

## Netzwerk mehr Sprache (More Language Network)

Cooperation platform for an equitable access to education in municipalities



### Context and background

Depending on their family background children have different starting positions and resources for their educational path at their disposal. The Austrian education system cannot be relied on to balance these disadvantages. Accordingly, a part of the pupils are prevented from developing their potential. Socially vulnerable groups less likely to access education are particularly affected. For children of families with a migration background the challenge of growing up multilingually frequently constitutes an additional obstacle instead of a potential. In the field of language support many individual measures at municipal level are not coordinated and have no shared goals, standards or methods. Coordination within the network maximizes the effect of individual measures.

The central idea of the project is the realization that the promotion of equal opportunities in the context of different family resources cannot be provided by the education system alone, but has to be seen as a cross-cutting issue which is addressed by a community of responsibility on the ground. Everyone dealing with children and their parents in everyday life can contribute to this community of responsibility for equal opportunities. In the municipalities participating in the network the municipality and the individual players see themselves as a community of responsibility that has set itself the goal to provide parents and their children from the date of birth with the best possible advice and support in their language development and in this way contribute to promoting equal opportunities. By focusing on multilingual language support, children from multilingual families can develop their linguistic potential. Multilingualism thus also becomes experienceable for children of German-speaking families and as such a resource of language development. This creates an added value for all children.

The project centers around all children in the municipality. Facilitating the best possible development of all children, regardless of their social and ethnic background, as a goal that benefits the municipality's public good, clearly shows how equal chances, social mix and public good correlate.

Promoting a stronger social mix in the municipality is a key concern of the network, since this enables socially vulnerable groups with difficult access to education to make use of resources that are significant for educational success and thus for the promotion of equal opportunities.

By taking into account the correlation of group boundaries and the promotion of equal opportunities the project helps to create new potentials. The encounter and exchange between players from

different social groups encourages social mix and mutual understanding. Diversity is experienced in a positive way by developing additional resources and ideas.

Focusing on the village as the place where the child grows up and the village community's common responsibility for its development creates a shared goal that enables contact across groups. Everyone can contribute something to this goal and can feel a part of the community of responsibility. This helps to surmount group boundaries and enables outsider groups to become, via their involvement, a part of the community.

### Key Objectives

- Establishing networks on the municipal and regional level to promote equitable access to education through continuous, integral language support both within and outside the education system.
- Cooperation and coordination of the individual players in the area of early language support to increase the effectiveness of measures for all children, regardless of their social and ethnic background.

### Target Groups

The project's target group comprises everyone in the municipalities and cities present in the children's everyday environment and interacting with them and their parents. The focus is not exclusively on the institutional players but on all players on the municipal level (parenting education, family services, associations, child care, playgroups, nursery schools, schools, libraries ...). Connecting the players enables an integral language support that benefits all children and their parents.

### State of Implementation

In the first period from 2011 to 2014 around 30 3h workgroup sessions were held per municipality in Hard, Frastanz, Rankweil and Wolfurt, with 160 to 300 participants, depending on the size of the municipality. The implementation of the measures chosen by the workgroups are organized by steering groups in the resp. municipalities.

After successfully finishing the processes in those 4 municipalities, the process was redesigned. In 2015 Bludenz, in 2016 Feldkirch, in 2017 Lauterach started to develop a network and joined the cooperation platform. Thus, 7 municipalities take part in the collaboration platform at this time.

In "best practice profiles" (<http://www.okay-line.at/file/656/steckbriefe-gute-praxis-projekte.pdf>) examples of the implementation in the areas of action are provided:

- "Begin early", parent cooperation, parenting education (early support from age 0 to 3)
- multilingualism in the public realm and public relations
- language support in educational facilities
- vertical networking, cooperation structure and cooperation culture

The initiative has been in operation since 2011 in 7 municipalities. Its procedures, governance structures, principles and standards, methods, best practice and effects are documented in detail in the procedures manual, in the documentation including a survey on the effects (<http://www.okay-line.at/file/656/wirkungen-netzwerk-mehr-sprache.pdf>) and the profiles of already implemented "best practice projects" in the municipalities participating in the network. On this basis, the experiences, results and methods are wholly transferable to other regions and municipalities.

#### Effects

- building knowledge and skills in the areas of multilingualism, language development and support through exchange, continuous education and public relations
- establishing a (vertical and horizontal) network of institutions (e.g. for new target groups) governance and monitoring in policymaking and public administration (lines of responsibility and clear points of contact)

The players participating in the network are varied and have different goals and interests. However, the goal of promoting equal opportunities through good and continuous language support creates a common point of focus that in practice de-emphasizes the differences and instead becomes a connective element. This enables common implementations and the creation of shared perspectives.

#### More detailed information

<http://www.okay-line.at/okay-programme/netzwerk-mehr-sprache/>

<http://www.okay-line.at/file/656/programmbroschuere-netzwerk-mehr-sprache.pdf>

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