



TRANSITION OF CHILDREN TO THE FIRST DAY CARE – HOW DOES MIGRATION BACKGROUND INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S SETTLING PROCESS?

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Abstract:

This study investigates how children with and without migration background are settled in day care centers. The design of a gentle transition period from the family to the day care center together with parents and children is one of the indispensable quality criteria of early childhood education. The steadily increasing migration to Germany and thus also the number of families with migration background lead to the fact that more and more migrant children are settled in German day care centers. To examine how the migration background influences children's settling process, I conduct interviews with head teachers of German day care centers. The results show that the head teachers are confronted with a variety of challenges by children with a migration background, which no longer represent an exception, but rather characterize everyday life. Successful settling requires good teamwork: internally with colleagues and externally with parents. In addition, there should always be a friendly and constructive level of communication that allows feedback, criticism and feelings. Decisive criteria for how a settling will go are the character of the child and the willingness of the parents to let go and cooperate. This applies regardless of whether it is a family with or without a migration background. The article provides several practical recommendations for successfully managing the transition process.

Keywords: settling process in day care, children with migration background, settling of migrant children, early childhood education, transition process to day care

1. Introduction

In this study, I examine the settling process of children with and without a migration background in day care centers. The design of a gentle transition period from the family to the first day care center together with parents and children is one of the indispensable

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quality criteria of early education. A professional settling in a day care center makes it easier for children to get used to the new situation (Dalli, 2007).

The current study examines the settling process in Germany, which has been shaped by various migration movements over the last years and is now largely considered an "immigration country". In Germany, there are currently different models of settling. Dreyer (2017) finds that two of the settling models have become the most widespread nationwide - the Berlin and Munich Settling Models. The most widely used concept is the Berlin Settling Model (Dreyer, 2015), which is based on attachment theory (Hédervári-Heller & Maywald, 2009). The second model is the Munich Settling Model (Skalska, 2015a), which is based on the results of transition research (Dreyer, 2017).

The steadily increasing migration to Germany and thus also the number of families with a migration background mean that more and more migrant children are being admitted to German day care centers. This makes it all the more important for educators and teachers as well as parents to be sensitized to the issue. The fundamental basis for a successful transition to the first day care are the two aforementioned settling models as well as the competencies of the educators and teachers with regard to children with a migration background.

In order to investigate the settling process and the impact of children's migration background on it, I conduct an interview study with head teachers in Germany. To get as diverse answers as possible I contacted head teachers from various day care centers, which differed both by day care provider, size and by experience.

The results show that for a successful settling process, all those involved must work well together. This applies to both the educators and the parents. Very important here is skillful communication, which should always be friendly and constructive, allowing room for feedback, criticism and feelings without being hurtful. This creates a sense of well-being for all involved. The children also sense this and feel comfortable and at home in the day care center, which is ultimately the goal of the settling process.

The main challenges in an adjustment are the character and individuality of the child, the parents' willingness to let go and participate, and communication with the parents.

When children with a migration background settle at the day care center, hardly any differences are noticeable compared to children without a migration background. It is not until kindergarten, when language becomes more important, that children with a migration background need to be accompanied with more facial expressions and gestures, since it is no longer a matter of basic needs, but also of explaining facts and rules. In summary, however, the character of the child and the attitude of the parents are also decisive here as to how the settling process proceeds.

Special features of the work with families and their children with a migration background are sometimes the serious cultural differences and expectations of the parents with a migration background as well as their poor knowledge of German. Otherwise, as with all families, it depends on their attitude and parenting style how successful the settling process is.

This article contributes to prior literature in several ways. First, it provides in-depth insights into the settling process from the perspective of head teachers. Prior literature focuses on the perspective of mothers (Dalli, 2007). Second, it adds to the study of Schaich (2011) by providing additional evidence on how the settling process differs between children with and without migration background. Third, this article provides specific recommendations on how to manage the transition process.

2. Literature review

Relatively few studies exist on the question of how young children experience the process of settling to day care and what consequences the experiences children have in this process of settling have for early childhood developmental and educational processes (Ahnert & Lamb, 2003). However, there is consensus on the assumption that the transition between the care of the child in the context of the family to the regular care in the day care center represents a process of transformation and change, which puts considerable stress on both the child and his or her educators and, in this sense, has a crisis-like character (Dalli, 2007, Datler et al., 2010).

Laewen (1989) shows that children who were professionally settled and were accompanied by a parent without attempted separation during the first three days were four times less likely to become ill during the first six months than children who had already experienced separation during the first three days (Dreyer, 2013). In addition, unsettled children are significantly less able to take advantage of the new opportunities in their day care center and show more pronounced anxious behavior (Laewen et al., 2006). The unsettled children show a lower level of development and more frequent irritations in their attachment relationships. This was particularly evident in the under-two-year-olds (Laewen et al., 2006). This study thus substantiates the assumption that the design of the transition situation into a day care center has a considerable influence on children's favorable and unfavorable developments during the first six months of their day care center attendance. A mediation of the controversial positions regarding early day care thus gains a realistic perspective (Laewen, 1989). Based on these findings, INFANS developed a settling model for child-appropriate and age-appropriate entry of children into day care (Braukhane & Knobloch, 2011).

Datler et al. (2012) investigate 104 settling processes in different day care centers in the so-called Vienna Day care Study. The aim of the study is to record the child's experience during the settling period. It investigates which factors have an impact on the settling process and how the children can influence it (Datler et al., 2012). This study examines young children's initial response to entering day care and their behavior change during their first months in care. One hundred four infants (10-33 months) in Viennese day care centers participated in the study. One-hour video observations were conducted at three time points during the first four months and coded into a total of 36 five-minute observation segments. Two weeks after entering care, infants' affect and interaction levels were low. Overall, changes in all areas of observed behavior were lower than expected.

There is considerable individual variation in changes over time, most of which is unrelated to child characteristics. The study documents significant relationships between children's positive affect, their dynamic interactions, and their exploratory and investigative interest (Datler et al., 2012).

The Vienna Day Care Center Study showed that the quality of the day care center, but also the temperament of the children and mothers, the child's attachment behavior, and the behavior of the educators determine how well and quickly the settling process succeeds. A key finding is that the children themselves make a major contribution to successful settling. It is found that the more the children express their feelings, the easier it is for them. In most cases, the children are only comforted when they cry. The children, on the other hand, who do not show their feelings outwardly, receive little to no comfort and suffer "silently" to themselves. They exhibit internal withdrawal behavior, which was evident by their wandering aimlessly and staring into space. This is often followed by aggressive behavior. For this reason, it is precisely these children who require special attention during the settling period, so that their behavior is not misinterpreted as "*well settled*" (Dreyer, 2013).

The Berlin study by Laewin (1989) and the Viennese study on day care centers by Datler et al. (2012) examine the settling process and which factors influence the children and the success of the settling process, but without addressing the issue of the children's origin and multilingualism. However, this is very important due to the ever-growing proportion of children with a migration background in Germany.

Schaich (2011) is the only study that examines both topics, settling and migration, at the same time. The paper conducts both a longitudinal study and a case study on this topic. It highlights a challenge of the educators for a successful settling (Schaich, 2011). The study accompanies and analyzes eight settling processes in two day care centers with regard to the institutional design of the transition and its effects on a positive development and education of children of different origins as well as different genders (Schaich, 2011). Using the example of the settling story of a two-year-old girl with an immigrant background, the author shows that the transition from family to day care is a complex and painful challenge for very young children and infants. A high degree of empathy is demanded from parents and educators, but this empathy proves to be extremely prone to disruption. It becomes clear that the more or less successful empathic accompaniment of the child is linked to the actualization of stressful, unresolved separation experiences of the parents and the accompanying defense processes. This dynamic may gain importance in the context of migration, among others, as migration evokes experiences of separation and loss. It is also shown that a lack of self-reflection and a lack of confrontation with stressful feelings on the part of the educators complicates the triangulation between child, parents and educators that is necessary for coping with separation (Schaich, 2012).

The present study makes an important contribution to the studies mentioned above. In-depth interviews focus on the perspective of head teachers. I also examine the

influence of different settling models and elaborate important strategies for a successful settling.

3. Research design

In the study, I interview head teachers of day care centers. 9 of the 16 head teachers contacted agreed to participate in the study. I made sure that the participants come from day care centers with private, municipal, church and other providers. All interviewees work in Munich/Germany. Based on the theoretical findings, I developed an interview guide, which I pre-tested on a personally known head teacher. Based on the feedback and experiences from this pre-test, I finalized the interview guide. Despite the use of this guide, the semi-structured interviews leave room for unstructured content, the interviewees' thematic preferences, and follow-up questions that arose during the interviews.

It was a great challenge to gain access to the head teachers of day care centers. To establish initial contact, I use existing networks. In later stages, I used a "*snowball system*" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in which I asked interviewees for referrals for participants. I contacted participants by phone or email.

During the interviews, I established a relationship with the interviewees by introducing my research areas and ensuring confidentiality (by means of a written consent form). I then asked interviewees for their consent to tape-record the interviews, which they all accept. To motivate interviewees to respond openly and honestly, I emphasized - consistent with the consent form - that they will be given the opportunity, if they wish, to review the final transcript of their personal interview for accuracy and to make any changes to the transcripts that are deemed necessary. However, none of the interview participants took advantage of this opportunity.

After the personal introduction, I asked an introductory question to assure the interviewees that I am interested in learning about their world from their point of view in order to elicit the relevant background information of the settling process. I asked open-ended questions about the interviewees' personal opinions and experiences. The interviews were terminated after saturation, i.e., when no new insights were gained (Yin, 2015).

I transcribed all interviews and analyzed them afterwards. In doing so, I elicited important constructs and analyzed the answers of the individual interviewees with respect to these constructs. In the following, I provide the main findings of the interviews in different areas.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Application of the settling models

The provider or the head teacher of a day care center is free to decide which settling model is anchored in the concept of a day care center. Dreyer (2017) notes that in

Germany, the Berlin and Munich Settling Models have become the most widespread. The results from the interviews support this finding. The interviews also provide information on why they selected the Munich Model, the Berlin Model, or a mixed form or a variation of the models, and how the decision-making process (if any) proceeded.

Three out of nine interviewed head teachers use the Berlin Settling Model. Two of them have adopted the model from their predecessors and continued it:

R1: "the [Berlin Model] was already embedded in the pedagogical concept."

R4: "the day care center has been in existence for 12 years now ... and because the Berlin Model has simply proven itself to be very good for the day care children at our day care center. It's also my personal opinion that the Berlin Model ... is the better option for such young children."

While most of the interviewees simply continued to use the Berlin Model, the third interviewee, who also uses it and assumed her head teacher position only a few months ago, had an informed decision:

R2: "At the request of the colleagues, the Berlin Model. So, we have two colleagues who have dealt intensively with the Munich and Berlin Model and in the end, it was a team decision."

A variation of the Berlin Settling Model is used by two out of nine of the head teachers interviewed:

R3: "Yes, based on the Berlin Model. ... from the very beginning, when I started here, of course I also developed it, yes. I really picked it. I said, please, colleagues, adopt this. It's good, it's gentle for the children. ...we should always respond to the children individually, that is important. Yes, of course we say: the parents should be present for three days and then see whether a separation can take place or not. Some need a little longer. Sometimes it is only really feasible on the seventh day. There are illnesses, there is a change in staff, and so on and so forth."

R5: "It is essentially based on the Berlin Model. There was good experience there and that coincided with what [they wanted to achieve]. ...a lot of effort has been made to make the children feel comfortable ... [when the] children come from home into an unfamiliar environment. ... for all the parents [the model is] a security, [something] that has been proven and parents love that."

It is interesting to note that two of the interviewees decided to use both settling models at the same time in their day care centers. A decision whether to use the Berlin

Model, the Munich Model or even a mixture or variation of them depends on the individual needs of the child and his or her family:

R6: "since the opening of the day care center, we have been working ...according to these two models. Of course, there are years where these two models are adapted to the child or to the family. [Since]...both models are not basically for the children to put on, you have to be very individualized in your approach."

R7: "[We] use ... both settling models depending on the child, depending on the needs, what the child needs, what previous experiences they have. [We] actually adapt the settling to each child and see which model fits better or sometimes just still mixed, depending on how the children need it."

Two other respondents run municipal day care centers that are trying out and applying the Munich Settling Model for the first time. While the older municipal day care centers still have the application of the Munich Model firmly anchored in the framework concept, the newly opened municipal day care centers are free to choose a settling concept. Despite the freedom of choice, however, most head teachers of new municipal day care centers in Munich opt for the Munich Settling Model. This decision is made out of conviction:

R8: "The Munich Model. ... we got the specification on the one hand from the city of Munich - from our sponsor, that we should settle in this way through our framework concept. But we are still very satisfied with the model. We also have to say that it is very well received by the children and also by the parents."

R9: "My predecessor also used this and basically all the employees just go along with it. ... that's the reference to the Munich Model and that was introduced at the time at the municipal day care centers, or yes [it was] worked with. And that's how it came about that this then simply continues to be used."

4.2 Challenges of the settling process

Niesel & Griebel (2013) define the process of settling as a transitional situation, which is referred to in the literature as a transition. For the infants, settling is usually the first transition they have to cope with and therefore they need a lot of attention and care. It happens that the settling does not succeed. One reason given by the interviewees for this rare case is that the child is overwhelmed:

R2: "In fact, we have already had the case that the child could not get involved with the group at all, was very overwhelmed with the other children in a group and with the whole group dynamic. [Which is why] the settling process was broken off. This was a day care child between one and a half and two years old."

R4: "Big hurdles can be when you can't get the child to calm down."

Other challenges are also presented by the age and behavior of the child to be settled, so that not every settling can be carried out strictly according to certain guidelines, but must be adapted to the individual case:

R6: "[Other challenges are] ... the different individuality ... and the different prior experiences of the children."

R7: "The challenges are simply that every child has different needs and you simply have to make sure that you give every child the opportunity to settle in well. Some need longer, some just need a few days, some need mom or dad to be there longer and be in the group. [You have to] find a way for each child to settle in well."

The needs of the other children in the group must also be taken into account in the settling process:

R2: "What I always find difficult about settling is the rest of the group. So not only the new children, but also the children who have been there for a while, not to lose sight of them and to catch their needs."

R4: "Hurdles can also be when [in very early] settling, the [children from the group] are very jealous of other children, that they ... do not accept that there is now a new child, which gets the attention of the educator. ...it can also be that the child does not accept the educator."

The framework conditions of a good settling model include, among other things, the early selection of a specialist who becomes the reference specialist for the respective child, accompanies the settling process, and pays full attention to the child being settled in for the duration of the settling period (Dreyer, 2015). Hédervári-Heller & Maywald (2009) add that this is necessary to establish a new sustainable relationship. In practice, this sometimes poses another challenge, as one of the interviewees notes:

R8: "[Another challenge is the] staff, that a staff member is then really also consistently there and can take care of the child and the parents. Because the staff next to that has gotten sick or just changed."

An important finding of the interviews is that regardless of which settling model is used, it is not the child per se, but rather the partnership with the parents that is of decisive importance for the success of the settling process. Thus, the interviewees state that it is usually not the children but the parents who pose the real challenge:

R2: *"The parents are always a challenge, of course ... on the one hand, to finish the settling relatively quickly ... so that they can go back to work and with the good feeling of being able to hand over the child and on the other hand, just make the parents aware, you can't just hand over such a small child for six to eight hours overnight and everything is great and you don't have to worry about it."*

R3: *"Is always the challenge to respond to the children and also the families. ... some need a little more attention and conversation. Of course, it depends on the level of education of the parents, it depends on previous experience, it also depends on whether there are already siblings. If you don't give the parents the best possible support, it doesn't matter what age [the child is], you've lost. ... you really have to encourage them [the parents]. That means a lot of work with the parents, sometimes more than with the children. That's why the initial interview is so important, to go into the rules and points before settling in."*

R4: *"The challenge is often the parents. Because for the parents ... it is often difficult with the first child, if you have perhaps never given it up before, to then consciously separate ...and also to leave when the child cries. ...that's already the case that the well-being and also the behavior of the parents can explicitly influence the settling - in a good direction and also in a bad direction."*

R5: *"The settling itself takes place very differently. First and foremost, a family is settled and then the child. There are parents who bring the whole family with them because they live in families in larger groups. Yes, you don't just settle mother or father, ...[but] sometimes grandparents as well."*

It is very important that parents, and especially mothers, are ready for the child to be taken care of by others. Although nowadays day care at a very early age (often from six to seven months) is quite common and mothers quickly go back to work (usually after one to one and a half years), it does not mean that the separation from the child in practice is as easy and painless as one would wish or imagine. This weaning is associated with a lot of uncertainty and separation pain on the part of the mother or father. Respondents describe several cases where the settling process had to be paused or even aborted because the parents were not yet ready to relinquish the child. Fear, insecurity, a feeling of guilt or even dissatisfaction come up in the parents, which have an effect on the child and the entire settling process:

R1: *"That was ... a boy, that was actually an even younger child... almost a year old and it took longer to settle in. The child was sick on and off and the parents couldn't really let go. The father was on paternity leave. ... he also obviously had such guilt, ... [since] he knew he could stay home longer with the little one, and [the paternity leave] he had eventually extended. [The parents] thanked him very much, ... they were actually very satisfied with the pedagogical work. It was also difficult for the child to let go, because it was also*

noticeable to the dad, who did the settling, that it was very difficult for him, which the mother also said. She had worked full time and also suspected that it would be difficult and so it was. This was a German family."

R2: "Once there was the case because the mom just said: she is not ready. So she just realizes she's not ready to let go of her child. But the child was also still relatively small - that was seven months old. [The mother] had somehow imagined it would be easier in theory and now realizes in practice that she can't let go of her child and would rather take another year of parental leave."

R3: "In the eleven years [of my previous work as head teacher], I had two [cases].... with one of them it was the parents - they weren't ready yet. They said: I can't do it and I'd rather stay at home a bit longer. And the other [time], the mother simply wasn't ready for it. ... she always blamed the staff, it [was] just not possible to find a level of communication."

R9: "I can remember one family ... There it was because, for one thing, the mother could not detach herself from the child and had transferred that to the child and that, the child could not understand a word of German."

The parent's style also plays a role in the settling process, especially if the parents come from a different country and have little interaction with other families:

R1: "It was about a boy between one and a half and two years old. The family was from abroad, both parents were English speaking and working full time. At home, only English was spoken. ... The settling took a very long time, and we had many discussions with the family, tried to come to a common denominator. Unfortunately, it did not work out. The mother was very, very careful with her child, could hardly set limits, did not want to overtax her child or force anything on her child, which often led to a role reversal, where you did not know who is the adult in the relationship and who is the child. This made it very difficult for the child to settle, and we often discussed this in the team, and we noticed that the child feels much more comfortable in a smaller group, preferably only with the educators or with one to two other children, so we wanted to recommend another form of care to the family. Surprisingly, suddenly the whole thing turned around, as if the child felt it and then everything went again. ... the settling was about to break off, but it still didn't come to that. ...I have to say, the family also had hardly any contact with other families or children, as I said, they came from abroad and worked full time, which is why they didn't have so much time to make new contacts and they didn't have any family here in Germany either."

Settling is particularly difficult when the parents do not speak German. Often there are parents who know very little German or even no English and thus have a

communication problem. Many questions and feelings remain suppressed and one quickly tends to feel not understood. The insufficient communication can lead to a lack of trust on the part of the parents. One of the interviewed head teachers has found a very loving way to overcome this problem, to get closer to the families and to gain their trust:

R5: "But the difficulty is also that the mother and father do not always speak the national language. The language of the heart is the mother tongue they bring with them, but they have the German language as the language they have to acquire here in order to communicate in a German institution. We are bilingual, but not every mother and father has English or German as their mother tongue, but they have their language that they bring from their nation. We helped ourselves by ... buying such a small booklet [that] defined the most important statements in each national language, which you can read there in spoken language. [I want to be able to give parents] the feeling that they are dealing with someone who respects them in their mother tongue. ... since my children live abroad, I know how important that is and how nice that is when you have that feeling at the beginning. Then you open up more easily and also give people that confidence to take care of your child."

4.3 Settling of children with a migration background

In this section, I examine the special features that arise in the settling process of children with a migration background in comparison to German children. In the interviews, I ask about corresponding differences. Overall, however, it turns out that there are hardly any differences between German children and children with a migration background when it comes to the settling:

R1: "I can't really see a difference among the children."

R7: "What I've noticed now [is] that it happens equally quickly with most [children]. ... you have to handle it a little differently with each one, of course, but how quickly they settle always depends on the child. It can also be that with German children it takes longer than with children with a migration background, but it can also be the other way around. It always depends entirely."

R6: "No differences. ... build a good bond, I can even if we don't speak the same language."

The responses clearly show that the differences between children with and without a migration background are hardly noticeable at day care age. At the age of up to two and a half to three years, the settling process is primarily about addressing the child's individual needs, regardless of whether the child has a migration background or not. The respondents point out that later in kindergarten, language plays a role and it mainly leads to differences or special features in the settling process of children with a migration background:

R2: *"I have to say that with the children you don't notice the differences so much, because the crèche children are all relatively small when they come to us anyway and don't yet face such a hurdle in terms of language comprehension as perhaps the kindergarten children do."*

R3: *"There are hardly any differences in the nursery. ... if, of course, they [first settle] later in kindergarten, then it really depends on the German skills ..."*

R1: *The age group can also play a role in this, [to be able to determine the differences]. It's mainly language, of course. It depends on whether we're talking about kindergarten or day care."*

Since respondents believe there are few noticeable differences in early age, some of them also advise early settling and share their experiences:

R1: *"The very young children more often settle in more quickly than those who can already see a little more of their environment."*

R2: *"With children who can't speak yet, is not that difficult. ... And basically, younger children are easier to settle in."*

R3: *"So I prefer the day care kids in the settling process so even under a year."*

R8: *"[Settling] is always very individual. You have to observe the child innately, of course, but basically you can say that a year like this is actually the best age for settling."*

Most important for the course of the settling process remains the character of the child. The individual character traits, preferences and feelings of the child are independent of his or her origin. Thus, there are both German and migrant children who are outgoing, fearful, curious or shy. The culture in the family may have an influence on his behavior, but does not change the child's individuality:

R3: *"I wouldn't generalize that at all. Yes, there are other factors that play into it: the insecurity of the parents, the previous experience of the children, the age of the children, the character of the children. I think that's more relevant than migration or non-migration background."*

R4: *"I think the differences really lie in whether the child has already been handed over.... and that is simply decisive in terms of character, how the child is now. ... if it's an open-minded child, then it works out better than if it's a shy child. But so that one distinguishes now from child to child [according to origin], there are no differences that I know now."*

Some of the respondents have observed that children from rural regions in Germany, similar to children with a migration background from more southern countries, live in extended families and have a lot of contact with relatives and neighbors. As a result, these children are more easily detached from their parents and thus have a more relaxed settling period. It can be seen that it is not so much the culture that plays a decisive role, but the image of the child and its place in family life:

R1: "[Settling] always goes very differently - both with German-speaking families and with families with a migration background. It really depends on what kind of image of a child the parents have, what kind of educational goal they have. ... I have experienced settlings that go really smoothly, very quickly, both with German-speaking children and with children with a migration background, and vice versa. ... as I said, a lot of work with parents is important."

R4: "[The families] of the migrant children, who are more from the southern direction [come], they give the [child] sometimes rather ... and there [the child] also already participates, because it is used that it is sometimes also cared for by grandma and grandpa. It's more used to mom doing something [else] and I also have the feeling that they can separate more easily. ... there were often siblings, so the [families] already had a larger child, which we very rarely had with non-migrant children. That's usually the first child, and the mothers cling to it somehow, and maybe grandma and grandpa aren't around, dad worked a lot, mom was at home the whole year - there are more feelings of guilt. So my experience is that the children with a migration background were more relaxed before."

R4: "The background [then] doesn't so much influence the child in terms of how they cope with settling per se, but how the parents and the whole family look, and the child is sort of very much influenced by that."

As mentioned above, mastery of the German language plays an increasingly important role only from the age of about two and a half to three years. For this reason, educators can only differentiate the linguistic differences in the settling of children with a migration background in day care centers and address them separately. If the child hardly speaks German, then it is advisable to include special elements in the settling process. Familiar phrases, songs or books in the language of the country make the children feel more comfortable in the new environment:

R4: "The child did not speak German, it was already over two years old - so relatively large for a settling in the day care center ... She did not understand us and simply many things. We then worked with Google Translator. So, we had it translated, ... asked the mom what certain words might mean, so that we also simply get reference to the child. So, we were able to explain: mommy is coming again, we are eating now, mommy is coming after we sleep. And that worked out quite well. This familiarity is important. We have parents with

a migration background bring us music in their language so that the children have something they know and that we can show the other children. So, I think the [other children] don't perceive it as foreign, but simply quite normal. They sometimes look really funny or say, 'Wow, that's funny.'"

R7: "It's much more about gestures and facial expressions with the children who don't yet know German or also work a lot with pictures. You have to repeat some things more often than with German children, for example ... [so that they] learn the German language. But as far as now otherwise the settling is concerned, there is not a big difference. More in terms of language."

R2: "Yes, if the child has not yet mastered the language, it is always difficult, because then of course you have to look at how you can interpret the non-verbal signals or how the child finds its way in everyday life. [If you] don't yet know the characteristics [of the children] and you don't yet know what they like, how do I best respond to their needs, you then have to ... read a bit between the lines ... with the children and see how they try to express themselves, what they like and what they don't like."

One of the respondents gives a very clear example of exemplary parental work and a very creative and empathetic intervention with a four-year-old girl who did not know German when she first came to the day care center, but spoke it fluently after a year:

R3: "I had a child - he was five years old and only spoke Russian. It was more difficult for her to settle, because of course in day care the language is the gateway to the world. And if she [the girl] doesn't understand anything, it's a bit more difficult to get her settled. I got her to occupy herself with pictures and handicrafts, but that was a bit more difficult. After a week and a half, I thought, [she] is of Russian descent, I'll try "Masha and the Bear" - she'll definitely know that. Then I brought coloring pictures down [to the group] and then I had her. You really have to find a "door opener" for the children: what are their interests? Where do they feel comfortable? And it's best to discuss this with the parents to see what can be done. So, when I had them, it was a load off my mind - it was really great. It took half a year until she dared to say something [in German], but after a year she really spoke German very well. She also went to the preliminary German course and she was so ambitious and wanted to learn the language and after a year she could really speak German very, very well. [That was exactly] after she left us, because then she went to school. And the parents didn't speak German, but really only Russian at home. They also asked: Should we speak German with her at home? Then I said: No, please stick to Russian. She hears it here in day care, she hears it at the day care center, in the German pre-course. Yes, and the teacher [from the German pre-course] was also super enthusiastic about her."

Some of the respondents express the opinion that an early settling is more relaxed, since the children do not yet know so much of their environment, such as their mother tongue, among other things. The question arises, when it comes to a child with a migration background whose parents have no professional compulsion to settle the child early to the nursery, what is the optimal age for the settling of children with a migration background in a German institution in terms of optimal preparation for school. The interviewed head teachers answered this question differently:

R6: "[Settling] would be sufficient for me between the third and fourth year. Even for children with a migration background, the time would then be sufficient for a child to come to the day care center at four, four and a half, even if he or she [is] not proficient in German. It's still enough time to be ready for school, because children learn so much so fast at that age. A child with a migrant background, which is under three or three years old when they settle in, has a very glaring double burden or triple burden. It does not know the language, then it must separate practically from its parents and thereby also into a new group purely. Settling for a migrant child would be perfectly sufficient if [the child] enters day care at age of four, because he or she will be more mature. I believe that it will still get quite a good linguistic basis by the time it starts school. Even two years would be enough for that. Especially since we have already had children who have learned the German language even without a German course - only with the help of the family."

R7: "If you only look at the emotional aspects, i.e. the separation from the parents, I will definitely stick to the four-year mark. When it comes to language, I have to say that I think the earlier the better. It doesn't necessarily have to be a crèche or kindergarten, it would also be sufficient, for example, to simply have childcare, a childminder, or a playgroup ... once or twice a week, so that the children have contact with German children. This would make it easier for the child to go to kindergarten later on, because they could already immerse themselves a bit [in the German language]. ... [for children] who are three years old and [then also] still with a migration background, day care is almost a bit difficult at that age. I would rather recommend a playgroup, maybe a childminder, and a first settling only at the age of four."

R8: "In my opinion, it would definitely be advisable to start at day care and not just at kindergarten age, as is the case in some cultures. That way, the child has enough time to learn the German language. This does not have to happen at the age of one year. If it is only about learning German, the child can first learn his native language at home, and it is also enough to come to the day care at the age of three and learn German. A child needs about two years to be ready for school, even if you didn't speak German before."

One of the respondents talks about her experience in a day care center, in which ten children had to settle in at the same time. Through appropriate language support, she and her team succeeded in ensuring that the children were able to communicate with

each other and with the educators in German after only four months. This example shows that targeted language support for children with a migration background can lead to the desired results relatively quickly.

The ten children in the last example and the four-year-old girl from Russia in the previous example show that children can learn German very quickly (within a few months to a year) and thus reach school readiness. This makes it possible to successfully settle children with a migration background in an age range of one to four years.

4.4. Working with families and their children with a migration background

In the last section I discussed the specifics of settling for children with migration with a focus on the children. In this section I focus on the parents. The respondents report interesting experiences they have had working with families with a migration background:

R1: "They come from a wide variety of cultures, and even if you don't want to think in pigeonholes, then you do always notice certain parenting models that are perhaps more prevalent in a certain culture, and that could also help you to adjust a little better to working with the parents, and just to know where to start so that the settling process works best, for the child and for the parents, of course."

R4: "Indian cultures or Arab cultures are sometimes quite different - for example, they eat with their hands. Then we let the child do that at the beginning, because we know that it is his culture, it is his familiar environment, he is offered cutlery, but he doesn't have to eat with cutlery. There are also parents from the Asian region who demand that their children not be allowed outside in the summer because they can get a tan there. And they [the Asian children] are not supposed to do that. And then we often say, well, but we won't deny the child to go outside if he wants to."

R2: "The difficulty is also the parents, because there is a different cultural understanding of childcare, a different understanding of early childhood education and different expectations. ... on the other hand, of course, communication with the parents is not always easy. ... Some can still speak German, with English you usually get further, but I notice that I sometimes reach my limits when it comes to subject-specific things that can't be conveyed quite so well in English. But I think it's more cultural, because there are other expectations behind it."

If the family hardly speaks German, then it is advisable to cater specifically to their needs:

R8: "What is ... important is to always talk a lot with the children as well as with the parents, but that is a basic requirement that ... we presuppose here, that a lot works through communication. Especially for migrants, it is also important to visualize a lot, to give

notes, that you ... write down in detail how it works, that there is a plan that you can orientate yourself by. ... Also, of course, that you ask [the parents]: ... What does it look like at home? How do you handle it?"

R5: "The parenting is different, the timeline [between parent meetings] is shorter. [Everything is] more time intensive, you have to get these people settled, this family. It's not just about language. It has to do with the fact that these people are in a new environment, in a new home. Their sense of home is passed on to them through us, and they need that right from the start. [But also] talking about misunderstandings, if I don't understand something, I have to clarify that. Parents who come from other countries are still uncertain themselves. ... I have to strengthen the team incredibly, not to limit the contact care only to a processing of any questions that are in the settling booklets, but I want them [the educators] to formulate small steps to reach the parents and to support them."

R7: "Also in the mother tongue of the parents, if you have the possibility to do that, so that it is easier for the parents [with migration background] and they also come to the day care center with a good feeling. ... [so that] they know that attention is being paid to the fact that they don't know German and that attempts are being made to help them in some way. ... that one asks more often, makes more written information, visualizes conversations and then gives the notes to the parents. Then someone else can translate for them [the parents] what you have communicated and explained. ... you have to ... work even more and even closer with the parents, talk and explain even more."

For this reason, the interviewed head teachers recommend that parents with an immigrant background be asked about their wishes, views and ideas in an initial interview before they settle in, and that explicit reference be made to the German education system and the daily routine in the day care center:

R4: "So for the colleagues: to be open, open to the culture and the parents. Maybe talk to the parents in advance to see: How do they feel about settling or handing over the child to the day care center? Do they know about it? Have they ever had to deal with something like this? Which country do they come from? Does that exist there, too, or doesn't it?"

R4: "Many cultures don't do that and then they come to Germany, so to speak, and then they say: The children go to the day care center here and they have to work and the child has to be handed over. So that you're not faced with a fait accompli, but are really at peace with yourself as parents with this decision."

R1: "Because there are often communication problems with families with a migration background, more often because of the language. So, it's all the more important that you really take the time, that you also discuss in the team when I can have a conversation, so

that I can do it undisturbed, even if it takes a little longer, maybe intermediate conversations come up again and again."

One of the interviewed head teachers, who takes care of a large number of migrant families in her institution, proudly reports on her sense of achievement and emphasizes that this is only possible through well-organized and controlled teamwork:

R5: "I have been told by many parents that you feel at home here with your family, that you can talk openly and honestly, that you are also allowed to criticize, but that you always talk to each other at eye level. ... I think that's really good. But I have to say that all of this is thanks to the teamwork in the house."

In the case of paused or aborted settling, it is almost always the parents and not the children who are the cause. In this context, the interviewees recommend more understanding for the feelings and expectations of the parents. This may be due to cultural reasons. The educators should gain the trust of the parents and this happens through interest, through conversations, through being accommodating. A very important competence of the educators in the day care centers is the so-called diversity competence, which is very important especially when working with children and families with a migration background:

R1: "What I would say is that as an educator you should first be aware that there are different cultures and that the way you grew up or what you got to know may be completely different for others. To be aware of the fact that the parents are and remain the most important reference persons for the child and to value their culture is especially important. In order to get off to a good start in this educator-parent relationship, communication with the parents plays an incredibly important role, both for children without a migration background and for children with a migration background. With these [parents] with a migration background, I find a more intensive parent partnership all the more important because the parents themselves have probably not yet settled in, let's say in the new country. And for every mother, every father, the child is the greatest happiness in the world and if the parents already feel insecure, then they also really want the best for their child and they can feel insecure in different ways because they are in a new country, because they are getting to know a new culture here, a new language perhaps not yet known to them and there the, let's say, fear of loss in the parents, this letting go is also perhaps much stronger than in families who have grown up here."

R2: "Yes, it depends a bit on where the children come from, what culture the family brings with them. Is it very similar to our culture or is it really something completely different? In any case, it's helpful to get to know the culture of the family a little bit, just to know: Why are the parents maybe behaving the way they are right now? Why do they have this expectation of us? What is actually behind it? Just to look behind the scenes a little bit in

any case. Now it's also the case that the teams are also quite multiculturally mixed. Sometimes you're lucky enough to have someone in the team who perhaps comes from the same culture or has already gained experience in it and can take over the settling. ... I personally think that preliminary talks are always very important, where you simply give the parents the opportunity in advance to build up trust, to get to know each other, to let a certain relationship develop right from the start. It's not just about the children, but about the whole family behind it."

R4: "So for the colleagues: to be open, open to the culture and the parents. Maybe talk to the parents in advance to see what their attitude is to the settling process or to the transfer to the day care center. Ask them if they are familiar with this, if they have ever dealt with something like this, which country do they come from, does this also exist there or not?"

A cooperative educator-parent relationship is the basis for successful settling and good cooperation. This not only depends on the professional actions and knowledge of the educators, but also on the equally important commitment of the parents. It often happens that parents are uncertain and do not dare to ask questions. Lack of knowledge or misunderstandings can lead to discomfort, anger or even rage. This has a counterproductive effect on cooperation and on the settling process. Therefore, educators should encourage parents to open up, ask questions, and get to know the day care center and other parents. The interviewees have the following tips for parents:

R1: "A tip for parents ... who are new, no matter what country [they are in], is simply to make contacts, make friends, don't isolate yourself or only socialize with people who come from the same country or from a similar culture. In order for the child to be open and gain these experiences, the family should first open up. The ... day care center could also create a space for establishing contacts, building a network. The parents' council could become active and get the families to meet privately, perhaps organize a parents' café in the day care center or a book reading of a favorite book that has already been translated into different languages and is known to the children. Parents could be invited to the day care center and each could read something to the children in their own language, which would also provide time and space for socializing - among the parents and among the children. Language means culture, so I also advise every family to open this door for their child and look for opportunities for their child to come into contact with the new local language."

R4: "And with regard to the parents, that they are open to us, that they give us a chance and that they also talk to us, that is, they also communicate wishes and statements. For example: I don't know now whether an Islamic child is allowed to eat pork or not, if I'm not told in advance."

5. Recommendations

The results of the interviews show how important a cooperative educator-parent relationship is as a basis for successful settling and good cooperation between parents and educators. This benefits not only from the professional actions and technical knowledge of the educators, but also from the equally important commitment of the parents. It often happens that parents with a migration background are unsure and do not dare to ask questions. Lack of knowledge or misunderstandings can lead to discomfort, anger or even rage. This has a counterproductive effect on cooperation and on the settling process. Therefore, the educators should encourage the parents to open up, to ask questions, to get to know the day care center and the other parents.

The settling of children who come from other cultural contexts and who may have spent their first years of life in another country requires an analysis of the situation and needs by the professional staff in the day care center. This analysis takes place primarily within the framework of the so-called initial interview or admission interview. It is recommended that the child is not present so that the parents can speak freely about all topics. The educators must be informed about the following: the children's living situation, cultural differences in bonding behavior, challenges in learning the German language as well as in getting to know the German culture. Only if the pedagogical work is linked to the life worlds of children with a migration background can these be strengthened. This in turn can lay the foundation for equal participation in the German education system.

Transition management for families with a migration background is more complex, as they have to master the cultural and linguistic challenges in addition to the transition to day care. Often the family has also just moved, a new apartment, the parents or at least the father a new job, the siblings a new school. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the settling to the day care center individually to the target group, taking into account the life situation, the mental stress as well as the manifold demands that are placed on these children and thus also on the entire family in the context of acculturation.

When analyzing the situation, the framework conditions of the day care center must also be examined and, if necessary, improved or adapted. For the admission of children with a migration background, the necessary resources in terms of time, personnel and space are required, which are explicitly addressed in the preparation of the settling. The individual situation and the needs of the child and the family are considered and analyzed in order to be able to draw appropriate conclusions for the settling. In doing so, it must also be examined which risk and protective factors of the family and the environment can influence the settling. The information gained in the situation analysis serves as a starting point for designing the settling process. For the practice in day care centers, a dialogical understanding of the situation and needs analysis can be helpful, which can be carried out in exchange with the family and educators and adapted in the process.

To facilitate communication with parents with a migration background and as a sign of welcome, day care centers can also prepare a flyer on settling, which is translated into the languages of the respective parents. In addition, day care centers can also set up a parent café where parents are in the day care center at childcare time and a well-known fairy tale is read aloud and visualized in different languages, or where parents bring native food from their countries of origin. Other possibilities include explaining and celebrating festivals from the respective countries of the migrant families that are not known in Germany. These measures can help the families with a migration background to feel accepted and, in turn, the other parents and children to have a contact with their culture.

6. Conclusion

This study uses interviews to examine the settling process in day care centers for children with and without a migration background. The results show that the educators should develop interest and openness towards other cultures. When dealing with parents, it is important to value their culture and otherness, to ask about their expectations and to take them seriously. It is very helpful for all involved to develop and live a welcoming culture.

Often parents, especially those with a migrant background, have no or the wrong idea of what the educational system in the elementary sector in Germany entails and provides for in the crèche or day care center. An explanation of the concept about the pedagogical work in advance gives the parents the chance to deal with the topic in time and to be able to ask possible questions. Creating an environment of intercultural encounters is a relatively new and modern goal in day care centers, but it is all the more important in the current times. Parents should experience the day care center as a meeting place for exchanging ideas and making contacts.

Every child needs closeness, reliability and security, and these should also be offered to him or her in the day care center. During the settling period, the child's personal characteristics should always be taken into account and the duration and procedure should be adapted accordingly. The time factor should be taken into account in the individual settling process.

During the process of settling, attention to group processes and the avoidance of stressful situations should be ensured for the child. Creating a framework for play, learning and development opportunities is an important prerequisite for the child's everyday life. As a result, the child will more quickly establish a relationship with the educators and also with the children. The choice of special elements in the settling process must always be coordinated with the child's experiences of being raised at home or in his or her cultural environment or original home. Sensitization to culturally determined behavior and attachment patterns plays an important role.

With regard to dealing with children with a migration background, the respondents predominantly cite mastery of the German language as a challenge.

Children who have not yet mastered the German language can be reached a lot through nonverbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions.

With regard to the optimal time for settling, some respondents recommend an early settling already at day care age, but others have also observed very good success in learning German from the fourth year of life with several children with a migration background. Therefore, there is neither an optimal age nor an optimal time for settling. Rather, it is about welcoming the family, getting to know their personal touch, culture, language and expectations, and then responding to the child's individual needs.

The settling process should also not follow schematic guidelines too closely, but should be adapted to the individual case. This ensures that any stressful situations for the child can be avoided. The group dynamic, which can have an influence on the settling process, should not be underestimated. The children in the group should also be cared for very sensitively so that no feelings of jealousy or rejection arise.

Overall, the study shows how important the settling process, and here the interpersonal level, is in gaining the trust of the child and also of the parents. Particularly among families with a migration background, who are in a new country and far from family and friends, the settling process and trust in the educators are given special importance.

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About the Author

Michaela Ernstberger is doing her doctorate at the University of Sofia in the field of preschool education. This article is part of her dissertation on "Settling models and standards for children with a migration background in the German education system with a focus on the state of Bavaria".

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