equal numbers, of teachers, the pupils' self-administration, parent organisations and the school's responsible body. It aims at supporting the cooperation between all parties and can be founded if there is at least 20% backing from the parents' side. The parent representatives hold approval rights at the school authority regarding the acceptance of organisation and work regulations, as well as house rules, appraisal rights concerning the school's education policy and proposal rights concerning the choice of the head of school and his/her direction methods. Moreover, the parents' position is regulated within each individual school's organisation and action plan and in the work plan of each individual form teacher. Recommendations made by parents can be realised if there is 50% support from the parent association.

In *Poland*, the position of the parents is fixed in the school statute. It grants the parent board, which is made up of elected parents from the

Analysis concerning the parent representatives' position in the school legislation

individual classes advisory functions in matters of education and care of the children. The parent board also has co-determination rights regarding the development of the school programme. The board works together with the school administration, the teacher board and the pupils' self-administration. The parent board disposes of a fund that consists of contributions made by parents, which can be used for various school projects.

The position of parents in *Slovenia* is fixed in article 46, 47 and 66 of the school legislation. Regulations are also set in the annual school agenda and in the kindergarten law.

In each case a class parent council is to be elected, which then delegates an elected representative to the school's parent advisory board. In addition, the school legislation states that parents are to be included in the implementation of school programmes. The parent advisory council, representing parents' interests, is an advisory body to the school concerning the annual work plan and the development of the school programme. A parent representative who is elected by this council is delegated to the school inspector where he/she has an advisory function. Furthermore, he/she is able, as a representative of the parent advisory council, to assert veto and complaint rights with regard to tuition and education matters.

In *Northern Ireland* und *Great Britain*, each school is administered directly by a Board of Governors. The position of the parents is therefore regulated in the school development programme of each school. Two parents – governors- belong to this board.

In addition, the parents' position is organised in the constitution of the respective school's parent-teacher association.

The example of the private school Grindstedt in *Denmark* (chapter 2.1 – 2.3) makes clear that the cooperation, participation and integration of parents not only depends on statutory conditions and establishment, nor do these necessarily provide the prerequisites for a successful cooperation. As indicated by most schools, the statutory premises for cooperation between school and parents seem adequate and good. Therefore it will become clear in chapter 3, that most of all human values like acceptance and mutual openness are needed in order to find occasions for cooperation at joint encounters.

2. Comparison of the current status of the cooperation between parents and school in the partner countries

Apart from the compilation of the statutory-administrative prerequisites and regulations, it is very informative for the formulation of transferable models and methods to record and present the current status of the participating schools' cooperation. The information and data were also generated from the written surveys. Here too, the results are to be understood as a first overview, which should be deepened and specified by the further development of the form of the participating schools in the course of the project.

General rules and requirements

The schools involved in the project, including the parents, largely agree that the statutory-administrative requirements alone do not necessarily lead to a good and intensive cooperation.

These requirements need to be supported by a multitude of opportunities that create the possibilities and chances for communication between the involved partners of a school. Communication is the fundamental element of cooperation and requires a high level of sensitivity from all participants, because the respective ideas about the role each party plays greatly differ and the expectations towards one another are, to some extent, not known. Therefore, it should in first instance be discussed what ought to be agreed upon. What exactly do we want to do collectively and who takes part and how? Common goals, transparency, definite responsibilities with clear tasks and deadlines are all factors needed for success – as well as trust and appreciation on both sides.

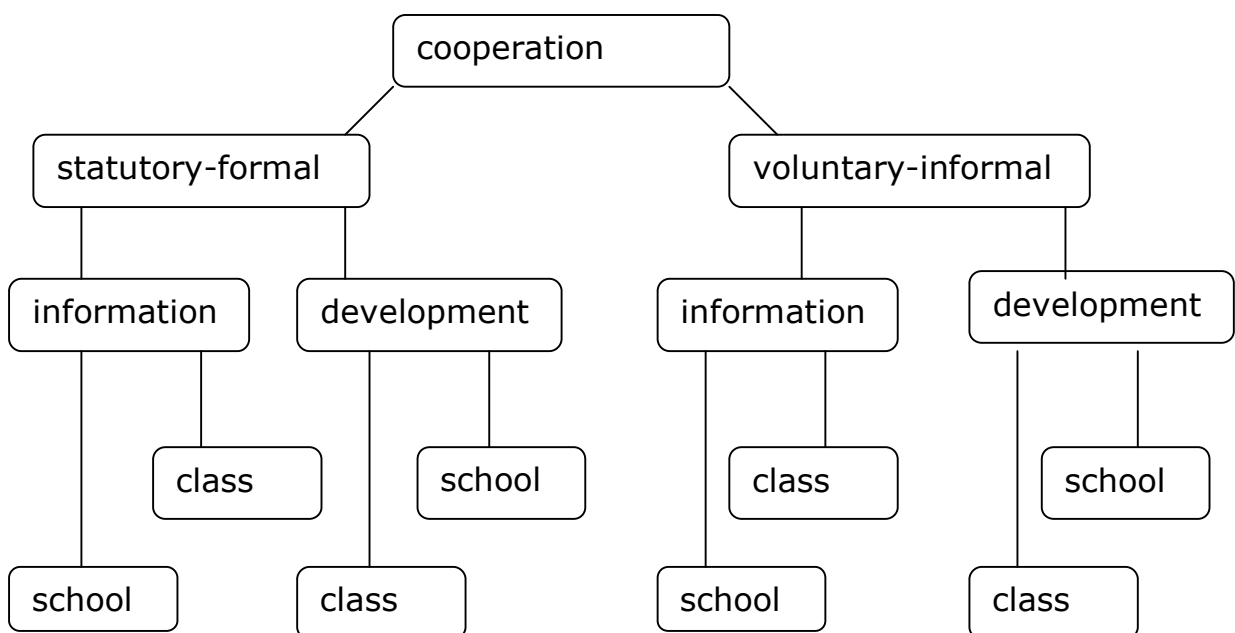
It seems that in this area a lot has already happened and is happening at all schools. Despite missing or statutory regulations the majority, with two exceptions, rates the cooperation as normal to good. The successful path towards a very good cooperation needs time, modified structures and ideas.

In the analysis of the cooperation's current status, the different forms and methods of cooperation are made apparent.

On one hand there are forms that refer to the specific information and consultation rights (2.1), especially on the part of the school opposite the parents. There are two observable categories. One, the statutorily regulated, formal forms (2.1.1) and two, the more informal and loosely organised forms (2.1.2) of cooperation.

On the other hand, there are forms that are structured by the parents' involvement rights concerning school life. Next to the forms of information and involvement possibilities for parents, mentioned under 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, there are forms that are mainly aimed at the circle of parents (2.2). These can be seen as communication opportunities amongst the 'like-minded'. Furthermore, forms of involvement in daily school life (2.3) are generally noticeable and can be distinguished as involvement in matters of tuition and education one side (2.3.1), and the participation in structuring school life on the other (2.3.2).

The individual forms of cooperation are therefore arranged on different levels:



2.1 Forms of cooperation – Information and consultation

2.1.1 Formal-statutory forms of cooperation

The cooperation between parents and school with regard to information and consultation rights is, with the exception of Denmark, regulated by law in all education acts of the participating partner countries. Thus, forms are found at class-level, like parent-teacher meetings and office hours but also at school-level, like school conferences.

The particular information rights and duties that are regulated by the rights of the participation committees (cp. ch. 1 for the position of the parents) are not explicitly mentioned again at this stage. Rather, this chapter deals with the presentation of the common forms of information and consultation. These forms of cooperation were stated by nearly all partners and reported as structured cooperation. These forms differ partly in mode and temporal set-up but the goals and the structure of these cooperations are for the most part identical.

a) Regular talks at class and school level

The statutorily fixed parent-teacher evenings, class and school conferences (cp. ch. 1) are forms of information and participation at class and school level respectively. Here, the main function is to inform parents about general day-to-day school procedures, statutory changes or the school's cultural events. But they also function as a medium through which parents can communicate and resolve questions, concerns and exchange advice.

In *Germany* and *Denmark*, parent-teacher evenings take place twice a year, often at the start and the end of the academic year. Even though there is no statutory establishment of the parent-school cooperation in Denmark, this cooperation nevertheless is very important because the parents choose their child's school, whereby the cooperation gains high significance for the school.

In Germany, parents are organised beyond the school level in the district and state parent council (cp. ch. 1), where they have the opportunity to obtain information about structural and organisational aspects of the education act.

In *Finland* – similar to Germany and Denmark – there exist general parent-teacher evenings, their number and frequency determined by the matters the teachers wish to discuss. At the parent-teacher evenings the parents receive extensive information regarding the

following year's curriculum of their child. The parents are actively included in the discussion about the curriculum and only after their opinions and ideas are heard can the plan be changed.

In *Austria*, parents are informed about general school issues at parent-teacher evenings. Here, the cooperation between school and parents expresses itself mainly in the school's general information responsibilities towards the parents. The school sees parents more as recipients of information rather than informants.

In *Greece* there exist methods of structured cooperation between parents and school according to the law. In addition to parent-teacher evenings taking place at the class level each class sends one parent as a representative to the school conference. Despite the fact that they are fixed by law, these methods of structured cooperation are only rarely appreciated and used by parents. While parents perceive themselves as being available for the school, they often only actively intervene to secure more tolerance and leniency.

In *Hungary* school-law prescribes that each class has to hold two parent assemblies per year. Among other things, these assemblies serve to make parents and students sign the internal school rules.

In *Poland* parent-teacher evenings are held to inform parents about the schools assessment and classification system as well as about cultural events. Here schools aim at informing parents more comprehensively about educational questions. Parents are to be invited to an educational class, which serves to enhance their sensibility and knowledge towards the education and development of their child.

In *Slovenia's* schools parents have access to extensive possibilities for informing themselves about their child's development as well as about the school in general. Parent-teacher evenings, informing about important dates, tests and school affairs such as festivities and excursions, takes place four times a year.

In *Northern Ireland and Great Britain* parents have different possibilities for obtaining information about their child's performance and development as well as about school affairs in general. An essential element is, like in all other participating schools, that parent-teacher evenings are held for every class.

b) Individually designed dialogue

In addition to the forms of cooperation taking place at class or school level, every school has found ways of individual cooperation in form of dialogues that take place during office hours or phone conversations.

All schools in *Germany* and in *Denmark* hold parent office hours or parent visits at primary level, during which the teacher takes time to concentrate on one set of parents and on 8 individual children.

In Grindstedt – *Denmark* – phone conversations between teachers and parents are an essential part of the cooperation. Parents know that they can call the class teacher whenever there are problems or questions regarding their children and teachers are also in contact with parents when necessary. In *Finland*, the teacher offers parents similar parent office hours where the focus is on the individual child's strengths and weaknesses. In the case of a child needing special assistance, the teacher will discuss further assistance and advancement plans together with the parents. Like in Denmark, phone calls, letters and e-mails are an essential element of every day school life.

In *Austria*, parents have the opportunity to inform themselves about their children's academic performance and to discuss individual issues during office hours and days respectively.

The Piarista Szakiskola secondary school in *Hungary* offers regular office hours, which the parents can visit according to their needs. Apart from the statutorily regulated number of consultation hours, parents also have the possibility of additional contact to the teachers, e.g., phone calls or other conversations.

In *Poland* too, the cooperation between the participating partners is supported by individual parent-teacher meetings, sometimes also in the presence of the director. Here, the individual child's progress and possible difficulties are discussed.

In *Slovenia* - apart from the statutorily fixed parent-teacher evenings - individual meetings with parents and pupils take place, mainly to discuss and to solve problems and difficulties. The parent-teacher evenings are enhanced by a monthly office hour for parents where they can obtain information concerning their child's overall performance. These information possibilities are further complemented by phone conversations.

In *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain*, the parent-teacher evenings are also supplemented by office hours and individual parent visits. Individual parent-teacher talks are part of school culture, whereas several schools are striving to increase the number of these meetings.

It becomes clear that there are hardly any observable differences between the individual partner countries in a) and b). Individual forms of communication like phone calls or individual parent consultation hours are practiced in several countries and clearly show that both parties are opening up to each other and a basis for continuous cooperation is present.

2.1.2 Informal-voluntary forms of cooperation

Beside statutorily fixed possibilities of information, each school participating in the project has its own ways of benefiting the cooperation through informal methods like learning and behavioural contracts, parent-letters, parent-teacher associations, parties and other celebrations.

a) Festivals and celebrations

In *Germany*, parents are invited to all kinds of school festivals and celebrations: from theatre and music evenings to sporting events. That way parents get to know more about their child's school life beyond the classroom.

In *Denmark*, beside the regular parent-teacher evenings at class level, there is a special "parent-evening with school theatre" every Christmas that takes place for the parents from grade 0-3. At this more festive occasion, the youngest pupils perform a play and afterwards students, parents and teachers enjoy the rest of the evening together. There is also an annual "Parent-Saturday" that parents organise.

In *Finland*, similar to Denmark, "Parent-Saturdays" are part of school life. These events (including content and finances) are organised and held jointly by parents and teachers.

In *Austria*, individual methods of communication are rarely seen. In order to improve the flow of information between school and parents, individual forms of cooperation are sought. However, parents should

also initiate this contact proposal, given that they are only contact recipients but can also provide the school with important information concerning their children, their wishes and possibilities of support.

The Piarista Szakiskola Gymnasium (high school) in *Hungary* invites parents to a festive meal to give everyone the opportunity to engage in relaxed and informal conversations. As Piarista is a Christian school, parents, teachers and students also spend a spiritual day together. In addition, there are many opportunities (e.g. excursions and celebrations) in the course of the year for all parties to get in contact with each other.

In *Slovenia* there also are a multitude of possibilities for parents to participate in school festivals and parties. Exhibitions and cultural events are organised together with parents and joint picnics are arranged.

b) School newspapers and information media

In *Denmark*, the private school Grindstedt developed the book "Parent ABZ" where parents can find information and advice on homework, food and sleep for grades 0-3. The school also publishes a monthly "leaflet" that inform parents and pupils about next month's upcoming activities.

In *Finland*, an annual school brochure that informs about activities and school and classroom life is compiled by the school and sent out to the parents.

In *Slovenia* too, each school publishes a brochure for parents that contains information relevant to school life. Beside information about timetables, meals and office hours, the brochure also lists excursions, after school and winter school activities as well as school holiday dates. In *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain*, some schools have "wall newspapers" with information for parents and also provide letterboxes for complaints and suggestions.

Furthermore, parents are informed about school activities and day-to-day classroom life through newsletters and parent guidebooks. Parent guidebooks contain information concerning the timetable and curriculum, clerical aid and general support and guidance brochures.

c) Open school days

The private school Grindstedt in Denmark holds a monthly “open school day” where parents have the opportunity to experience and participate in their children’s day-to-day school life.

The majority of schools in *Slovenia* open their door for all interested parties and offer a “day of the school”. At this event parents can gain insight into every-day school life and at the same time can participate in the organisation and realisation.

As in Denmark, open days are an integral part of everyday school life at certain schools in *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain*. By participating in general classroom and school life, parents find out more about their children’s behaviour and work.

d) Continuing education and schools for parents

In Brandenburg, *Germany*, an additional qualification for parents “parents educate parents” was developed by the “Landesinstitut für Schule und Medien” (institute for school and media). Committed and interested parents obtain a basic pedagogic education in questions of pedagogy, psychology and didactics in various seminars. They then communicate this knowledge directly to other interested parents in parent counselling and further education sessions.

At the private school Grindstedt in *Denmark*, the above-mentioned (2.1.2 b) “Parent ABZ” serves as a method to further educate parents concerning pedagogical and development-psychological issues.

In *Hungary*, parents receive information concerning drug abuse prevention and are also included in supporting these prevention methods alongside the school.

In *Slovenia*, teachers and pedagogues generally offer lectures and workshops for parents, where they are informed about issues like children’s upbringing and development, games and interests.

Another method, which is currently being established in *Slovenia*, is “the school for parents”. Here parents are informed and advised on different aspects of childhood and youth following a specific curriculum. „The school for parents” is not statutorily regulated but organised and implemented by the association VEZI. The curriculum changes every year as parent’s wishes and suggestions are included.

e) Learning and behavioural contracts

In order to support the cooperation between the school and parents, learning and behavioural contract were applied at several schools participating in the COPASCH project.

Learning and behavioural contracts do not represent contracts in a legal sense. They are voluntary, yet binding agreements that can provide the basis for a trustful and responsible cooperation. These contracts and agreements contain guidance, goals and rules for teachers, parents and students that all participants believe are important for the educational process. All schools participating in the project use different titles for these agreements and contracts, e.g. in England they are called Learning Contracts and Behavioural Contracts, in Germany Verhaltens- bzw. Erziehungsvereinbarungen. The form or title is not important but rather the negotiating process between the parties, communication with each other, and the discussion about the respective parties' expectations concerning their actions and behaviour. Depending on the goals, the form and use of the contracts change, and individual, class specific or school specific agreements are made.

In recent years, the school legislations of the individual federal states in *Germany* have increasingly accommodated terms and requirements. The "alliance for education" in North Rhine-Westphalia and the "alliance for education and upbringing" in Brandenburg have paved the way for the use of contracts and agreements.

In North Rine-Westphalia, the responsibilities of the involved partners –teachers, parents and to some extent students - are clearly outlined in learning and behavioural contracts. The acknowledgement of the house rules can be part of these contracts, as they clearly describe the codes of behaviour at school. There also are individual contracts in form of behavioural contracts between parents, teachers and pupils, which especially make sense in cases of difficult or deviant behaviour. In these contracts, the student makes concrete behavioural promises, which then are to be achieved and kept with the help of teachers and parents. In some cases, the pupil is rewarded if he/she manages to fulfil these agreements. At the same time, it is also determined how and when corrective measures are applied according to the school regulations.

In Brandenburg, teachers and parents are also encouraged to close behavioural and learning contracts to support the cooperation. The parties concerned should agree on who contributes what in order to reach the school's goals. These self-commitments are aimed at keeping to the rules that were made and agreed on by all parties concerned. In Bremen, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt, learning and behavioural agreements are implemented on the recommendation of education experts or an alliance. In Bavaria, the cooperation between the school and parents, amongst others, is supported by a commitment to engage in a frequent dialogue about jointly drafted agreements, school programmes or school constitutions.

In Germany, the 'Gymnasium' (high school) Rangsdorf uses parent and education contracts to integrate parents. There, an "agreement on educational principles" is signed by all 7th grade students, parents and teachers at the beginning of the school year. With this, all participants agree to fulfil various conditions that help maintain a positive school atmosphere as well as support the intellectual and social development of the individual. There also are individual development agreements that act on strengths and weaknesses. Here, the pupil assesses his achievements at the start of the academic year and then plans appropriate measures to develop his/her strengths and reduce weak points. The following steps are planned together with class or subject teachers and reassessed every six months.

The Europagrundschule Ortrand also works with individual agreements that are developed specifically for each child in accordance with the individual student, parents and teachers. These agreements are displayed, visible to everyone, in the classroom and reviewed on a half-yearly basis so parents stay informed too.

The Lyceum of Kardista in *Greece* also works with behavioural and learning contracts where all participants' roles are defined and agreed upon.

The Piarista Gymnasium (high school) in *Hungary* also involves parents in joint work through learning and behavioural contracts. They give the cooperation a binding form and help integrate parents in the education and development of their children.

The use of learning and behavioural contracts or parent-contracts is part of Northern Ireland's and Great Britain's school culture, too. These contracts are applied to several, special initiatives - similar to the use of feedback models - and thus are not widespread in day-to-day school life.

f) Feedback-culture

Certain schools participating in the project not only work with forms of cooperation that solely aim at the transmission of information regarding students' behaviour and performance. In addition, they also work with feedback models that enable an evaluation of various aspects of classroom and school life by the participating partners.

That way, everyday school life at the high schools Rangsdorf and Ludwigsfelde – *Germany* – is supported and broadened by a feedback model. Here the school's obligation to inform the parents is reversed in the sense that parents provide the school with information. They give information on, amongst others, the involvement in classroom and school life, which includes projects and offers from homework supervision to student internship placements.

In the primary school Alhaisten Koulu in *Finland*, the work of all parties concerned is supported by the use of feedback models. They register the expectations, wishes and ideas in order to facilitate the cooperation between parents and the school. Furthermore, the school developed a questionnaire for parents to record how these can be supported in the best possible way. The results will be presented at the 2nd network meeting in Berlin.

The Lyceum of Kardista in *Greece* also makes use of a feedback model.

The Piarista Gymnasium in *Hungary* relies on feedback models to clarify mutual expectations and to register all partners' satisfaction and problems.

At various schools in *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain* there were initiatives that tried to establish a feedback culture to pass parents' information, criticism and suggestions on to the respective school. As each school is directly administered and independently responsible for every day school life, a high interest in these feedback models was noticeable. Given that these individual initiatives are voluntary, they

only rarely managed to establish themselves as an integral part of school culture in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Regardless of the continuity of the use and the design of feedback models, this method of assessment and information has proved useful and important. Nevertheless, to make this method an integral part of school culture, openness and awareness for such methods have to be promoted and the communication with parents about this procedure needs to be deepened and strengthened.

2.2 Parent associations

A satisfactory and successful cooperation between parents and school not only depends on the communication between these two partners but also on the collaboration between parents. For this purpose, platforms or media were created at the schools by the schools themselves or with the help of parents. Here, parents meet and often work among themselves but sometimes also interact with parents at other participating schools. These platforms are mostly informal and not statutorily regulated meetings and provide a basis for parents to exchange information and promote school activities.

a) Parent rooms, cafés and regulars' tables

In *Germany*, parent cafés and regulars' tables can be sporadically found at the schools. Here, parents are among themselves and can discuss their questions and concerns. To some extent parents also organise the participation at school, district or even country level. According to parents' interests, experts and teachers are invited to the cafés or regulars' table.

In *Finland*, committed parents get together in voluntary parent committees to, for example, plan, discuss and raise money for trips and festivities.

In *Hungary*, the Piarista high school partly initiated parent groups. One group deals with education issues and problems. Another group concentrates on the parents' assessments and ideas.

In *Slovenia*, there are "round tables for parents" where parents of all age groups get together to discuss various subjects like "values" or "life between cultures" among each other or with experts.

b) Parent educators / multipliers

As described in paragraph 2.1.2, the continuing education project "parents educate parents" was established in Brandenburg, *Germany*. In this project, committed and interested parents obtain a basic pedagogic education in questions of pedagogy, psychology and didactics in various seminars. They then communicate this knowledge directly to other interested parents in parent counselling and further education sessions.

c) School funds and school sponsor associations

At many schools participating in the project parents often manage the school's funds. The respective organisation and form of this administration varies considerably. The administration of these funds mainly applies to funds from parent committees and associations. These are used mostly for events. In *Slovenia*, for example, there is a school fund that is managed by parents.

In *Germany*, some schools have sponsor associations. The European Primary School Ortrand works closely with its sponsor association, which deals with the acquisition of financial means and also contributes to various school projects.

2.3 Forms of cooperation – involvement

The following two chapters present the individual schools' possibilities and forms of involvement for parents in classroom and school life. These forms of participation go beyond "mere" cooperation in form of providing and exchanging information (compare chapter 2.1), because they refer to concrete occasions and meetings that include parents with their knowledge and their experience. Here, two forms are distinguished, the involvement in tuition (2.3.1) and the shaping of school life (2.3.2).

2.3.1 Participation and shaping of lesson content (classroom activities)

a) Classroom involvement / career guidance

At the high schools Rangsdorf and Ludwigsfelde – *Germany* – *parents* provide school internship support for students and teachers by offering internship places themselves or by helping with the search and placement.

Parents in *Slovenia* are partly involved in shaping lessons by explaining examples from their own everyday professional life or presenting other aspects of interest. In addition, they help teachers design their didactical tools.

b) Project involvement

In *Germany*, parents are actively involved in the creation of school and classroom projects. For example, they assist students in single-student-projects at several schools.

In *Hungary*, parents help with various projects in the individual classes. There, they contribute their experience and professional knowledge.

c) Educational support and partnerships

Parents in *Germany* form a kind of educational partnership with students in the context of single-student-projects. In doing so, parents one hand become their child's partner and on the other hand they also form partnerships with other children depending on the parents' specific profession or interests.

In *Finland*, a special method was developed to integrate immigrant parents as partners in educational processes. The school Alhaisten Koulu offers special orientation classes where immigrant children are prepared for Finnish-speaking classes in the first year. Especially in these classes it is attempted to work closely with the parents. As the introduction into classroom and school life only in English language proved difficult and complicated for the parents, the orientation class teachers now organise a joint parent-teacher evening for all immigrant parents. There the immigrant parents gather in four language groups – Russian, Thai, Estonian and Kurdish. The school director first of all

explains general aspects of the Finnish school system and then the classroom teachers present individual aspects of lesson organisation with the various language and age differentiated grades. Professional interpreters are hired for these parent-teacher evenings who interpret the director and teachers' words into three to four different languages (Russian, Thai, Estonian and Kurdish) for the parents.

This cost intensive method insures that all immigrant parents are given essential information concerning school and classroom life and also feel that they are part, and partners, of this life.

In *Slovenia* too, there exist various possibilities to engage parents as educational partners. They, for example, carry out different lesson projects and support gifted children as well as those with special needs.

In *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain*, parents are involved in the educational process by starting reading initiatives with children that are not necessarily their own. They choose books together, let the children read, read to them and review the text together. This encourages children to read more and also increases the individual child's reading confidence.

2.3.2 Participation and shaping of school life

a) Project organisation

In *Germany*, parents support certain projects financially but they also provide their knowledge and labour by organising and coordinating project work. For instance, parents coordinated the campaign "Tragwerk" at the Marie-Curie high school in Ludwigsfelde or supported the redesign of the schoolyard and playground – annual project "our place to play" – at the European primary school Ortrand. Parents at the high school Rangsdorf administer, maintain and supervise the parent database that helps administer parents' offers and fields of support and was created in the context of feedback models.

In *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain*, parents are involved in developing and realising projects. That way they, for example, support the school library with technical help and organisational advice and work.

b) School celebrations and excursions

At the schools in *Germany*, parents are involved in preparing and realising school festivities and events. They take over organisational and administrative tasks but also contribute to the projects with ideas and their experience.

Parents in *Denmark* generally participate in the organisation and realisation of celebrations and parties. The parent advisory committee in particular, takes on the organisation and realisation of the annual excursion for everyone – teachers, parents, and students.

In *Finland*, parents contribute to festivities with their experience and knowledge and are also responsible for financial coordination by fundraising in voluntary parent committees and providing funds for school celebrations and parties.

In *Hungary*, parents participate in the organisation of celebrations and parties and also realise the conception of excursions and school trips where they are often responsible for supervision and catering.

Parents in *Poland* take part in school events such as school theatre and school festivities. These events are mainly organised by the school, whereby parents often are spectators and not directly involved in the organisation and realisation of these festivities. Nevertheless, they are in large part responsible for care and supervision of the children at these events. The support and involvement in school life currently is characterised by parents mainly providing financial support for projects and celebrations.

In *Slovenia*, parents are integrated in school life through various forms of participation. They organise and participate in school projects that take place at classroom and school level. In addition, they support the school in preparing, organising and realising cultural and sporting events. They actively participate in their child's excursions and school trips by organising trips, supervising them and deciding on the places and sights that are to be visited.

c) Working groups

In *Germany*, parents sporadically offer working groups at schools, which the children can attend in the afternoon. The choice of activities always depends on the parents' interests and skills and ranges from plastic design to dance and computer clubs.

In *Slovenia*, parents not only manage projects in their child's grade but also offer working groups in the afternoon. Here, the choice of activities also depends on the parents' interests and skills and ranges from sowing and stitching to ceramics.

The involvement of parents in *Northern Ireland and Great Britain* in form of working groups is also very well established. They arrange and realise after school activities such as sports and dance courses.

d) Information and guidance for parents

As described in paragraph 2.1.1, in Brandenburg – *Germany* – a form of continuing education for parents was developed at the request of parents by the "Landesinstitut für Schule und Medien" (institute for school and media). In the context of the programme "parents educate parents", pedagogic parent counsellors are trained who then communicate their knowledge directly to other interested parents and parent initiatives in parent counselling and further education sessions.

As highlighted in paragraph 2.2 a) there are parent groups in *Hungary* that deal with various education issues and problems, whereby ideas and behaviour are effectively influenced. These parent groups meet regularly, support each other and exchange advice on certain issues.

Regarding parent information and further education, parents in *Slovenia* can express their interests and wishes within the framework of "the school for parents". The curriculum changes every year as parent's wishes and suggestions are included

In *Northern Ireland and Great Britain*, individual parents organise and plan specific programmes that motivate other parents and include them in everyday school life. With "Family First", active parents organise programmes and information events for other parents.

f) Open days, special days for family and parents

In *Denmark*, parents are responsible for the organisation and realisation of "Parent Saturdays". For this purpose, parents need to agree on who takes on which task and who is responsible for which part of the project.

e) Parent-Teacher Tandems

In *Finland*, as mentioned in paragraph 2.2.2, special interpreters were hired to support the work of the classroom teachers and facilitate the exchange between immigrant parents and teachers especially at parent-teacher evenings.

In *Northern Ireland* and *Great Britain*, the cooperation between parents and school regarding various creative after school activities can be described as a kind of parent-teacher tandem.

Summary

It becomes apparent that the activities between the school and parents to some extent focus on one particular activity, e.g. organising school festivities, specific project work or accompanying school trips. These selective offers are in certain cases extended through continuous working structures like working groups, partnerships or care of individual students.

It is also shown that contacts between parents and teachers are often still limited to the usual parent-teacher evenings and consultation hours.

The individual schools stated that the statutory requirements are sufficient in order to enable and establish cooperation structures in day-to-day school life. However, the degree of satisfaction with the cooperation is not always adequate. The private school Grindstedt highlights once again that, despite the missing statutory regulation of involvement and participation rights, parents nevertheless have many forms and methods of cooperation at their disposal. This shows that the formal-statutory regulation of participation possibilities alone does not guarantee a good cooperation. Schools need to find new, informal and individual ways of cooperation.

If parents and school wish to cooperate more intensely not only legal requirements are needed but also appropriate, opportunity-creating structures. First and foremost, these structures need the partners to appreciate each other, their uniqueness and their respective values in order to provide a basis for mutual openness. Furthermore, sufficient occasions, e.g. celebrations and parties should be created to give encounters and exchange a chance. Lastly, providing time for individual conversations to create and establish trust should extend the joint parent-teacher evenings.

Over the years it has become apparent that the traditional division of duties between the family and the school – parents are responsible for their child's upbringing, the school for its education – is no longer valid. Upbringing has become part of the school and education part of the family. In order to interlock both spheres and grant a comprehensive and fair development for all children, education partnerships are increasingly becoming important. Upbringing and education are common responsibilities and duties of the family and the school.

In order to win over parents from the much-discussed "working classes", or teachers, who have always been "lone warriors", first and foremost motivation and perseverance is needed from those who, to this day, are working consistently on these partnerships. However, a political reaction to the changed circumstances is needed too. Be it teacher training, the provision of additional resources – staff, time, funds – for schools or the creation of other structures to include additional partners, like the youth welfare services. Above all though, it requires the firm belief, that only by providing the young generation with a good upbringing and education, the basis for a good and just society can be created.

It is also important to note that each school and each type of school should develop their own specific forms and methods according to the socio-geographic conditions and the students' age structure. In times of increasing heterogeneity among parents and students, a universally valid model of cooperation would be rather impeding. A culture of communication and partnership can only be effectively developed during and through the process of approach and negotiation.

2.4 Digression – forms of cooperation at schools not participating in the project

To improve and to intensify the cooperation between the school and parents it is very informative to have a look at existing and successful practices of other schools in Germany not participating in the project. Opening up to other and new forms of cooperation at schools that are not part of the project supports the development and expansion of a Europe wide network and the transfer of good practices.

Concerning the cooperation between parents and school with regard to information and guidance (cp. 2.2), no new methods have arisen in comparison with the project schools.

Looking at the cooperation with regard to involvement (2.3) however, some interesting forms become apparent.

Parents at the Montessori School in Potsdam have the possibility to take part in their children's' everyday classroom life by *sitting in on classes*. At this school as well as at the F.F. Runge Gymnasium (secondary school) Oranienburg, parents are intensively and equally involved in working on and *drafting the school agenda*. At the secondary school in Oranienburg, parents are further granted participation and an advisory function in teachers' subject conferences. With regard to general school life, parents at the Montessori School in Potsdam independently organise "parent weeks". They also create various job, internship and project offers for pupils through the "self-supporter network". Generally, parents create a *choice of various projects* that take place in the morning as well as the afternoon, especially at all-day schools. At the van-Saldern Gymnasium (high school) in Brandenburg and at the Korczak Gymnasium (high school) in Finsterwalde, parents take over the guided tour and the presentation of the school at open days, where they act as advisors for interested parties and applicants. Even though they do not directly take part in classroom life, identification with the school and knowing how the school functions, are essential for it. At an elementary school in Freiburg i. Br., the cooperation between school and parents is effectively supported by the participation of both parties in *joint further education programmes*.

Schools working on a good cooperation between parents and school should maintain the exchange within a Europe-wide network to always try new and different ways of cooperating on the basis of successful cooperation examples.

3. Models and good practices of cooperation between parents and school with recommendations for further activities

With regard to the transferability, curiosity and openness are important and recriminations and reproaches from the participant's side are to be avoided. When it comes to good teamwork, it should not be expected that everyone acts in concert and that changes happen from one day to another. Every reorganisation lives on those, who believe in it and carry on optimistically and eventually manage to convince and sweep along even the last critic.

3.1 Requirements / criteria for good cooperation

Before explaining good methods and models of cooperation between parents and school, it is necessary to primarily look at criteria that characterise good teamwork. A good cooperation requires certain criteria. Only after clarifying these aspects with all participants, joint activities and continuous cooperation is possible.

With any kind of teamwork that aims at improving the situation, it should be considered how to change things for the better rather than looking for someone to blame. Because only if each participant accepts the other to be capable in his/her field and learns that mistakes are at the same time indices for improvement possibilities, future joint activities have a chance.

Therefore, not contextual aspects and material or personal resources are at the centre of attention when it comes to encourage cooperation, but human values and competence and the willingness of all participants.

In order to highlight good or exemplary methods of cooperation, it is informative to look at the criteria that count as pre-conditions for a cooperation. Cooperation is based on *dialogue* and an *equal relationship*. This again requires *mutual openness and interest*. The success of this cooperation furthermore requires the *appreciation and acceptance* of the other person. The *continuity and quality* of the cooperation finally results from the clarification of expectations and the regulation of mandatory steps towards cooperation.

a) Communication and dialogue

The participants in a dialogue need to dismiss the idea, that pedagogic information, hints or suggestions are only significant if a so-called professional mentions them. This means that the pedagogical and psychological expertise of teachers does not necessarily need to be perceived as the final truth. Equally, even if parents claim they are experts with regard to the needs and development of their children, their beliefs and experiences are not necessarily universally valid. All information, coming from teachers or parents alike needs to be negotiated and differentiated in conversations.

Every communication is based on exchange of information. This information is often not perceived in an equivalent manner during parent- teacher-communication, as the content of what is said often varies from the content of what is understood. These misunderstandings occur mainly because of the prejudice, attitude and expectations of both parties. Successful communication is based on specific rules. Every encounter that is interested in cooperation requires the understanding of all sides. Understanding based on dialogues needs an unbiased and

non-judgemental conversation at eye-level. Here, *respecting difference* is important. Teachers and parents should see themselves as equal partners in the educational process, whose goal is a common one: the best possible development and educational support for the child.

For this, teachers should stop seeing the education and upbringing parents provide as "deficient" and parents should stop judging teachers as "know-it-alls".

Communication can be successful and cooperation between the parties can follow, if teachers and parents do not talk about each other but with each other, i.e. resolving things together without accusations and scepticism. This impartial communication focused on action and resolution requires a basic mutual openness (b) of all participants. In addition, respect and appreciation of the respective other parties (c) combined with their knowledge, the resources and experiences, are important. And finally, with regard to good cooperation, interest and knowledge of the other parties' suggestions and wishes (d) is of utmost importance.

b) The “opening-up” of all parties

Every good cooperation, based on respect and tolerance towards the other party can also be described as a partnership. The school and the parents are therefore in an educational partnership, due to their interests and duties. This partnership can only be realised if both parents and the school open up. A common interest of parents and school is essential. Opening up from the family’s point of view means that parents talk about their child’s behaviour within the family, special experiences, their educational goals and methods. Furthermore, information about the *child's environment* and the *general familial situation* is important. This openness requires a good amount of trust, which can only develop through a long process of acknowledgment and appreciation. Parents and teachers should choose this path of *mutual trust*. On behalf of the school, openness means giving families insight into the everyday school life. Parents, for example, want to know which educational goals and methods teachers have, which subjects they teach and how they act in difficult situations. Openness also means that parent can profit from the teachers’ psychological and pedagogical expertise. Teachers open up in the sense of contributing to the cooperation and do not lose their competence or sphere of action in any way. Openness furthermore means that parents open up towards other parents and exchange information, ideas etc. At the same time, opening up means *transparency of school and classroom life*. This transparency becomes apparent at open days and class visits.

c) Appreciation

The shared responsibility for the upbringing and education of the children can only be fruitful and end up as a successful cooperation, if all partners get to know and appreciate each others *strengths and weaknesses*. With their common responsibility, parents and the school enter an educational partnership, through which they *share an equal status and are equally important*. Therefore, parents should acknowledge, respect and appreciate the teachers’ work and teachers should likewise appreciate competence, knowledge and experience of the parents. This way teachers are, among others, experts in communicating their expertise, in observing the child’s development,

and providing support. Parents at the same time are experts concerning the needs, lifestyle, strengths and weaknesses of their child.

d) Clarification of expectations and roles

As mentioned above, teachers as well as parents are specialists or experts in their respective field. This knowledge and experience is gathered through equal communication, and then is evaluated and integrated into cooperation and mutual support. It is important to find space and time to gather concerns, wishes and possible fields of cooperation through talks and meetings or through formal questionnaires.

By talking with each other rather than about each other, the individual partners' expectations, roles and possibilities are discussed and clarified. That way, wrong expectations and accusations are prevented and a basis of trust for collaboration in an educational partnership is created.

3.2 Practices of good cooperation

Following the requirements for a good cooperation described in the previous paragraph, this chapter presents various practices that accommodate these aspects of good cooperation.

3.2.1 Communication – occasions for contact and exchange

Communication and equal dialogue is only possible if occasions for exchange is created.

As highlighted in the analysis of the current status (compare chapter 2.1), forms of communication and exchange between parents and the school exist in every school. They become apparent at parent-teacher evenings and conferences that take place at class or school level.

These forms of collaboration within school life are institutionalised and ritualised, as they result from fixed school and class legislation respectively. However, these legislations do not necessarily create an atmosphere of openness and acceptance towards the other parties that is needed to effectively benefit cooperation.

Furthermore, these forms rarely offer opportunities to individually pass on or solve parents' concerns or teachers' information.

The exchange between parents and school therefore should not merely remain on a collective level but should rather develop from 'talking about each other' to 'talking with each other'. Several schools participating in the project state that the cooperation – despite its statutory regulation – is not satisfactory. Conversely, the private school Grindstedt in Denmark clearly shows that a good cooperation is possible without legal commitments. This fact can be traced back to the circumstance that there is demand from the parents' side to discuss individual problems, which go beyond the common interest of the class and school as a whole.

By solving individual concerns between parents and school, a basis of mutual trust can be created that can effectively intensify the cooperation.

Thus, practices and models that have managed to develop more or different ways of communication and exchange are of importance, rather than solely the already established forms of parent- teacher evenings or office hours.

The schools participating in the project show good practices of exchange and contact between parents and school. They range from individual meetings and conversations that revolve mainly about the achievements and development of the child, to celebrations and parties, which include parents in school life and provide opportunities for further communication.

Individual conversations and curricula/special needs plans

Both in Finland and in Denmark, parents and teachers use *phone conversations* as a method of exchange, meaning that they have the possibility to consult each other anytime they have questions and problems.

Furthermore, in Finland individual talks with the parents are held about *individual support plans* in the case of a child having special needs. In these talks it is discussed with which means and methods the individual child can be supported and which duties the parents and teachers have to fulfil.

The Europagrundschule Ortrand (European elementary school) also found an individual form of exchange. Here, *individual agreements* are

made, which are the result of personal arrangements between the pupil, his/her parents and the subject teachers. These are evaluated regularly every semester, so the parents are always personally involved in their child's development.

Questions and concerns from both sides are discussed during this individual contact. Teachers have the chance to find out more about the family's situation (living conditions and environment, unemployment, divorce, only child etc.) and the child's behaviour and experiences outside the school. Parents on the other hand, find out more about their child's development and behaviour at school. During this individual contact, observations about the student's behaviour can be exchanged, instructions can be agreed on and support procedures can be developed. In doing so, not only the achievements, but also the "whole" child is at the centre of attention, with its strengths and weaknesses, interests and hobbies, behaviour and habits, friendships and enmities, joys and problems.

The methods described above do not only underline good communication, but are also a sign of a good cooperation (comp. 2.2.4) by jointly searching for solutions and ways.

Celebrations and parties

Apart from the individual meetings that concentrate on the aspects of education and development, mainly informal casual meetings like sporting or cultural events are an occasion for communication and exchange. Here too, informal talks can sometimes lead to cooperations if parents are involved in organizing and supporting the event.

The majority of the schools participating in the project make a habit of getting together at celebrations and parties, resulting in possibilities for parents to meet and exchange thoughts. A good example and especially interesting are events, which do not "only" remain a sporting or cultural event, but turn into a personal and familial event. The private school Grindstedt, for example, organises an annual "parent-evening with school theatre" every Christmas that takes place for the parents from grade 0-3. At this more festive occasion, the youngest pupils perform a play and afterwards students, parents and teachers enjoy the rest of the evening together.

These individual forms of cooperation, like meeting at celebrations and parties, or planning and arranging support measures for the child, pave the way for an “education partnership”. Dealing with each other in an open and accepting way emphasises and supports the joint responsibility and work of parents and teachers. Phone conversations, relaxed and informal encounters at festivities but also formal talks regarding development and special needs plans lend them best to this purpose.

3.2.2 Information – diverse knowledge and experiences

As described in the paragraph above, parents as well as teachers are experts concerning upbringing, education and development of the child. Because of their professional and pedagogical training, teachers are able to observe and support development processes and communicate their specialised knowledge. Parents also possess expertise due to their education and job-related experience but just also have a pedagogic knowledge as a result of their child’s upbringing and development. Teachers should therefore not restrict their expertise and knowledge to academic education but rather share their knowledge with parents. Parents should also offer their knowledge and experience to the school and the children, as well as to other parents. This exchange requires both parties’ acceptance and openness.

Continuing education for parents – guides and seminars

For parents it is very important to obtain information about their child’s every-day life at school and in class and to be up to date on aspects of academic and personal development as well as possible support. This information should be gathered and passed on by teachers and all other qualified persons. The school should not expect the parents to be informed about these aspects just because of their parental role. Knowledge and experience tends to vary from parent to parent. This way, information serves as a display of offers and support possibilities that can be used by parents as needed.

With regard to further education for parents there are two good forms of providing information and qualification for parents - the use of

guidebooks and information material on the one hand and gaining qualification in seminars and lectures on the other hand.

The private school Grindstedt in Denmark tackles the issue of continuing education for parents with guidebooks. Thus, the school developed the book "Parents ABZ" in which parents can find information and advice on homework, food and sleep for grades 0-3. In Northern Ireland and Great Britain a parent guidebook compiled by each individual school provides information about general activities that take place in day-to day school life. These books also provide suggestions for games, ways to support the child and information about special needs programmes.

Schools in Slovenia and Germany work with *seminars and lectures* to provide further education for parents. In Slovenia, teachers and pedagogues generally offer lectures and workshops for parents, where they are informed about issues like children's upbringing and development, games and interests.

In Slovenia, another method is currently being established, "the school for parents". Here parents are informed and advised on different aspects of childhood and youth following a specific curriculum. In Brandenburg, Germany, the additional qualification for parents "parents educate parents" was established. Committed and interested parents obtain a basic pedagogic education in questions of pedagogy, psychology and didactics in various seminars. They then communicate this knowledge directly to other interested parents in parent counselling and further education sessions. (Comparisons can be found in the appendix on page 44.)

Groups and forums for parents

Different projects and schools have made clear that a good cooperation needs strong and committed parents. A lasting exchange of ideas and suggestions benefits from an association of parents, as parents are able to confer and exchange advice within a group. At the Piarista Gymnasium (high school) in Hungary, parents formed various groups with the school's support and encouragement. One group specifically deals with questions and problems concerning the upbringing of children. This way parents profit from each other's knowledge and

experience. In another group, parents are at the centre of the work, meaning that a self-awareness group was established, which focuses on the parent's evaluations and ideas.

Continuing education of parents represents an important aspect of a successful and good educational cooperation. Parents need increasingly more knowledge and exchange concerning the child's development and advancement in order to support the school's work from home. The schools in Slovenia, Denmark, Great Britain and Germany have developed good models for this purpose. Teachers thereby provide further education for parents using guidebooks and lectures and parents also act as pedagogical advisors for other parents.

3.2.3 Information – transparency and openness

For cooperation between the school and parents to develop, not only openness but also transparency of the work at the specific schools is necessary. This transparency gives parents the chance to gain insights into their children's school and class life. It encourages parents to feel part of the school community and not just "handing their children over to the school" which then works behind closed doors. This transparency is made possible at some schools participating in the project by various good practices. For example, different school brochures, announcements, open door policies and parent-rooms encourage and secure transparency.

School brochures and newspapers

The private school Grindstedt in Denmark produces a monthly "flyer" for parents and pupils, which informs about the coming month's activities. In Finland and Slovenia, an annual *school brochure* for parents is published, which contains information about activities at school and in the classroom. Some schools in Northern Ireland and Great Britain have "wall newspapers" with information for parents and provide letterboxes for complaints and suggestions.

Open school days/open house

The private school Grindstedt in Denmark holds a monthly “open school day” where parents have the opportunity to experience and participate in their children’s day-to-day school life. Parents feel they are welcome guests at the school. In Finland, there are “Parent-Saturdays” once or several times a year. These days are specifically organised, contextually planned and executed by parents and primarily address other parents. This way, school communities are effectively supported because parents have access to, and are recognised as part of school life.

Parent rooms and cafés

In order for the parents to feel welcome and part of the school’s community, they need space and time within the school to meet and exchange ideas etc. As a result, parental and academic education interlock and do not get separated by school fence or gate. Therefore parent cafés or regulars’ tables were organised in several schools in Germany. Here, parents are among themselves and can discuss their questions and concerns. To some extent parents also organise the participation at school, district or even country level. According to parents’ interests, experts and teachers are invited to the cafés or regulars’ table.

In Finland, there also are opportunities and room for parents at the school. Committed parents get together in voluntary parent committees to, for example, plan, discuss and raise money for trips and festivities. Several schools in Slovenia provided premises where the “round tables for parents” can take place. In these groups, parents of all age groups get together to discuss various subjects like “values” or “life between cultures” among each other or with experts.

A good cooperation is possible, if the school opens up and makes its work transparent. This means that information is able to get from the “inside” to the “outside”, i.e. that the school compiles information for the parents and vice versa. “Open days”, school brochures, web sites and wall newspapers for parents are important for gaining insight into school life. By generally opening up the school through “parent rooms” or cafés, parents’ affiliation towards the school community is strengthened and their trust effectively promoted.

3.2.4 Cooperation- parent involvement

A successful education partnership and a good cooperation between parents and the school go further than just exchanging information about the children. As some of the schools involved in the project show, good teamwork results from "real" cooperation. "Real" cooperation gives the parents opportunities to participate and get involved in school life. This again can only be realised if the above-mentioned information and communication possibilities exist. Only then are the fields of possibilities outlined and the readiness for collaboration given.

Celebrations and parties

At almost all schools there is an opportunity for parents to provide input and to get involved in celebrations and parties at school. The school gives parents the chance to take part in the organisation, content input and realisation – not only in form of supervising and providing food and drink for the participants. At this point, no particular or good model is especially highlighted as all schools have good existing practices.

Project work and working groups

The support on the part of the parents in projects and working groups is a good opportunity to show parents that they are being accepted as experts, as they are able to contribute their knowledge and experience. Here too, several participating schools managed to find good ways and possibilities.

In Germany, Slovenia, Northern Ireland and Great Britain, parents are involved in *planning and defining projects*. These projects can take place at school or classroom level and benefit school life. This way the parents take on all kinds of tasks to support the school's work, e.g. private tutoring, hosting the website, looking for sponsors or general maintenance and technical tasks.

In Northern Ireland and Great Britain parents are in charge of the project "school library". They support and contribute to the project with their technical help, their personal labour as supervisors, as well as with organisational advice and support. In an elementary school in Germany, parents contributed to the construction of the playground and schoolyard. Many things that qualitatively and quantitatively improve school life are only made possible at all because of this voluntary work in several projects.

Furthermore, several schools in Slovenia, Germany, Great Britain and Northern Ireland work in close cooperation with parents by giving them the opportunity to offer afternoon *working groups* for children according to the parents' interests and profession. In doing so, the schools can offer a broad spectrum of course, such as computer courses, dance and theatre groups and even experimental science groups. Especially at all-day schools these cooperative structures are very popular and common. The parents volunteer as educational partners and thus are acknowledged as experts - and at the same time integrated in the school's work.

The 'Gymnasium' Rangsdorf in Germany developed a good model that helps to gather, systemise and make the possibilities of cooperation accessible to all participants. This model avoids that parent's ideas and capacities go unrecognised by teachers and the school. At the beginning of the year, the "Gymnasium" Rangsdorf asks each parent about his/her specific offer of support for the school and the students respectively. The actual support possibilities are listed on a form, on which each parent then defines their form of support in detail. It is also asked who can help build and organise a parent-cooperation-database, so that the parents' often numerous offers are accessible to the school and teachers in a structured manner. Teacher can access these offers from a password-protected database over the Internet. The parent-group is also responsible for the update of the database.

(More detailed information concerning this model of cooperation can be found in the appendix on page 44.)

Educational patronage and participation in education

On top of helping to design projects and working groups, some parents in Slovenia and Great Britain offer educational patronage for children.

In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, parents start reading initiatives with children that are not necessarily their own. They choose books together, let the children read, read to them and review the text together. In Slovenia, parents form partnerships with gifted as well as disabled children within the scope of different projects. Parents accompany children during different processes of work and then solutions and ways are found together or independently.

A good cooperation, which most of all benefits and supports children, is achieved by the direct involvement of parents in form of projects and working groups. That way, parents are appreciated as experts. These offers provide children with additional knowledge that the school on its own cannot afford.

3.2.5 Continuity and sustained yield

Every good cooperation requires a high degree of structure and systematic thinking in order for it to have a lasting effect and not just to remain a good intention, idea or promise. Furthermore, a good cooperation requires constant evaluation, feedback and change or adaptation according to resources and needs. Because every cooperation lives on the partners' spiritedness and their relations with each other.

Agreements and contracts

Some schools participating in the project have recognised the benefit – continuity and transparency of common goals – of *agreements* and *contracts*. This way, several schools in Germany, Greece, Hungary, Northern Ireland and Great Britain make use of these instruments. Here, the responsibilities of the participating partners – teachers, parents and partly students – are clearly described and determined. It is stated on paper which tasks each party is in charge of and when they need to be fulfilled. There are collective meetings to evaluate the set goals and, if necessary, to afterwards adapt and change these aims.

In Finland it is common, in cases of special needs requirements, for teachers and parents to get together and to find and agree on methods, procedures and ways of supporting the child. In Germany, the 'Gymnasium' (high school) Rangsdorf created an agreement on principles that is signed by all students, parents and teachers at the beginning of the school year.

With this, all participants agree to fulfil various conditions that help maintain a positive school atmosphere as well as support the intellectual and social development of the individual. The Europagrundschule Ortrand also works with individual agreements that are developed specifically for each child. (Links with examples can be found in the appendix on page 44.)

Feedback models

Beside the exact determination of responsibilities, it is important for a good cooperation to broach the issue of problems and wishes and provide the other parties with *feedback* concerning their work. Praise serves as acknowledgement and motivation and criticism provides an opportunity to implement changes.

Several schools participating in the project, like Germany, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Northern Ireland and Great Britain, practice this form of feedback. The *feedback model* used by Gymnasium Rangsdorf and Gymnasium Ludwigfelde proves to work very well in practice. Beside the evaluation of the teachers' work by students and the school direction, parents are involved in the feedback process through a survey about general school issues. For this matter all parents are individually informed about their possibilities to give the school and teachers feedback. Parents are encouraged to provide their opinions on the parent-school cooperation, general well being at the school, class instruction and, in general, on perceived strengths and weaknesses of the school. These aspects are gathered in a differentiated manner alongside precise sub-questions. This way, the parents' satisfaction becomes clear, as well as issues that provide the school with potential to further improve communication with parents. These topics are then discussed together in a group and possibilities for a mutual solution are worked out. (For further information see page 44.)

For the development and consolidation of a good cooperation between parents and school it is important to determine which duties of day-to-day school life are to be fulfilled by *whom* and *when*. Agreements and contracts that clearly state responsibilities seem to best serve this purpose. Several schools participating in the project show good practices of determining and evaluating responsibilities. Furthermore, it becomes clear that each cooperation is sustained by mutual appraisal in form of appreciation and criticism of the individual partner's activities. Here too, the individual schools participating in the project have developed good models of feedback.

3.3 Transferability

In order to improve and extend the cooperation between parents and school it is interesting to look at other practices and collaborations and to exchange ideas with those schools. Nevertheless, it always has to be kept in mind that the models cannot be transferred one to one. It is undeniable that a good collaboration thrives on dedicated and motivated people who are able to engage and persuade others. In addition, a successful cooperation undoubtedly needs financial and personal resources, which, in certain cases goes beyond the school's capability. Each school needs to find its own way according to its individual resources and interests. Patience is also required, for a cooperation needs time to grow.

All models of cooperation described in this chapter are generally transferable to all schools' practices.

Every school needs to create occasions to initiate contact and exchange with parents. Festivals and celebrations provide an excellent opportunity for interaction. The private school Grindstedt in Denmark demonstrates how a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere makes it easier for parents to approach the school. These activities are realisable at all schools. Like the schools in Denmark and Finland, individual conversations in forms of phone calls are applicable to all schools. Parents and teachers are thus able to contact each other anytime for suggestions and questions. This openness has a lasting, supporting effect on mutual trust. It is also possible for all schools to have talks about individual support programmes and further development with the parents.

The mutually developed duties concerning the child's advancement can be fixed in *agreements and contracts* as shown by schools in Germany, Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This procedure can be established in the school culture of all schools.

In addition, all *feedback models* mentioned above, which report the suggestions and wishes of all participants, are applicable to all schools. Aspects that are gathered this way can then be discussed in joint meetings and can be incorporated into joint work. Thus a mutual acceptance of everyone's work is encouraged. But above all, feedback makes it possible to improve the quality of work. The forms of informing parents chosen by the schools in Denmark, Slovenia, Northern Ireland and Great Britain support the transparency of the schools' work.

These practices, which are created by school brochures, open day policies and 'parent Saturdays', are realisable models for all schools. This way it becomes clear, especially for parents, that the family is no longer separated from the school by fences and gates. Through the school's information and openness the parents feel that they are part of the school community.

The models of "true" or contextual collaboration, i.e. forming of *working groups* and *projects* as well as the organisation of *celebrations and parties* by the parents, are practices that are transferable to all schools. Here, it is important for parents to systemise and structure the offers and possibilities. The web-based *project database* used by 'Gymnasium' Rangsdorf can provide orientation for other schools.

Then again copying this model one to one is not always possible because of the missing technical equipment in schools and parents' households. Nevertheless, schools can look for other forms such as a card index or catalogue systems. The models of continuing parent education and training, developed or supported by the individual schools, can serve as a reference point for all participants and are basically realisable at all schools. Here every school has to find its own way of handling things concerning its resources and interests; whether it is a parent-school, organised by external pedagogues, a class or seminar offered by the schools themselves or a training course held by parents for parents.

It shows that in general, all described models of good cooperation are transferable to all schools. Undoubtedly, the realisation always depends on the available resources. The lack or absence of certain resources should never be an excuse to refuse or block collaboration. If all participants are clear about their common interest – the child's development and support – then a good cooperation is possible even with small means.

3.4 Recommendations for further activities and events

Within the network of participating schools, it is important not only to exchange and look at good practices but to also work towards shared activities, which concentrate on the principles of good cooperation.

The key themes are: communication between the partners (a), mutual openness and transparency (b), further education of parents and teachers (c) as well as the cooperation's assurance and sustained yield.

a) Communication

In order to establish contact and exchange with one another, a high degree of communication skills and competence is important for all participants.

On both sides there observable deficits or too little experience in how to properly listen to one another, how to provide acknowledgement and criticism and how to deal with both.

Therefore schools involved in the project should try out different *models of communication and training* at meetings or events to understand their effects. These communication exercises are important for parents as well as teachers. Furthermore, these events should also deal with different *conversation management techniques* for teachers.

b) Openness and Transparency

For a good cooperation from the school's point of view it is important to open up to parents and the environment and to make the school's work transparent. Only by doing this, parents can gain access to information about academic matters.

The individual partners should discuss strategies and models for increased openness and should also develop models of transparency concerning the school's work. Interesting and good examples from each of the project schools can provide guidance.

c) Further education for parents and teachers

The majority of schools and parents involved in the project stated that there need to be more possibilities for providing further education for parents, but also training courses for teachers.

Often there are deficits, little experience and knowledge on the parent's side concerning the opportunities of involvement in school life. These issues of parent education and information can be dealt with in joint

events. Here too, the already existing practices within the network can be used for orientation. Besides informing and educating the parents about their possibilities for involvement it turned out that parents also need more knowledge and comprehensive education concerning the social-emotional development and the support of children.

Here, already existing models can be discussed in joint meetings, but new forms can also be developed. It is of high importance to discuss themes and issues of further education models and to look for possible partners - who will work on and implement these models - within the school's environment. It is just as important to discuss advantages and disadvantages of certain forms and models (e.g.: parent-schools by pedagogical workers or by parents themselves).

Training courses for teachers should be focused on too. Contents should be compiled together, for example highlighting changing familial and societal aspects and making the changing demands teachers are faced with nowadays a central issue.

During a joint event one should also try to compile content and form of a joint parent-teacher further training programme. Here, all different kinds of aspects can be dealt with: joint communication training, fields of involvement or methods of evaluation and safeguarding information.

As both parties are on their way to a shared training programme and educational partnership, they should attend the same courses.

d) Sustained yield and systematics

As initially mentioned, a good and lasting cooperation needs systematic and reliable structures. Joint events should be dedicated to the subject of education contracts and agreements. It should be further worked out which areas these agreements can be applied to, if they can be implemented on an individual level or on class level and which persons should be included. Models already mentioned above can be tested regarding their advantages and disadvantages.

Another subject area for the joint meeting should be models and possibilities of use for feedback models. Here too, the existing models can be used for guidance, whereas each school has to consider their available resources. The described web-based model can be modified and these forms can then be jointly discussed.

Finally, the issue of the network's sustained yield and systematics needs to be broached. The projects partners' wishes and proposals should be incorporated as well as suggestions on how exchange between the partners can be improved.

4. Appendix

Cp. point 3.2.2

1) <http://www.bildung-brandenburg.de/2246.html>

Cp. point 3.2.4

1) <http://www.net-anschluss.de>

2) http://www.mcgy.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Elterninformationen/Kooperationsbogen_Lu_3_.pdf

Cp. point 3.2.5

1) <http://www.fo-gy.de/fogy/images/stories/0411/bsp01.pdf>

2) http://www.fo-gy.de/fogy/images/stories/0411/Entw_V_271003.pdf

3) http://www.schule-ortrand.de/foerderverein_grundschule/htm_doc/vereinbarung.htm

4) http://www.blk-demokratie.de/fileadmin/public/praxisbausteine/rangsdorf/Rangsdorf_neu.pdf

5) http://www.net-anschluss.de/schulen/download/eltern_feedback_fragebogen.pdf



Socrates

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.