

Basic debates

In this methodology description & foundation the renewed methodology 'parenting debates with fathers with a migration background' is described. Sinds 2015 the methodology has been developed further and extended, regarding both the target group and themes. The main target group is fathers with a migration background, who in general are not reached by formal provisions for parenting support.

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*For me atmosphere and safety are very important. The debates for me felt like family evenings. I felt free to speak about all kinds of personal issues, that concerned me and my home life, without any judgement from anyone.*

*I always found it difficult to discuss my children with others. I am happy with the skills I learned during the debates, like communicating, active listening, setting boundaries and giving space.*

*Despite we all have a different background, we all want the best for our child. Our norms and values do not differ that much from each other. What does differ is the way we approach certain aspects of parenting. By talking with each other about our problems and our successes, we can give each other tips and guidelines.*

# Parenting Debates with Fathers with a Migration Background

*A methodology description & foundation of the basic debates*

Marjolijn Distelbrink, Lauren Ekelboom, Abdellah Mehrnaz, Amella Mesic & Trees Pels

**Trias Pedagogica**

Wilhelminaplantsoen 1B  
1111 CJ Diemen

T: 020 - 280 78 70  
info@triaspedagogica.nl  
www.triaspedagogica.nl



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Marjolijn Distelbrink (Verwey-Jonker Instituut)

Lauren Ekkelboom (Trias Pedagogica)

Abdellah Mehrnaz (Trias Pedagogica)

Amella Mesic (Verwey-Jonker Instituut)

Trees Pels (Verwey-Jonker Instituut)

With the cooperation of Liselotte Oudega

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## Summary

In this renewed document the foundation of the Trias Pedagogica methodology on 'parenting debates with fathers with a migration background' is described.

Since 2015 the methodology has been further developed and extended, both looking at the target group and the themes covered. The target group remains fathers with a migration background who generally are not reached by existing services for parenting support. In some cases, the debates are with mothers. The goal of these parenting debates is to make fathers aware of their role as a father. Also, to teach them about basic principles of parenting, such as the importance of communicating with children and raising a child together with their partner. Through the debates, fathers adopt a different attitude and learn new skills. The debates provide knowledge about, for example, child development and upbringing. They also allow fathers to learn a lot through mutual exchange of experiences. Fathers are actively recruited through various informal channels and the debates take place at times and locations that suit them. The role of the debate moderator is important: he should feel safe and familiar to fathers, stand with the fathers and approach them from a positive and empowering attitude.

The parenting debates are divided into three modules: the basic parenting debates, the in-depth debates (in which specific (and often taboo-sensitive) themes are discussed such as domestic violence, sexuality, radicalization and much more) and a return day. In this document, the first module – the basic parenting debates – is described and substantiated.

It is important to start the debates with the creation of a bond of trust within the group, a basic awareness about the role of the father and the increase of fathers' basic knowledge of parenting. More specific, often taboo-sensitive, topics can be discussed in more detail after. For this, Trias Pedagogica always

starts with four fundamental parenting debates.

During the first parenting debate (Parenting – personal experiences) fathers learn more about each other and the methodology. They also talk to each other about parenting. What do we mean by parenting? How do they look back on their own upbringing? What did they like? What did they miss? What elements have they brought to the upbringing of their own children?

During the second parenting debate (Parenting – fatherhood) fathers reflect on the meaning of fatherhood, their role in parenting and educating their child as well as the impact of father involvement.

During the third parenting debate (Parenting – parents in alignment) coordination between both parents in the upbringing is the central focus point. What is the division of roles between mother and father within the family? Are both parents involved in parenting? Do they talk to each other about norms and values? Are they on the same page?

During the fourth and final parenting debate of the basic debates (Parenting – balanced), fathers engage in conversations about the differences between upbringing in their own community/youth and in The Netherlands. They also discuss differences in the surroundings of the child (at home, at school, on the street, online etc). As a parent, are you involved in all these parts of the child's life? How can you best guide and support your child?

Active elements of the methodology are: outreaching approach, low threshold, calm buildup, attention to the migration context, learning from each other in combination with a positive approach and the use of various working methods (including the in-house developed card game 'The Parenting Quiz'). These elements are substantiated by literature.

## Introduction

Trias Pedagogica develops and gives parenting trainings for Dutch fathers' with a migration background on various (taboo-sensitive) topics. She does this by means of parenting debates where fathers talk to each other about education under the guidance of a debate moderator. The last few years, Trias Pedagogica has organized about fifty series of debates annually in various cities in the Netherlands. The parenting debates are offered in a series of three modules: four basic parenting debates, three in-depth debates and a return day. If desired, this series can be followed up with even more series of in-depth debates on other themes. In recent years Trias Pedagogica has started to organize debates with mothers and mixed groups.

Fatherhood gets a lot of attention in the basic debates. Most debates therefore focus on fathers, but there are also some groups with just mothers and mixed groups. The in-depth debates have been developed based on the needs within the groups as well as questions from municipalities as clients. For a significant number of years now, Trias Pedagogica has offered an in-depth series of debates on prevention of domestic violence (entitled 'domestic happiness'), about prevention of youth criminality (Encourage & Discuss) and prevention of radicalization (Derailment & Alienation) (Distelbrink, Ekkelboom, Mehraz, Mesic & Pels, 2021), about sexual resilience (titled 'Feelings and Intimacy') and various in-depth series around the theme of healthy lifestyle (see Appendix 1 for an overview).

Trias Pedagogica also provides individual support to fathers within the context of these debates. Practice has shown that questions rise about parenting that parents prefer to ask the debate moderator, with whom they already experience a relationship of trust. After a few conversations, if necessary, parents

[1] Since a number of years Trias Pedagogica also has debates with mothers or both parents. For a short description see box on p. 10.

can be directed to follow-up support by others. Frequently, groups of fathers who followed parenting debates, keep meeting each other to discuss parenting issues together (read more in section 3.1).

The basic debates were described and substantiated in 2012 and 2015 by the Verwey-Jonker Institute and Inholland University of Applied Sciences (Distelbrink, van der Gaag, Halane, Knippels, Mehrasz & Naber, 2012; Distelbrink, Halane, Mehrasz, Naber & Pels, 2015). At the time, the debates focused mainly on Dutch fathers with a Moroccan, Somali and Ghanaian background. Due to the expansion to new target groups (and mothers) and further development of the debates themselves, the existing description and substantiation needed an update. This publication provides this update, once again in collaboration with the Verwey-Jonker Institute. In the coming period, we will describe and substantiate the various in-depth debates in separate publications. These publications are intended for municipalities or organizations that are interested in making use of the parenting debates. The text can also provide inspiration to professionals and organizations that deal with youth for a better understanding of and support to fathers with various backgrounds.

### Reading guide

In the following chapters we describe the target group (1) and goals (2) of the parenting debates. Subsequently we shall give an outline of the approach (3) and its implementation (4). This is followed by the substantiation of the approach (5), starting with a problem definition: what are the risks and problems that make parenting debates necessary? Which factors play a role and which of these are central to the approach (related to the sub-goals)? Chapter 6 provides a foundation of the core elements of the basic debates. Chapter 7 describes the available research.

## 1. Target group of the parenting debates

*The target group of the parenting debates are – mainly low-educated – fathers with a migration background, partly belonging to the first generation. They are often little aware of their role and influence as fathers and/or struggle (consciously or not) with questions about fatherhood and upbringing within the Dutch context. In general, they are not reached by regular parenting support providers.*

The parenting debates initially focused mainly on Moroccan-Dutch fathers. A group that was hard to reach and with whom the developer had a close relationship. Over time, the target group has been broadened to other ethno-cultural groups. At the time of the original methodology description of the debates in 2015, in addition to fathers of Dutch Moroccan origin, fathers with a Somali and Ghanaian background were also part of the target group. In recent years, fathers with the following backgrounds have been participants as well: Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi, Eritrean, Surinamese (Hindustani and Afro-Surinamese), Antillean/Caribbean-, Spanish speaking (South American), Nigerian-, Eritrean-, Somali- and Turkish-Dutch. Occasionally, native Dutch fathers who have a partner with a migration background participate in the parenting debates.

The level of education of fathers in need of support in the form of the parenting debates is usually low. Most belong to the first generation: fathers who came to the Netherlands as teenagers or adults. For participating fathers of the first-generation length of stay and age can vary greatly, as well as the age at which they arrived in The Netherlands. Especially fathers who have come to the Netherlands as an adult have little knowledge about Dutch facilities, the school system et cetera. This applies less to fathers who came to the Netherlands as teenagers. Fathers of the second generation (born in the Netherlands) or fathers who came to the Netherlands at a young age (sometimes referred to with the term 'intermediate generation') do join the parenting debates. They usually

have similar questions or benefit from the same approach as fathers of the first generation. The debates focus on fathers with children of all ages (0-23 years). Trias Pedagogica aims to further expand her target groups in the future. Experience teaches that approach and content of the debates (sometimes with small adjustments) works well with many different migrant communities.

### Mothers as participants

Although most of the groups that Trias Pedagogica focuses on are still mainly fathers, mothers with a migration background are also a growing target audience. Sometimes they participate in parent groups with the same program as father groups, sometimes in the form of mixed groups consisting of both fathers and mothers. The involvement of mothers stems from the need of mothers to talk about fatherhood and/or about themes that fathers are also interested in. It also happens frequently that fathers, after a few debates, indicate that they want to involve their wives in the parenting debates. Either by joining the father groups or by organizing a separate series of parenting debates for mothers.

The topics of the parenting debates for mothers are generally the same as for fathers, apart from the second debate: parenting – fatherhood. Although the role of the father is also central to the mother groups during this debate, the debate with mothers focuses specifically on the space mothers allow their husbands in the upbringing of children. After this debate, mothers regularly acknowledge that they “tend to monopolize the upbringing, not always trusting their husbands and doubting their skill or think that the man should not interfere with it” (a.o. Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2019a; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2019b; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2020; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2021).

### Selection of participants

Based on the client’s request, usually a municipality or an organization there-in, it is determined in which city and/or areas the parenting debates are to be organized. This selection is made based on local issues and/or priorities. It then depends on the client whether there is an existing desire to work with specific organizations, or that Trias Pedagogica has the freedom to select a target group itself (within the indicated areas). In the context of prevention, Trias Pedagogica approaches local self-organizations, places of worship and other groups with the offer of providing parenting debates. It is important to mention, fathers do not have to register with Trias Pedagogica. And since the program is completely preventive in nature, there are no specific selection criteria for the target group. Anyone can and may participate.

### Contra indications

As indicated above, in principle everyone is welcome at the parenting debates. However, the parenting debates are not intended to help families with serious problems. Trias Pedagogica will therefore never target a specific group of fathers who are already dealing with serious problems. It does happen on a regular basis, that a group that gets together for debates includes fathers who have something going on. In that case, the debates often gain more depth: people can exchange experiences and support each other. It has happened more than once that fathers facing some serious problems (domestic violence, addiction, etc.) participate. In those instances, Trias Pedagogica also provides individual support in addition to the parenting debates. After a few conversations individuals can be directed to follow-up support by others if necessary.

### Involvement of the target group in further developing the debates

The target group is involved in various ways in the further development of the debates. We discuss them here.



The experiences of the participating fathers (and debate moderators) are collected through observations throughout the series of parenting debates. Every debate (from the second one onward) starts with a plenary review based on a number of predetermined questions. What did the fathers think of the previous debate? What has stayed with them the most? What do they take away from this? Relevant points for further development of the debates are noted by the debate moderator. During the eighth debate (the return day) a review and evaluation takes place on the entirety of the series of parenting debates. Here the debate moderator engages in a dialogue with the fathers (plenary) on the basis of pre-prepared questions. The purpose of this is to clarify what the fathers think of the parenting debates, what they have learned and what else they need. Based on previous experiences, it has been found that this oral evaluation by the fathers is experienced as more pleasant and perceived as easier than, for example, a written evaluation (a.o. Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2021). In addition, many of the principals (especially municipalities) find it important to give the parenting debates a grade. This is done on the basis of the following question to participants: "Do you feel that you have benefited from this course? Can you grade the course with a number from 1 to 10?". Based on the answers an average satisfaction rating is recorded as input for evaluations.

The debate moderator writes a report about the meeting at the end of each debate. This will keep track of how many participants were present, if the goals have been achieved (if not, why not?), how the meeting went and whether there were additional points of attention. Based on these reports, Trias Pedagogica receives feedback on how the debates went, which they can then use for intervention and quality control. These reports also give insight into signals and/or possible needs for which Trias Pedagogica can subsequently develop (new) training materials.

In the development of new (follow-up) material, Trias Pedagogica always collaborates closely with the fathers. They always start with

gathering ideas and wishes, both through plenary conversations as well as individual interviews with the fathers. This input is then combined with insights from the most recent literature (and practical experience). All of this is shaped for intervention and a concept training is developed. This concept is always tested with various groups of fathers (and sometimes also mothers and/or young people). Once again, plenary conversations and individual interviews are used to collect feedback. After several test sessions (and adjustments in between), the training is finalized and used in other groups.



## 2. Goals of the basic debates

### Main goal

*The main goal of the basic parenting debates with fathers is to reach and support fathers, who have proven difficult to reach by regular parenting support organizations. Emphasis is on the father role, alignment between both parents and upbringing in the Dutch context.*

The parenting debates trigger reflection about the father role, about the influence of one's own behavior on the behavior of children and about the challenges of parenting in the Dutch context. Knowledge about possibilities and awareness of one's own role form the basis for change in attitude, the willingness to shape the father role in collaboration with mothers, and to develop new skills for this purpose. Furthermore, the approach is also intended to strengthen fathers in their role by means of informal mutual parenting support and by lowering the threshold to other existing parenting support facilities.

### Sub-goals

#### **Reaching and serving fathers who are at a distance from regular parenting facilities**

The debates are primarily aimed at offering direct parenting support to fathers who are far removed from regular parenting services, by lowering the threshold with an approach that inspires confidence and allows for open discussion of parenting.

#### **Creating awareness**

Especially parents of the first generation and low-skilled parents with limited education are not always aware of their role in the upbringing and development

of their children. The parenting debates aim to raise awareness of:

- The fact that both parents are responsible for the proper upbringing of their children.
- The importance of good coordination between mother and father.
- The importance of active fatherhood. Active fatherhood involves questions like: 'How does my child benefit if I am there? What should I do exactly? How can I positively influence my child?'
- Aspects of the living environment of children in a Dutch context, and of the stages of development they go through. This is particularly important for low-educated parents of the first generation of migrants because they are generally not aware of this.

### Transfer of knowledge

Awareness is achieved in part by providing knowledge, for example about the importance of fathers' active involvement with their children. During the basic parenting debates the specific goal is to provide knowledge about:

- The influence of fathers (and mothers) on child development; the importance of active involvement of fathers.
- Different parenting styles, positive communication, and its influence on their children.
- The Dutch system of upbringing, education, leisure activities and how youth care works (most important for parents of the first generation).

### Developing a different attitude as a parent

The willingness to adapt behavior – in addition to awareness and knowledge – is essential to eventually achieve a change in behavior. The debates aim to stimulate fathers to develop an attitude that propels them to

be more (or differently) involved with their children as well as to be more entuned with their partner and to continue learning. That fathers are feeling motivated to work on further development, is demonstrated by the fact that almost all groups express a need for more in-depth debates (among other things).

### Development of parenting skills

The extent to which skills can be practiced depends on the 'starting level' of the group, or to what extent the process of increasing knowledge, awareness and changing attitudes has started. Trias Pedagogica aims to teach the following skills.

- Skills to communicate differently (more positively) with children and/or partner.
- Skills to engage in conversations with Dutch service facilities more effectively. Because fathers obtain more knowledge and because they talk to each other about what they consider important, they improve these skills and they have more (and new) questions about parenting<sup>2</sup>.
- Skills to communicate as fathers about parenting among each other. During the debates fathers learn to talk in all openness with each other and with respect for each other's positions. These skills enable them to support each other in follow-up meetings even without guidance.

### Strengthening informal mutual parenting support

An important secondary goal is to strengthen informal support among fathers as parents. This already happens during the debates, when parents share experiences, engage in conversation, learn from each other's insights, and see that they are not alone in their experiences and questions. Even when the debates have ended, we know fathers contact each other with their parenting

[2] In the basic debates only the basic skills for this are developed; in the in-depth debates this is developed more explicitly by facilitating accessible contact between fathers and local professionals.

questions and some fathers keep in touch.

### Lowering the threshold to formal institutes and professionals

Even though fathers develop (new) questions about their role, upbringing and development of children, it is not always easy for them to contact formal parenting institutions on their own. During the parenting debates, Trias Pedagogica is committed to lowering the threshold to formal agencies and professionals. During the in-depth debates explicit attention is paid to the link to the professional assistance. During the last in-depth debate, a local professional is invited to work with the fathers and join them in conversation. Which professional is invited, always depends on the theme of the in-depth debates. Of course, the needs of the group are also taken into account. Outside of the target group, principals can also have ideas about the content of the debates, for example: strengthening pedagogical partnership with school by letting fathers engage with each other and with the school about education at school, as a first step towards parent involvement. For a detailed description, we refer you to the in-depth modules (Distelbrink, Ekkelboom, Mehrnaz, Mesic & Pels, 2021a + 2021b).

## 3. Approach to the parenting debates

### 3.1 The working method

An important part of the methodology is the way fathers are recruited and how the start of the debates is set up. We describe this below. After that, some other important elements are addressed which are vital characteristics of the approach: low threshold, calm buildup, connecting with fathers on content, learning from each other, a positive approach and the use of various working methods. Finally, we describe the actual content of the individual debates.

#### Outreaching approach

Trias Pedagogica's working method is an outreaching approach: they take initiative by actively seeking out people and offer (unsolicited) help, instead of waiting for people to actively ask them for help. The recruitment of the target group usually starts with the use of existing contacts through informal organizations. Trias Pedagogica has a large network of key figures and contacts at informal organizations and places of worship, with whom they keep in close contact. This provides access to parents (and sometimes children). Trias Pedagogica contacts these informal organizations when a municipality has decided to invest in a series of debates. Of course, it also happens that an informal organization approaches Trias Pedagogica when they notice a need from parents. Both the many contacts that Trias Pedagogica has fostered, as well as the positive experiences people have with Trias Pedagogica, results in more and more self-organizations, places of worship, groups of fathers etc. finding their way to Trias Pedagogica and asking them to organize parenting debates. Trias Pedagogica uses a so-called roof tile construction, in which alumni of previous debate series have an (active) role in recruiting and sometimes also co-executing new series of parenting debates. Fathers and/or key figures who have previously participated in a series of parenting debates share their acquired knowledge and experiences with other fathers in their neighborhood and in this way arouse interest. In some cases, the fathers/key figures who participat-

ed in the debates were inspired to sign up with Trias Pedagogica to become a debate moderator themselves.

Participating in the parenting debates is entirely without obligation. The fathers do not need to register/register to participate in the debates. This is intended to keep the threshold low (see also below). In consultation with the key figures and other contact persons, it is determined whether there are enough participants to start the meetings. The groups consist of an average of 15 participants. A minimum of 8 participants is needed to be able to start the meetings. The maximum number of participants per can be up to 30 to 40 fathers. Practice shows that with more than 20 participants often a second debate moderator must be deployed to ensure the interaction between the fathers. In that case it might be better to work with two groups.

In some cases, Trias Pedagogica chooses not to start immediately with a series of eight meetings. Experience has shown that offering a full series of meetings right away, does not always work. Some fathers and/or organizations do not want to commit to a full series immediately. Sometimes, this has to do with unfamiliarity and reticence. In that case, Trias Pedagogica consults with the key figure about organizing a one-time meeting (factually the first debate) in which fathers get to experience the methodology of Trias Pedagogica. This allows them to get an impression of the debate moderator and they can experience what it will be like to talk to each other about parenting. Another possibility is that (initially) only four meetings are organized (only the four basic debates). After the one-time meeting or the first four basic parenting debates, the decision whether to continue with the follow-up series of debates (in-depth debates) is made together with the fathers. Experience shows how at the first debate arrangements for follow-up debates (and to carry out the entire series) are almost always made with the attendees.

After the first debate, the experiences of the participants are often

discussed within the community. This regularly leads to new interested participants joining the debates that follow. The program is designed so that participants can also learn and develop sufficiently, when they have not attended the first meeting(s). Only those fathers who have attended at least five of the seven parenting debates (basic and in-depth) will receive a certificate of participation and 'The Parenting Quiz' (this will be explained later).

### Low threshold

As mentioned above, fathers do not need to register to participate in the parenting debates. The accessible character of the parenting debates is strengthened by organizing the meetings at a location, day and time that meets the needs of the participants. Mostly parenting debates take place in houses of prayer, community centers and/or locations of self-organizations, as these are familiar locations to the fathers, and they take place at a time that is convenient for them. Because many fathers work during the week/day, meetings often take place in the evenings/weekends. If the Dutch language is an obstacle for the group, the meetings can be conducted in their own language. The purpose of the parenting debates is not to teach the parents the Dutch language, but to increase their involvement with the children and improve their parenting skills.

If they cannot (or in many cases do not dare to) express themselves (well) in Dutch, the parenting debates are conducted or continued in their own language. Usually, the groups are homogeneous as far as language and/or background is concerned. This has to do mostly with the language that is spoken during the parenting debates. Practice shows that many participants have insufficient knowledge of the Dutch language or find it difficult to express themselves well in Dutch (as already discussed). Because of the interactive nature of the meetings, it is important that the fathers can communicate well with each other and with the debate moderator. This makes it impractical to work with heterogeneous groups. However, it is possible to put together a group in which all the fathers speak Arabic (Moroccans, Iraqis, Egyptians), for example.

For many fathers it is relevant to 'be among each other'.

Partly because of language, but certainly also because of familiarity and 'having to explain less' the debates are led by a debate moderator who is close to the fathers: usually someone with the same cultural background, usually a man. Or – if this is not possible – a male or possibly female debate moderator from a different migration background. Having a migration background is even more important than the gender of the debate moderator, is the experience. Sharing the position of (the child of a) migrant with the debate moderator makes fathers feel better understood and lowers the threshold.

Finally, for a low threshold it is important to have an informal discussion prior to the parenting debates, before going into the actual content of the meetings. The debate moderator is always present at the location well in advance to catch up informally, to drink coffee/tea together and in some cases even to eat together. At the eighth debate, Trias Pedagogica offers the participants the opportunity to prepare a festive meal themselves.

### **Calm buildup**

The parenting debates always start with the basics. For example, it is important to ensure that fathers are aware of the important role they have in parenting. Only when the fathers are aware of this, do they come up with questions such as "How can I ...?" and "What can I do? It is also important to first pay attention to certain basic parenting skills. These include communication between parents, communication between parents and children, providing structure, discuss punishments and rewards, etc. Mastering these basic parenting skills is important to be able to go deeper into other subjects. If children are not allowed to talk about their day and their feelings at home at all, how are they supposed to talk to their parents about falling in love, friendship, and/or bullying or discrimination?

The basic parenting debates are also designed to create a bond of trust within the group and between the group and the debate moderator, before going deeper into taboo subjects in the following in-depth debates. More about this structure can be read in section 3.2 'Structure of the educational debates'.

### **Attention to the migration context**

In the approach to the debates, the living environment of the participants is taken into account: the approach focuses on themes for which knowledge and awareness is lacking and subsequently provides this to the participants. Starting point is always those subjects that appeal to and concern fathers. We explain this in more detail below.

A first way is often: giving space to emotions that might exist about (institutions in) society. In some groups, participants have negative emotions about Dutch upbringing, which they need to relate to or about the Dutch system of parenting support. If these kinds of emotions are present with participants, time is allotted to address this, even if this leaves less room for other topics. The debate moderator has an important role in how this is facilitated. Two elements are important in this regard: individual participants should feel safe to express their emotions. And the debate moderator should help participants to look at their own role and not linger in victimhood or anger. The experience teaches that giving space to (negative) emotions can help fathers to be more open towards topics that come up later in the day.

A second way in which the debates connect with the fathers is by giving room to various elements of parenting and parenting experiences that are related to the position of parents as an immigrant and as a minority. For example, there is a lot of focus on culture-inspired values of fathers, traditions from within the own community and how they affect parenting. Raising children in a migration context is a common thread in all the debates. It is also important to recognize that fathers sometimes have little knowledge about child development, about

Western parenting methods and about the importance of hands-on fatherhood. We reflect on, among other things, the expectations schools have of parents, the role of professionals, both topics that often show a difference between the Netherlands and the fathers' country of origin.

Finally, connecting with fathers happens by focusing on religion. Religion is an important frame of reference for some groups. For many fathers it is a guiding principle in their lives and therefore for parenting. For example, participants often contribute their ideas about the division of roles between fathers and mothers to religion. Debate moderators consider this in their approach. If fathers, for example, derive their beliefs about how they should have a limited role in raising children from religion, debate moderators provide insights into the raising of children with insights from the faith or from the Holy Book which can help them rethink their initial ideas. For example, by reminding participants that the Prophet never literally made certain statements (about the roles of men and women).

### Learning from each other

At the heart of the approach to parenting debates is 'learning from each other'. The parenting debates deliberately use a group approach. Fathers are stimulated to talk to each other about parenting (and related topics). The debate moderator supports mutual conversation, stands with fathers and not above them. During the introduction, the debate moderator emphasizes that he does not know everything either, he/she is also 'just a parent' and wants to learn from the rich experiences of the fathers present. The debate moderator can also share personal experiences, as a father or son, to strengthen the concept of 'standing with fathers'. During the debates, the debate moderator doesn't tell a father (or parent) what should be done, but informs what he can be done in parenting. Every parent is an expert in their own right. Everyone raises their child in their own way, the parenting debates offer the opportunity to exchange experiences. When a parent has a problem, other par-

ents may already have a (working) solution. During the discussions the debate moderator offers insights, but in a way that allows fathers to come up with the solution themselves while talking. The expertise of the debate moderator is 'parked' at first and then applied throughout the discussions – especially by letting fathers make discoveries themselves.

Through the group process, fathers discover that they are not alone and that almost everyone is confronted with similar questions. The exchange of experiences also allows fathers to learn alternative ways of dealing with certain situations. The emphasis on the free exchange of experiences, on learning from each other, fits in with the Trias Pedagogica vision on parenting support. The developers aim – in line with the living environment of the participants – to use knowledge that is already present in the parents. This also aligns with the important goal of importance for fathers to be aware and to change attitudes throughout the debates.

Some quotes from fathers:

*"I am very happy to participate in the parenting debates. I learn more from the discussion than from books (I haven't read these in over ten years!)"*

*"Nobody is perfect. Talking about parenting and asking questions is the best way. Nobody knows everything, but everybody knows something."*

### Positive approach

Another core element is the positive approach that Trias Pedagogica uses. The debate moderators use an approach of empowerment, rather than a paternalistic approach. And they trust the motivation of all parents to raise their child in the best possible way. An important principle in the work of Trias Pedagogica is: "Every parent wants what's best for his or her child; the intention is good,



but the way (of parenting) does not always match that". A good example is the way 'hitting a child' is discussed. The experience is that focusing too quickly on the fact that this is 'just not allowed' in the Netherlands, does not get the conversation going. Instead of disapproving of parents who do this, discussion is opened up. This involves looking at why parents would hit a child which then allows the debate moderator to let other fathers suggest alternatives, share their experiences. The discussion deals with consequences for children and considers fathers' own experiences, for example from their own youth. It turns out that fathers often feel powerless, or they are simply not aware of the consequences of hitting for children. Trias Pedagogica focuses on the positive: the intention is good. The father wants his child to stay on the right track.

During the parenting debates, fathers learn about the potential consequences of their actions, and they discover, by discussing this topic, alternative methods of punishment. This is a good approach to create awareness. It happens regularly that a father tears up, because he never knew that it 'could be done differently'. "Now that I know that you can also keep your child on the straight and narrow in a positive way, I feel like I have failed as a father. From my own upbringing, I only knew physical punishment, no reward or love. I want to do better, and I'm going to do so!" (participant in parenting debates). There are numerous of other examples like this.

Quote from a father:

*"Too often we focus on what is going wrong in parenting and we provide too many corrections. I know now that it is important to communicate openly, to cooperate with others and to respond in a positive way".*

### Use of different working methods

To promote collaborative learning and reflection, Trias Pedagogica deploys various resources. By means of questions, propositions and

examples (sometimes in the form of a video, animation or case study), the debate moderator stimulates fathers (or parents) to think about their own opinion/vision, to discuss possible problems/difficulties and to propose possible solutions. Fathers are encouraged to think for themselves first, before the debate moderator provides any additional knowledge and/or tools. Trias Pedagogica makes use of the card game 'The Parenting Quiz'<sup>3</sup> (see frame for a description of this card game), which was developed by Trias Pedagogica. This card game is developed as a tool to make it easier for fathers to talk to each other about the themes of the debates. The fathers are divided into smaller groups (the rest of the debate takes place in plenary). 'The Parenting Quiz' is repeated in each of the four basic debates.

At the end of the series of parenting debates, fathers are given the quiz to take home with them. They can then play the game with their own partners or with others to fuel the conversation about parenting even more. On the return day it is discussed to what extent fathers have used the card game in their own environment (more about this later). During the in-depth debates, board games that have also been developed by Trias Pedagogica are used, allowing fathers to get information in a playful way and through healthy competition, while creating awareness about various themes. You can read more about this in separate publications which will be published as part of an in-depth series. Using 'competition' as a working method has proved to be appealing as well as activating when working with fathers. It is also reflected in the name of the method: parenting debates. Although the meetings take the form of a dialogue (the exchange of information, experiences and convictions, which do not necessarily lead to a solution or agreement), rather than a heated discussion, the term 'debates' (which often has a connotation of winning or losing anyway) appeals to fathers more.

[3] [https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/tools\\_spellenn.php?ppt=showcase&TileID=1&language=UK](https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/tools_spellenn.php?ppt=showcase&TileID=1&language=UK)



### 3.2 Structure of the parenting debates

The intervention 'Parenting debates with fathers from a migrant background' has been designed as a group training that consists of eight meetings. The first seven meetings take place weekly (approximately 2 hours) and the last meeting (return day) takes place four to six weeks later. At the request of the participants (due to availability), it can be decided to adjust the time between the meetings: twice a week or once every two weeks if necessary. It is also possible to reserve two full days in which parents go through all the topics.

#### Card game - 'The Parenting Quiz'

During the basic parenting debates, the in-house developed card game 'The Parenting Quiz' is used. This card game has been developed to allow parents to discuss parenting in a playful manner. Fathers play the card game during the parenting debates and eventually they take the card game home so they can play it with their families and with others in the privacy of their own home. The card game offers partners a tool to discuss what they consider important in parenting, which rules apply and how they want to punish/reward their children.

The deck consists of 35 cards divided into six categories: alignment, parenting, norms/values, technology/social media, (house) rules and school. Each card contains a question or proposition that participants can discuss together.

Some sample questions/statements are:

*"How were you raised as a child?"*

*"What norms and values do you want to pass on to our child?"*

*"I raise the children in a different way than you do. Agree/disagree."*

Only in exceptional situations can there be more than two weeks between meetings. In that case, participants choose, in consultation with Trias Pedagogica, to complete the basic debates first and then continue with the in-depth meetings (a couple of weeks) later.

The parenting debates consist of eight meetings divided into three modules: the basic parenting debates, the in-depth debates (which are further described in separate publications), and a return day (see Figure 1). The basic parenting debates are comprised of four sequential themes.

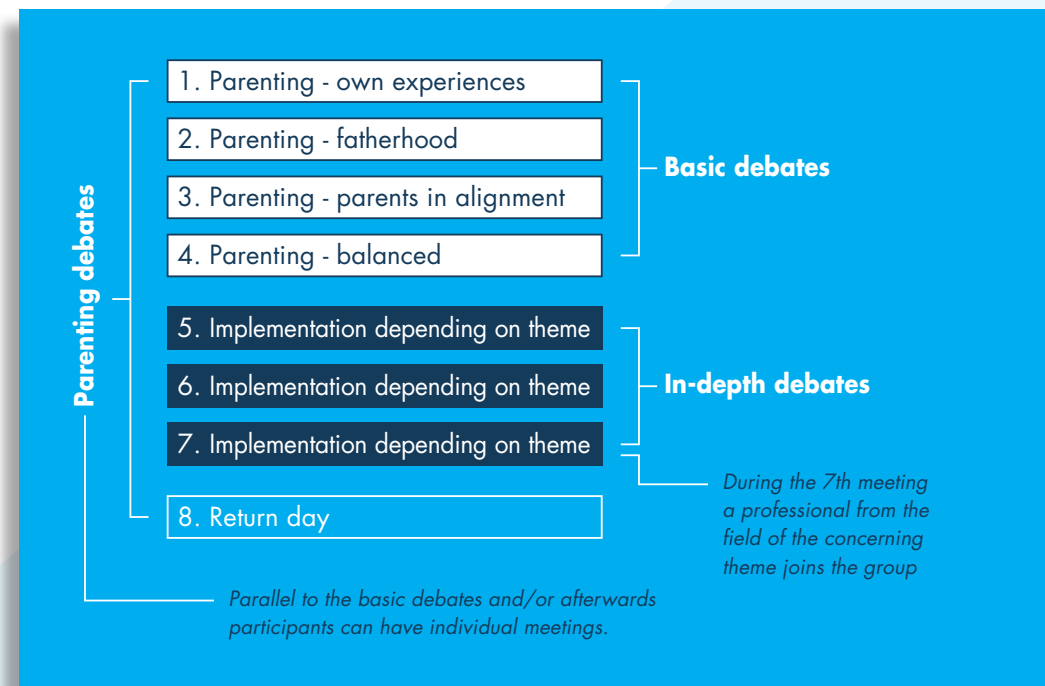


Figure 1. Structure of the parenting debates

During the first parenting debate (Parenting – own experiences) fathers get to know each other as well as the methodology. They also discuss parenting

with each other. What do they think raising children means? How do they look back on their own upbringing? What did they like? What did they miss? Which elements have they brought with them into the upbringing of their own children? During the second parenting debate (Parenting – fatherhood) fathers reflect on their own role in parenting. What role do fathers have at this moment? Are they satisfied with this? Are they aware of their unique contribution to the development of their children? During the third parenting debate (Parenting – parents in alignment), focus is on alignment between parents in upbringing. What is the distribution of roles between the mother and father in the family? Are both parents involved in the raising of their children? Do they talk to each other about norms and values? Are they on the same page? During the fourth and last basic parenting debate (Parenting – balanced) fathers discuss differences between parenting within their own community/youth and parenting in The Netherlands. And the differences between living environments of the child (home, school, street, online). Are you involved in all of these? How can you guide and support your child best?

Although participants are always welcome to join sessions, we do advise fathers to attend the basic parenting debates first before participating in the in-depth debates. As previously outlined, the basic parenting debates focus on certain basic parenting skills, which are necessary to be able to go deeper during the in-depth themes. In addition, the basic parenting debates provide the opportunity to build trust.

### 3.3 Content of the debates

#### Module 1: basic debates

As already described, the module ‘basic debates’ consists of four meetings, each with its own theme. Although Trias Pedagogica main-

ly works with a predefined program, there is always room for input/questions from participants. Usually, these are integrated and linked to the topic on the agenda, but deviations can be made when necessary. For example, if a recent terrorist attack or an incident (e.g. honor killings, knife use among young people or the riots during the COVID-19 lockdown) has taken place, this obviously concerns parents and Trias Pedagogica makes room for these topics.

From the second meeting onwards, debates always starts with a review of the previous one, in which the fathers can indicate what stuck with them, what they took away from the earlier session. Homework assignments (which fathers receive at the end of the previous debate) are discussed.

#### Meeting 1: Parenting – own experiences

Meeting 1, as the name suggests, focuses on the fathers’ own experiences. When fathers have become acquainted with the methods of Trias Pedagogica, with the debate moderator and each other, they discuss what parenting means to them. Subsequently, fathers are asked to look back at their own upbringing by means of three questions: What did you learn from your parents? What did you miss in your own upbringing? What do you think is important to pass on to your own children? These questions stimulate fathers to think critically about the way they were raised and the way they want to raise their own children. Fathers are also introduced to the card game ‘The Parenting Quiz’<sup>4</sup> (see box – p. 28 – for a description). They play the part ‘Parenting’. At the end of the first session, fathers receive a homework assignment to prepare them for the second meeting: “Think about three things your father has given you”.

It is important to talk about the relationship with the municipality during the first session. The groups know that Trias Pedagogica is able offer them the parenting debates because they are funded by the municipality. As it turns out it is important to explain that Trias Pedagogica operates independently and that de-

[4] [https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/tools\\_spellenn.php?ppt=showcase&TileID=1&language=UK](https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/tools_spellenn.php?ppt=showcase&TileID=1&language=UK)

bates are developed for and together with the parents. During the first debate, it is also emphasized how everything discussed during the parenting debates is confidential and will not be communicated to the municipality (without consultation).

### Meeting 2: Parenting – fatherhood

Meeting 2 focuses on the role of the father. Fathers discuss the meaning of fatherhood and the role their own father played in their lives together: what did your father give you? What did you miss? Will you do this differently now that you are the father? In small groups fathers then discuss their own role in parenting.

Subsequently a two-part short animation is shown of a situation in which the father does not pay attention to his son vs. a situation where he does pay attention to his son. Afterwards, the fathers talk to each other about the animation and the relevance of father involvement. The debate moderator informs them about the unique role a father has and the influence of hands-on fatherhood on the life of the child. This will include topics such as the complementary roles of mothers and fathers, the influence that they have as a parent in relation to their children (e.g. self-esteem/self-image, self-confidence, exploration, but also skills, knowledge and attitude of the child). Finally, the fathers play the sections '(house) arrangements and school' of the card game 'The Parenting Quiz' in small groups. At the end of the meeting, fathers receive a homework assignment to prepare them for the third meeting: "Think about the communication between you and your partner".

Some quotes from fathers:

*"The debates have taught me to change myself. I try not get angry so easily anymore."*

*"Most children mirror their parents. This is about both parents, not just about the mother. We as fathers are role models".*

### Meeting 3: Parenting – parents in alignment

Meeting 3 focuses on the coordination between father and mother, as well as between parents and children. A short animation is shown in which mother and father disagree about the time their son should be home and they discuss this in his presence. Then an animation is shown in which the same situation is approached in a more positive way. Afterwards fathers discuss the animations (and related themes: the importance of a well-coordinated division of roles; the role fathers themselves have and whether they ever talk to their partners about parenting). What the distribution of roles is like in many families is addressed.

The excerpt shown earlier indicates how important it is for parents to be on the same page, but how to do this? The debate moderator informs fathers about the 'iceberg theory', illustrating how crucial it is to engage about underlying beliefs etc. with their partner, to find out why the other does and/or believes something. In the second half of the debate, fathers talk to each other about the communication between parents and their children. Discussing for example the extent to which children (depending on their age) have a say in rules and agreements. Finally, fathers play the 'alignment' section of the quiz in small groups. At the end of the session fathers receive a homework assignment to prepare for the fourth debate: Discuss with your partner the rules that apply outside the home (at school, in the neighborhood, with friends, etc.).

Some quotes from fathers:

*"Good parenting starts with communication. You often see that in the Netherlands parents stand with their child instead of above it. I find it very difficult to talk to my children without losing my role as a parent. The tips from the debate moderator and the other fathers have given me guidelines for how I could do this".*

*“We need to listen to our children. How do they think about certain things in the news? Don’t immediately shout out our own opinions but try to really engage with them and ask if they want to hear your opinion. Then you tell them it, but in a calm way”.*

*“I have not only engaged with my children, but also with my wife. I have asked her questions which we have dealt with. Also at home, we have been looking for clarity and we discussed our roles once more. We base our actions on positive parenting: give more space to the children, consult as much as possible, set frameworks and try to act from those frameworks”.*

*“Structure and good coordination between parents automatically lead to calmness. We are all busy, but we must show our positive side at home”.*

*“Among other things, I always found talking to my children difficult. I am happy with the skills I learned during the debates, such as communicating, active listening, setting frameworks and giving space”.*

#### **Meeting 4: Parenting – balanced**

Meeting 4 focuses on the balance between upbringing in the country of origin vs. the Netherlands, as well as the balance between education at home and outside (at school, in the neighborhood, with friends and online). Fathers talk to each other about (clashing) norms and values and the struggle of their children with their identity. Fathers learn which possible strategies there are to combine their own values with those in Dutch society and to name and overcome cultural differences in parenting. They talk about what they think integration is and what influence it has on parenting. Using examples, the fathers discuss different acculturation strategies, advantages and disadvantages.

Furthermore, a diagram is presented, showing what influences

children (at home, in school, outside) and it explains that rules can differ for parenting environments. The debate moderator informs the fathers about the differences that may exist between the rules inside and outside the home and about the risks this entails for their children. Fathers discuss possible solutions and ways in which they can keep up to date with rules that apply outside the home. Finally, fathers play the ‘standards’ and ‘technology’ sections of the card game ‘The Parenting Quiz’ in small groups. At the end of the meeting, fathers are given the homework assignment: “Look back at the past four debates. Has anything changed and to what extent? (your opinion, your attitude, maybe even your behavior already)”.

Some quotes from fathers:

*“By being involved as parents at school, at home and at the soccer club, you notice that children start to behave better and also perform better”.*

*“Collaboration between home, school and the outside world is a prerequisite. This says a lot about parent involvement. Know what your children are doing when they are not at home, but don’t try to do this in an overly controlling way. Take responsibility as a father and as a local resident”.*

#### **Module 2: in-depth debates**

After completion of the basic parenting debates, one of several in-depth modules will follow, described in subsequent publications<sup>5</sup>:

- **Domestic Happiness:** These in-depth debates focus on elements that promote domestic happiness (communication structure, etc.) or hinder (and could lead to domestic violence) (Distelbrink, Ekkelboom, Mehrnaz, Mesic & Pels, 2021a).

[5] [https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/diensten\\_opvoeddebatten.php](https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/diensten_opvoeddebatten.php)

- **Derailment & Alienation:** These in-depth debates focus on prevention of radicalization. The focus is on what parents can do to protect their children from derailment and alienation (Distelbrink, Ekkelboom, Mehraz, Mesic & Pels, 2021b).
- **Encourage & Discuss:** These in-depth debates pay focus on the children's time use, and their parents' view of it. In addition, attention is paid to discussing possible concerns within the family unit, with the larger social environment and with professional assistance agencies (Distelbrink, Ekkelboom, Mehraz, Mesic & Pels, 2021a).
- **Feelings & Intimacy:** These in-depth debates focus on the importance of parents' awareness regarding open communication and education about feelings, sexual development and intimacy.
- **Healthy Lifestyle:** These in-depth debates focus on the importance of a healthy diet, adequate sleep and sufficient exercise for the whole family.
- **Healthy Lifestyle - activation:** This in-depth course is a continuation of 'Healthy Lifestyle' and focuses on aspects of a healthy lifestyle that have not yet been addressed (such as mental health). Fathers are stimulated to actively work on this theme in parenting their children, for example by cooking or walking with their children.
- **First 1000 days:** These in-depth debates focus on the importance of father involvement in the first 1000 days.

Which in-depth theme will be dealt with has, in most cases, been determined prior to the start of the basic parenting debates. This is determined by the client, but there is always freedom to consult with the group. Of course, we always check if the theme meets the group needs (this is almost always the case, because all themes offered by Trias Pedagogica are based on issues in specific cities /neighborhoods. Moreover, they are developed based on the needs of parents Trias Pedagogica works with).

During the final in-depth debate, a local professional is invited to engage with the fathers. The connection of professionals with parents is described and substantiated extensively in the various in-depth modules (e.g. Distelbrink, Ekkelboom, Mehraz, Mesic & Pels, 2021).

### Module 3: return day

A few weeks (4-6) after the in-depth debates, a return day takes place, during which fathers look back at the series of parenting debates they have participated in. They reflect on changes at home following the debates and any questions they still have. During the return day an inventory of the needs of the fathers is made. For example, whether there is still a need for new topics that Trias Pedagogica does not offer yet. Whether there is a need for an extra series of in-depth debates, or (for individual fathers) a warm transfer to another professional and/or care institute (see below).

### Individual support

If parents still have specific questions or problems during or after the parenting debates, Trias Pedagogica offers (low threshold) individual support. This occurs on a regular basis. It often concerns parents who do not want or dare to go directly to a social service agency. They usually have questions about dealing with adolescents, problems in relational sense or addiction. Trias Pedagogica offers light individual support in the form of advisory talks. When specialist help is needed, referrals are made to the right agencies.

## 4. Implementation

### Materials

Several materials have been developed for the implementation of the parenting debates. All materials are managed by Trias Pedagogica and are provided to the debate moderators prior to the series of parenting debates.

- Manual for debate moderators: this manual contains information about the design and implementation of parenting debates and the theoretical principles underlying them. The manual contains an explanation of the PowerPoint presentations and instructions on how to use the various card and board games.
- PowerPoint presentations: for each debate, a PowerPoint presentation is developed to support the debate moderators.
- Card game 'The Parenting Quiz': this card game will be used during the basic parenting debates as a tool to get the fathers to start a conversation. At the end of the entire series of parenting debates (basic + one of the in-depth modules), this card game will also be given to all participants who have attended at least five meetings. For a description of 'The Parenting Quiz', see box p. 28.
- Certificates: upon completion of the entire series of parenting debates (basic + one of the in-depth modules), every participant who has attended at least five meetings will receive a certificate.
- Observation forms: debate moderators report back after each debate on the number of participants, the overall debate, atmosphere and response/stories/experiences of fathers.

### Location and type of organization

The intervention 'Parenting debates with migrant fathers' can be used throughout the Netherlands (and on request also internationally). Up to date (2020) the intervention is conducted in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Amersfoort, The Hague,



Groningen and surrounding smaller municipalities. Trias Pedagogica carries out the parenting debates at a location of your choice. The debate moderators come to the target group; we do not work at our own fixed locations. Some example locations are: places of worship (mosques, churches, etc.), community centers and schools.

### Training and competencies of implementers

Only debate moderators trained and managed by Trias Pedagogica can conduct the parenting debates. As already described, ideally, parenting debates are supervised by a debate moderator who matches the fathers in terms of cultural background, language and where possible (or if necessary), it is a man. The matching ensures 'recognizability': the debate moderator shares their position as a (child of a) migrant with the participants. He/she knows from his/her own experience what it is like to grow up in a migration context and he or she can discuss cultural customs and differences in parenting styles. Internal evaluations have shown that parents experience this as very comforting.

When selecting new debate moderators, the first thing considered is that they have an eye for the fact that regular institutes do not reach the target group sufficiently and that this demands a specific approach. They must be motivated and they must endorse the Trias Pedagogica approach. In addition, it is imperative the debate moderator has parenting expertise (Higher education/ University education, pedagogical training is preferred). Finally, experience in working with groups is necessary also. Basic knowledge of group dynamics should be present, in order for the training to address the specific principles and methods of Trias Pedagogica.

Trainers of Trias Pedagogica usually train debate moderators one-on-one in the implementation of the basic debates and in-depth debates. During the training aspiring debate moderators get to know the vision and working methods of Trias Pedagogica. They are also introduced to the card

and board games used during the debates. The debate moderators are offered additional information (theory) in the form of written and online documents.

During the training knowledge (e.g. about the main questions of the target group concerning growing up and parenting in a migration context; ability to interpret and handle parent behavior, and getting an idea of how fathers learn) and attitude (e.g. don't send, but listen; adopt a neutral attitude) are addressed. Skills in dealing with group dynamics are considered too. Debate moderators also learn about the practical aspects of the Trias Pedagogica approach (recruiting participants; reporting, etc.). After the theoretical part, the debate moderators-to-be watch a few sessions with one or two experienced debate moderators to get a good idea of how the debates work in practice. Next, they start their first debate series, with one of the experienced trainers present, who provides them with feedback where necessary.

### Quality control

In each series of parenting debates, one of the experienced trainers joins at least once. The trainers are also available throughout the year for telephone consultation regarding questions about the implementation of the parenting debates or about complex issues.

As already described, after each debate the debate moderators write a report about the meeting using the observation form. Because of these reports Trias Pedagogica receives feedback on how the meetings went, which in turn can be used for intervision and quality control. In addition, this provides insight into signals and/or needs to be used for programs or materials to be developed. Four intervision meetings are held annually, during which experiences are exchanged as well as the results of the past quarter, updates and/or new projects are discussed and signals and/or needs in regard to new/adapted programs are gone over. The opinion and experience of the debate moderators is taken seriously and may lead to certain debate series being honed or expanded.



All materials are managed by Trias Pedagogica. These materials are reviewed continuously and adapted and/or expanded based on information that emerges from the observation forms and from peer review meetings as described above. When adapted or new materials are developed, refresher training is provided for debate moderators.

New programs are developed in collaboration with parents and debate moderators (see also p. 11 – *Involvement of the target group*). The debate moderators are then re-trained. The new in-depth series is tested several times (in the presence of the trainer/method developer) and evaluated. After possible refinement, the new in-depth series is included in the range of debates.

### Secondary conditions

When organizing a parenting debate, a number of secondary conditions must be met. There must be a minimum of eight participants otherwise a series cannot be started or continued (in the case of extraordinary circumstances such as COVID-19 or a specific one-time situation exceptions can be made). Any parent is welcome. A principal may prefer to focus on parents with children in a specific age group. This should be taken into account when recruiting, but parents are never turned away. A flexible attitude is very important to carry out the debates successfully. This means: a willingness to go to the group's location, to work outside of regular business hours (9 am – 17 pm) and on weekends and the willingness to adjust the debates to suit the availabilities of the participants. Clients need to consult with Trias Pedagogica about the best day and time for their parenting debates. This will also depend on the target group (regarding work hours, for example).

The parenting debates are typically organized at a location that is approachable and easily accessible to the fathers. This can be the school of their child, but also a community center or other familiar place that is close, such as a prayer house or a sports club. The location should be large

enough to accommodate the expected group of participants. Also consider technical prerequisites such as the presence of a laptop, beamer and speakers. The debate moderator will possibly bring films, parenting quizzes and a Power-Point presentation. It is useful to choose a setup in which participants can see each other, so that they can enter into a dialogue more easily. For example, a horseshoe arrangement or two wide rows of chairs that the debate moderator is facing. The debate moderator stands during the presentation and walks around. For a follow-up debate, it is important that the room is large enough to allow fathers to break up into groups, if that is necessary. One form may be for some of the fathers to sit in an adjacent space. At the meetings, it is crucial the atmosphere is informal (see also section 'Approach to parenting debates – low threshold')

## 5. Foundation

### Problem description

Fathers from different migration backgrounds are on average less involved in parenting than mothers and in some areas also less involved than Dutch fathers without a migration background (Pels, 2005; Pels & Geense, 2005; Choenni, 2002; Distelbrink et al., 2015). The degree of involvement is related to their views on a father's role, awareness about their influence on children as well as the time they are able and willing to devote to their children; these elements in turn correlate with education level and migration generation (Distelbrink et al., 2015). The parenting debates have revealed that there is a lot of uncertainty among fathers about their own role and a father's role in relation to the mother's role. It is becoming less and less obvious that the man should be the sole breadwinner and the woman the main parent. As a result, parents need to recalibrate their roles, also when it comes to raising children. This often raises more questions for parents with a migrant background, as they have fewer examples to follow in their home environment (Distelbrink et al., 2015).

The general literature shows that fathers – when involved as parent – have a particular influence on their children's development. For example, we know that father involvement leads to positive effects for children regarding school performance, IQ scores, attachment, coping with stress, self-acceptance, social competencies, relationships with peers, and pro-social behavior. It also appears father involvement is a protective factor when it comes to risk behaviors, such as substance use, internalizing problem behaviors, and behavioral problems. Also, fathers offer a relevant male role model for their sons (FIRA, 2007). In a recent review on father involvement, the positive impact of fathers on children's social, emotional and cognitive development is confirmed, and this effect is even greater in disadvantaged children (Henry et al., 2020).

Thus, the lack of active father involvement can be a risk to the development of children. Research shows that low father involvement is also a risk factor for families with a migrant background. For young people with a migrant background, being able to communicate well, especially with fathers, appears to be associated with better health, being more social and showing fewer behavioral and emotional problems, issues with peers and hyperactivity (De Roos & Bucx, 2015; as also confirmed in general literature on father involvement, Marsiglio et al., 2000). The literature on marginalization and radicalization of youth with a migrant background also indicates risks of low father involvement (Pels, 2003; Van Bergen, De Ruyter & Pels, 2016). More specifically, as the latter authors argue, the lack of open communication between parents and their children is considered a risk factor (see also Van San, Sieckelinck & De Winter, 2010; Wessels & Dijkman, 2012).

### Causes

Parenting in a migration context is not an easy feat and can cause insecurity. This is especially true for parents of the first generation of migrants and low educated parents; the main target group of the parenting debates. At the start of 2020 more than 732.000 parents (with children) with a non-western background were living in the Netherlands; 305.600 of them fathers. Almost half (44%) of these fathers had a Turkish Dutch or Moroccan Dutch background; both are important target groups for Trias Pedagogica. In 2020 82% of the Moroccan Dutch fathers belonged to the first generation of migrants (more than 50.000 fathers). The data of CBS shows this concerns fathers who came to the Netherlands after they were born (in their youth or as an adult). 74% Of the Turkish Dutch fathers belong to the first generation of migrants (more than 50.300 fathers). In smaller groups of fathers Trias Pedagogica has reached, such as Somali or Ghanaian-Dutch fathers, around 95% to 99% were born outside the Netherlands and are of the first generation. Among Syrian and Eritrean Dutch fathers, this is even close to 100 percent (source: own edit data CBS; Statline 2020a). The first generation is

therefore still a sizeable group.

Data on education levels of parents is not available from national data, but of all men with a non-western migration background between the ages of 25 and 55 in 2020, more than a quarter will fit that bill. Among Turkish Dutch and Moroccan Dutch men in this age group their share is even higher, around one third (14% among men without migration background) (source: own adaptation data CBS; Statline, 2020b). Among the first generation, the share of low-educated people is relatively high (Flisi, Meroni & Vera-Toscano, 2016). It is precisely these low-educated fathers that Trias Pedagogica manages to reach. Approximately three quarters of the fathers reached are low educated (oral information Trias Pedagogica). Qualitative research shows that a considerable number of fathers with a migrant background are not aware of their influence on their children; fathers do not always see the importance of their involvement in the upbringing of their children (Distelbrink et al., 2005; Pels et al., 2012).

Low educated parents (with a migration background) experience more problems with parenting and more frequent negative parenting experiences than among high-educated people (e.g. Van den Broek, Kleijnen & Keuzenkamp, 2010; Bellaart, Day & Gilsing, 2016; Pharos, 2019). They often have more difficulties with the transition to a parenting style that is more common in the Netherlands. Especially low educated parents of the first generation are often further removed from 'modern' methods of upbringing including such as agreement between parents or open communication with children (Distelbrink et al., 2005; Pels et al., 2009a). This does not mean that higher educated fathers or fathers of the second generation do not have a need for support in their role as parents (in the Netherlands) (e.g. Distelbrink et al., 2020). The parenting debates are also open to these parents, as explained earlier. They are often more aware of the importance of hands-on fatherhood but they may have the same type of questions as first-generation parents (Distelbrink et al., 2020); questions which we discuss below.

Dutch parents with a migration background have to deal with additional questions on development and upbringing compared to parents without a migration background (Aarts, Boendermaker & Distelbrink, 2017; Distelbrink, Pels & Winkelman, 2017). Often these questions are related to parenting in a migration context. For example, subgroups of parents have more questions about support in school careers and the Dutch education system or about supporting children in the context of Dutch society (Distelbrink et al., 2005). Examples of other common questions are: "How do you make your children resistant to possible discrimination and/or negative perceptions?", "How do you support your child in the development of a religious and/or bicultural identity?" or "How do you convey values about parenting that are less common?" (e.g. Distelbrink et al., 2020; Distelbrink & Pels, 2015; Farag, 2017).

Adolescence also raises specific questions, particularly for these parents. Conflicts about values and norms play a stronger role in this age group. The challenge to keep children on the right track becomes bigger, especially if they grow up in multi-problem neighborhoods (Pels & Distelbrink, 2014). Not only do parents with a migrant background have more and more specific questions and insecurities around parenting, the regular parenting support programs on offer do not really reach parents with a migrant background very well, specifically the first generation and the less educated. It often offers insufficient answers to their specific questions about parenting in the migration context (e.g. Bellaart et al., 2018). Regular parenting support is mainly focused on general parenting questions and problems that affect all parents. The proportion of Dutch parents with a migration background who participate in (preventive) programs aimed at parenting support is low (Pharos, 2019). A number of factors, on both the demand and supply side, explain why these parents do not find their way to formal parenting support. Demand-side factors include: distrust of and unfamiliarity with existing services (e.g., De Koning et al., 2018; Bellaart et al., 2018), the common practice of finding solutions to problems within one's own circle, not being used to reflect on parenting and

a limited control of the Dutch language (see also De Hoog et al., 2011; Distelbrink et al., 2012; Distelbrink et al., 2015).

Another factor may be that parents do not always recognize or acknowledge problems in children nor their own role in them (see e.g. De Hoog et al., 2011). This means that, although many parents are aware of losing grip on their children or unable to support them properly, they are not able to formulate concrete (parenting) questions (Pels et al., 2009a). Finally, many parents traditionally do not realize that they themselves are primarily responsible for raising their children. In the country of origin, parenting is often done in close collaboration with other adults in the extended family around the core family (Pels et al., 2009a).

On the supply side, it is mainly the lack of competences of some professionals to support parents with a migration background (De Hoog et al., 2011; Distelbrink et al., 2012; Distelbrink et al., 2015). In addition, the standard level of parenting support does not focus much on specific parenting questions that may be involved for Dutch people with a migration background (e.g. Pels, Distelbrink & Tan, 2009; Bellaart, 2014). Practical issues sometimes make the services on offer barely accessible: opening hours do not fit the working hours of parents (especially fathers) or there is no option for childcare (De Hoog et al., 2011).

All of these elements also come into play when supporting mothers. However, when it concerns fathers, the distance to standard programs on parenting support is even greater. Across the board, parenting support professionals reach fathers less (Distelbrink et al., 2012; Distelbrink et al., 2015). This is even more true for fathers with a migrant background, partly because the support is primarily aimed at mothers: the form, content, tone and timing (Distelbrink et al., 2015). Meanwhile, fathers with a migrant background are more likely to need support with their parenting. The gap between what they have experi-

enced in their own upbringing and what the current time and society demands of them as fathers, is greater than what the average father without a migration background experiences (Distelbrink et al., 2015). In addition, fathers are often even less aware of the importance of their contribution to the development of children and are not always actively involved in parenting their children, as previously indicated (Distelbrink et al., 2015). Parenting support to fathers can considerably increase father involvement, which in turn can have a positive influence on the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of children (Pels et al., 2012). The fact that fathers are hard to reach and the offer of support is poorly tailored to their needs and questions, was an important reason to create the parenting debates.

### Factors that the sub-goals address

The debates primarily aim to reach parents who are at a distance from regular facilities that provide direct parenting support, using an approach that builds confidence to discuss parenting openly (sub-goal 1).

The emphasis here is strongly on awareness, knowledge and attitude (sub-goals 2, 3 and 4), because of the 'starting level' of the parents (in terms of awareness and knowledge of the father-role and parenting).

Specifically, the parenting debates initiate reflection about the father-role and about the influence of one's own behavior on that of children. The debates also teach that transfer of knowledge about and reflection on different parenting styles and on the Dutch school system is needed. The resulting insights enable parents to understand why a particular way of parenting or communication is beneficial to the development of their child. This awareness forms the basis for a change of attitude, a willingness to shape the father-role in conjunction with mothers, and to learn skills to apply certain ways of parenting themselves, especially in dealing and communicating with the partner and children (see also Keizer, 2015). To what extent skills are practiced, depends

on the starting level of the group (sub-goal 5).

Furthermore, the approach aims to empower parents by means of informal parenting support (sub-goal 6) and by lowering the threshold to formal facilities (sub-goal 7).

### Accountability: active elements

Earlier, we discussed some of the key elements of the approach to the parenting debates. Below we give a foundation from the literature.

## 5.1 Outreaching approach

A very important element of Trias Pedagogica's approach is the way fathers are recruited and reached. Because of the distance to facilities and the fact that facilities often do not connect with fathers (see problem definition), the target group is often both inaudible and invisible. Van Doorn et al. (2013) even state that it is not so much the target group itself that is inaccessible, but that the professionals/supporting agencies themselves have become inaccessible to the most vulnerable target group by forming unnecessary barriers. It is important to go out and find these fathers and to connect with them through individuals they trust, an outreach-approach. This is still a little used approach within the standard programs of parenting support. This specific approach shines a light on fathers, who would never have come in contact with a parenting service otherwise. It often concerns fathers who are not yet aware that they have questions about parenting, as described before. The fact that no one is turned away and everyone is welcome contributes to the open approach that is needed to build rapport and eliminate distrust. The importance of an outreaching approach and the collaboration with key people and/or informal organizations to reach groups who are at a distance to what is offered, is supported by literature (Movisie, 2017; Pels et al., 2009a,b; Pels et al., 2012; Bellaart et al., 2018; Heineke et al., 2012; Ponzoni, 2016; Ponzoni et al., 2016).



Part of this outreach approach is to go step-by-step if necessary; to not offer an entire course of multiple sessions right away, but hold an exploratory meeting first. It is also important to be flexible when dealing with variations in the group during the debates. Research on Triple P teens in Amsterdam confirms that there is resistance among parents with a migrant background to follow an entire debate series (De Boer, Jansma & Distelbrink, 2018). This is even more true for fathers that Trias Pedagogica works with; generally, they are not likely to attend a meeting where parenting is discussed.

The low threshold (e.g. working in a familiar location for the target group, working with professionals/volunteers with a shared background and 'standing with the parents'), the building of trust, connecting to the context of the target group and an unprejudiced and open attitude are factors that increase and strengthen the effectiveness of the outreach approach (Movisie, 2017). These factors reflect the working method of Trias Pedagogica. They are further explained below.

Research shows that the outreaching approach is both an effective way to connect to isolated groups and a way to signal problems that would otherwise remain hidden for regular professionals/support agencies (Cornelissen & Bransen, 2008; Holsbrink, 2009; Lupi & Schelling, 2009; Matthijssen, 2014; Nicis Institute, 2010; Verplanke & Tonkens, 2013). An outreaching approach increases the overall trust people have in support agencies and it also strengthens the social structures of the target group. Various analyses show that in the long run an outreaching approach also has a positive financial effect, because specialist care can be prevented (Kruiter & Kruiter, 2013; Verplanke & Tonkens, 2013). Additionally, people become more willing to actively support civil initiatives targeting discrimination or unemployment (Staples & Gradener, 2012).

In order to effectively reach vulnerable target groups, it is important

to establish contact as well as to maintain it. The professional, volunteer or (aid) organization has to remain present in the neighborhood, has to stay accessible and approachable, keep talking to people, stay and continue to be visible. Research has shown that the effect of an outreaching approach is lost if it is limited to one-time or short-term contact (Lupi & Schelling, 2009; Movisie, 2017).

Maintaining contact and investing in a network of self-organizations, places of worship and key figures is something Trias Pedagogica spends a great deal of time on. This way, Trias Pedagogica continues to be visible within neighborhoods and the threshold to approach Trias Pedagogica remains low.

## 5.2 Low threshold

Trias Pedagogica is committed to low threshold debates to maximize the chance of continued participation and motivation. The way the debates are designed strongly increases the chance of participation of the groups that Trias Pedagogica is targeting; fathers who are not yet very aware of the importance of their role in parenting, and who are not used to having conversations about this. Making the debates accessible is done by choosing a time that fits in with fathers' working hours, choosing a location that is familiar to participants, creating an informal atmosphere by offering food and drinks and to start informally. Literature suggests that a familiar environment and informal atmosphere encourages relationship building and the sharing of experiences (Prinsen et al., 2012; Movisie, 2017). For fathers specifically, it is important to take their working hours into account, it is a prerequisite for reaching them (e.g., Distelbrink et al., 2005; Pels et al., 2012).

Another way accessibility is ensured, is by offering debates in one's own language when necessary. Research supports this choice. Language is a major barrier for many migrant parents to participate in the program (Distelbrink et al., 2011; Mutsaers, 2009). Especially with such personal and sensitive topics

as parenting, feelings and doubts, it is crucial to be able to speak in one's own language if the Dutch language presents a barrier. Through the use of their own language (words, ways of addressing someone, sentence structure) people can express their personal identity, give expression to their self-esteem and emotions best (Hofman, 2002).

Accessibility is also achieved by working in homogeneous groups in terms of cultural background, language and specifically gender. In part, working in homogeneous groups is motivated by practical considerations (language), as explained earlier. But 'being among each other' helps fathers who are not used to talking to each other about parenting and children to cross the threshold and participate in the debate (Pels et al., 2012; Hamdi et al., 2018). Among first generation fathers, who are often accustomed to a degree of segregation between the sexes, group-oriented work within their own circle can be a crucial condition to start a conversation. A male debate moderator with the same background is also important here, another element discussed under the umbrella term 'low threshold of the parenting debates'. In a recent review of fatherhood interventions, the significance of working in men's groups led by a male debate moderator, focusing on topics such as parent-child/ parent-partner communication and one's own role as a father, is confirmed (Henry et al., 2020; see also Sicouri et al., 2018). The same review states that this type of intervention is still in short supply (Henry et al., 2020). Regular support usually focuses strongly on mothers and is mostly implemented by women, which sometimes makes it less appealing to fathers (cf. Sicouri et al., 2018).

The use of role models and debate moderators from their own circle can be an important pull-factor for fathers, as research has shown (Distelbrink & Ketner, 2011; Pels et al., 2012). Studies on the value of people that provide informal support for parents show that elements like familiarity, 'not having to explain' and safety are important values in talking about topics among peers and with a support person from their own community (e.g., Ponzoni

et al., 2016; Hamdi et al., 2018; Movisie, 2017). Particularly for parents who feel they have little power, as a person and as a parent, and who have little experience with using standard forms of help, the recognizability of someone from their own background can lower the threshold to ask for support and increase its effectiveness (Pels et al., 2009b).

Quote from a father:

*"I think atmosphere and safety are very important. For me the debates were like family nights. I had the freedom to speak freely about all kinds of personal matters related to me and my home life, without anyone judging me."*

### 5.3 Calm buildup

The debates are structured in stages. Before fathers go more in-depth and discuss themes such as safety or healthy behavior, a basis is required in which there is a lot of room for awareness of their behavior and role as a parent and basic skills such as communicating with their partner and children (Distelbrink et al., 2013). This basis is a requirement for the next level where topics are delved into deeper. For example, being able to talk to children about their experiences and feelings is necessary to protect them from, for example, sexually transgressive behavior or radicalization (e.g., Pels, 2014). This has also emerged clearly from the different field studies and evaluations that Trias Pedagogica itself conducted during the development of its trainings (e.g. Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2019a; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2019b; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2020; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2021).

To ensure that fathers are 'ready' for the often taboo-sensitive in-depth topics, fathers should always first follow the basic debates first. There is also a phased structure in another respect. Trias Pedagogica works according to the learning model that is often used in trainings. Trias Pedagogica uses a learning model with four phases in which participants, before they learn new behavior, first



make a transition from unconscious to conscious incompetence; and subsequently learn new skills (especially in debates that go in-depth; 'conscious competence') until they become ingrained so that at a certain point, they become unconsciously competent (Broadwell, 1969; Curtiss & Warren, 1974). Working structurally (with clear goals and in consecutive phases) is, according to the literature, an important and effective factor with interventions (Van Yperen et al., 2010).

The calmer buildup, starting with a series of basic debates and following those with more in-depth debates, also matches what is described in literature about building a relationship of trust in group discussions with parents from immigrant backgrounds (Hamdi et al., 2018; Bellaart et al., 2018; Distelbrink, 2014). The more general literature also suggests that sufficient time and attention should be devoted to the 'connecting to' and motivating for programs in parenting support (Breuk, Khatib & Jongman, 2007; Ingoldsby, 2010; Movisie, 2017; Santisteban et al., 2006). The basic debates lay the groundwork for this.

#### 5.4 Attention to the migration context

An important element in the approach to parenting debates is the focus on the migration context. This is done by paying attention to themes fathers are concerned with, such as parenting as a minority and parenting in the context of their own cultural background. Additionally, through the transfer of knowledge, mutual discussion of topics such as western parenting styles, positive communication with children and the importance of hands-on fathering. And finally by leaving room for emotions, including negative emotions about (and experiences with) Dutch society and/or standard support programs.

That (views on) parenting for many parents with an migrant background is inspired by religion, and that parenting from the position of a minority is an important issue, has been confirmed in recent studies. This

includes second generation parents (e.g. Hamdi et al., 2018; Distelbrink et al., 2017; Distelbrink et al., 2020). This was discussed earlier in the problem outline. How transferring knowledge is necessary, has been confirmed in previous studies among fathers with a migrant background (Distelbrink et al., 2005; Pels et al., 2012).

It is important that fathers can reflect collectively on how they themselves have contributed to the discussion, and that they can exchange relevant ideas and approaches under the guidance of debate moderators who are familiar with their living environment. This offers the opportunity to tie in the background, knowledge and life experiences of those involved, which is shown to be an effective factor in care and support in literature (Barnhoorn et al., 2013). This also applies when it concerns fathers (Van Staple & Bwalya, 2021; Van Beurden & de Haan, 2019). Forging a connection with fathers needs to be done in a positive and reinforcing way, if it is to be effective. We will return to this later. The importance of tapping into the environment of fathers, points to the need to make an intervention culturally-ecologically valid. This increases the likelihood of effect, as international literature has shown (Pels et al., 2009b).

That room for emotions is essential in order to open up to (mutual) learning is also confirmed by literature. International research has shown that the way a parent adapts to the demands of their environment (i.e. Dutch society) strongly correlates with how migrant parents perceive their place in society and the treatment therein (Ogbu, 1987; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). If they perceive their position, including the perception of them as a group, as negative, it is more likely they will have resistance to change (Portes, 1995; Gomperts, 2009). Specific coping styles and (defensive) attitudes can result from unfavorable experiences and interactions and with circumstances in the social, economic and political sphere. These can lead to mistrust, for example towards social workers (e.g. Sarno Owens et al., 2007; Armistead et al., 2004). Literature offers starting points to respond effectively. One example in the migration context is

the role of a 'cultural broker' in a 'culture-migration dialogue' (Bernal, Bonilla & Bellido, 1995, p. 78). Furthermore, a good, somewhat informal atmosphere, in which trust plays a central role is essential and there has to be room for emotion and reflection (Pels et al., 2012).

## 5.5 Learning from each other

The parenting debates are a group intervention. According to the literature, group interventions, in addition to home interventions, work relatively well with parents with a migration background (Fierloos et al., 2020). In addition, the group character is used explicitly: in the approach to the parenting debates, there is a strong focus on mutual learning. We know from literature that learning from each other and the knowledge that you are not the only one with a problem, is an important motivator for parents to participate in a parenting support group (e.g. Naber, Smallegange & Van Dongen, 2018).

In the parenting debates, fathers discover together what is helpful to them by sharing their backgrounds and life histories, using their values and norms collectively as resources (Ungar 2012; Poortinga, 2012; Van Stapele & Bwalya, 2021). According to international comparative research (Van Stapele & Bwalya, 2021) Trias Pedagogica (with their training method) is a front runner in a movement for democratic parent-to-parent support, that is slowly gaining more traction (Ivan, Da Roit, & Knijn 2014; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson 2014; Kurtz 1997; Ainbinder et al. 1998; Van Stapele & Bwalya, 2021). During the parenting debates, the knowledge and experience fathers already have, forms an important basis for the exchange. There is a lot of room for exploration together and for individual input. The dialogical character of meetings is considered an important and effective factor in the literature about support for parents with a migrant background (Van Beurden & De Haan 2019).

Previous literature also substantiates the importance of exploration

and joint determination with parents regarding the course of the conversations, as a counterpoint to the often dominant 'expert model' in most parenting support (e.g. Davis & Meltzer, 2007; Movisie, 2017). Parents often only truly accept help and advice if it matches their needs, goals are set jointly, and there is a degree of equality. And if the person who offers support comes across as genuine, humble and empathetic to parents. 'Standing with the parent' is essential. A review from 2000 (Statham, 2000) also endorses the importance of an interactive working method that provides room for parents' own ideas and experiences for the effectiveness of parenting support.

To support the process of mutual learning, the debater leaders apply an approach that is referred to in the literature as 'decentralizing/recentralizing' (Ponzoni, to be published). This means facilitators create a lot of room for conversation and are genuinely curious, they are able to 'park' their own knowledge (expert role), while fathers discover answers through dialogue and then share their knowledge over time. During the conversations, they also bring their own experiences as fathers and sons to the table. This method – the effectiveness of which has been demonstrated more and more – is referred to in the literature as 'professional intimacy'. The debate moderator shares his or her own experiences to emphasize equality with the participants, ensuring this is in support of the group's process. It is imperative that parents do not get the feeling they have to support the professional (Ponzoni, to be published).

## 5.6 Positive Approach

To allow the knowledge fathers bring and to allow dialogue, an open, supportive attitude without judgement is required: the positive approach. When working with parents with an immigrant background, it is especially important to work in a culturally sensitive way. At the core should be an open, respectful and curious attitude without prejudice, using a dynamic approach to 'culture' (e.g. Knipscheer & Kleber 2004; Bekker & Frederiks, 2005; Bellaart et al.,

2018). Evidence has also accumulated in general literature about the importance of an unbiased attitude among professionals to ensure success of parenting programs (cf. the meta-study of Kane, Wood & Barlow, 2007; Barnhoorn et al., 2013; Movisie, 2017). Prevention literature also emphasizes the importance of a approach that's positive and empowering, 'without pointing the finger' (Miller 2014; Stanley et al., 2015; see also Distelbrink et al., 2013). Encouraging changes in thought and behavior with a positive approach (rewarding, giving compliments, etc.), has been used for many years in various fields, for example in parenting, in the workplace, the legal sector and healthcare (e.g. Driessen, 2007; Rietdijk, 2011; Van der Pligt, Koomen & Van Harreveld, 2007). Trias Pedagogica applies a similar, positive approach in working with fathers, by focusing on the positive intention rather than the behavior.

Quote from a father:

*"Nice to hear that I'm actually not doing so bad at all."*

## 5.7 Use of different working methods

Bijkerk & van der Heide (2006) show how methods that are activating are crucial to sharing information, transferring knowledge, acquiring skills and attitudes; this applies both in education and in meetings. Following Kolb (1984), they distinguish four learning styles that form a learning cycle: learning by experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, experimenting. This implies that learning situations contain moments of experience and application. It stimulates participants to actively contribute. The use of appealing examples is wise and very suitable for learning situations in which a level of diversity is present (Naber & Knippels, 2013).

Various forms of discussion – exchanging experiences, listing problems, weighing up and choosing solutions – can be ways to learn and reflect.

The debate moderator introduces a question or proposition (in-

depth, evaluating, applying etc.), stimulates discussion, possibly gives assignments, takes stock of experiences, summarizes standpoints (see also Bijkerk & Van der Heide, 2006). In the parenting debates the quiz on upbringing, discussions based on film fragments or animations, are also powerful methods to get a free-flowing exchange going. If participants are not used to (or to a limited extent) reflecting on parenting, the use of games and (film) examples is a great tool to stimulate such an interaction between fathers. Literature shows that the combination of various methods such as exercises, games and transfer of information, is an effective element in parenting support (Ince, 2011).

In evaluation of the various methods to use, it was noted that the motivation of fathers to learn is increased by the competitive element in the quiz. The competitive element is also visible by the use of the name: 'parenting debates'. It is known from literature that specifically fathers who are far removed from regular parenting support, a different approach may be useful in order to encourage them to talk about parenting; less focused on daily parenting questions and more on the future of their children, for example (JSO, 2005). Also, more focused on discussion than on personal parenting questions (Distelbrink et al., 2005; see also Pels, Ketner & Naber, 2012).

## 6 Research on the parenting debates

Finally, we discuss the research available regarding the basic parenting debates. There is no external evaluation research on the basic parenting debates; certainly not with a 'before' and 'after' measurement. A before measurement is difficult to achieve due to the nature of the group. It is difficult to question fathers beforehand because of the (trusting) relationship that still needs to be forged, because of the informal character (fathers do not need to register; there is no intake) and the fact that some fathers join only after the first debate. Currently, evaluations of the debates take place mainly by orally collected evaluations after each debate, observational reports from debate moderators at each debate and through questioning fathers at the various return days. These data are used by Trias Pedagogica for annual reports to clients, in which they combine these findings. Trias Pedagogica has carried out exploratory studies among target groups with the objective to develop new training sessions and to test them out. These studies are discussed in the methodological foundations of follow-up modules.

Before we discuss the evaluations of Trias Pedagogica itself, we will briefly address data collected as part of the methodology description and foundation in 2012 and 2015.

### **Data collected for the original methodology description and foundation**

For the methodology description of the parenting debates with Moroccan Dutch fathers in 2012, three debates were observed and 23 fathers of different migration generations and education levels were subsequently interviewed. Some of these fathers had already participated in several debates; and some came for the first time. The data was collected with the main purpose of getting a better picture of how the debates were in practice, how fathers experienced them, and why they chose to participate (Distelbrink et al., 2012). The interviews show the importance of the debates for the target group of Trias Ped-

agógica, and how the approach resonated with the fathers. Younger fathers also come to the debates to get information and tips. However, for older first generation fathers the emphasis lies more on exchanging ideas. Fathers want to participate out of concern for their children: they notice that things are not always going right. They want to learn and are curious about the approach of other fathers. They notice during the debate that they lack the knowledge necessary to properly guide their child in the Netherlands. Through the debates, they have received practical tools to use at home, for example, to give compliments to their partner and what the effect of that is, or to have conversations with their children in a different way. Fathers confirm that it is important to talk about school and how to support children in this during the debates; they deem this a very important subject. Also, emotions about how their children were given below-level advice on which high school to choose, need a place in the debates, as well as topics like puberty and discrimination or negative perception.

For the 2015 methodology extension and foundation (Distelbrink et al, 2015), ten Somali and six Ghanaian Dutch fathers with different levels of education were observed, interviewed and asked about their experiences. Among the fathers with a Somali background some of them were fathers who had already participated in a debate some time ago, some of them were fathers who had recently participated in a debate and some fathers that had recently participated. The Ghanaian fathers had recently participated in a debate. The aim of the interviews was to find out if the debates connected with these groups as well, and what questions they might have.

The Somali Dutch fathers who had participated recently were enthusiastic about the debates and indicated that they had gained a lot of new knowledge, among other things, about the importance of spending time with the children as a father, communicating more and differently with children and being actively involved as a father from a young age onwards. Also,

they learned about other ways of punishing children, and became more aware of the importance of 'respecting women as mothers' and consulting on a more equal division of labor with their partners. Their stories show that fathers know little about the Dutch school system, that they want to support their children, but do not know how. And there is a need for follow-up support, for instance regarding the influence of peers.

The fathers who attended the debates longer ago say that they appreciate the space for mutual discussion and personal input and the valuable guidance from the debate moderator. They have learned from the debates that it is important to talk with children in a way that suits them and to coordinate with their partners. After the debates they said they started to give children more compliments, address them at a younger age, discuss their behavior with them, and educate them more consistently.

The fathers from Ghanaian backgrounds who all participated in the same debate emphasize that it was nice to have the debate about fatherhood together. 'From an African perspective' as one of the participants added. Communication with children is an important topic and that is appreciated. For example, one participant says that he now knows that it is important to communicate well with children. Many participants are concerned about the relationship with Dutch service or care organizations, especially the threat of 'youth care' undermining their own way of parenting. There is a lot of fear of interference from the school, youth care, the police or others, and too little knowledge among parents about the laws and regulations behind this.

### **Trias Pedagogica's own evaluations**

As described earlier, the parenting debates are always evaluated orally with the fathers, both at each debate and for the series of sessions in its entirety. At the return day, fathers look back at the series of parenting debates participated in earlier and they reflect on the changes they have made after the debates



and any problems they are still encountering. We summarize the most recent findings here. These are also reflected in reports to clients in recent years: Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2019a; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz, 2019b; Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz (2020); Ekkelboom & Mehrnaz (2021). The evaluations show that the fathers experience parenting debates and the methods used, as very pleasant. The fathers find it very nice to meet under supervision to discuss cases and to discuss alternative ways of responding/acting. They feel it is important to keep talking about different topics regarding parenting.

Below are some quotes from fathers who participated in the parenting debates:

*"I like the way the parenting debates are organized very much. Parental input is essential. We really get the space to actively participate instead of us sitting back and just listening. This is how we discover what we need as parents".*

*"I am a father of four children. I find that the knowledge and experience gained from Trias Pedagogica and the other fathers is a useful addition to my vision on parenting. I have found confirmation with myself and the other fathers".*

*"Even though we all have different backgrounds, we all want the best for our child. Our norms and values are not that different from each other. What does differ is the way we approach certain things in parenting. By talking to each other about our problems and successes, we can give each other tips and handles".*

In addition, the fathers mention that, since attending the parenting debates, they have become more aware of their role in parenting and the importance of involvement in school, the social environment, and their children's media use. In many cases, fathers see an improvement in communi-

cation with their partners and with their children, now that they have applied the tips and tools from the parenting debates at home. The fathers also see parenting in two cultures as something that can be positive instead of just a challenge.

*"We often worry about whether our children will end up on the wrong path too. The focus in the neighborhood is often on fighting when it is already too late. We need prevention, the prevention of problems. 'Al Wikaya kharoun mina al llaj – prevention is better than curing', as we say in Morocco. It's nice that Trias Pedagogica focuses on this. With the tips and tools, I now know how I can try to protect my child."*

*"There is very little conversation with our children, especially when it comes to taboo topics. We need to be open to have conversations with our children and make it routine. The tip about the dinner table conversation from the debate moderator was very valuable to me. I will definitely apply this at home".*

*"I'm a grandfather, but I'm still active in raising my grandchildren on a weekly basis. It is an opportunity for me and other grandfathers when we hear how important we can be in their lives. We also parent them and we can give our advice on certain topics".*

A few weeks/months after the fathers have participated in the parenting debates, changes in behavior and actions often start to become visible: communication between parents has improved frequently and the fathers are more involved with their children. For example, fathers at the return days regularly indicate that they help their children with homework, play together, and/or play sports together and show an interest in their children's daily lives by asking them about their day, friends and needs. Fathers who participated in the parenting debates also regularly commit themselves to neighborhood safety, for example, by calling out young people on their behavior.

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## Appendix 1. Themes in-depth debates

### Domestic Happiness

**Central theme:** prevention of domestic violence, elements that further and prevent domestic happiness. As needed: financial parenting, addiction.

**Extra:** use of the board game 'Domestic Happiness'.

### Feelings & Intimacy

**Central theme:** open communication and education about feelings, sexual development and intimacy, speaking to your children about their sexual development.

**Extra:** use of the board game 'Feelings & Intimacy'.

### On the Right Track: encourage and discuss

**Central theme:** the role parents play in preventing their children to engage in risky behavior.

**Extra:** none.

### On the Right Track: derailment & alienation

**Central theme:** (prevention of) radicalization, elements that can prevent and risk factors in radicalization.

**Extra:** use of the card game 'Derailment & Alienation'.

### Healthy Lifestyle (multiple routes)

**Central theme:** healthy diet, sufficient sleep & exercise, and also attention to mental health and 'positive health' as an umbrella term.

**Extra:** use of the board game 'Healthy Lifestyle'.

### First 1000 days

**Central theme:** the importance of father involvement in the first 1000 days in parenting a child.

**Extra:** none.







## Colophon

Principal: Trias Pedagogica  
Authors: Dr. M. Distelbrink (Verwey-Jonker Instituut)  
Drs. L. L. Ekkelboom (Trias Pedagogica)  
A. Mehrasz, BSc. (Trias Pedagogica)  
A. Mesic, MSc (Verwey-Jonker Instituut)  
Em. prof. dr. T. Pels (Verwey-Jonker Instituut)

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