

Making contact with a refugee parent

This workshop is designed for migrant parents in a special situation. His workshop was done with refugee parents. Their situation of residence is unstable, they live in a refugee camps waiting for a special status which help them to start to build more stable future. It cause some specific problems with integration in school, the motivation toward integration is low and stress is very high.

This workshop is designed for this kind of a situation. The main aim is to discover a cultural difference which is a problem in functioning of a migrant child in a school and prepared a base for cooperation between migrant parents and a school. For this reason it will be good when the members of a workshop will be as well migrant parents as well teachers of a given school. So that the meeting could be held in a nice atmosphere, a pleasant place and suitable time for parents are to be chosen. If it is necessary, the organizers should provide professional care for workshop participants' children. It seems the presence of interpreter of native language of parents is very important. But, what it is important she/he make translation for teacher (or person who do the workshop), he/she helps parents with presenting their ideas for teacher.

Part A.

Objective: making parents and school workers aware of cultural differences and their significance in school contacts

I. The integration of a group (parents and school workers)

Exercise 1

The presentation: each participant presents their visiting card: they write the first name and draw the symbol of something they like doing or the symbol of own characteristic they like in themselves. After that they share the information. I drew that because....., I most like this..... etc.

This exercise can help to establish a level of language capability of a migrant parent, communication skills, level of openness in the group.

Exercise 2 On the table there are pictures, on which smiles are painted. Each mother chooses the symbol of smile which characterizes their child's smile. They explain to each other why they have chosen a given smile symbol and what it means to them. This is smile of my son/daughter because, This smile is the most like smile of my children because.....

This exercise can show each child as an individual as well for the mothers as well for the teachers. Through this exercise we can look for the different interpretation of a symbol. Through stories about smiles we talk about children - their identity, their self. We can discover what we interpret as a good feature or bad in our children.

Exercise 3

Mothers are divided into four- and five-person groups. Each group draws a figure of child on big sheets of paper. Mothers' task is to list their children's positive characteristics on one side and negative ones and undesirable behaviors on the other.

While working, mothers will spontaneously begin to talk about their children in groups. The conversation should become a general discussion at an appropriate moment.

This exercise can help to discover difference in interpretation of a child behaviour and can show an ideal type of self in a migrant parent's eyes. This exercise needs a lot of cooperation, discussions and it is important that in each group should be a teacher of a school. Additionally this exercise shows very clearly the difference between child behaviour and their self.

II. Communication part (cultural differences and their influence on the situation of children, their parents and school work).

Exercise 4

The division of meeting participants into two groups: the red group and the green one. Each mother is given an appropriate instruction (red or green), in which the way of behaviour of either group is characterized (completely opposite - thus, e.g. if the red look straight into eyes, the green avoid eye contact; if the red speak briefly and to the point, the green and speak in a lengthy way etc). The instruction, composed of about 6-8 characteristics, should be prepared earlier and printed in an appropriate number of copies. Participants' task is to have a conversation about a freely chosen subject with several others. It is important to make sure that mothers do not know which instructions other persons have been given. The activity duration - approx. 10 minutes.

While summing up, mothers share their ideas regarding the conversation: with whom they found it easier to talk, with whom it was more difficult; what are the causes of it. The result should be the conclusion that one should learn about the customs and culture of people from other cultures, because it facilitates communication.

Exercise 5

Participants are divided into 5- or 6-person groups. The task of groups is to list problems which they encounter at school (what they do not understand, what is different?) on one side; positive point in the relation school - immigrant parent/student on the other side - on a big sheet of paper. All groups present the material prepared, then they discuss together which of the positive points and problems result from cultural differences, from the lack of knowledge of e.g. educational law of a given country, and which are common for all children, and which result only from their individual characteristics. The problems listed during the activity will become the basis of the next one, teaching proper solving child's school problems (see below).

III. Information part. A short lecture on the system of education in Poland. The meeting is finished with the work evaluation. Participants are asked to share their ideas about the meeting. Everybody is invited to the second part of the workshop.

Part B.

Objective: Searching for forms and methods of collaboration of the immigrant and school.

I. The integration of meeting participants.

Exercise 1

The integration activity: "Everybody who ...". Participants sit on chairs arranged in a circle. One person (who has no chair) stands in the middle and says: Those who ... (e.g. are wearing glasses, a watch etc.) Then the participants to whom fit this characteristic change the place.

Exercise 2

Participants are divided into national groups (or multicultural ones) and prepare a short presentation, characterizing an element of their culture. For example, they can sing a folk or national song, perform a dance typical of their region or talk about an interesting habit or custom.

II. Communication part. Forms and methods of cooperation.

Exercise 3 The scene: "Learning new words and expressions": by acting the scene the presenters model the situation, in which the student, not knowing the language of the majority, enters a new environment. The discussion based on the scene regards the feelings and experiences of immigrants' children within the first days at schools and problems concerning communication. The discussion is conducted so that one could suggest concrete ways and methods of supporting the child by parents and school in learning a new language.

Exercise 4 The scene: "Conflict and their significance in the child's school life": Workshop presenters act

scenes showing a variety of difficult matters and conflicts, which have appeared in task 5 in part A. After each scene a discussion regarding the problem presented is conducted. Presenters collect parents' opinions and ideas and listen to the proposals regarding how to prevent conflicts and how to solve problems. The teachers and the school pedagogue who are present should participate actively in the discussion. It is worth devoting one of the scenes to the problem of aggression at school (e.g. a scene presenting a conversation between a teacher and a parent about the child's aggressive behaviour at school). In the end participants write together on big sheets of paper how they should react in difficult situations regarding the child at school.

Exercise 5 A free conversation regarding the possibility of cooperation between the school and parents, whose result may be e.g. the idea of organizing by parents a school event, aiming to familiarize the school community with their culture; the idea of preparing together materials which can help students and their parents functioning in the reality which is new to them etc.

III. Information part. A lecture on the rights and duties of the student in the Polish school. Workshops are finished with summing up and collecting participants' opinions regarding the meetings.