

4.4 “Sprachbox”

Pre-school language support measures in Lower Saxony

Language support measures before starting school are written into the School Law and have been available for periods of up to a year since 1.8.2006. All children coming of school age are tested on their language prowess in German in the May of the previous year. Then, in the following year, courses are offered for all those children whose knowledge of German is in all probability not sufficient to participate appropriately in the lessons for the 1st class. There is a regional in-service further education programme for the schools and teachers to prepare for this. (See ⇨ <http://nibis.ni.schule.de>)

The Importance of Literacy Education

How do children develop their language competence? How can children be systematically accompanied and supported from kindergarten to beginning school?

The positive relationship between adult and child is always basic to successful communication. Respectful behavior and language attentiveness towards the child makes an encouraging, language supportive atmosphere possible.

During kindergarten the children extend the range of things they can do through their language acquisition and thinking, thus becoming thoughtful planners and organisers of their activities. As a language education concept it follows that language stimuli and support should be designed with rising expectations. More and more it is the case that an increasing number of opportunities for their planning, questioning and interpretative language behavior have to be offered.

The development of literacy competences begins in early childhood. Long before children “formally” learn to read and write, they acquire experience with the different facets of the reading, narrative and writing culture. Children, who are able to gather a wealth of experience in literacy in their families and in pre-school institutions, have a distinct advantage in the development of their language competence, but also in their reading and writing competences – and this is also true for long-term gains. The language, reading and writing competences are known to belong to the most important fundamentals for success in primary school and for the educational career of the children. In primary education, it is important to systematically observe and document the development of language and literacy (cf. for (im)migrant children, Ulich/Mayr 2003; more info under ⇨ www.ifp-bayern.de).

Literacy experience varies greatly according to family background, socio-cultural environment and the degree of childcare. For many children, this experience is rich and intense, for some it is rare and sporadic. There are very large differences in the area of language and literacy between so-called privileged and less privileged children. In institutions with a high proportion of children disadvantaged language-wise and socially there should definitely be more emphasis on this area with an eye to creating more equality of opportunity.

At all events, conscious literacy education should take the parents and the languages of the children’s families into account. Literacy education is also of special importance for the children of (im)migrants who are learning German as a second language.

Competences in the area of literacy

Literacy comprises many abilities. Children of pre-school and school age should gradually develop the following interests and competences, in order to:

- understand texts and
 - o be able to follow a story of some length;
 - o understand and talk about the meaning of a text;
 - o relate texts (stories) to their own experience;
- express themselves in an abstract way about concrete, familiar situations; to talk about faraway and imaginary things, so that the listener can imagine them, too
- develop an awareness of the sound structure and patterns of their language (phonological awareness)
- cultivate a narrative competence and pleasure: to be able to tell a story or relate a series of events in the right order and in context and find pleasure in that activity
- show interest and find pleasure in books and stories
- feel comfortable in a book and written word culture and
 - o know what an author, illustrator, title is, for example;
 - o understand the relationship between illustration and text;
 - o get to know different types of book (e.g. dictionary, non-fiction, readers);
 - o know how to borrow a book (from the library)
- develop an awareness of different language styles (e.g. registers) and text types: e.g. distinguish daily chat, fairy stories, fiction, the rules of politeness from one another

- develop an interest in sound and language games, rhymes and poems
- become aware that another imaginary or faraway world can be created with language
- show an interest in the written word (writing and graphics) to
 - o start writing, play with writing;
 - o decipher writing and logos;
 - o know that there are (individual) letters;
 - o see that writing has different functions and experiment accordingly.

Target group

The project is aimed at student teachers and teachers of nursery pupils and of pupils in the first year of primary school.

Aims

- to make the children’s school start easier and to support the parents’ new task with trust within the framework of a special project.
- to introduce and use the Sprachbox as an appropriate method in parent education and reading support.
- to create a productive atmosphere through the work on this common topic (both in the parent and children’s groups) and provide a feeling of mutual security for both groups in working together.
- to meet on equal terms from the very start; to work on the basis of competences.
- to tie the parents in with the Parents’ Café initiative on a regular basis.

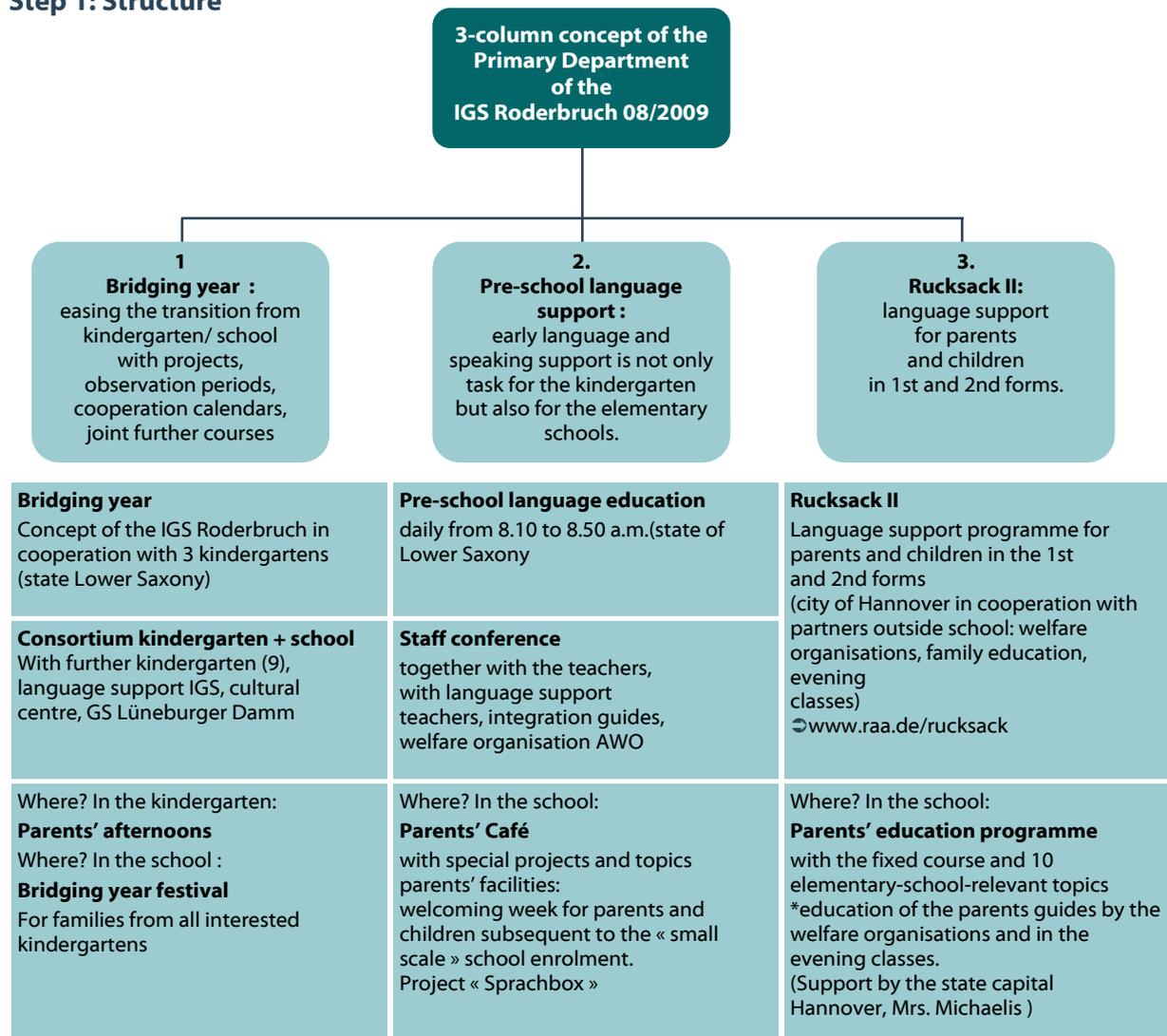
Sessions in practice

The “Sprachbox” project in the welcoming week of the pre-school language support course at the IGS Roderbruch

The Sprachbox is a method for working on literacy and creates an encouraging atmosphere for language use and practice. The method helps to include multilingual language picture books in its own special way into language support learning and teaching and facilitates the participation of the parents in the support of reading.

Contact: ➔ www.igs-roderbruch.de

Step 1: Structure



One year before starting the 1st year of school, the children are enrolled in the pre-school language course. At IGS Roderbruch these take place daily from 8.10 to 8.50 a.m. To start off, the teaching team organizes an eight-day welcome programme for the children and their parents. In part, they use the local facilities of external partners (town library, family welfare organisations).

Sprachbox – Programme for parents:

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|--------------|--|
| 1. Tuesday | school enrolment |
| 2. Wednesday | library visit with the parents alone/library ID |
| 3. Thursday | Parents' Café , introduction, info |
| 4. Friday | Parents' Café, info brochures, planning for the following week |
| 5. Monday | Sprachbox "The Baby Polar Bear", parents and children |
| 6. Tuesday | Parents' Café – "Language support" for parents with the Sprachbox for parents, songs |
| 7. Wednesday | parents and children – Sprachboxes in the mother tongue |
| 8. Thursday | Parents' Café |
| 9. Friday | Final rounding-off meeting for the week |

Activity 1

The course participants need to set up a programme for their own school(s), because there will certainly be individual differences. In group sessions they will discover common features, but also isolate the difficulties or opportunities individual schools have. The programme above offers a structure, but it is not compelling.

Step 2

Enrolment of the children in the language support course in a small ceremony with the parents, brothers and sisters, the school head, the teachers responsible, the family welfare association and the integration guide.

Activity 2

The enrolment of the children is both a formal , but also a family occasion. It is important on the one hand to show that a new phase in life is beginning, but, on the other, to show that the children and parents are in this together for the success of everyone. The participants can consider how to provide a formal framework, but include informal, or less formal, elements to make everyone feel at home and be ready. The individual child is important, but also the family and the group. These interests have to be reconciled.



Step 3

The children go to their classroom together to get to know one another. The parents visit the library and are given a small guided tour. The parents have the opportunity to apply for a library card for their children to be used in the children's language support course.

Step 4

The children go off together to the classroom and design the “Butterfly” logo which stands for the school’s work in cooperation with the day centres for the children and accompanies them in the pre-school phase. Afterwards, the finished butterfly “flies” off with the children on a tour of the school. In this way, the children are also shown the Parents’ Café, which is open for the day, and are secure in their knowledge of where to find their parents.

The Parents’ Café opens regularly for the parents when they accompany their children and have to wait for an hour or so. We use this time to pass on information concerning the children and to exchange opinions. The mother tongues of the children are noted.

Activity 4

The participants should practice designing logos together, as this is a brainstorming skill which is best practised in a team.

Passing on information to parents is also a communication skill which should not be underestimated, as they, too, are entering the new world of parenthood with all its pitfalls, but, of course, happy moments as well.

Step 5

Introduction of the Sprachbox: parents and children go off together to the classroom. After a welcoming song the teacher draws the children’s attention to the special layout in the middle of their circle (see photo). The children guess what is in the box and react spontaneously: ice, sea, water, North Pole. The box in the middle is opened. Following the initial verbal utterances, the materials in the Sprachbox support the imagination of the children: a big polar bear and a baby polar bear appear, and a brown bear, too. Spontaneously, the children call out that the brown teddy doesn’t live in the Arctic and explain that it lives in the woods. After the first exchanges, the book “Baby Polar Bear, where are you off to?” was read out to the children. This book takes up the children’s experience and is known to some of the children already from their time in kindergarten. They were thus able to follow the story attentively and felt safe subsequently talking about the books. In part, the book was read out by a Turkish mother in Turkish. The Turkish-speaking children translated the story and kept the thread going for the other children in German. The scene in the middle of the circle was continually adapted to the episodes in the story with the help of the children (for instance, the small bear was laid on the mother’s back).



Step 6

The children go off to their room together and carry on working on the story of the little bear.



In the Parents' Café, the parents are told how a language support lesson is done (greeting rituals, introduction of a theme, worksheets and instructions, songs, move and groove units, closing rituals) and receive further insight into how the Sprachbox is used. The parents' attention is drawn to the importance of supporting the children in their reading at this point. (Material 1).

As preparation for the next day, the parents learn that they will find a Sprachbox that fits their mother tongue and that they will be able to try it out with their son or daughter. A model Sprachbox is shown to the parents once again and the parents experiment with its use.

Step 7

Parents and children go off together to the children's room, where prepared tables await them, which have been laid out with the appropriately designed Sprachboxes. The parents now know exactly what they have to do, and they can work competently and motivationally with their children. They are happy and enjoy working with their children with the in part surprising materials they have found in the boxes.



The multilingual books were provided by the local library and were bought with funds from a special account used by the libraries in Hannover.

Step 8

The children go off to their room and work on the story of the polar bear again.

The parents meet in the Café to reflect on the introductory week and on the use of the Sprachbox on the previous day. Any questions or topics that need to be worked on are gathered together in the Parents' Café. To close, the parents learn some things about language development in early childhood and the possibilities of reading support.



Step 9

Final meeting in the Parents' Café and a look forward to coming topics. What would the parents like to do or have? The family welfare association makes a note of the topics.

The whole group comes together for a final closing meeting. The children present the results of their work to their parents. Sitting in a circle together, the children learn what they will be doing the following week.



A successful school start – letters to inform parents

Letters to Parents: Why and How?

by Hans-Georg Häring & Dr. Walter Kowalczyk

The relationship between parents and school often suffers from the start from the parents not being properly informed. As a result, the observations and suppositions melt into a subjective picture which is then the starting point for further opinion forming and certain behaviours. Parents need information and wish things to be clear, so that they can adjust to school in a better way.

Letters from school to the parents can support the other possibilities of contact efficiently and complement them sensibly. They can clarify many everyday issues, even if they are not a substitute for talking to the parents.

What are the advantages of written information?

Letters are taken more seriously and are more carefully formulated than information passed on in a conversation, where the wrong word may possibly slip out. A letter can be re-read and support human memory better than the spoken word. With the letter, the parents can more easily check after a certain period whether they have followed certain suggestions, resp. whether the

latter are still valid. Such offers of communication and differing forms of cooperation contribute to improving the knowledge of parents about school, teaching and learning, about the teacher's task and the children's work, thus developing a deeper and, logically, better mutual understanding. Parents with different social and environmental backgrounds can thus arrive at a more realistic appraisal of the situation at their school. A regular – and written - exchange of information can produce, as a by-product, a positive atmosphere. It signals to the parents that the school places a high value on remaining in contact, because questions of education and upbringing are important to both parties.

A primary school is all about language – all education is intrinsically about language (W. v. Humboldt).

Intensive and empathetic parent involvement is important for the success of the work in pre-school language support courses. In the following, the reader will find a model letter to the parents, which can be translated into other languages. Please make use of this letter, if you wish, changing it accordingly.

Address of the school

Date

To the ...[Smith]... Family

Starting school for your son/daughter , born

Dear Parents,

The school year is just starting and we are making plans already.

The enrolment of the children who start on ...[date]... will already begin in ...[month]... .

In the framework of the enrolment, the language knowledge of the children will initially be tested. If we discover that your child needs support, he/she can take part in an intensive support course from ...[date]... until school starts, in order to make the best possible start to school.

Further information is available from the school.

To get to know your son/daughter better, we would like to talk to you and the kindergarten teachers. May we ask you to give your consent on the slip at the bottom of this page?

We have reserved the following appointment time for you and your son/daughter:

Day:

Date:

Time:

Please bring your child's birth certificate with you.

Looking forward to meeting you,

...[school head]...

----- Tear along this line -----

Form of consent

We / I give our consent to talk about the development of our/my son/daughter with the teachers of the ...[name of school]... and of the ...[name]... kindergarten.

Date

Place of residence

Parents' signatures

☞ <http://nibis.ni.schule.de/nibis.phtml?menid=1125>

Material 1

Put together by the Brilon Town Library in cooperation with the Minnesota Humanities Commission, Family Literacy Initiatives

⇒ www.minnesotahumanities.org [English translation follows]

8 Tipps zum Lesen mit Kindern	8 Tips for reading with your children
<p>1. Suchen Sie regelmäßig Gelegenheiten zum Singen, Erzählen und Sprechen mit Ihrem Kind. So werden Geschichten und Bücher im Leben Ihres Kindes selbstverständlich eingebaut.</p>	<p>1. Spend time with your children – talking, telling stories and singing songs.</p>
<p>2. Geben Sie dem Vorlesen einen festen Platz im Tagesablauf. Das macht Spaß und wird Ihrem Kind den Zugang zu Geschichten und Büchern erleichtern.</p>	<p>2. Read to and with your children every day.</p>
<p>3. Entscheiden Sie gemeinsam mit Ihrem Kind, welches Buch vorgelesen werden soll. So können Sie sicher sein, dass das Kind sich auch für die Buchinhalte interessiert.</p>	<p>3. Let your children help choose the books you read together.</p>
<p>4. Suchen Sie sich einen bequemen Platz zum Vorlesen. Kinder werden die gemütliche Atmosphäre lieben.</p>	<p>4. Find a comfortable place to read and sit close to your children.</p>
<p>5. Machen Sie beim Vorlesen Pausen und verändern Sie Ihre Stimme. Die Spannung für die Kinder wird dadurch deutlich erhöht.</p>	<p>5. Change your voice and the pace that you read to fit the story.</p>
<p>6. Sprechen Sie mit Ihrem Kind nach dem Lesen über die Geschichte. Kinder verstehen die Handlung des Buches dann viel besser.</p>	<p>6. After reading a book, talk about the story.</p>
<p>7. Leben Sie den Umgang mit Büchern vor. Lesende Eltern sind das beste Vorbild für Kinder.</p>	<p>7. Let your children see you reading books, newspapers and magazines.</p>
<p>8. Besuchen Sie gemeinsam mit Ihren Kindern die Stadtbibliothek. Bibliotheken sind wunderbare Fundgruben für Bücher und vieles mehr.</p>	<p>8. Take your children to the library regularly.</p>