

1. Introduction

Team of the Coordination Centre ‘Männer in Kitas’ (Men in ECEC Centres)

‘Fatherhood is my greatest role’.

Brad Pitt

ECEC centres are increasingly considering how better to address, reach and integrate fathers in the long term. For many reasons, including the gendered public and private division of labour, fathers are usually less present than mothers in ECEC centres. Some fathers also have a sense that the kind of work done with parents thus far does not apply to them, or feel rather uncomfortable or out of place given the scant presence of men in ECEC centres.

How can fathers be brought into ECEC centres as equal partners? How can fathers be firmly integrated into the everyday life of ECEC with their specific skills? Do fathers need male contacts in ECEC centres?

The 16 ESF model projects ‘MEHR Männer in Kitas’ (MORE Men in ECEC Centres) pursued these questions and made working with fathers a focal point of their work. They developed ideas and methods for activating fathers and integrating them into actions with their children. There are three main approaches here: A more project- and experience-orientated approach aimed to win over fathers for life in ECEC centres with the skills they have gained in the workplace and hobbies. In this way, untapped resources could be activated for ECEC centres. What marks this approach is a special appreciation for untapped skills. A further approach examined fathers from the pedagogical-systemic perspective and aimed to strengthen fathers as caregivers in the family system. In this case, the focus is on seeing not just the child and his or her mother within their relationship, but considering and addressing all caregivers, that is, fathers and where relevant even grandfathers, as part of the family system. A third preventive approach addresses fathers (as well as mothers) as potential sceptics towards male ECEC workers. The objective was to prevent preconceptions about male caregivers and allay fears (including by fathers) about the possible sexual abuse of children in ECEC by specifically addressing them. These three approaches cannot be strictly separated from one another. They complement and build on one another and can be combined.

The underlying images of fatherliness are as varied as the approaches to working with fathers.

Images of Fatherliness

Societal notions of fatherhood or fatherliness and the family have changed massively in recent decades (cf. Meuser 2009, pp. 148ff.). Many fathers now wish to play a greater or more equal part in rearing their children, beyond the role of family breadwinner. The number of fathers taking parental leave, and thus a break from work, in order to care for their children is growing. This is

associated with both changes in and a multiplication of the images of fatherhood, masculinity and the family. These changes are marked by great contradictions, however: There is often a large gap between wishes and reality here. On the one hand, actually changing entrenched gendered behaviours is clearly a long-term process. On the other, fathers who would like to spend more time with their families and therefore to work part-time or take parental leave still encounter resistance and incomprehension in the workplace (cf. Cremers 2012, pp. 56ff.).

Despite the wishes of many heterosexual couples for a gender-neutral division of childcare and housework, the birth of the first child frequently leads to a re-traditionalising of the division of labour in families (cf. Baader 2006, p. 128). It is still unusual for fathers to take more than the two months of parental leave that are obligatory in order to attain the full fourteen months of parental allowance: Only 5 per cent of fathers stay home longer than two months. The many books on fathers taking parental leave alone reveal the exotic status of such men. German publications bear such titles as 'The Male Mama' (2012), 'My Life as Mummy. True Tales of a Parental Leave Papa' (2009) or 'The Chaos Begins by 7 am: The Ordinary Madness of a Father on Parental Leave and How to Survive It' (2010).

Society is grappling with the (often paradoxical) image of the father on various levels, evidence of searched for meaning that are also expressed in this guide. What might fatherhood look like beyond the traditional breadwinner role? How can fathers be seen and empowered with their childrearing, caring and comforting skills beyond stereotypical images of masculinity?

Approaches from Fatherhood Studies

We have been witnessing a boom in fatherhood studies and the representation of fathers in the media (cf. Bereswill, Scheiwe and Wolde 2006). To that extent, there has been increasing discussion of the significance of fathers for children. Psychoanalytical approaches stress the importance of the father in child development, especially with regard to detachment from the mother and the development of autonomy from the age of two (cf. Dammasch and Metzger 2006). Here, too, however, we see stereotypical images of masculinity, since the father is regarded almost exclusively as the one 'liberating' the child from symbiosis with the mother, supporting the child's autonomous behaviour, encouraging risky play, etc. The literature long ignored fathers' nurturing and comforting activities and significance in their child's infancy (cf. Heberle 2008, p. 221). The family model on which these models are based is outmoded, however. One could also point in this connection to more recent work in attachment research. While the mother was long regarded as the most important person for the child, researchers are increasingly taking into account the significance of the father as an attachment person and also regarding him as a primary caregiver. It also emerges, for example, that mothers employed outside the home engage in risk-taking and activating play with their children to the same degree as employed fathers. Thus social factors and family arrangements, and not primarily gender, influence how parents deal with children (cf. Brandes, Andrä and Röseler 2012, pp. 156–57). The 'different' bond between fathers and children often emphasised in fatherhood studies simply reproduces gender stereotypes unchallenged (cf. Baader 2006, p. 1221). In this way, fathers are increasingly viewed as important for children, but we still lack alternative role models and images of fathers beyond existing stereotypical notions of

fathers as 'different' than mothers. Moreover, the research rarely takes into account alternative family constellations.

Diverse work with fathers and parents in ECEC centres

Fathers, we have seen, are attracting increased scholarly, media and also educational attention. Given the stronger presence of fathers in childrearing and thus also in ECEC, ECEC centres are increasingly seeking possibilities and methods of better integrating fathers into the everyday life of their facilities. The educational partnership with parents is a central component of the work of ECEC centres. In work with fathers, fathers are regarded as part of the family system and the aim is to empower them in their child-rearing function.

Given the diversity among fathers, what offerings make sense, though? Fathers can be single parents or live separately from their children, they can be employed or unemployed, conservative or alternative, structurally disadvantaged and stigmatised, they can have varying sexual orientations, they can be transgender, members of the German majority or come from diverse cultural or religious backgrounds. Some children no longer have a father, or have no contact with him. Or they have a social father. Some children live in patchwork constellations or rainbow families with no father, one father or two fathers.

Especially in large cities, ECEC centres therefore encounter a diverse mix of parents with differing value systems. Designing work with fathers that takes this diversity into account entails special challenges. Aside from popular classic activities such as regular fathers' get-togethers or afternoon barbecues, which can be quite useful for addressing fathers, ECEC centres should also offer non-stereotypical activities, which on the one hand speak to different fathers and on the other aim to expand gender roles for fathers and mothers alike.

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