

DAY 5



EMPATHY FOR
CHILDREN
E4C - ELEOS



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Empathy for children

ERASMUS + SCHOOL STAFF TRAINING TEACHERS

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A strong support system fosters empathy

The circle of empathy



Support system

Teams

Suppose teachers must feel motivated and manage their resources in the best possible way, promote balance and energy, they need to have good colleagues around. Being part of a healthy, well-functioning learning environment reduces stress. It provides greater joy and makes everyday life more comfortable with a sense of togetherness and community.

When having professional sparring partners close by to listen, support, and give feedback, the teachers appear as a cohesive unit rather than just a single - more vulnerable – one. It makes them better equipped and no longer

exposed to criticism from parents, students, or management. When the purpose is clear and leads to better pedagogical work, learning and well-being teamwork works the best.

Teams are often composed of each grade level or based on subjects and didactics in Denmark. In those teams, teachers can structure interdisciplinary courses, put together annual plans and take over each other's teaching by, e.g., illness, doubt, conflicts, if necessary, where they use each other's resources to the greatest joy and benefit of the students.

The better and the worse

**IN GROUPS OF FIVE,
FOLLOW THE
PROCEDURE FOR
THE NEXT 1 ½
HOUR.**

The exercise requires one focus person and one person to "interview" the focus person.

The rest in the group listen and maybe take notes if there is anything that catches their attention (paying attention to strengths).

There are five parts to the exercise, divided into 30 minutes for the first part and 15 minutes for the rest parts.

First part:

The focus person starts telling about personal strengths and weaknesses in being a teacher – opening up as much as it feels comfortable. The idea is to help the focus person develop a greater understanding of reaction patterns and who he/she is as professionals.

The interviewer asks questions like:

- Tell me a little more?
- What is it like for you to be in this situation?
- What do you do?
- What does it make you think?
- How do you feel it in your body?
- Can you find your way back to your balance? Get in touch with your center of being?
- ... and other clarifying questions you may be having

Second part:

If possible, the "interviewer" puts focus on how the focus person's development opportunities can be strengthened and how to support and challenge him/her in that process.

The work with the development opportunities can be concretized so that it is clear to the focus person what kind of support, for example, in a conflict with a child or parent, is needed and how the group/team can support as best as possible. Using questions like:

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- What would you like to change?
- What does it take for that?
- What do you want more of instead?
- Why?
- What will it give you?
- Who will you tell about this?
- Who would you like support from?

Third part:

After the conversation, the others in the group, who until now have been listening to the interview, join in and tell:

- What they have noticed that the focus person is already mastering
- What they come to think of, from their own life
- What they want to do so that they can strengthen their team of colleagues

Fourth part:

Finally, the focus person can put words on how it was to be interviewed. Perhaps using these sentences:

- It was...
- I came to think about...
- I now feel...
- And I know that I will now do...

Part five:

Debriefing Questions

- What do you think about using your team to talk about what is complicated or challenging?
- What will it give you to spar with your team around life as a teacher - good and bad?
- How can you make sure that everyone feels safe? (Confidentiality, recognition, physical and mental presence, clarity, etc.)

How is it going?

RATIONALE

In hectic times, it can be hard to find time to reflect on how things are going. However, moments of inward attention and discussing with colleagues are essential for change and for continuously ensuring a well-functioning everyday life for the teacher, the team and the students.

OBJECTIVE

Individual reflections on the positive and negative aspects of one's own school culture and shed new light on them in dialogue with others.

MATERIALS

Paper and pencils.

PROCEDURE

This works well at a team meeting as an agreed exercise on the agenda. It starts as an individual exercise for each teacher in the team, and finish with collectively reflections.

- Write on a piece of paper all kinds of things that characterize your classroom. Things that are working well and things that are not so good, what you like, and what you don't like. Positive and negative small things and bigger things. See appendix..
5 minutes.
- Choose 1 negative and 1 positive statement. Choose the ones that express your most substantial feelings and draw a line under them.
- Think for a short while about those two statements. Focus on each statement one by one:
 - What do they mean to you?
 - What is the core of the problem or the resource?
 - How do you recognize the problem or help?
- Find and choose two specific situations where the positive and the negative are shown in the class (one for each). Something happened on the outside that made you feel something.
 - What was that?

ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE

PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Feel the situation.
 - What becomes active in you?
 - Which feelings?
 - How do you sense your body, your breathing, and your thoughts in the situations?
 - What are the signs that make you recognize the problem or the resource?
- Turn your attention towards the others in the team and each of you presents the problems and resources. 5 minutes each for this.
- Let all members from the team come up with their thoughts and reflections on what they hear, focusing on your resources and what they specifically notice.
- Reflect on yourself.
 - Did the group reflections give you another understanding of what you have written on the paper?
 - In what way?
- Sum up in plenum and let all know that you appreciate being in a team, where it is possible to show vulnerability and help.

WHAT TO OBSERVE

When you have someone who spars with you that you dare to be open to and seek support from, you let your parades fall, and it becomes easier to be empathetic.

NOTE TO TRAINER

Implementing new ways of working can take time. Therefore, everyone must have time to find their own point of view in the group and, in that way, to be there for each other and, at the same time, turn their attention inward.

School and Home

In a good school-home collaboration, the school and the parents have clearly defined roles, respect each other, share knowledge, and work together with a common interest in their professional, emotional, and social development. To build a healthy collaboration, teachers must consider parents as partners, who they need to work well with to best support and stimulate the students well-being. This means that the teachers show confidence that all parents can contribute and be a positive resource, they too can communicate with and keep misunderstandings or quarrels away. A strong school-home collaboration gives the students' better-learning conditions and deprives teachers of burdens that shut down empathy. There is a strong tradition of cooperation between school and home in Danish schools. The School Act states that parents play a central role in students' schooling, learning, and development. The collaboration may concern the individual student, or it may focus on entire classes. Therefore, the collaboration is characterized by several different activities and areas of cooperation, such as dialogue with the school, parent meetings, conversations between school and home, joint exercises, and ongoing dialogue with teachers.

There are some areas a teacher must consider when a well-functioning partnership between school and home is to function optimally:

Trust

Trust is an essential element in a well-functioning collaboration. If parents do not trust the teacher,

parents hold back critical views because they worry that it may harm the student. A trusting relationship creates profits to deal with problems and conflicts when they arise. Therefore, it is important that the teacher always contact the parents about everyday topics and continuously communicates about the student's strengths and potentials.

The ongoing contact can take place, for example, when the teacher writes weekly updates to the parents at the schools intra communications tool in an informal and personal way. In this way, they show a commitment that helps to give the parents security and trust. In the younger classes, the teacher can be in class in the morning when the parents drop off children (See exercise E2.1), and take the time to small-talk with the parents. In the older classes, a short phone call can allow an informal talk about the student.

The work of creating a trusting and cooperative relationship is strengthened by the teacher continuously showing care for the student and patiently focusing on the student's learning and empathic well-being.

Learn from parents

To support a good collaboration between school and home, teachers and management must understand the parents' values, perspectives, and expectations for the collaboration and, at the same time, set a clear direction for the collaboration. The school's responsibility is to frame the collaboration, develop a dialogue with the parents, and create shared understandings.

Parental knowledge can give teachers a more coherent picture of the student and better understand strengths and weaknesses.

In concrete terms, this means that the teacher in the meeting with the parents is listening and asking about their child's parents' experience. When the student is challenged, the teacher must avoid interpreting the parents' perspective either as wrong or as an expression of an inherent problem with the student or family, but instead show curiosity and empathy. The parents' perspective can be an essential source for understanding the student and the next understanding of the student's family culture and background. Practicing empathy here is of great significance.

Parents' position and commitment to the school-home collaboration are created relationally through the school's opportunities for participation. Therefore, it is essential that the collaboration makes it possible for all parents to be heard and does not place higher demands and expectations on the parents than they have the opportunity to live up to. In some cases, the school-home collaboration goal may be that the student attends school every day or has a packed lunch with them. Especially about vulnerable families, there may be a need for informal and flexible forms of cooperation. In concrete terms, this may mean that the school must supplement jointly written messages with personal or telephone contact so that the relevant information reaches all parents - regardless of reading skills or language background. To accommodate the parents who have negative school experiences, the teacher can also choose to move meetings and activities away from the school's usual framework, e.g., to the sports hall

or entirely outside the school. Another option may be to go on home visits and gain a greater insight into the student's everyday life.

Commitment

If teachers are to succeed in developing forms of cooperation that are flexible about the parents' prerequisites, it requires strategy and management. Management is of great importance for teachers' attitudes towards parents and for maintaining an empathic approach. It focuses on opportunities and resources rather than barriers and shortcomings.

Three key elements should be anchored (and often handed out as a folder to parents, when their child begins in school, because it is the responsibility of management to formulate):

- First, the strategy must clarify the division of roles and responsibilities for both teachers and parents.
 - That an inclusive school is a shared responsibility.
 - That the learning conditions work best when everyone contributes to the community, as it influences their living conditions and development opportunities.
 - That everyone has a shared responsibility to be able to include, accept, and respect the students with their living conditions and stories.
 - That there is open communication, and challenges are solved together.
 - That parents and school equally speak positively about the other.

ESSENTIAL 5 / APPENDIX

- Secondly, the strategy must formulate a value-based basis for the collaboration. The parents are mentioned as partners who can make a positive contribution. The school management must convey a belief in the parents' prerequisites and willingness to cooperate.

That the parents:

- Helps their child meet the school's expectations.
- Shows interest and loyalty in collaboration with the school.
- Is informed about the school's activities.
- Actively participates in promoting a good environment so that everyone thrives.
- Understands and contributes to their child being part of a community.
- Makes demands on their child by its ability.
- Teaches their child to strengthen friendships and build up good manners.

- Thirdly, the strategy must clarify the resource framework for cooperation. In short, it is the management's task to create clarity about resources and time for collaboration.
 - Responsibility - consider each other as whole people, take co-responsibility, and are credible in word and deed.
 - Attitudes - make demands, and have expectations of each other, maintain healthy traditions, and use humor.
 - Care - creates security for all, respects each other, and uses disagreement constructively.
 - Community - has a good working environment and commitment to daily work.
 - Ambitions - prioritize social, creative, and highly professional learning environment and use each other's competencies.

School and Home Collaboration

**DISCUSS THE
FOLLOWING
QUESTIONS FOR
THE NEXT 45
MINUTES: .**

Take a look at the parameters teachers must consider when a well-functioning partnership between school and home is to function optimally in the document .

- Do you agree that TRUST, COMMITMENT, and PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE are important areas to consider for a well-functioning collaboration?
- What are you already doing to create a good school and home collaboration?
- What do you find challenging? (And why)
- What works well? (Describe)
- Does your school inform new parents about the school and home collaboration and what it entails? (Via folder, parent meetings, intra, etc.)
- What does it take to make it even better?
- Who can support this?

Parent-meetings

RATIONALE

A constructive meeting must be clearly framed. The teacher must set out a clear purpose and present an agenda for the meeting and allow the parents to express their expectations and influence the meeting's content. This means that space is provided for the parents to have a say or to organize events/groups/initiatives outside the school, possibly by the parents talking to each other in small groups, or inviting them to a workshop day. However, it is important that parents do not feel insecure about the teachers' qualifications and didactic knowledge - involving parents is more about them being taken seriously and involved in their child's learning and school life – and supporting the good spirit with activities outside school.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to be clear to the parents what their role is, that they have influence and that the agreements that are made oblige the parents and the school.

MATERIALS

Paper and pen.

PROCEDURE

To the first meeting for parents for the class at the beginning of a new school year, let the parents sit in groups of 6 working with these questions:

- What school experiences were the best and most educational you have brought with you?
- Why do many children, when they reach a certain age, find school boring?
- How effectively do students learn when they are bored?
- Does the school become more or less exciting when the teachers continuously measure the student?
- What motivates you the most to give your best?
- How important are communities and well-being for learning?
- Should teachers focus on everything in school that can be measured and tested and spend less time on soft skills?
- How high do you prioritize that your child maintains and strengthens his/her curiosity, creativity, and empathy at school?
- Are good relationships with classmates and teachers essential to your child's learning?

ESSENTIAL 5 / EXERCISE

PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

After 20 minutes, one from each group must present the key conclusions of each question. The answers are noted on the board and used to understand the parents' expectations and values.

A reflective dialogue can open up a constructive dialog about the school's values and the teacher's knowledge of relational competences, community, empathy, and well-being. This way, it will give the parents a better understanding of the foundation the teachers come from and how they can all better cooperate. The parents can better support the social and emotional initiatives that are worked on in the classroom, while knowing the importance of that, which can be considered as general formation.

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

- Did all parents participate in the group work?
- Were they good at listening to each other?
- Could they find consensus?
- Was there a balance between professional expectations and the desire for well-being for their children?
- What did you learn about the parents of the class?

WHAT TO OBSERVE

Possible how some parents change perspective from being focused only on didactic competencies and high grades to appreciating the soft values like empathy and community more.

NOTE TO TRAINER

An appreciative approach to parents can present a dilemma. On the one hand, the teacher must be open and accommodating to the parents' different values and expectations. On the other hand, it is the school's responsibility as the professional party to formulate a purpose for the collaboration and give it a clear direction. However, the teacher must be able to balance being listening and appreciative and being a professional authority. For example, the teacher cannot accept that some parents ultimately interfere with the student's schooling, or that a parent takes over an agenda at a parent meeting. It is the teacher who is professional in this context.

Parent and Parent

Even though it is outside the school area, many Danish schools encourage parents to do social things together in their free time (they are handed out a folder). It is to strengthen the unity and joy around the students' lives in school. It's also to create bonds between parents who then know each other's values and motives. That will make it easier to talk about difficult topics if they

arise, as adults who spend time and enjoy each other's company are more tolerant of small conflicts. Happy parents have more surplus to arrange social activities outside of school, which helps to thicken the unity and the understanding of the individual in the class. As with students, parents must also work together for many years to come.

Self-organized Play Groups

RATIONALE

Another way is how to bring students together and strengthen their social skills and empathy is the self-organized play groups. Many Danish schools encourage parents to organize playgroups outside of school. Children learn and develop empathy skills when they participate in social contexts. Making a contribution to the community hosting Play Groups has an impact on the life quality of students and carry developmental opportunities. This, too, contributes to reducing bullying, since it is harder to tease someone they know while also knowing the family. Therefore a well-functioning community around education is a plus.

OBJECTIVES

This initiative is to strengthen the sense of community among the students. When they come home privately to each other, play, eat, and meet their parents, it becomes harder to bully. The students get mixed up in different playgroups each time and come home to various families that way. It also blends students across genders and interests, opening up new friendships, which reinforces non-bullying behavior and enhances empathy. When students feel they have friends in school, they take their guards down and are more ready to learn. Therefore this has a significant impact on the learning environment for all involved.

MATERIALS

Snacks and dinner.

PROCEDURE

One of the class's parent representatives organizes all students into small mixed groups of 5-6 students to come for "Eat and Play" at their house after school till around 7-8pm once a month (or 5-6 times a year).

A set of parents creates the hosting groups of students, agreed on at the first parenting meeting. The parents and students rotate every month, changing the group of students and hosts. All children get to be a host during the year. Once the groups are made and passed on to all parents, immediately after the parent meeting, the host parents are responsible for seeing when their week is. The event must be held on a day that suits the family during the required week. They must make sure to invite the students (via the parents) who are going to their home and thereby find out if everyone can participate.

Joint Birthdays

RATIONALE

Shared birthdays is when the students of the class are celebrated in groups. Everyone is in a group, and the whole class is invited every time. As a basic rule in Denmark, students invite either all girls, all boys or the whole class home for private birthdays. It is not tolerated that there are students who are not invited. As a parent, you can do a lot to make the joint class' birthday parties excellent and fun - for all children to feel a part of a whole.

OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose is to gather the students around something fun and nice. When they experience good things together, they forge new bonds and create new communities and friendships. It reduces bullying and loneliness and foster empathy. The parents also get to know each other better, and their joy of working with other parents to solve a task spreads to the students.

MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

PROCEDURE

- The parents are divided into birthday groups according to the month in which the children have a birthday. Gather the groups so that birthdays are celebrated 3 or 4 times a year.
- Each group agrees on a date for the birthday and announces it on the school's communications tool so that the calendar can be ticked.
- The groups meet to vote on expectations and start planning when time is near for their birthday to be planned.
 - How long should the birthday be?
 - Where should the level of ambition be? A good piece of advice is - NOT to make a piece of equipment but to keep it simple but fun.
 - Does anyone have a shared house or an adequate space at home? For example, can you hear if the school hall is vacant or find a good playground somewhere?

ESSENTIAL 5 / APPENDIX

PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Once the framework is set, make a small birthday meeting with the children. Hear them what they would like. Make sure that all the children have a say. Before the meeting, each parent couple can have a small talk with their child about the day's wishes within the framework. Also, so the children know that for a joint birthday, there are several who decide. Tell the children that now the parents have written down their wishes and will sit down together to plan the birthday.
- Put the day together and make sure all children have an impact. Each parent tells their child how the day will be.
 - Now the parents must divide the tasks among themselves.
 - Rooms, decorations, and music.
 - Food and drink can be divided between several, so one bakes muffins/cake, provides fruit and snacks, provides drinks, and makes chicken skewers and vegetables, or whatever you need.
 - Entertainment - games, treasure hunts, or whatever it may be.
 - Cleaning.
- Write an inviting invitation that is handed out to the class and sent via Aula. Remember to write:
 - Where to meet, date, and time schedule.
 - That the children can be picked up and brought if their parents cannot.
 - Name, tel. No., and email a contact person.
- Do what you can to get all the children to join the joint birthday event. Call those parents who have not reported back within the deadline. Offer to pick up and bring the child if the parents are prevented.

WHAT TO OBSERVE

Fellowship, joy and togetherness.

NOTE TO TRAINER

It may be a good idea for the teacher to talk about how birthdays should be held among the class students. This can be brought up at this year's first parent meeting, and questions such as the following can be discussed:

- Do you hold birthdays separately, or should you consider joint birthdays?
- Who do you invite to birthdays? The whole class, the boys' group or the girls' group, so that no one feels left out.
- Do the children give gifts? Do the parents of the birthday child buy a joint gift from the whole class? What must the gift cost?

ESSENTIAL 5 / APPENDIX

NOTE TO TRAINER (CONTINUED)

- Should there be ½ hours of parent coffee at pick-up? A quick and effective way to get to know each other better and show the children that the parents talk well together. It is contagious to children.

Highly prioritize birthday invitations. The fact that the student does not want to participate is not a good reason to cancel.

- Respect the way the parents of the class have agreed to hold the birthdays.
- Birthdays do not have to be the big piece of equipment, it is more important to keep them simple, cozy, and fun for the kids.
- Talk openly about different ways to celebrate birthdays. It's just exciting if there is a difference. Remember that even a small criticism can hit a student hard on his family's options and choices.
- Stick to the agreed gift amount. No one should have their worth measured in the price and size of a gift.

Joint events

RATIONALE

Joint events are for the whole class, planned and held by groups of parents in the class. Here the students meet outside school hours for joint activities, like when with Joint Birthdays – most often at weekends. The school prepares proposals for the parent groups before the first parent meeting in the lowest classes, to make sure this important initiative reaches all parents in school - and from thereon the parent representatives from the class put together four groups (fall, winter, spring, and summer) with the participation of all students' parents divided into one group for each student. As it is outside school time, the Danish schools hold no responsibility, but support these events strongly.

OBJECTIVES

Joint events help to ensure good well-being in a class and thus contribute to making everyone feel comfortable. Planning and conducting joint events is a unique opportunity to build up a social community among the parents, which is essential for the class's well-being as well. Still, most of all, those events are about securing community and well-being in all students, where boys and girls learn to interact with each other across genders, share experiences, create memories, connect, and have fun.

MATERIALS

(No materials needed).

PROCEDURE

- The parents are divided into three groups, organized and handed out by the class representative.
- Each group agrees on a date for the event and announces it on the school's communication tool so that the calendar can be ticked. They will most often correspond by email or the school's way.
- The groups meet to discuss what kind of event they would like to hold.
 - How long should the event be? An overnight stay in a shelter. Bowling. A bike ride. Campfire. Swimming pool and fun. Treasure hunt. Visit one of the parents' workplaces. Theme party etc.
 - Where should the level of ambition be? A good piece of advice is - NOT to make a piece of equipment but to keep it simple but fun.

ESSENTIAL 5 / APPENDIX

PROCEDURE (CONTINUED)

- Once the framework is set, make a small meeting with the children involved. Hear them what they would think. Make sure that all the children have a say.

Before the meeting, each parent couple can have a small talk with their child about wishes for the day - within the framework. Also, so the children know that for joint events, there are several who decide. Tell the children that now the parents have written down their wishes and will sit down together to plan the day.

- Put the day together and make sure all children have an impact. The parents tell their children how the day will be.
- Now the parents must divide the tasks among themselves.
 - Practical things are depending on where to go and do.
 - Food and drink can be divided between the parents.
- Write an invitation that is handed out to the class and sent via the schools intra. Remember to write:
 - Where to meet, date, and time.
 - That the children can be picked up and brought if their parents cannot.
 - Name, tel. No., and email a contact person.
- Do what you can to get all children to join the joint event. Call those parents who have not reported back within the deadline. Offer to pick up and bring the child if the parents are prevented.