

Dedicated Fathers in a Society of Immigrants. The same and different!?

The editors interview Michael Tunç

We interviewed Michael Tunç about the background and practical approaches to cooperation between ECEC centres and fathers from immigrant backgrounds. Michael Tunç has a degree in

sustainable development of intercultural work with fathers in NRW (North Rhine Westphalia), a project of the Center for Turkish Studies and Integration Research (ZfTI) conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Labour, Integration and Social Affairs of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (MAIS). The two-

which factors lead to the success of this work with fathers. The project is intended to promote the

and to help to sustain the quality of intercultural work with fathers in the long term.

Editors: In developing concepts and practical approaches for work with fathers in ECEC centres, migration background (*Migrationshintergrund*) of parents is also an issue. Given the stereotypes associated with it, how meaningful is this term and with it a certain way of looking at an allegedly similar group of people?

Tunç: migration background in *migrationsgezeichnet* or marked by migration, which was coined by the psychologist and pedagogue Paul Mecheril, suggests that

that somebody else attributes to me, or is it something that I can fill with content in a self-

exists in an increasingly distant past, it is my impression that the term migration background ve. People are increasingly being addressed and also invoked in terms of their affiliation. I am concerned that there are fewer self-determined spaces in which I have the chance to fill it with meaning. Instead it is assigned from outside, for example in ECEC centres. And it is precisely there that a gap often opens up: When is tion other people to see it? And when is it only important for others, but not for me?

tion remains paradoxical: Pat Parker, a Black lesbian poet and political activist, has said that sometimes it is important to take a migrant background into account and sometimes it is important to overlook

ity of this task:

forgetting and not forgetting. It is the many aspects of migration. For example, people of migrant background are often denied the right to think of this as their home. For them, migration then also means being part of a minority, and thereby also in certain ways subject to discrimination and stigma with varying effects. Often, they cannot escape them. This is already clear in the question

grandpa? A

simply annoying, or serve as a plainly ethnicising ascription intended to exclude me.

This also applies to ECEC centres that work with fathers of migrant background: to have this sensitivity, to realise when it is important to see it and when it is important for me to simply be

your family.'

issue at all?

If there is some uneasiness, it is important to have the courage to pose

with your own discomfort or confusion

so you notice something was going on there. And: What exactly was it that made me feel uneasy?

And I think this is precisely what staff members find the most challenging: Showing when they are uncomfortable and confu

ot always suitable and

there is not always space to address such misunderstandings and uneasiness.

Editors: What images of masculinity and models of fatherhood have you discovered from your current research among migrant men? Would you say that there is currently a change in the way people live fatherhood, which is also noticeable among men of migrant background?

Tunc: I like the way you bring masculinity and fatherhood together in the question. Because if I look at men solely in their role as fathers I run the risk of only seeing them in relationship to their child and in the parental role. In order to get a more complete picture I must also look at their history as men. There are many different milieus in which fathers operate. In different contexts, the very same father can be confronted with widely varying tensions with his life script, his masculinity and his fatherhood. How is he in the family? In the workplace? With his child? In the ECEC centre? What group compositions does he operate in? Is he alone among German fathers,

together with two or three other fathers of migrant background, at home? As you see, there are many different contexts, which also change.

Basically I believe there are many changes. Many practice a rather egalitarian gendered division of labour, just like many white families of the German majority, sharing the work of earning money and childcare quite equitably as parents. There is a good portion of so-called new fathers among migrants; this is evident for example in the fact that similar numbers of fathers with and without a migration background take paternity leave and claim parental allowance (*Elterngeld*). Whether I see this, though, also depends on the attitude with which I approach a father. My central thesis is always that I approach the father with the assumption that he is interested in being an active father and I go to him and ask how things are. This applies even when there are concrete problems in a family of migrant background. According to the major representative studies of men, the majority appears to apply equally to migrant fathers.

It is therefore important on the one hand to keep an open mind, but on the other to ask questions. The dilemma is always that I already have an image of the person; that is true of all of us. But I can only recognise changes in fatherhood if I trust that the fathers are capable of making these changes, is the precondition. Then I have a basis for recognising the -sensitive pedagogy, which also demands a critical faculty above all else. That is being an open, questioning attitude.

Editors:

ECEC centres people are always saying that it is hard to reach fathers with a migration background. Do you see it that way too, and if so, what might be the reasons?

Tunç: I believe it is important to adopt a dual perspective here, too. I think we are very quick to ask with the fathers that keeps them from coming to our events?' That happens quickly. And yes, perhaps they are somewhat harder to reach than members of the white German majority. But the most important thing is to look: Where are there barriers that prevent (migrant) fathers from coming to my facility, from showing up and addressing issues?

For the organisation it is an important perspective to check its own side: Where are the thresholds? side. What do I know about

occasions that present themselves.

important for institutions to look at how we see fathers, what kinds of images we have, or where we see migrant fathers in everyday life. And then to really look. That means making a kind of organisational check, examining our guiding principles, public relations, how we address fathers, where I meet them, modes of work, the visual language of the ECEC centre etc. It is important to keep an eye on how f

This questioning attitude is the prerequisite for reaching fathers. I have discovered that it is institutional perspective that there is a reason to work with fathers and that I would like them to come to my facility. It is equally important to get to know the are.

I think for instance that it is easy to make our offerings overly pedagogical. But it is also important to see that fathers enjoy educational activities involving games and leisure and also simply want to spend time with their child. Many approaches in the model projects I know of are not specifically geared to migration or intercultural communication, but simply start by creating space in the first place for fathers using games, fun and leisure activities, usually with offerings for fathers and their

with the campfire and the tents. 'We can get together again.' And only then would I take it a step ith it is more accessible to begin with the children and enjoy fun and games together.

true

childrearing topics. If I say, we would like to discuss this or that topic, which we offer on theme

One option is to post leaflets and posters. It is equally important to ask the fathers coming?' or to important to ask: Who do I actually see in the facility is it mothers, fathers? For example, I advertise via the mothers and tell them that the father should come. I know many providers who choose the direct approach and are quite successful. They have a list of people in this case it is a

Do the facilities want this, can they manage it time-wise?

ve been working the late shift this week and doing too much overtime and it completely slipped my mind.' But then I choose to speak to the father directly, and perhaps the next time around I tell him we are continuing our work with fathers and I

or someone who can offer us expert knowledge and professionals. The point is to scan the environment for organisations that I think might be resources with relevant experience.

It is also a matter of opening ECEC centres up to people and institutions that might become cooperation partners. Certainly a wealth of ideas and solutions exist in models of cooperation.

Editors: What would you say are the most important points for inclusive, intercultural work with fathers?

Tunç: I find a neighbourhood approach very good. Here I can build bridges to fathers by adopting

ECEC centre where are they, and where are the places they go to and feel comfortable and secure? For many of them a kindergarten is not that place. Many tend to feel insecure there.

Editors: Given the diversity and the many life scripts of people today: If we look at models of heteronormative gaze? Is there a critical debate about this going on in research on fathers?

Tunç: I know of very little in this direction and I can only share your assessment that this heteronormative framework has received too little critical attention thus far. We need to look at where there are non-heteronormative life scripts: gay fathers, trans fathers etc. I think this is quite separate from ethnic-cultural affiliations or migration or perhaps even social or class positions. I believe that this topic has been largely ignored in the debate about fathers up to now. I find it fascinating to take a closer look. I think this topic is neglected even more than migration. The majority of men who work with fathers and I would include myself here always proceed this heterosexual, generally middle-

be

to at least recognise this in ourselves. I think that most of us are still not saying this is a heteronormative event and actually we are leaving quite a few people out. It would be important to signalise that we are open to the topic and to seek out allies, for example gay fathers, in order to address other groups of fathers. How can I reach all fathers with an inclusive approach and how can I put this into practice? And how do I do this without scaring off others and marginalising myself politically?