

# LESLLA Symposium Proceedings



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## LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

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## **PARENTS IN (INTER)ACTION**

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### *1 Introduction*

The difficulty of communication between teachers and non-Dutch speaking parents of children in primary school, and its possible impact on the educational achievement of these children inspired the Centre for Language and Education to develop the project 'Parents in (inter)action'. The aim of this project is to optimise the communication between school and parents and to increase the involvement of the parents in their children's school. The key principles of the project were: Successful communication with immigrant parents is a shared responsibility of both the primary school and the parents, not of the parents alone. Knowledge of the Dutch language should not be a preliminary condition for participation in the school community; however, participation provides the ideal context in which to learn Dutch. One has to stimulate participation in the school community by providing a 'safe environment' where non-Dutch speaking parents can participate (CTO & Steunpunt, 2007; De Niel et al., 2008).

These principles were used to form a project in which Dutch as a second language classes were organised in the child's school. In this article it will be explained how the concept of 'Parents in (inter)action' aims to increase the Dutch language skills of the parents-students, in order to intensify their participation in the school of their children and to find an indirect way to deal with communication problems between parents and school. A very important aspect in this concept is the combination of language lessons, about 80% of the classroom-time, and project-based activities, the remaining 20%. Both seem to be necessary to reach the three goals mentioned. The language classes dealt with the materials that each specific school submitted. The project-based activities consisted of the organisation of an event, such as a concert, breakfast or exhibition, and was organised within the school by the students themselves.

Several centres for adult education and centres for adult basic education brought this concept of the Centre for Language and Education into practice in a number of primary schools. Some parent groups completely consisted of illiterates; other groups consisted of both literates and illiterates. Candidates were screened beforehand. Based on test results, classes were formed. Depending on the number of enrolments, groups of parents with little schooling were organised. Although we aimed at forming groups of illiterates separate from those of literates, in practice, this dichotomy was not tenable, as our main concern was to include as many parents as possible. Therefore, the majority of our groups of students were very diverse in terms of literacy. As a consequence,

teachers had to differentiate their teaching method and exercises as much as possible within a single group.

In this article the experiences of two teachers of the Centre for Adult Basic Education of Antwerp are described. They both dealt with a group of illiterate parents and they both adopted the same methods and exercises in the language lessons as will be explained in section 2. The project-based activities described in section 3 were applied in one of the groups. The other group chose other project-based activities such as the organisation of a healthy breakfast. The evaluation in section 4 and the conclusion in section 5, therefore, deal again with the experiences of both groups.

## 2 *The language lessons*

About 80% of the classroom-time is devoted to Dutch language lessons, the remaining 20% goes to project-based activities. The three main goals of the language lessons are: (1) to improve the mothers' communication and social skills with regards to school and other parents, (2) to enhance the functional, reading and writing skills which these mothers need in the context of school and (3) to give them a better understanding of scholarly events.

To discuss in more detail what really goes on in the classroom, we will focus on that group of students with which we have got the most experience: illiterate mothers. (Regrettably, fathers have not yet found their way to our groups.) These students do not have prior reading or writing skills (not even in their native language); they possess very little vocabulary in Dutch or none at all. Obviously, letters and texts pose a major problem to them. But the lack of schooling also manifests itself in other areas: students master little of those specific attitudes and skills which are normally acquired as a child attends school. They do not have a sound learner's attitude; they have trouble understanding instructions and they struggle with the wide range of different classroom activities. They often need constant and very close guidance when doing exercises, and they work very slowly. They might find it difficult to abstract from a concrete situation. They often fail to apply general rules onto their own specific situations and they have no insight in the set-up of a language.

Of course there are huge differences between the learners in one group. Some of them just missed out on opportunities and are making up for lost time in speed-tempo; others just have mediocre or low learning capacities. For the latter, there's a huge advantage in learning at their children's school. There is no extra mileage and baby-sitting services at hand. A whole lot of practical headaches – that regularly scare these mothers away – needs to be taken care of. Their role in the classroom is clearly defined, too: they are students and (grand)mothers learning Dutch. In contrast to learners in the 'regular trajectory', parents in these school groups are never required to take on different roles (e.g. customer, or employee) in the classroom. This hurdle, which proves to be very hard for illiterate learners in the regular trajectory, is done away with.

### 2.1 *Communication and social skills*

The women in our groups have little or no knowledge of Dutch. Facilitating their communication with their children's teachers and other parents is an important aim of

the Dutch lessons in schools. Throughout the year, we specifically target those speech acts and items of vocabulary that are needed in this environment.

Some examples:

- introducing themselves and other family-members.
- putting into words in which class their children are and who their teacher is.
- notifying verbally the school of a child's absence.
- inquiring about a child's behaviour in the classroom.
- asking for clarification when they do not fully understand forms and letters the school has sent them.
- understanding a simple conversation about a child's score card.
- understanding a simple conversation at the school's gate.
- naming the utensils necessary in school.

Introducing and practising the targeted speech acts and items of vocabulary is done - as in the regular trajectory - in class using recorded dialogues and pictures which underscore the contents<sup>1</sup>. The main difference, in regard to the 'regular groups', being that contents-wise everything is oriented towards the concrete school of the children. Cooperation from headmasters and teachers is clearly indispensable to obtain all the necessary information and relaying it correctly to the students. Students are expected to transfer what they learned in the classroom activities to their contact with teachers, for example, in a parents' meeting. The dialogues learners come across in every-day life are however not as clear-cut as those which students have tackled in the classroom. That is why it is so important that the school teachers know which of the parents are taking the course and preferably also what they are learning. They can then encourage the mothers to speak Dutch and involve them in conversation. Acknowledging and respecting the initially receptive phase in the parents' learning process is also very important.

## 2.2 Functional reading and writing skills

Communication between parents and school often goes through written means. This obviously is a big problem for illiterate parents. Becoming fully literate, or even merely a skilled reader, is not something that happens overnight. It requires serious in-depth and sustained effort from the learner. We, as teachers, therefore opted to focus on functional reading and writing skills. We took typical examples of written communication between schools and parents (e.g. notes, school diaries, invitations) as a starting point for the development of parents' functional reading and writing skills. A few examples are:

- writing one's first and last name.
- writing their children's names.
- recognising the (often abbreviated) notation of the class in which their children are, and writing it down (e.g., K1, L2).
- recognising and writing down a date.
- whole word recognition of terms which often reappear in letters (e.g. mother, parent, child, class).

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of pictures: [www.betavzw.be](http://www.betavzw.be) and [www.sclera.be](http://www.sclera.be).

- dealing with the different ways of notating time (digital and on the clock-face).
- selecting relevant information in a letter (who, what, when where) without reading it in its entirety.
- working with a school-diary.
- understanding the organisation of information in a simple table (in order to read a report card).

The students learned to examine the letters for as long as necessary in order to distinguish different kinds of information, such as: who is this letter for? Is there an image that might suggest what the subject is? Are there any dates indicated? They also learned to focus on words in bold type, underlined information, and words in capitals, and they practised recognising words like 'parents' 'teachers' 'class' 'children', which appear frequently on written materials from school.

Some schools make use of monthly calendars, so we started working on the word-images of the weekdays, the structure of the calendars, images used at school and the names of the classes. By connecting all these elements they learned to distinguish when there were swimming lessons, mother's meetings, parents' evenings, etc. In the same way they learned to use the school-timetables and in some groups even the school reports.

To give the parents some extra support we started the acquisition of the technical reading skills by teaching them how to distinguish characters like 'k' (kind 'child') or 'm' (moeder 'mother'), both in an auditory and a visual way. This background also offered the possibility of starting to learn functional writing skills. Our students practised writing their own names and the names of their children. They also learned to write the names of the classes and tried to complete some simple forms. In some groups we taught them how to write dates of birth and addresses. In this way we began teaching them to write.

### *2.3 Insight into scholarly life*

Last but not least of our goals is to promote parents' insight into scholarly life from preschool to university. We try to clarify the scholarly trajectory of a child. The majority of parents in our groups have children in pre- and primary school. We therefore invest a lot of time in exploring the school itself and the activities that take place in it. An employee of the school (e.g., the principal, the learning/pupil support assistant) shows the students around and names each of the classes and other school areas (e.g. the playground, the gym, the cantina, the secretariat) for them. Thus, the mothers get to know their way around the school and are introduced to the school staff. We also discuss what happens in each of the classes. What do toddlers do in preschool, what skills do they acquire by doing these activities, what does their class look like? In primary school, we introduce the different subject areas (e.g., mathematics, language) pupils take, AVI reading levels, the yearly medical examination, the diary and homework - and ways in which (illiterate) parents can assist their children with the latter - and we pay a visit to the library. Other excursions and subjects may be dealt with as long as parents are interested and their language level allows for it.

### 3 Project-based activities

#### 3.1 Why project-based activities?

As mentioned in the introduction, participation provides the ideal context to learn Dutch. As a result, the concept of 'Parents in (inter)action' includes project-based activities as well as the language lessons. As the school can be considered a 'safe environment' for the parents-students, we encouraged them to participate in a school project. Not only do these project-based activities offer a realistic context to bring Dutch into practice, they also involve the school. In the following example we will see what advantages this can have.<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.2 Which project-based activities?

The choice for certain project-based activities should be supported by and, if possible, embedded in, the school. In this way there will be more chance that the school and the teachers will cooperate with the project-based activities and there will be more openness towards communication with the parents-students.

At The Horizon Primary School, teachers started looking for a way for the parents to help to organise a school event. The school wished to celebrate all the people who actively participate in the school community. This idea inspired us to create an exhibition with the parents who were taking Dutch lessons. The exhibition, titled 'People at school', aimed to introduce all the active groups at school. The opening was foreseen during the yearly school celebration and all the people involved would receive a badge to link them to both the exhibition and their participating roles within the school community.

The choice of these project-based activities offered a few advantages. First, most of the work had to be done during the preparatory stage. Previous project-based activities with the same group of illiterate students had shown that the students were quite capable of asking simple questions, but they weren't ready yet to express themselves in Dutch without having carefully prepared their phrases. Project-based activities without having to speak in front of a large audience were thus advisable. Moreover, the preparatory phase proved to be very instructive for the students. Before being able to introduce the active people or organisations at school, they had to learn more about the different ways those people participated. The students were able to organise the exhibition separately from the other elements of the celebration as putting together the exhibition could be done within the Dutch lessons.

#### 3.3 The realisation of the exhibition

During the first preparatory phase, our students had to find out about the different groups active at school. We introduced the images that represented the activities. Here we also continued a process which they had already learned to help them to distinguish

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of other projects:

[http://www.steunpuntgok.be/downloads/school\\_en\\_ouders\\_scenario1\\_het\\_ontbijt.pdf](http://www.steunpuntgok.be/downloads/school_en_ouders_scenario1_het_ontbijt.pdf)

[http://www.steunpuntgok.be/downloads/school\\_en\\_ouders\\_scenario3\\_verhalentocht.pdf](http://www.steunpuntgok.be/downloads/school_en_ouders_scenario3_verhalentocht.pdf)

the main information in the monthly agendas or in letters from school. The images helped to explain difficult Dutch concepts for all kind of groups gathering in the school such as 'pupil council', parent committee, 'basketball club', 'school paper editors', 'reading volunteers' etc. The students practised recognising the different 'word-images' as well as linking them to the appropriate visual images. They re-checked the monthly calendars to find out when and where the activity groups met. Then they found out how many people were involved in these groups, counting names in written communicative material or getting in touch with people at school. Based on these numbers they could determine how many badges should be provided for the event. They learned how to represent all this information in a table in order to be able to find it back later on.

For the second preparatory phase, our students needed to develop some understanding of the concept of an 'exhibition' in order to determine what could be exhibited. They visited the permanent exhibition in the school-hall and discovered how, by means of drawings and worksheets, life in the classroom was represented. Afterwards we discussed how the activities that took place in the Dutch lessons could be shown to an audience. All the students chose which worksheet out of their files could be hung in the exhibition. We decided that the other activity-groups would mainly be introduced by pictures. They practised the sentence 'Can I take a picture?' and took a camera around the school. Due to lack of time, however, most of the pictures used for the exhibition were taken by the teachers. After that, our students had to judge the pictures based on their qualities, and they tried to match them with the right groups. Each picture always brought up a variety of questions, such as 'Which group is being shown?' 'Who are the people in the picture?' 'What is their function at school?' 'Who knows them?' 'What are their names?' Although looking at the pictures seemed to be the main activity, the questions and conversation about it were actually more important. Language became a means of sharing information and better understanding school life. Interesting information was shared, provoked by the people represented on the pictures. Then they linked the pictures with the appropriate word-images and visual images. The pictures of the staff-members were accompanied by a small card with their names and functions on it. Here the parents could use in a functional way what they had learnt during the language lessons about the abbreviated notation of the classes. Though nine activity groups had been looking at, it gradually became clear that they could be split into three main groups: children, mothers and staff. Each of them received a specific colour to support the course members' insight in the structure of the exhibition and which was to be used as a background in the construction of the exhibition.

The third phase consisted of the construction of the exhibition itself. The pictures that had been selected, as well as the worksheets used in the Dutch lessons, were arranged and glued on to large sheets of coloured paper, along with the correct name and word cards. Asking the headmistress for panels, the students found out that the school has an 'hidden' attic where school materials and 'school history' are stored, a place where they had never been before. They got the panels there and they successfully constructed the exhibition. Finally we still needed to arrange the opening of the exhibition. We discussed how we ought to bring our exhibition to people's attention. Our students asked the headmistress to open the ceremony and she agreed to do this with a short speech and the cutting of a ribbon. The students, with the help of teachers, also arranged for the badges to be distributed and for there to be a suitable ribbon.

They had proved they were able to ‘produce’ something for which categorical thinking and insight in school life was needed and that they could organise a small event.

The school celebration and the exhibition were a great success. Both staff and children were very proud of the way the exhibition portrayed them. The headmistress felt that the exhibition was a great asset and saved it for future use. The exhibition stayed in the entrance hall for another week, so everybody had the opportunity to see it.

#### 3.4 *What was learned?*

During the six weeks that our students were working on these project-based activities, they worked in a very practical way in order to accomplish a task. They did not have any real language lessons but they practised other capacities of equal importance, such as, using language to achieve their goals. They also learned to work with written documents, they asked people at school for information in Dutch and they acquired more understanding of the school system. Although, initially, our students were not enthusiastic about these activities as they did not understand the concept of an exhibition, and they did not know what was expected of them and feared that it would not help them to learn Dutch, in the end, they were extremely satisfied with the results. In order to help to combat their doubts we introduced the different phases of the project-based activities step by step.

If we had had more time, our students would have been able to learn about the different groups in a more active way. Although we did have some plans to organise this, it turned out to be too difficult to make our lesson times coincide with the groups’ meetings.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true to say that the exhibition was a positive contribution to the school celebration. The exhibition surpassed the expectations of the school-staff; they learned that illiterate mothers, coming from another language context, could make a positive contribution to the school community and expressed a wish that they continued to be actively involved in the school. The headmistress felt that the preparatory phases of the exhibition created a nice atmosphere at school. Course members became visibly present within the school and known by the teachers. Each question asked, each question understood and each question receiving a positive reaction was a great achievement for our students; as a result, their self-confidence increased, and the distance between teachers and mothers shrank.

#### 4 *Evaluation*

We believe that the project ‘Parents in (inter)action’ definitely offers positive results on three grounds. First, we managed to raise the language skills of our course members. Secondly, the participation of parents in the school improved. And thirdly, we successfully dealt with the communication problems between school and parents with a different linguistic background.

#### 4.1 *Dutch language skills*

##### 4.1.1 *Communication and social skills*

Because the school and communication with the school are of most importance for our lessons, it is to be expected that the students obtain more vocabulary related to the school system. Working on themes that deal with school and children proved to be very useful for our students. It would appear that this contextual way of working increases the speed of language acquisition and enables our students to make more rapid progress than those participating in a normal DSL course. The concrete setting of the school seems to offer the students extra stimulation and guidance. First of all, the vocabulary concerning the school is relevant for them. For many of the students the school of the children turned out to be the only place where they get in contact with the Dutch language. Their wish and motivation to learn how to communicate in Dutch therefore concerns precisely the school and the children. Secondly, newly learned words can be more easily remembered because students can hear and use them also outside the classroom, in interaction with their children or their teachers. At the end of the course, the students declared that they are talking more with the teachers of their children and understand them better than they did before the course. The vocabulary offered during the language lessons about emotions, behaviour, 'likes or dislikes', and subjects of teaching, is used in conversation with the teachers. According to the parents, they now discuss about the emotions and behaviour of their children, or at the very least, understand the teacher when she/he wants to explain what is going on.

Repeatedly practising certain speech acts gives the students the necessary confidence to use those acts in the real world. Many of them were able to call when they were absent, or when one of their children was ill. The project-based activities also stimulate the frequent use of typical language acts. Working on a specified theme leads to the repetition of certain words and phrases. The regular and relevant use of these language functions makes them easier to remember. For instance, every request for information had to be introduced by 'Can I ask you something?' Questions like 'Do you have...' or 'Have you got ...' could be used when a student needed some material. Also the rather abstract but frequently used 'Would you please...' gained a concrete use as course members frequently used this when they needed help.

In our project-based activities, communication in Dutch is never confined to communication between our students and their teachers. On the contrary, they are constantly challenged to ask simple questions to others and react to questions asked to them. The questions always tend to be goal-directed. These kinds of project-based activities help them to embed the speech acts in a certain reality. Above we described how one of our students asked for a ribbon, for this was a very useful act, and the opening of the exhibition depended on it. Moreover, working in this way offers a range of possibilities to differentiate between students. There are many tasks to be fulfilled and the teacher can easily determine who should complete which task by knowing the different capacities of the students. Very often we encourage our students to help each other.

Not only do our project-based activities improve our student's fluency, they also stimulate them to dare to speak. It increases their confidence and willingness to express themselves. The first time they are sent out to ask a question they need a great deal of guidance. First they practice that particular question in the classroom, and then they are sent out of the classroom to ask the question for real. As the project-based activities

continue, the students become more confident and in the end they are able to fulfil a task independently. They leave the class alone and return with the required information or material as a result. It becomes quite natural to communicate with the school staff in Dutch. Daring to speak is an obvious necessity in obtaining speaking skills. At the end of the course, one of the students testified proudly how she was able to communicate in Dutch outside the school context. She had a problem with a cash machine which had taken her bank card and entered the bank to ask to get her card back. She succeeded in explaining the situation and got her card back. Her husband could not believe she was able to do this on her own and kept on asking who had helped her. Although we never talked about banking in the course, this student attributed her capacity to do so to the course. She definitely learned to dare to speak!

As the students also receive reactions from the people they talk to, this means that they can also effectively use their listening skills.

#### *4.1.2 Functional reading and writing skills*

Due to the language lessons in which the written means of communication used at school were examined, our students learned to overcome their fears of documents and letters and obtained more understanding of the written means of communication used at school.

Some stronger students are able to distinguish some relevant information in the letters of the school, like the date of an activity. For others the insight in the monthly calendars of which some schools make use was very much appreciated. By the end of the course they were really able to distinguish when there were swimming lessons or parent's meetings. They were using the calendars at home in order to get their children well prepared for the next school day or to plan their own presence at school activities.

Apparently even some weaker students were able to transfer this new attitude towards written documents outside the classroom. At the end of the course, one of the students testified that she now opens the mailbox at home and that she is able to distinguish the letters meant for her. The first time when she proudly showed her elder daughter which letter was for her, she got her amazed by this progress. Another student told that she is now able to differentiate the social security cards of all her children and finds this very useful.

Despite the fact that our students are illiterate, it turned to be possible to work, to some extent, with written material, and through practise, to help our students to obtain some technical reading skills which can be applied in their daily lives.

Writing is maybe even more difficult, but students are proud that they became able to write their own name. Some of them told that they used to sign papers with a 'meaningless' signature and that they are happy to be able to write their full name now. Also writing the name of their children and the names of the classes completing simple school forms seems to open a new world for them.

#### *4.2 Participation by the parents*

Since the Dutch lessons take place within the school, and exploring the school is part of the lessons, parents start getting used to the school environment. Consequently, parents feel less intimidated when visiting the school. They do not get lost nor do they feel lost anymore, as they did before. This means a big step forward and it is an important condition for their further participation in the school.

Since the language lessons also deal with insight into scholarly life, the parents-students are always informed about the activities which are taking place within the school. Gradually they feel more confident in interpreting the calendars, letters and school diaries on their own, and they even start telling their teachers what is going on before they have the opportunity to do so. At this stage, the students are more likely to become actively involved in the school. The parents-students start motivating each other to attend information sessions and meetings and to join them together.

However, participation of parents can also be situated on the level of supporting the school activities or homework of their children. For example, a mother, now able to understand when her child has a swimming lesson, will remember to give him trunks and a towel. Previously, she did not understand that her child had a lesson and did not, therefore, provide the necessary equipment. This could have been interpreted as indifference towards the child's school activities. Now that the mother is able to understand what is going on, she is able to demonstrate that she is concerned about her child. Sufficient understanding of the written information handed out by the school and of the scholarly life is, therefore, a basic condition for more participation.

Participation also becomes more attractive through the interaction in the context of the project-based activities. These invite the parents to get involved and to show their involvement in the school. As a consequence, the relationships between parents and school become closer.

#### *4.3 Dealing with communicative problems*

This closer relationship between school staff and parents gives us a nice foundation to deal with frequently experienced communicative problems. Both parties derive much benefit from understanding each other better. A school team that feels the motivation as well as the involvement of the parents is more willing to offer them extra help.

##### *4.3.1 Parents start understanding the school's means of communication*

The fact that the parents-students subscribed to follow the Dutch course at the school of their children, might be interpreted as their wish to communicate better with the school. Coming to the course twice a week, a whole school year through, gives already an indication of the effort these parents put in order to be able to understand and to communicate better with the school and with their children. In the previous sections it has already been explained that the students really made progress in understanding the school's language, the school's means of communication and in understanding scholarly life. This way they take a huge step in learning to solve communicative problems which exist between school and parents. Although they are learning a lot through this project, it is not yet enough to solve all communication problems. Moreover, they are still illiterate.

##### *4.3.2 The school acquires a deeper understanding of the communicative potential of the parents.*

In fact, the understanding is a reciprocal process. The project 'Parents in (inter)action' also helps the school team to understand the parents better. It is very hard for literate people to imagine what it is like to be an illiterate adult. Schools frequently do not realise how difficult it can be to decipher and interpret their written information. Through frequent contact with both the parents and their Dutch teacher, the school gradually develops a more accurate idea of the problems that the parents have to cope

with. Firstly, they see the necessity of complementing the written documents with oral communication. Secondly, the closer contact with parents encourages the school to adapt the written material they sent to parents in order to make it easier to understand, by means of, for instance, simplifying the school calendar, or by consistently underlining the phrases of main importance instead of mixing bold, capitals and underlining as an indication. These are important steps to help the parents understand the written information.

#### *4.3.3 The school starts understanding the manner of life of the parents*

As the understanding of the communicative possibilities and constraints of the parents increases, so does the insight into the parents' environments. The school team becomes more conscious of its possible impact on school. During the course of the programme, we sometimes discover surprising matters. For example, a teacher wanted to run errands with the mothers as an organised activity, but some mothers told her that they were not allowed to enter a shop. This case shows that the daily life of these women is often confined to their homes, only interrupted by a small walk to bring their children to school. Their husbands are not likely to tolerate other outings. Also participating in evening meetings at school can be very difficult for these women because their husbands or sons demand their presence at home during meals or when the children need to be put to bed. When a school realises this, it can take this into account when arranging a meeting where they would like these mothers to be present.

These incidents also surprise the school staff. It increases their insight into the mothers' and children's environment and, for example, helps them to understand why these mothers may be absent at meetings or on outings. This means that teachers no longer interpret these absences as a lack of interest on the mothers' part.

Low-educated parents with a different linguistic background are not easy partners for a school community. Quite often the teachers feel annoyed by their inability to speak Dutch or by their absence during meetings. Through project-based activities, the parents can show the teachers how enthusiastic, motivated, and involved they are. They really want to do and mean something for their children's schools. In the example of project-based activities we gave, through the exhibition that our students arranged, the school was able to see their eagerness to participate in the school community, and, as a result, decided to ask them to participate in future school events. The school staff was surprised by their dynamic way of working.

After one year of 'Parents in (inter)action' the school understands both the possibilities and restrictions of the parents' communication skills. This can help them by taking these things into account in their organisation.

## *5 Conclusion*

Before the start of the project, the course members were tested to determine their level of knowledge and fluency in Dutch. They got the same test as candidates for the regular courses. At the end of the project they were tested with the same testing materials as before. It turned out that almost all of them reached a higher level of understanding and speaking Dutch, and that they also had a better insight into some 'supportive' elements such as dealing with numbers and the calendar. A few students made much progress and were able to start two or three levels higher in the regular courses. This

means the method of teaching within and making use of the context of the school of the children is really effective for those parents who are motivated to learn Dutch because of their children.

Besides the general knowledge of Dutch, and the specific vocabulary concerning the school, the course members also obtained insight in the school of their children. The project-based activities helped them to dare to speak also outside the classroom and as a consequence of their growing familiarity with the school and with scholarly life, the parents' participation and involvement at school increased. They really gained a lot.

The project-based activities proved not only effective to get the parents closer to the school, but they also had a positive effect on how the school viewed these parents. Through their interaction, and through the teacher-as-intermediary, it gradually becomes clearer for both parents and school team which steps are necessary in order for them to understand each other and communicate better.

As course members, school staff, language teachers and supportive organisations were all enthusiastic about the initiative, the project 'Parents in (inter)action' is continued. Other schools got the opportunity to join the project and started new groups already.

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