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Das Praxisbuch: Mitentscheiden und Mithandeln in der Kita

Wie pädagogische Fachkräfte Partizipation
und Engagement von Kindern fördern

Abstract

This handbook describes how to successfully promote social engagement among children in day care facilities. It was developed within the framework of the “Young and Involved” project, which aims to provide young people opportunities for social engagement early on in their life: in day care centers, schools and youth facilities.

Acting on the concept of “co-determination and participation in day care,” pedagogy practitioners begin by enabling children to become active in the community of their day care facility – for their benefit as well as that of the community. This begins with paying special attention to the variety of daily duties and challenges that arise within the context of a day care facility.

The goal is to have children participate as much as possible in all the activities that need to be done within and around the facility. The point here is to get more things done with the children, not for the children. Sharing the power to decide plays a major role in this regard.

This concept draws upon the ten years’ experience gathered through the “Nursing Democracy” (Kinderstube der Demokratie) project – the largest of its kind in the German-speaking world – and develops its aims further. The Nurs-

ing Democracy project addresses the issue of who should have the right and power to make decisions in the day-to-day activities that take place at a day care. By implementing the concept of “co-determination and participation,” children are encouraged to take part in the decisions affecting their communal life and to become active in facilitating this communal life.

Cultivating social engagement in day care facilities strengthens not only children’s sense of who they are as a person, but their sense of community, their independence and self-confidence. It also fosters educational processes and provides children experience with democratic activity at an early age. Cultivating social engagement is therefore not a task to be carried out by practitioners in addition to their other duties. It is much more. It helps them provide each child individualized assistance, build a thriving sense of community among the children, and foster autonomy as well as solidarity.

This concept was developed and tested by the Bertelsmann Stiftung together with three day care facilities in Schleswig-Holstein. Since 2011, it has been implemented within the framework of the Young and Involved project at various facilities in Berlin, Magdeburg,

Mainz and Halberstadt, and has yielded positive results.

This book examines the experiences of these day care facilities so that others may learn from them. The book describes what social engagement among children in day care centers means (Chapter 1), what children need in order to take part in decision-making and to act (Chapter 2), and why children's social engagement should be fostered (Chapter 3). It presents practice-tested methods for fostering social engagement (Chapter 4), shows how this can work even with children below three years of age (Chapter 5), and how children's families can be involved (Chapter 6).

A variety of best practices are showcased to illustrate how social engagement among children in day care might look in concrete terms and how it can be supported in pedagogical terms. This is done in part through stories of co-determination and participation involving Leon and Jelena at a day care facility. Though the characters and location are fictional, the stories are based on real-life developments at actual day care centers. Some of these stories have been published in five children's picturebooks (Hansen and Knauer 2014). These books help practitioners not only introduce the

issue of social engagement to children but also explain the issue to parents. Our handbook contains these and other stories to help explain pedagogical plans targeting democratic social engagement.

The handbook encourages practitioners to critically examine and potentially rethink their daily activities. Methodological tips are also provided, but not with the goal of being copied one-to-one. Because each facility and each child is unique, methods must be adapted to an individual day care facility's needs and context, and tailored to the children involved. In their work, practitioners face the challenge of appreciating the diversity among "their" children and incorporating this into their actions so as to ensure social inclusion in everyday life.