

3. National Curriculum for the Development of a Joint Culture of Participation in Kitas

The German curriculum "*A Joint Effort for More Scope of Action*" not only focuses on themes, contents and objectives for the participation of parents and children in Kitas: it also combines the cross-subject learning objective of participation with aspects and elements of modern play area designs in Kitas. The curriculum pursues two objectives:

1. Redesign and improvement of play, exercise and meeting spaces (indoor and outdoor spaces) of the educational facility;
2. Improvement of the opportunities for participation of children and parents, and the implementation of a culture of participation in the facility.

Play area design has been selected as a field where participation models can be rolled out and tested. It also provides an ideal gateway to a participatory educational philosophy by integrating and interlinking spatial concepts, educational activities and children's playing and learning experiences. The following explanations describe the assumptions and principles of the curriculum, explaining the structure as well as the realisation and implementation of the curriculum in the educational practice.

3.1 Basic Assumption and Structure of the Curriculum

The curriculum is based on the fundamental assumption that participation is more than just a subject or element within the educational process. Participation as a cross-subject learning objective of early-childhood education represents more of a professional attitude. Human beliefs and actions in the field of education are not only influenced by professional skills and personal competencies but also by individual biographies and social environments, moral concepts and attitudes. Attitudes – conscious as well as unconscious structures of perception, subjective frameworks and idiosyncratic "models of reality" – influence the process of implementing knowledge, skills, social skills and self-competence into action (Schneider et al. 2015, 69f). This means that the selection of subjects and forms of participation as well as the methods of converting them into action are generally determined by the attitude of the educators who are involved. External mediations or the implementation of specific participation methods would therefore be insufficiently thorough. Only a change in the attitudes of the professional teachers and the introduction of new ways of understanding participation can have a really profound impact and pave the way towards educational processes that put the emphasis on participation. According to Schache (2012), educational philosophies are not the product of a short-term adoption or of a deliberately intentional process. "They have grown, depend on knowledge and have been refined in practice" (Schache 2012).

Attitudes towards action directed orientation shapes of humans are contained in their biographies as well as established in their lives and environments (Nentwig-Gesemann et al. 2011, 17). Besides personality features, standards and moral concepts to which humans are exposed in familiar, professional and social contexts and the **experiences** and **knowhow** generated from it, are the fundament of attitude and influence their actions. In professional pedagogic processes especially the **professional knowledge** as explicit, profession-related knowledge and the **experience knowledge** as implied knowledge are essential for the attitude of the professional. To attain professionalism, there is however the need to question critically the implied knowledge – among others the attitudes gained

in the own life biography, educational actions and ways of thinking – and to match it with the professional knowledge attained, as otherwise they would be used as “correctly” marked and as pedagogic orientation. Only through reflexion of biographical behaviour and thought patterns, actual experiences and knowledge in complex practice situations, action contexts and attitudes will become clear. A professional understanding of attitude distinguishes itself from the general notion of attitude, that action is not only understood as based upon an experience orientation, but implicitly existing knowledge is reflected and can thus be presented explicitly and retrievable in the practical work (Schneider et al. 2015, 74).

In order to influence the attitude of professional educators towards participation in a sustainable way in favour of a participatory educational philosophy and to strengthen their competence for participatory action, it seemed to be necessary to develop a curriculum structure that takes into account and unites the two dimensions that derive from the notion of attitude: knowledge and experience. It was also very important for the German team to integrate children and parents as further target groups into the curriculum. The development of a participatory integration culture requires the integration and further development of all participants. Based upon these assumptions, we established the following 2-column structure:

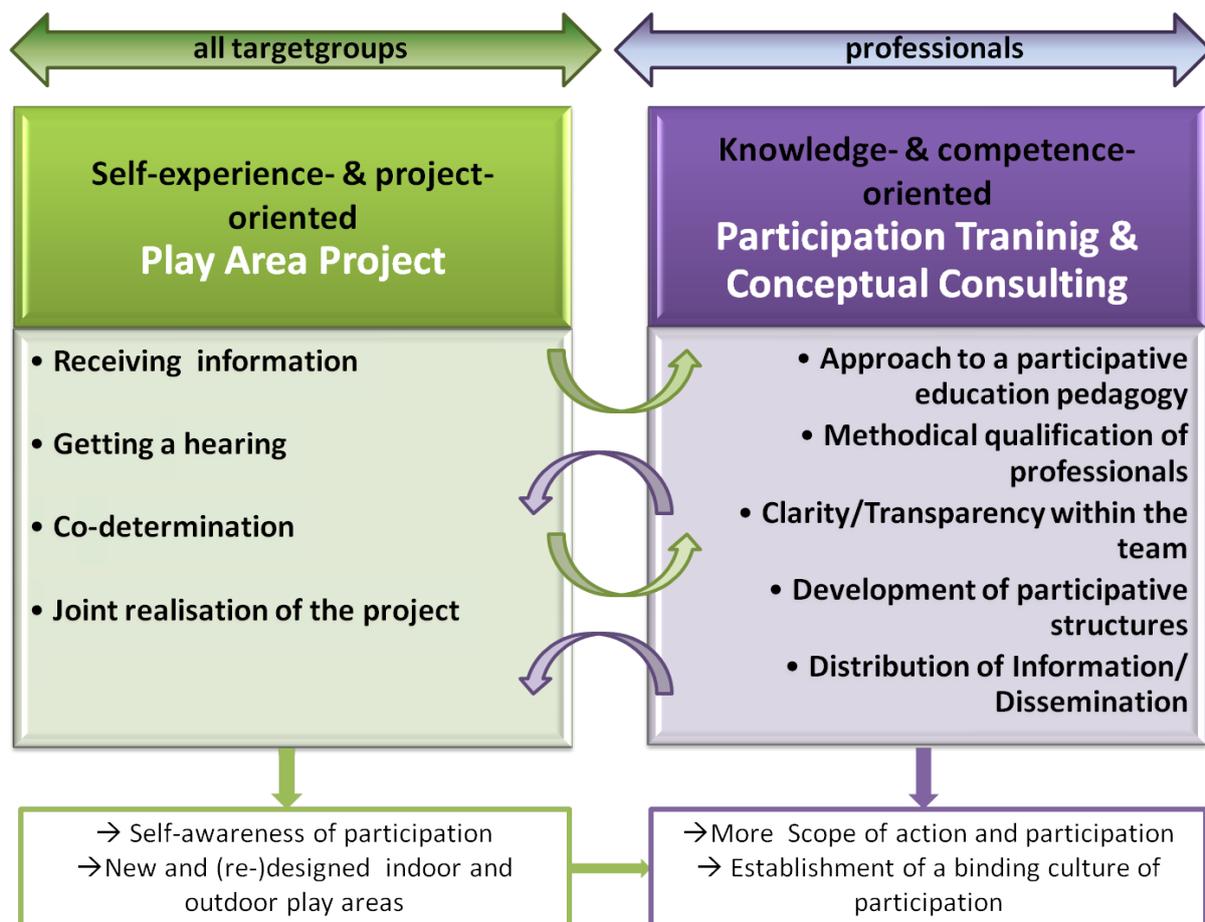


Figure 1: Structure of the Curriculum

The first column of the curriculum is oriented towards (self)experience, i.e. the primary target of all teaching-learning formats (workshops, etc.) is to provide new participation experiences and action spaces for all target groups involved (children, parents and professional educators). In joint



interaction processes, participation should be personally experienced in a positive way. In order to allow such experiences and to make them happen, a joint **Play Area Project** is initiated first to prepare the structural embedding of the children's and parents' rights.

The project-oriented approach in the Signals curriculum is based on the insight that a participatory approach for the implementation of participation processes is essential. "Participation cannot be reduced to a mere surface phenomenon. It is not a strategy that can be adopted at will, independently from one's core convictions and attitudes. A participation-focused approach requires the wholehearted commitment of the professional. Attitudes can only be changed through an intense involvement on an every-day level, characterized by an alternation between supervised experience and reflection" (Hansen et al. 2011b, 48). Experience-oriented participation projects are the perfect "entry-level" projects. They enable the participants to deal with a clearly defined subject within a clearly defined time frame, and most of these projects end with the development of a finished product. Within the manageable project frame, participation allows all stakeholders to acquire first-hand experiences that can later be put to good use in the project's downstream stages. Although children, parents and educational professionals are equally involved in the play area design within the Signals project, the professional teachers were given a dominant status/role in the first column of the curriculum. In order to implement sustainable participation processes into educational practice, i.e. to extend their effect beyond the Play Area Project, professional educators must gain individual experiences with the integration and participation of children and parents. The activities and workshops for the play area planning with children and parents are run autonomously by the professionals, but are professionally controlled and supervised. The results and experiences gained in the Play Area Project are used, on the one hand, for the redesign and new design of the rooms, while the experiences provide, on the other hand, an important foundation for the professional development and conceptual consulting of the educators, thus ensuring the conceptual link between the two curriculum columns.

The second column is knowledge- and skills-oriented and focuses on the required professional and personal skills of the professional teachers as well as on their professional attitude towards participation. The **Participation Training and Conceptual Consulting** embedded in this part of the curriculum aims at the professionalization of the staff with regard to their participation skills and meets a requirement from the quality standards for the participation of children and adolescents (MFSFJ undated). This is what it has to say about the attitude and skills of the professional educators: "Participation can only succeed if the educators show that they respect the children. This requires the educators to reflect upon their own view of human beings and its relevance for educational acts". And: "Participation can only succeed if the educators have the proper methodological skills" (BMFSFJ undated, 17). Even Hansen et al. (2009, 48) refer to the necessity of methodological skills, while Rehmann (2010, 51) concludes in her master's thesis: "Participation requires democratic knowledge (theoretical and methodological), participation-oriented skills and a respectful attitude".

In order to distinguish it from other professional development concepts, two particularities of this curriculum should be pointed out. First of all, the professional development of the professional teachers not only covers the acquisition of participation-relevant skills. The close interaction between "participation" and "play area design" also allows the discussion of selected educational concepts and of didactic forms and methods of a participatory childhood education. As these contents are transmitted, discussed and integrated into a team process, adapted to the development



and requirements of the Kita, a conceptual consulting is explicitly part of the second column. The second distinguishing feature concerns the participation of parents. On top of the direct participation at the Play Area Project, the participation of parents is considered equivalent to the participation of children, and the cooperation of parents is a topic of its own in professional development courses of teaching-learning units.

3.2 Principles of the Curriculum

The principles of the curriculum illustrate the basic orientation of the curriculum and should be understood as integral features of all activities, workshops, units for professional development, exchanges, discussions and planning rounds.

3.2.1 Professional- and Team-Orientation

The design of a participative educational pedagogy requires mainly professionals of a high level of professionalism and the readiness to share „power“ and to initiate and institutionalize participation processes. Therefore, first of all, adults and especially the professionals have to discuss, what they think children are capable of doing and to make them participate. Children are still unable or only up to a limited level able to claim their rights. The integration and realisation of participation is thus primarily the responsibility of adults. „Participation starts in the heads of adults“ (Hansen et al. 2009, 47). Furthermore, an institutionalized and legally composed implementation of participation requires, that the professionals deal together with various attitudes, reflect them in the context of their pedagogic activity and create clarity with regard to the scopes of decision-making of children and parents. This can be seen as a team development process.

3.2.2 Participation- and Activity-Orientation

The acquisition of participation competence is an active process of acquisition and a state of participation in the frame of individual contexts (such as day-care centres, education, further education, everyday routine, etc.). As a consequence, participation can only be learned through participation. Therefore, in the curriculum described, all target groups will be participating at decisions which are relevant for them and integrated in the planning of further activities. Therefore, subjects and contents are not strictly fixed beforehand, but can be flexibly adjusted to the needs and development processes. Interaction is referred to as a medium of participation. It is understood as verbal/linguistic communication and discussion; the second perspective focused in the curriculum defines interaction primarily as acting, active and physical activity that reflects itself in motion-oriented activities, playing-activities, non-verbal and cooperative actions. The action-oriented discussion of participation – as child- and inclusion-conform method – is not only made use of in pedagogic work with the child within the group. With regard to the cooperation with parents and the design of team- and network tasks, it will open new and diverse accesses to relevant development, relation and cooperation subjects within the process of implementation.

3.2.3 Reflection-Orientation

Participation orientation as a basis for action always includes the professional in its personal and professional attitude and finally the whole team in its diversity of attitudes, values and working methods. If the pedagogic practice is expected to change in favour of a stronger participation of children and parents, professionals need the possibility to exchange via the everyday routine and enter into a professional discourse. It is highly important to question one's own way of working and facility conception critically. The teaching-learning formats used in the curriculum, such as



observation and reflexion tasks in small groups, moderated roundtable discussions, social and cooperative exercises and role plays offer various options for reflection and open new perspectives for the subject participation. Parents and children, too, are invited within various activities to reflect about and to discuss the pedagogic everyday life, educational and playing options in the day-care centre as well as their own educational biography.

3.2.4 Bildungs- Orientation

In the curriculum, education is considered primarily as an individual activity of a subject, acting in its own environment. Children as well as adults are – according to this understanding of education, constructors of their own development, of their learning and education processes and always embedded in their social and material context. Humans construct their own image of the world by facing it with their activities and create a relation between every new impression and their self being. Following this understanding, the mediation of education by teaching is very limited (Spitzer 2006, 417; Laewen 2007, 44f). It goes close with a change of paradigms from the mediation of knowledge (upbringing/education-oriented) to an orientation of adoption and Bildung. The task of the professionals or teachers is rather to grab the readiness of the children/adults to learn and to support potentials and activities, prepare for appropriate spatial and material framework conditions and to enable self-active and social learning. In this sense, upbringing/education can be understood as the request for Bildung (Liegle 2008, 85). Bildung becomes a knowledge-related, self-controlled process of competence creation (Olk/Roth 2007, 54), where adults turn from teachers to educational companions. The described educational understanding is a prerequisite for the realisation of participation in its educational function and thus becomes a fundamental principle of the work with children, parents and professionals under the education plan. (Self)Bildung always requires the participation of the participants/the learners. In this context the co-construction between children and adults is a special, but solvable task for the participating adults, because they have a huge advantage towards the children with regard to development, experience and knowledge.

3.2.5 Inclusion- Orientation

Inclusion orientation refers to the fact that being different is normal and the basis of any pedagogic activity today. Also with regard to the implementation of structures of participation in the framework of the German project special attention is paid to realising a pedagogy of diversity, enabling a participation for everybody and making the Kita an exciting, supportive and challenging place of learning for all children (parents and professionals) no matter about age, level of development, handicap, social origin and cultural background. This goal is on one hand strived for the joint play area project: with the help of early-pedagogical professionals and therapists, young children and children with development problems and handicaps are given options to participate at common plannings and decision via specific – mostly non-verbal, visual and action-oriented methods. Furthermore, parents are offered demand-oriented offers to participate at the creation of playing rooms with their abilities and competences. On the other hand, the principle of inclusion-orientation is considered as an essential content of the participation training and the conceptual consultation of professionals and is permanently thought of, discussed and modified in all modules as a cross-sectional subject, to develop and to ensure a participative educational pedagogy for all children and families in the day-care centre.

3.3 Modules and Contents of the Curriculum

“Quality in the development of children and adolescents has various dimensions: It is based on the targets and realisation strategies (concept quality), on the design of the interaction between the participants (process quality), the framework conditions (structural quality) as well as the handling of results (result quality) and the enabling of personal benefit (benefit quality) in terms of the experiences of the subjects“ (BMFSFJ 2010, 8). The curriculum “*A Joint Effort for More Scope of Action*“ strives to achieve processes of change in all dimensions, adapting its overall structure to comply with the quality criteria of the Federal Department for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2010) that apply to all participation processes. The specific quality standards for participation in Kitas are particularly relevant for the module structure of the column “Participation Training and Conceptual Consulting“. They describe the features, opportunities and challenges of the field and specify what the professional educators must deliver in respect of the following three aspects:

- Attitudes of adults: Participation can only succeed if the educators show that they respect the children. This requires the educators to reflect upon their own view of human beings and its relevance for educational acts.
- Structural embedding of participation: If the principle of participation is embedded in a “constitution“ for the day-care centre, or if it is implemented by introducing conferences or children’s parliaments, the children learn that they have rights of their own.
- Participation skills of adults: Participation can only succeed if the educators have the proper methodological skills.
(BMFSFJ 2010, 17)

Therefore, participation in Kindertagesstätten requires

- That the professionals clarify their understanding of participation and their idea of how they want to shape educational relations.
- That they reflect on the balance of power in the Kita.
- That they communicate with children, parents and each other respectfully.
- That they clarify the rights of children and parents at the facility.
- That they create structures in which children and parents can exercise their rights.
- That they support the children and parents in the exercise of their rights.
- That they tell the children, parents and others what rights they have and make participation visible.
- That the professionals inform and involve the parents.
- That the participation structures and processes reflect and evolve in close cooperation with the children and parents.
- That the professionals have the necessary skills (through training, coaching, counseling, etc.).
- That professionals have the necessary resources in time, staff, scope of action. (BMFSFJ 2010 19)

The curriculum meets these requirements through the modules and contents described for the realisation of participation in Kitas.

The second methodological orientation structure of the curriculum modules is dedicated to the process for the planning and execution of participatory projects developed by Regner and Schubert-Suffrian (2011). As this process can facilitate the realisation of projects (2011, 36), the individual steps described here and the steps of participation defined with reference to Schröder (1995), Hart (1992) and Gernert (1993) determine the modular structure of the first column. The individual modules have been specifically designed for the topic of play area design in Kitas. Practical examples



for applications (**Annex 9**) give an insight into the contents of the modules and the methodological approach of the German Signals project.

3.3.1 Column 1: Modules of the Play Area Project

Receiving information – Preparing the ground/warm-up: Depending on the party that seizes the initiative, three different methods of selecting issues for a possible participation of children and parents can be distinguished – top-down issues, eye-to-eye issues, and bottom-up issues. Since the issue of the Signals project (play area design) is a top-down issue – the idea had been proposed by the organization that runs the centre and its members of staff – it was all the more important to provide professionals, parents and children with information right from the start of the project and to prepare the ground for their involvement. One objective of the project was to comply with the principles of openness, information and transparency, all the way from the start of the project to its completion, in order to ensure the full integration and involvement of all stakeholders.

Getting a hearing - Taking stock of existent views: At this stage, the predominant objective is to determine what views children, parents and professionals are holding of the current state of affairs and how they feel about it, so that a foundation for the further course of the project can be established. It has proved useful to record positive as well as negative perceptions and opinions (Regner/Schubert-Suffrian 2011, 37). Such an exercise of taking stock of existing views serves to reveal a wide range of ideas and opinions and creates space for important democratic and social learning processes. Stakeholders will, for example, be compelled to engage with opposite points of view and to defend their own opinions.

Getting a hearing - Firing the imagination: In this stage, all stakeholders are encouraged to give free rein to their imagination and to jointly develop new ideas for spatial concepts. The Signals project demonstrated that the opening of new conceptual horizons is of essential importance, since many of the initial suggestions of children, parents and even teachers merely reflected their respective backgrounds of experience and provided little on which to develop innovative (spatial) design concepts.

Getting a hearing – Brainstorming: Once all stakeholders (target groups) have developed a notion of what is possible and once they have expressed their wishes and suggestions, all of these ideas must be gathered and conflated. It is important to accept all ideas at this stage of the proceedings, without grading them in any way or checking them for their feasibility.

Getting a hearing – Turning ideas into detailed proposals and plans: In the subsequent stage, the ideas of the individual stakeholder groups must be converted into more detailed proposals and, perhaps, pooled or sorted.

Co-determination – Arriving together at decisions: Before ideas can be implemented, it is generally necessary to give certain ideas priority over other ideas. This can happen through mutual agreement or a vote. For children, an introduction into the principle of majority voting and the selection of appropriate voting procedures is of particular importance.

Joint Realisation and Implementation: When all decisions are made, the last step of the participation project to follow is the joint realization and implementation of the project plan with all participating target groups. A participatory implementation expands both the experience and the



participation competence participation of children, parents and professionals. The practical experience of participation and joint working and acting can promote togetherness and solidarity with the project and its stakeholders as well as social and communicative and democratic skills. A visualization of the temporal sequences may be useful - especially for long-term projects.

3.3.2 .Column 2: Modules of the Participation Training and Conception Consulting

Familiarization with/Approach to a participatory educational philosophy: In this module, the initial priority is to deal with the fundamentals (definitions, steps, forms) of participation and to develop a common understanding of the word “participation”. A look into the legal requirements shall make clear that children and parents are entitled to have a say in decisions about matters that affect them. The inextricably linked concepts of education and participation are discussed in the light of the educational objectives of participation. In this context, spatial and conceptual inputs and reflections are also part of the training. The experts explore the question which spatial-material and organisational-structural conditions have an impact on the possibilities of involving children and parents and which interactions exist between play area design in the facility and their educational work. Ultimately, the professionals acquire the skills that are required for planning the play area project by familiarizing themselves with various approaches of implementing a regulated participation culture.

Methodological Qualification of Professionals: This part of the professional development course focuses on fundamental participatory didactics and provides the professionals with the methodological skills required to develop and implement a participatory educational philosophy. On the one hand, concepts of early education are discussed such as “open work”, workshops and project work. On the other hand, the professional educators learn about moderation and visualization techniques and processes for the formation of opinion and coordination and how to use them to deal respectfully and considerately with children and parents. Strategies of cooperating successfully with parents, team work and networking will also be addressed.

Transparency & Clarity in the Team: This module aims to clarify what the professional educators mean when they talk about participation in the Kita and which hopes and fears they associate with this concept. The educators are meant to reflect on their own experiences with participation, to think critically about the distribution of power between educational professionals and children and to redefine their own role as “experts” in the field. "Participation can be experienced if the team clearly states: What can children decide in our facility and what not? Addressing this question usually leads to intense discussions and also makes it clear that participation raises both fears and hopes. The team should agree a common understanding on key issues. The areas in which different teams provide children with a voice may also be different. What is important is that children are given any voice and any such rights at all" (BMFSFJ 2010 17). Further clarification within the team is needed with respect to the creation of the new spatial concept, the future use of space/organization as well as the responsibilities and tasks within the team. During the reorganization of the play areas, various change processes are triggered. Training and conceptual advice offer the necessary framework for the understanding within the team.

Development of Participatory Structures: In this module, different ways of embedding participation into organizational structures are discussed. The aim of the module is to create a team consensus about the bodies that need to be installed and about the procedures of any future participation



arrangements at the facility. They should also agree on the need to write a constitution or a similar document to fix the rights of both children and parents as well as the participation and decision-making structures. Particular emphasis will be placed on the new participation and self-determination opportunities of children and parents that result from the need to redesign the spatial concept.

Distribution of Information & Dissemination: "Participation needs publicity, initially within the facility. The children need to know when the delegates' conference meets or what issues are to be decided. Documentation, reports, photos, etc. provide information not only to the parents but also to visitors of the Kita" (BMFSFJ 2010 17). This module is intended to enable educational professionals to implement participatory bodies and forms of participation in the Kita and to make people outside the Kita aware of their existence. Suitable methods of achieving this objective will be presented, and facility-specific strategies for disseminating information will be developed.