

Parents'interviews

1. Objectives

- Create a link with parents that allows a real cooperation between family and school around the pupils' schooling ("co-education")
- Learn about the elements that may have an impact on his/her learning (family languages, relation to writing, relationship to school)

2. Emergence of practice and theoretical support

By working with Travellers, I used to develop close relationships with parents, which was necessary to support their children's schooling. Back in the ordinary environment, I found it impossible to work without knowing my pupils' parents. The practice of cultural mediation that I had built with Travellers was transferable to this new multicultural environment. It is this experience that guided the choice of the 3 themes discussed during the interviews presented below.

Why these 3 themes?

Original languages and family language practices

It seems to us essential to develop knowledge about the bilingualism of pupils, to know which language (s) they understand, which language (s) they speak and with what degree of mastery. The aim is to better apprehend the state of the linguistic repertoire of the child in order to better adapt his teaching of French. Knowing the characteristics of a language (and its distance from the language of the school) can help to explain why a child encounters such obstacles in his learning of French, and how he can, on the contrary, rely on certain elements; it can also help to determine whether a child's silence in the classroom is due to language problems or to an entry into the schooling language made difficult by a significant language gap between the first language and the second language.

Moreover, it seems necessary to discuss with parents about their representations and attitudes around languages. And finally, by knowing the linguistic profile of pupils, we can better accommodate their languages in the classroom. In fact, pupils' bilingualism is often ignored by the school. If at least one of the parents can communicate in French, it is often too quickly inferred that the child is francophone. But we can master French, and not use it with his children, this is the case of many pupils' parents in our school.

Finally, the interviews with the parents allow a work around the language biographies, those of the parents, and those of the children: having knowledge of the languages in presence, thanks to the interviews, will make it possible to build for the class plurilingual activities around albums, nursery rhymes or picture books. The interviews also help to identify the resource persons among the parents and to discuss with them of what they are ready to do with us, for example, sing or read in their own language. With older pupils, we can work directly on their language biographies, in activities such as the "Flower of Languages" that allows them to become aware of their plurilingualism and see it valued by the school. At the nursery school, we need the mediation of parents, children being too young to have a conscience and a reflexive attitude on their multilingualism. The denial of the first language can lead to a child's silence at school or difficulty in entering the learning process; interviews with parents can then constitute a preventive action.

To know more:

Simon D. L. & Maire Sandoz M.-O. (2008). « Faire vivre et développer le plurilinguisme à l'école : les biographies langagières au cœur de la construction d'identités plurielles et du lien social ». *Études de linguistique appliquée* 2008/3 (n° 151), p. 265-276.

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-ela-2008-3-page-265.html> (consulted on 26/01/18)

The parents' relation to writing

The child's "reader project" is an essential element to promote his entry into writing. The "reader project" is constructed upstream of reading, both in the family and in nursery school. It can be defined as the set of representations that the child has built from reading and from his learning through his experiences of writing. It can be evaluated by asking these types of questions: What utility for you to learn reading? What is it going to do for you? How do we read? What happens when an adult reads? An elaborate reader project helps a child to enter reading, because "When the child knows where he is heading, he can be an actor of his own learning" (Ouzoulias, 2002, p.11).

Teachers specialising in teaching assistance, who work with a pupil with learning difficulties in reading, often begin by interviewing the child to evaluate his reading project. Here the interview with parents has the function of estimating the family practices and representations around the writing on which the child will be able to rely to make a representation of the writing. It also allows parents to consider how they can help their child get into writing, even if they are illiterate.

More deeply, as the school is a world of writing, children need to be introduced to school practices, especially if they have not been in their family: it is good for teachers to know for which children it will be necessary to support the entry in the writing and to explain the instructions of the school.

The sociologist Bernard Lahire, in *Tableau de famille* (1995), has shown, through a gallery of portraits of children from working-class backgrounds who have been successful in school, that their families had in common to use and transmit certain written practices such as "domestic managerial writings, objectification and time planning" which denote a certain cognitive organisation necessary for school adaptation.

To know more:

Ouzoulias A. (2002). *L'apprenti lecteur en difficulté. Évaluer, comprendre, aider*. Retz.

Lahire B. (1995). *Tableaux de famille. Heurs et malheurs scolaires en milieux populaires*. Paris : Le Seuil/ Gallimard.

For a reading report, see on the website of the French Institute of Education (ifé) :

<http://litterature.ens-lyon.fr/litterature/dossiers/litteratie/sociologie-anthropologie/bernard-lahire-tableaux-de-famille-hautes-etudes-seuil-1995> (consulted on 20/01/18)

The relation to school

The interview with parents also aims to identify the relationship to the school of families. Presumably it will be easier for parents who have been to school to understand the school's expectations and to engage in dialogue with teachers. Some migrants have not had the experience of nursery school: if so, the teacher can explain what is learned in nursery school and how it is a preparation for the following schooling.

These interviews also constitute the premises for genuine cooperation between school and parents, for a balanced relationship (which is not an overarching attitude on the part of teachers) and for an open and respectful dialogue around the education and the schooling of the child, what is called co-education.

To know more:

An interview with Catherine Hurtig-Delattre (who published in 2016 *La coéducation à l'école c'est possible !* Aux Editions Chronique sociale) :

<http://www.cafepedagogique.net/l'expresso/Pages/2017/02/10022017Article636223109155675326.aspx> (consulted on 28/01/18)

3. Implementation

We meet all the families over a period of at least 20 minutes. When possible, we prefer to meet the whole family, with the child concerned and the siblings.

Interview grid on 3 themes: countries and languages of origin: questions on migratory routes and **linguistic repertoires** of family members and how they are broken down according to the interlocutor and the moment.

parents' relation to writing and in which languages?

parents' relation to school, their school history, their diplomas, their professional qualifications; did they go to nursery school?

Preamble to the interview

The teacher always begins by explaining the purpose of the interview to the parents stating that the answers given will help to better know the child and to adapt teaching more effectively; it is also indicated that establishing a relationship of confidence between the family and the school will be beneficial for the child. It is always added that they are under no obligation to answer a question they might consider indiscreet and that everything that will be said here is confidential.

The interview grid

Each question is asked for the father, mother and pupil of the class, but also, in some cases, for the other members of the siblings. It often happens that some of them have already passed into our class, in which case the interview will be facilitated by the already established relationship.

The grid is conceived as a framework that the teacher can follow very freely, it simply serves as a guide to the interview that takes place in the form of an open discussion. The questions are deliberately not written, but only listed in the form of topics to be addressed in a free order and according to the interlocutors present. The teacher takes notes as the discussion progresses. He does this in a table with 3 columns for the answers: one for the father, one for the mother, and one for the child.

The public in our school is nowadays called "super diversity"; depending on the welcomed family, the different themes will take on a different importance and colour, some may not even be addressed. And sometimes, the interview may also cover other topics, depending on the parents' request. Each teacher in the school gives a personal colouration to the interview or according to his teaching class level: thus, the younger section teacher insists more particularly on the well-being of the child (separation, sleep, nutrition) . Finally, questions are also the pretext for explaining what we do at school.

In the grid below, the first column presents the topics addressed as they are written in our grid, the second column declines the question as it might be asked in situation.

| Interview guide | Proposals for the formulation of questions |
|---|--|
| Family history native country year of arrival in France other countries crossed siblings pupil's position in siblings | Where are you from? When did you arrive in France? (to the father, and to the mother) Have you stayed in other countries? How many children do you have? What age (s)? What position does the pupil of this class occupy in the siblings? |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Languages of the family</p> <p>understood spoken heard</p> <p>nursery rythmes, songs, tales?</p> <p>(degree of mastery of the mother tongue)</p> | <p>What language (s) do you speak at home? With which interlocutors? with your spouse? with your children? or with that child and that other? In what types of situations?</p> <p>What language (s) does your child understand, speak, hear?</p> <p>Do you sing with your child, tell him/her tales? In which language (s)?</p> <p>How does your child master his/her first language (s)? Does he understand it? Does he express himself easily, do you understand him?</p> |
| <p>Read/write: practices</p> <p>utility reading pleasure reading (books, library) in which languages? what alphabet? project for the child?</p> | <p>Do you have a personal practice of reading? What type? What do you read? The newspaper, novels, Does your child see you reading, writing?</p> <p>In which languages? With what type of writing or alphabet?</p> <p>What are you planning for your child's future?</p> |
| <p>Perception of the school</p> <p>schooling? well lived? nursery school?</p> | <p>How was your own schooling (and in which country)? Have you experienced it in a positive way?</p> <p>Did you go to nursery school?</p> <p>Do you have any diplomas? Professional qualifications?</p> <p>What kind of work do you do?</p> |
| <p>Comments</p> | <p>Personal notes space: teacher's observations, information on points other than those specified.</p> |

4. Impact

Interviews very interesting and beneficial in several ways

First of all, the parents are all present, which means that school is important to them and that they value their child's schooling.

Enhanced relationships with parents

We could fear that parents consider our approach as indiscreet or intrusive. This is not the case; on the contrary, they are generally touched that we are interested in their story, and, not only they speak easily and with confidence, but also it is not uncommon for them to thank us warmly (some with great emotion). They feel recognised as interlocutors by the school and see their background and their bi / multilingualism valued (which they often did not see as something positive, their languages being often socially depreciated). Thus parents are numerous (from Mayotte, or Ivory Coast) to have been educated directly at CP (without attending nursery school), to have had to learn French and, at the same time, learn to speak it, read it and write it. In addition, many parents, from the departments and territories of Outremer or former French colonies, have suffered, as children, from linguistic discrimination at school and have integrated a devalued representation of their languages. Attitudes towards the use of French at home are very varied. Some parents want to speak French at home when they do not master it well (to learn from their children, or because

they have heard a lot that it would help their child's success). These interviews also make it possible to share the contributions of research on bilingualism and to convey positive discourses.

Some potentially conflictual situations have been defused by the dialogue initiated during the interview, for example in the case where a parent was able to express his negative personal experience of the school. The informations obtained are extremely interesting and sometimes unexpected, and sometimes they break down clichés and representations: parents are often humanly remarkable, some of them having experienced very difficult courses.

Reinforced relations with pupils

This reflects on their attitude in class. Some pupils who did not dare to speak to me began to do so the day after the interview.

Example of implementation

In the first year of implementation (2014), I was very surprised by the information gathered during these interviews and in particular by the following elements:

- **a lot of recent immigration:**
 - out of 24 families, 9 families who arrived less than 5 years ago
 - 16 for less than 15 years
 - 5 French native (this year none)
- **very varied situations with regard to:**
 - reasons for immigration: (political refugees or come for political reasons: 3; come to study: 3; for economic reasons: 10)
 - the educational and professional level of parents (8 families whose parents have completed higher education or a bachelor's degree; 2 parents have never attended school)
- **very diverse origins:**
 - 11 Countries or DOM: Libya (2), Morocco (1), Former Yugoslavia (2 Kosovo Roma + 1 mixed couple), Mayotte (7), Cambodia (1 mixed couple), Ivory Coast (1), Yemen (1), Pakistan (1), Algeria (1), Madagascar (1), France (5 + 2 mixed couples)
 - Few of them intend to leave again.
- **very diverse languages:** there are 10 for the class (and there are often more than 2 languages within families)
 - french (only French): 5
 - Arabic (different dialects): 5
 - African languages: Shimaoré: 4; kibushi: 3; Malagasy: 1, Dioula: 1
 - European languages: Romani: 2; Croatian: 1; English: 2
 - Asian languages: Cambodian: 1; Urdu: 1