GOOD PRACTICE in Literacy Policies for Adults

Family Literacy Project (FLY)
Germany
[A more literate environment: Family Literacy]

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Part I. Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name / Title of intervention</th>
<th>Family Literacy Project (FLY)</th>
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1. Abstract

The Family Literacy Project (FLY) is a literacy programme in Hamburg, Germany, that uses an intergenerational approach and storytelling to develop the literacy skills of parents and their children. The target audience of the programme is families from socially disadvantaged and/or migrant backgrounds. Emphasis is placed on strengthening connections between school and home-based learning processes. This is achieved by supporting parents’ literacy levels, thus enabling them to help with their children’s schoolwork.

The project is built on the basic principle that the family constitutes the fundamental springboard for children’s sustainable learning and education. The most effective and intensive form of language development is that which occurs in the home as a result of communication within the family. Within the framework of FLY, parents are treated as equal partners and are therefore encouraged to play an active role in the planning and implementation of programme activities. This occurs at three different levels: active involvement of mothers in the class, working with parents (without children) in parallel sessions, and joint-out-of-school activities. Since it was launched in 2004, FLY has helped thousands of children and parents learn to read and write, and, ultimately, succeed in their ongoing education.

The FLY literacy programme supports the acquisition of writing skills among parents and children, using books, and letters of the alphabet. This is achieved through sessions with children in preschool by providing them with language support through creative writing. Sessions with parents are offered in order to provide information about how they can help their children at home to learn to read and write. Such scaffolded support improves the former’s communication skills and self-confidence, while providing instructions on how to work with their children. Furthermore, parents are incorporated into classes at certain times. Out-of-school activities offered through the FLY programme create opportunities for teachers, parents and children to learn and engage with one another. Out-of-school activities include visits to the library, and to other places in participants’ neighbourhoods. These activities strengthen listening.
and speaking skills, recognising, naming and writing letters of the alphabet, forming content and letters, and fostering writing and creativity. The term 'literacy' as it is being used in the project includes not only the foundational skills of reading and writing but also competencies such as understanding a text, linguistic abstraction ability, joy of reading, familiarity with books and the ability to express oneself in writing.

The project employs a variety of action-oriented, simple and contextually relevant teaching and learning materials to support the acquisition of writing skills among parents and children. These materials are mostly produced by the participants with support from the facilitators and are made available for both home- and school-based learning. During the joint parent-child classes, participants are actively encouraged to work together in the learning process as well as in the production of learning materials.

The FLY programme has strengthened co-operation between parents and schools and fostered greater involvement of parents in school activities and in the education of their children. Furthermore, the FLY programme has provided teachers with opportunities to teach learners from different cultural backgrounds, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to understand, appreciate and better handle the dynamics relating to the cultural diversity that exists among children in their classes.

2. Nation

Germany

3. Website

http://li-hamburg.de/

4. Lead organisation


5. Main partners

In its initial phase, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) supported the conceptualisation and implementation of the project.

The project is currently run by City of Hamburg as part of the Bund-Länder Commission (BLK) programme 'Promotion of Children and Young People from Migrant Backgrounds (Förmig).
6. **Period of activity**  
2004 to present day.

7. **Language**  
German

8. **Conceptual basis**  
Intergenerational Approach

Family and intergenerational literacy programmes are intended to improve the literacy of parents and children, based on the assumption that improving the literacy skills of parents results in better educational experiences for their children. In addition to the theoretical justification for this, research evidence on the intergenerational approach shows its effectiveness spanning a number of different fields, among them adult literacy education, emergent literacy, cognitive science, early childhood development, family systems theory, and multicultural education.

Family literacy is an approach to learning that focuses on intergenerational interactions within the family and community which promote the development of literacy and related life skills. Family literacy links elements of adult education, parents' education and preschool or primary education to enhance the literacy of both adults and children. It also support teachers and parents in strengthening young students' educational outcomes and preventing possible drop-outs.

- Rabkin, Gabriele (Hrsg.): Family Literacy Good Practise Beispiele aus elf Hamburger FLY-Schulen. 2013 LI
- Salem, Tanja/Rabkin, Gabriele: Kooperation von Eltern, Kindern, Elementarbereich und Schule im Hamburger FÖRMIG-Projekt Familie Literacyën in 2010, Zeitschrift Diskurs, Heft 4
- Elfert, Maren/Rabkin, Gabriele: Family Literacy, in Fürstenau, Sara/Gomilla, Mechthild (Hrsg.): Migration und schulischer
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<th>9. Objectives</th>
<th>FLY is an intergenerational family literacy programme that aims to:</th>
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<td>• improve children’s early literacy and language skills development by training and empowering parents to take an active role in their children’s psychosocial and learning development</td>
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<td>• improve the literacy skills of parents and children from migrant backgrounds</td>
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<td>• promote home-based learning through the provision of learning materials and training of parents as educators</td>
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<td>• create strong links and co-operation between school or kindergarten and home-based learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• use literacy training to foster effective and sustainable integration of migrant communities into mainstream German society</td>
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<td>• enhance the effectiveness of schools and kindergartens by training teachers and educators.</td>
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<th>10. Target group</th>
<th>The FLY programme targets parents, children at preschool, kindergarten and early primary school, as well as children with special learning needs.</th>
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<td>The target population are migrants, although the programme is open for all parents and there are also German mothers who participate.</td>
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<td>The majority of the participating parents and children are Turkish, but there is a wide range of backgrounds from all world regions. 90% of the participating parents are mothers. In principle the language used is German, but sometimes the mothers speak in their mother tongue. Language difficulties that may occur are overcome with the help of other mothers who speak German and can translate.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Many of the targeted people are from socially disadvantaged communities and from migrant families. Examples of key migrant groups in Germany include those from Turkey (23%); Poland (22.6%); Afghanistan (5.3%); Iran (3.4%); Russia (3%) and Ghana</td>
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</table>
### 11. Number of people involved
Since its inception, the programme has benefited about 1,000 parents and 1,000 children annually.

### 12. Methods for recruiting participants
Participants are at-risk children and parents at public schools in need of family literacy support, many of whom are from socially disadvantaged groups.

A lot of promotion in school and in the classes, a lot of patience and motivation is needed by the teachers to remember parents constantly to join the FLY groups.

### 13. Professionals involved
School or kindergarten teachers are the principal programme facilitators, as well as parents as child educators.

The majority of the facilitators working in the project are teachers who dedicate a part of their ordinary working time to the project, in agreement with the school.

Most of the teachers are specialised "language development teachers" who work with the class teachers.

Some of them have a migrant background. In some sites there are also facilitators (with a migrant background) working as freelancers.

### 14. Role of each professional
School or kindergarten teachers trained in family literacy teaching methodologies with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity impart knowledge and skills to parents in order to encourage their participation as active educators of their children.

Teachers work in teams, so that every FLY Learning group has two facilitators. This makes it possible to prepare the lessons together, and to share and analyse the FLY experiences.

Every school has special resources for language development, and the participating schools have agreed to carry out family literacy courses and finance the double staffing from that budget.

### 15. Main activities
The programme’s main activities are focused around:

- language development
- listening and comprehension (e.g. through storytelling)
- reading, writing and comprehension (reading aloud and discussions)
● letters and phonological awareness (initial sounds, rhymes, working with syllables)
● cultural awareness.

The programme is built on the basic principle that the family constitutes the fundamental springboard for children’s sustainable learning and education. Within the framework of FLY, parents are treated as equal partners and are therefore encouraged to play an active role in the planning and implementation of programme activities. Activities therefore follow these strategies:

**Active involvement of mothers in the class:** Mothers participate in class on a particular day of the week mainly after bringing their children to (pre)school. They participate in literacy-related activities, such as looking at books together with the children or playing simple literacy games. The participation of parents in children’s classes is intended to familiarise parents with how their children learn and to evaluate their learning progress, as well as to empower them to be educators in their own right.

**Working with parents (without children) in parallel sessions:** Parents participate in literacy classes without their children present, under the guidance of an experienced educator. During these sessions, parents learn about ways to support their children and produce learning materials (such as storytelling bags, word cards, written stories and pictures) on various topics which they can use for home-based learning with their children.

**Joint-out-of-school activities:** Joint-out-of-school activities involve the participation of children, parents and facilitators in joint outdoor activities such as excursions to museums and libraries or a trip to a market near the school, literacy walks and participation in special celebrations.

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<th>16. Implementation process</th>
<th>After the pilot project completed in 2009, the Hamburg Schools and Vocational Training Authority drew up a strategy creating a framework for the phased implementation, resourcing, consolidation and expansion of FLY. The project manager is based at LI, and the annual resources come from the authority’s budget.</th>
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<td>17. Resources and materials list</td>
<td>The main resources and materials used in FLY are storytelling bags, word cards, written stories and pictures in addition to the resources</td>
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outlined below:

- **Multilingual ‘mini-books’**: the mini story books are based on family photographs and biographies. They are produced by the parents in several languages in order to promote intercultural and multilingual learning. The mini-books play a critical role in motivating parents and their children to learn, not only because the books capture and reflect the families’ biographical histories, but also because they create an opportunity to learn about other people’s lives, cultures and traditions. Overall, this tool can play a central role in intercultural education and in promoting social integration among diverse ethnic groups.

- **Family literacy development packs**: these comprise of learning materials such as children’s books and CDs or tapes containing language games, stories, rhymes and songs. The packs can be borrowed by the parents for use at home.

- **Storytelling bags**: working with storytelling bags is a method of exploring picture books in a holistic, action-oriented and creative way. The main characters and objects in a picture book are manufactured and kept in a bag. Once the picture book has been read (or during the first reading), the objects may be touched by the children, used interactively (in role play) or explored using the senses (smelling, tasting, listening).

For further descriptions of materials and resources, see: http://www.unesco.org/education/rie/pdf/Doku-E.pdf

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**18. Financing**

During the pilot phase (2004–2009), the project was being equally funded by the Bund-Länder-Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (BLK) and the City-State of Hamburg. Hamburg as an integral component of the Promotion of Children and Young Adults with Migrant Backgrounds programme (FörMig: Förderung von Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Migrationshintergrund). Since 2009, the Hamburg Ministry for Education has been in charge of upscaling the programme to 25 new schools each year.

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**19. Evaluation**

The pilot project was evaluated and compared to the results of similar programmes in other countries. There are many studies on the effectiveness of parental involvement in early literacy development and pre-school family literacy programmes, particularly in the English-speaking world. In a summary of 30 studies, Hannon (1995) found that participants gained substantial benefits from such
programmes.

This British and American research was highly influential, because it showed that the family, meaning all the occupants of a child’s household, is a crucial factor in their reading and writing performance. Studies of parental involvement in children’s literacy teaching also vindicate the FLY approach.

An international study by John Hattie confirms the effectiveness of the British model and discusses in detail the importance of cooperation between school and home. It mentions two particularly important aspects: encouraging parents to have high expectations of their children, and developing child and parental literacy in tandem. Hattie states that parents have a key part to play in encouraging their children, demanding a great deal of them, and perceiving education as very important to their futures. Their hopes and expectations of their children’s educational performance are also a major influence, so schools must work in partnership with parents to ensure that such expectations are expressed effectively. FLY also plays an important part in building bridges and fostering continuous dialogue between all the parties involved.

Hattie’s study also found that many parents have difficulty understanding the language of education, and are therefore unable to provide adequate support to their children in achieving the desired outcomes. He states that parents should be taught this language so that they can play a part in sharing the school’s expectations of the child in the home environment. If they understand it, they can provide their children with a better start, particularly in the early years of school. If not, this can significantly reduce their ability to exert an influence on learning performance. FLY offers parents and children many incentives to develop a culture of literacy that can be transferred to the home environment and adopted by families.

The FLY project has been evaluated by the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development using qualitative and quantitative methods which included:

- structured interviews (questionnaires) with parents from different ethnic and social groups, educators from schools and day care centres, and headmasters
Additionally, children were systematically assessed or tested on non-verbal intelligence and language competence at the beginning and end of the course in order to determine their learning progress and/or needs. This also involved testing in pre-schools and grades 1 and 2 (in language, reading and writing), as well as teachers' assessments of children's educational development. In addition, parents were interviewed before and after the course in order to get their independent assessment of their children's literacy skills development.
| 20. Results of the evaluation | The results of the staff and parent surveys showed that FLY is not just about developing child language skills. It also had positive effects on relationships in all the schools and kindergartens involved, and particularly on parents’ attitudes to and experiences of education. The parents came from a wide variety of linguistic, cultural and occupational backgrounds, and their German language skills also varied a great deal. Some, mainly mothers, spoke it well; others spoke little or none, and had low standards of literacy even in their languages of origin. They cited the following as reasons for taking part in the programme:  
- Meeting and sharing experiences with others (82% of respondents)  
- Supporting their own children (56%)  
- Improving their own education (42%, mainly mothers)  
- Developing closer relationships with the school (10%).  
Questionnaires were sent out to parents at the end of the 2005-06 school year, and covered the following subjects:  

Changes in shared activities with their children: Nearly all parents said they felt much more motivated to learn and play with their children, and more confident about doing so.  

Changes in personal relationships: All parents stated that their communication with their child and the school had improved. They had more contact with other families than previously, and their language and literacy skills and enjoyment of learning had increased significantly.  

Changes in literacy activities at home: The majority of parents said the amount of time they spent on literacy-based activities had remained largely unchanged. In this respect, the project had no immediate effect.  

The facilitators completed surveys at the beginning of the first school year when the project began, and at the end of the second. The first focused on their expectations of FLY, and the second on the changes in their teaching methods and personal attitudes towards FLY, and on the effects they had observed in parents. |

From the outset, these staff members expressed a strong need for practical advice and materials, and for opportunities to share experiences.

They also expressed the following expectations:

**More effective language development** as parents' attitudes towards literacy changed and they began using the techniques they had learned from the FLY sessions at home.

**Improved communication** between parents, and a supportive atmosphere within the group.

**Improved relationships between parents and school**, as parents became less anxious about communicating with teachers.

In the second survey, carried out after the FLY project had been operating for two years, teachers stated the following:

They felt that parents' attitudes had changed. They had a greater feeling of belonging, attended FLY sessions more often, and interacted more closely with teachers and other parents. Some parents joined as a result of word of mouth.

The project had changed the way they taught. FLY is widely regarded by parents and teachers as a way of motivating parents and children to work together and increase children's interest in books, learning, and the written word. (é ) Actively involving parents in the everyday life of the school is clearly a learning experience both for parents and teachers. Although the project involved a significant additional workload, the teachers appreciated the professional way in which it had been carried out, and most said they enjoyed their work more as a result.

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21. Anything else we think you should know ...

There are three main ways in which the project could be expanded, all with significant potential:

- **Changing the attitudes** of those involved
- **Making it more flexible**, and extending it to new areas
- **Networking** with suitable partners at a variety of levels

It is therefore clear that family literacy has many facets, and is not
Part 2: Strengths/weaknesses

just about teaching people to read and write. The Hattie study showed that parents have a crucial role to play in encouraging children, telling them what is expected of them, and sharing their own hopes and expectations of their children’s performance. Schools need to work in closer partnership with parents to ensure that their expectations of their children are met. FLY undoubtedly plays an important role as a bridge between family and school, ensuring that everyone involved is engaged in continuous dialogue. The evaluation showed that it changes the behaviour of parents and teachers, giving parents a greater sense of belonging, and creating closer contact between both sides. Taking part in FLY can also increase parents’ confidence, especially if they feel involved and valued as stakeholders in a long-term educational partnership where everyone contributes a specific set of skills and is part of a process of open, direct interaction and communication. Parents and children must see themselves as equal, independent partners in the learning process.

Family literacy is a concept in which everyone, parents, children and teachers, has a role to play. Ten years’ experience has shown that it has many positive effects on all three groups. Parents are given the opportunity to contribute their own ideas, and the approach is wide ranging and flexible, incorporating families’ specific needs and easily adapted to local circumstances. If it is to be fully inclusive, parents, children and teachers alike must undergo a change of attitude.

FLY as a central theme of teacher training

If families from very different cultural backgrounds are to feel welcome in schools, and play an active part in the learning process, then teachers must be taught the necessary skills at each stage of the training process. This is not yet the case during the first two phases of teacher training in Hamburg and, if the wide range of questions asked to the project managers is anything to go by, a great deal still needs to be done.

Experience has shown that the success of FLY is particularly dependent on flexible implementation based on the differing needs of each school. As we have seen above, this affects its content, concept, and organisational structure.
| 23. SWOT analyses | The project has developed a concept and a curriculum for a family literacy programme, which is the first of its kind in Germany. It has created awareness of the need to involve parents in the early literacy development and school life of their children and has had an impact on policy developments and the creation of other projects in Germany. As a result, the programme is now being upscaled. It is currently running in 69 schools in disadvantaged areas of Hamburg. The project has changed the culture of the participating schools. In several schools, rooms/cafés for mothers have been created, in some cases even "family literacy rooms". These have not existed before.

The project has developed networks at different levels, locally (in the school culture - between parents and children, parents and teachers, other partners within the school in the community where the school is situated); between different Ministries in different German "Länder"; and internationally.

Materials and teacher training methods have been developed for use not only in family literacy programmes but also for the work with multilingual children and adults and children with a migrant background.

Fundamental publications have emerged from the project, in co-operation with the biggest educational publisher in Germany. Working with mothers, especially with a different cultural background, is a new experience for primary teachers. Thus there are also new requirements for all phases of the teacher training. The dynamics and requirements of working with adults rather than with children must be considered. Teachers need to be provided with knowledge on adult education but also on intercultural education and communication.

Another challenge is the participation in the programme. It needs a lot of resources and creativity to motivate mothers to remain regularly on the programme. In some sites, regular participation is a problem. Also, it is difficult to reach the mothers that are most in need as those are often the most isolated.

Approaches are needed to empower women with migrant background and low educational level so that they can find their place in the community and society. FLY is a good approach if the teachers are trained and sensitized, but much more remains to be done.

All in all, family literacy should be an integral part of education policy |

| Indicate strengths and weaknesses (usually internal), and opportunities and threats (usually external) of the programme |  |

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All in all, family literacy should be an integral part of education policy |
and requires comprehensive and public investment. Although the FLY project has achieved a lot in this regard, there is still a long way ahead of us.

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<th>21. Political impact and policies</th>
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<td>Through extensive advocacy activities and networking with partners, the project coordinators have made an effort to make the project sustainable so that it would be continued after the funding during the pilot phase (2004-2009). The concept of school-parent cooperation and involvement of parents in their children’s literacy education has been reflected in educational planning papers in Hamburg and was introduced in common school practice, teacher training curricula etc. Since 2010, the Hamburg Ministry of Education is continuing and upscaling the programme in the context of the language development initiative which targets children with severe literacy needs.</td>
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<td>It can be said that the FLY project is a model for a successful transfer from a pilot project started on the initiative of individuals to an institutionalised policy-integrated programme.</td>
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<td>As a further perspective, the project is interested in North-South cooperation. As an initial step, a cooperation has been started with Nepal, building capacities and awareness about the family literacy approach (see documentation).</td>
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<td>The project is not yet been replicated as such, but other German Länder have started similar projects and have held conferences advocating for family literacy (Berlin, Saarland, Nordrhein-Westfalen).</td>
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<td>At the time this case study is written (August 2015), the FLY programme was only in effect in the city of Hamburg. After the end of the pilot project in 2009, the city of Hamburg (Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung) provided 25 schools within Hamburg per year, situated in deprived areas, with additional resources to run family literacy as well as teacher training.</td>
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<td>The city of Hamburg had originally acknowledged the FLY project as a central element in the framework of possible action approaches for dealing with migrants (see: Hamburg Action</td>
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Concept for the Integration of Immigrants, 19 February 2006). As a result, the City-State of Hamburg has upscaled the programme to include 25 more schools per year through 2013, as well as integrated the approach into the existing co-operation project ‚Kita und Schule‘ (kindergarten and school).
**25. Your personal evaluation**

By what criteria do you consider the intervention to be "good practice"? In which respects do you consider the intervention to be in need of further improvements / developments?

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<tr>
<th>Family Literacy builds a bridge between the school, families and communities. All sides can benefit from the approach. It helps parents – particularly those with a migrant background – to find an easier access to school and other institutions and to learning in general. It increases parent-teacher communication in schools and changes the idea that schools have of themselves. The opening of the schools to parents could gradually lead to the development of schools to community learning centres with increased networks to other institutions in the community such as social centres and libraries.</th>
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<td><strong>Potential for expansion</strong></td>
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### FLY as a central theme of teacher training

If families from very different cultural backgrounds are to feel welcome in schools, and play an active part in the learning process, teachers must be taught the necessary skills at each stage of the training process. This is not yet the case during the first two phases teacher training in Hamburg and, if the wide range of questions asked to the project managers is anything to go by, a great deal still needs to be done. Experience has shown that the success of FLY is particularly dependent on flexible implementation based on the differing needs of each school. As we have seen above, this affects its content, concept, and organisational structure.

### Structural development of FLY

The existing model is being extended to later school years (class 1–3, class 5–6), and adapted to the different needs and situations of older children and their families. One important next step is to develop a FLY strategy for the transition from primary to secondary school (years 4 and 5), taking account of such issues as the onset of puberty and peer-group relationships. This will be implemented in different ways to the existing strategy, and will be developed during the next school year.

In the next school-year (2015/16), father’s groups will be an additional concept as well as FLY in preparatory classes for newcomers and refugee children.

### FLY networks

In the context of specific neighbourhoods, FLY also involves networking with various local institutions. In a national context, FLY was initiated as part of the FörMig project and extended after the pilot came to an end. For example, it is now networked with the HIPPY project.
Internationally, it has always been part of a highly successful network, originally set up in cooperation with the UIL. Since the end of the pilot project, and as a result of this co-operation, an exciting FLY project has been set up in Nepal. The project is also closely and inclusively networked with the community. If all families are to play their full part in this community, closer co-operation will be needed to involve partner institutions at all levels and create joint programmes that take account both of family situations and local resources.

Ideally, all local parents and other stakeholders should have a shared understanding of children’s development needs, and work together to find ways of improving the social and educational skills of families, particularly those in difficulty. This includes ensuring that the programme is family friendly and caters to all local people.

The more schools, kindergartens and other institutions that open up to the local community, the more chance there is of their joining forces to become neighbourhood learning centres, providing services to children, young people and adults.

Education providers, ethnic communities and other relevant groups could form integrated, interdisciplinary local educational frameworks based on inclusion and lifelong learning. Based on these connections, FLY could eventually become an integral part of a community which, as it expands, adopts a new vision of inclusion as a shared responsibility and alters the perspectives of everyone involved in this process.

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<th>26. Anything else we think you should know ...</th>
<th>How FLY brings people together</th>
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<td>Let me close with a letter sent to me by a FLY-teacher: Dear Mrs Rabkin, I’d like to tell you about my best FLY experience. I hope it’s the kind of thing you’re looking for.</td>
<td>During the 2010/11 school year, I kept inviting the parents of one pre-school child to come along. I asked them every week for many weeks, but they always said no. But then, one day and much to my surprise, the mother turned up, stayed in the classroom, and was persuaded to have a cup</td>
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of tea with some of the other mothers. She told the group that her eleven-month-old daughter had died, and she been visiting her in hospital every day for the past few weeks. A lot of women cried at that and subsequent meetings, and we developed a wonderful sense of shared experience. One Turkish woman took this story to heart and decided to do something about it. She went round visiting churches and charities, and collected enough money to fly the grieving mother and her pre-school child back to Ghana to be comforted by their family. The FLY group was the only place where she could talk about her problems, and after that she never missed a meeting.

I'm still really pleased at all the good that has been done by setting up these meetings, and the close relationships they have fostered, the questions the parents have asked, and the commitment they've shown to their children's education.

with best wishes, Kathrin Albers, Schule Rahlstedter Höhe
References


May, Peter: Family literacy in Hamburg’s schools. Approach and initial findings of the evaluation


