

English script.....

...“Ich bin super!” ...
Conflict resolution in German Schools.
A Feature by Nolito Marques and Katharina Borchardt.

KESS-Kinder

....Ich bin super! ... Wir sind super!....

Narration

These are pupils from the Hauptschule Herbertskaul, in Frechen, near Cologne, Germany taking part in lessons about perception and awareness as an anti-violence program in schools.

music

Music up and fade to announcement

Narration

You're listening to “Ich bin super!”, a Co-production between Deutsche Welle and the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation in the series “Crisis and Conflict resolution”. The producers are Nolito Marques and Katharina Borchardt.

Fx....

radio news....

Change Music accoustic to radio play and fade into news bulletin

Heute Morgen... (Originalnachricht erfurt.....faked or real)..fade....

„....In Germany 18 people have died in a school shooting. Police said a former student, who was expelled from school some weeks ago, took revenge and shot dead 14 teachers, two other students and a police officer before pulling the trigger on himself. The 19 year old was armed with a pump action shotgun and a handgun when walked through the school at around 11:00 local time in the eastern town of Erfurt, shooting at teachers in corridors, classrooms and restrooms. Hundreds of students from grades 5 through 12 were at school at the time. He was described as a calm boy but no one could have guessed what passed through his mind.....“

Narration

Before Erfurt it has been the perception that school shootings or violence have only been prevalent in American schools. Yet the recent Erfurt shooting has been somewhat of a rude awakening to the extent violence has increased in European schools. I told my co-producer, Katharina Borchardt that even Namibians were shocked by the event and discussed violence in schools on some of the local radio chat shows. Although the school shootings debate in Namibia has faded, in Germany alot of attention is still given to the issue.

Some of the questions that are emerging include how much violence really occurs in schools and where does violence start?

Kinder...mini-marathon
Fx...describing violent incidents.....

Narration

We visited a Hauptschule in Frechen, a quiet rural town outside of Cologne. We spoke to one of the teachers Christa Wächtler about what she hears when children describe a violent incident.....:

Christa Wächtler

The children have different answers to the question what violence means for you. The responses range from being laughed at, not being taken seriously, hitting one another, or not being allowed to be yourself. According to the pupils this includes being afraid to walk in the street or that some one may attack them. Some of the other impressions of what violence means included to feel oppressed, or bullied. According to ms Wächler there are different forms of situations that can lead to violence. It starts with something as simple as picking on each other, or throwing around pencil cases, pulling hair or taking away another pupils' sandwich...all of these situations have the potential to lead to fighting or physical violence. Sometimes a pupil may even have a knife, but this is very seldom.

Narration

Many parents are concerned about their childrens safety at school and have started to actively take part in discussions about violence.

*Parents /
Male*

The parents start with the basic question of when does violence start and even more personal, when does violence begin for the child. There are however differences in responses but there is a point where all agree that a certain action or situation is violent. But distinction should clearly be made between a real threat, thus real violence and mere playfulness or teasing.

Narration

Next we had to meet with a school psychologist and arrived some what late at the forboding Cologne Stadthaus. Here we had some difficulty in getting inside the building, but after explaining that we had a appointment we were let in by a security guard. In the nice warm office of Steffen Hildebrand he explains that the beginning of agression or an attack is different from one child to another.

Steffen Hildebrand

It seems the definition of violence is straightforward, but for the individual – his or her understanding of what violence is – is vastly different. One assumes that the intensity of physical violence has increased but in the quantitative sense –no. What has increased though is what is refered to as bullying or mobbing ...the sort of verbal violence or insults on the play ground, of which children suffer the most. To understand violence better one has to look beyond the definition and ask what the victim feels in that situation. So violent behaviour can start with a simple intimidating

glance or the feeling of being excluded. And from this we gather that violence is in reality a very subjective idea.

Narration

In our research we found that in the different school systems there is little difference in the violence potential that can take place. The German school system is divided into Grundshule...almost like a primary school. From there the pupil has the choice of going to either a Gymnasium, a Hauptschule, Realschule or the Gesamtschule. Form the research it seems that in the so called Gymnasien verbal aggresion or mobbing is more prevalent where as Hauptschule pupils were not as quick-witted. According to a recent report by Freiburger Max-Planck-Institut for international criminal law the „countable“ forms of violence had been almost 3 times as high in Hauptschule than in Gymnasien.

This lead us to an almost fairytale-like forest area, awash with autumn colors, where pupils of the Montesori Hauptshule and Gymnasien were taking part in a mini-marathon.

Kinder

Talking about two schools fighting (Katharina's questions inbetween)

Narration

The Montessori-Hauptschule and the Montessori-Gymnasium are situated in Ossendorf, in Colonge, where they share the same school yard and other facilities. According to the children this has lead to various small brawls between the pupils of two schools. Ossendorf situated in the north-western part of Cologne is also beset with various social ills such as gang related youth violence. Petty crimes such as pickpoketing, theft of cell-phones, special label clothing or money is almost a daily event. The school psychologist describes the influence of violence in the society on the child as a sort of quest to be the winner or conquerer over the weak.....

Steffen Hildebrand

Children who tend to show aggressive behaviour usually seek out weaker children to overpower or intimidate. This creates the feeling of power or of being the winner. In most cases violent behaviour stems from a reason or event maybe in the past and yet sometimes not. Violent or aggressive behaviour can also be used as an outlet for a situation or feelings the child can not cope with. On the other hand there may simply be no reason at all. It may be possible that one becomes violent to reach a certain aim. Additionally one can ask to what extent children copy violence in what is referred to as the Ellbogeng-gesellschaft or the so-called dog-eat-dog society as a means of gaining or being succesful over some-one or a situation.

Narration

School yard brawls are mostly assosiated with young boys but according to the various teachers we spoke to there as been a marked increase in girl or cat fights in the last few years.

Christa Wächtler

According to Ms Wächtler girl fights seem to be more intense. For example when they pull each others hair, insult each other it seems to be more serious. For the typical german girl being called a „slut“ or in that direction is the absolute insult. This then leads to a fist fight. In general one can not say that boys are more prone to fights than girls, but boys seem to be more direct, in that respect.

Narration

The saying goes.....a woman scorned... well we found that nowadays boys tread lightly when it comes the wrath of a girl. We interviewed two 15 year old Hauptshule- and rather outspoken madchens. One was sturdy-built with her blond hair combed back tightly while the other; a brown-haired cheeky girl with purple eye shadow and who thought the microphone was hard of hearing.

Schülerinnen

Zwei Geschichten: Ich habe den kaputt gemacht. Und: Tamara schlägt Jungen mit Stiefel. (Minimarathon)

Steffen Hildebrand

According to our school psychologist the dog-eat-dog society has brought a change to the previous image of women as the victim. The rule nowadays is: be strong! In this sense one has the desire to feel accepted. This is a gender neutral emotion felt by everyone. For a boy to achieve this aim it sometimes means to hit another boy. It is a fact that mostly the boys tend get involved in fights, but it has been shown that there is an increase in girl fights. For the girl to be accepted in her gang she will also resort to physical violence if required.

Musik

Meine kleine Schwester mit dem Messer
Kinder

Konflikte; Schülerin: Man kann aber auch zur Streitschlichtung gehen. Formular, shake hands, friends? (Minimarathon)

Narration

One of the interesting violence prevention programs we found is the Streitschlichter or arbitration program. Although the program has been in existence for several years it seems to be in vogue in German schools at the moment. The Streitschlichter program is but one of many other simliar violence prevention programs in German schools. In most cases these programs also work hand in hand and at times may invite school social workers, youth organisations or sexual awareness educators to complement their programs. Parents also find their rol in violence prevention important and have created spesiale parent-teacher crises meetings to discuss these problems..

Parents

/ female

Parents feel that they play a big rol in how a child develops his / her sense of aggression or reaction to violence. This is why they feel it is so important to discuss

the issue. The parents have also noted that if conflicts arise in class, and this has been discussed between parents, the atmosphere in class has really changed for the better. In addition to these active parents-teachers nights they've also had some cases where someone in a class has a problem. The parents normally meet and may have met up to 3 times to have more clarity on the conflict and try to find a solution for it.

Narration

Back to the Streitschlichter program....! In the Johann-Amos-Comenius-Hauptschule in southern suburb of Porz in Cologne we were led to a friendly and comfortable room where the streitschlichter- participants thrash out the conflicts. ...well not literally. The table was made up with a colorful table cloth, flowers and a suspicious looking cookie jar which turned out to be filled with soft gummi-bear jelly-sweets for the pupils at war.

Children with conflicts normally come to the streitschlichter room during the first break. It was while children were breaking down the door trying to catch a peek at us - the radio team - that we had a chance to interview ms Christel Poensgen-Dicke, the teacher in charge of the program. She explains what happens when children bring a conflict to the streitschlichter....

Christel Poensgen-Dicke

Children are normally welcomed and told what the rules of the room are. According to the teacher the children are not allowed to use strong language, or to chip-in. The program does not want to punish the culprits but merely get to the truth and solve the conflict. Then the children recount what happened, each telling his or her own version. The stories almost never agree. The streitschlichter also discuss what the children feel during the conflict. Role reversal is also used, and children are required to try and imagine how they would feel in the other's shoes. Describing their feelings as the culprit or as the victim. But also when the culprit sees him or herself as the victim and maybe shows up with a black eye, one immediately thinks that something bad must have happened. But in the course of the conversation one discovers that both parties share the guilt. And this is the crucial point where one can start to find a solution. So the children find a solution themselves. After this they are required to fill in a small form where they have to indicate that.... "I am willing to..." (dot dot dot) and on the other: „I want to....“ (dot dot dot). The children indicate what they wish from the other as well as what they are willing to do in return. When these forms have been completed the Streitschlichter go over the requests and when both parties have reached an agreement about their wishes it is noted in the special arbitration book.

Narration

In most cases a combination of insults and physical scuffelings are the norm in most schools. With the streitschlichter program children who've had a conflict have to return to the arbitration room after two weeks as a postmortem of their agreement. If their agreement had not been met further arbitration is required. We found that there is however a large variety of problems pupils take to the room. We spoke to some of the streitschlichter students about this....

Streitschlichter
(deutscher Junge)

Once a 5th form pupil brought a petty story about his best friend. Some of these conflicts seem to be petty, but they may sometimes have up to ten pupils who suddenly clam in front of the door, who want a solution to their fist fight or other problems. The streitschlichter student then has to determine who was involved in the fistfight and who wasn't. So these problems seem quite varied.

Schüler

Streitschlichtungsstories: Sticker, Boxen im Sportunterricht, his „enemy“ did not want to go to the Streitschlichtung

Narration

There are more serious forms of aggression or violence where the police may be required to step in. Next to the scenic and calm Rhine river we find the Porz police station...our next interview... and spoke to ...what we've heard - an old hand at youth crime combat in school centres in the Porz area, Ludger Reiniker.

Ludger Reiniker

In the Porz area the police have to deal with drugs, theft of bikes and cellphones, theft in general -- crimes that are of course prosecutionable, according to paragraph 163 of the criminal-prosecution act. The police also have a talk-hour about who they are, their role and tasks. These talks also help to solve conflicts where for example a pupil has taken another's cellphone ..these situations require a more sensitive approach. The police approach is not to have a victim-culprit-settlement. The sort of solution where bringing a slab of chocolate solves everything, but wants both parties to realize their part in the conflict.

Narration

Of course the police should be the last resort. One would think that when a situation begins to spiral out of control or where more serious forms of violence has occurred the police are the ones to run to. Pupils have according to the police also from time to time taken various conflicts to their desks, problems which have turned out to be a far cry from what is deemed criminal. Enter the streitschlichter. The streitschlichter students are normally trained in the arts of school arbitration from the 9th form and are actively involved in problem solving from the 10th form.

Christel Poensgen-Dicke

Teachers have found that more girls than boys are interested in the streitschlichter. In contrast the boys seem to be the more level headed and rational ones in solving problems. At first they all have the attitude of ...“show me whether this is an alternative method of solution finding other than what we are used to on the streets....“ But this soon changes when they have some practical experience with problem solving.

*Streitschlichter
(türkischer Junge)*

This student had seen a film about the streitschlichter when he first joined the school. He and some of his mates were interested in the program. He was especially drawn to how children view and experience problems emotionally, as well as the different approaches in solving these problems. He also feels that his previous experience in solving problems is of great help in seeking solutions for the conflicts.

Musik

Meine kleine Schwester (und ihre philosophie beruht auf angst...)

Atmo (Hauptschule Herbertskaul)

Kindergeschrei, dann Schulglocke, Kindergetrappel, übergehen in KESS-Unterricht (Fingerknöchelchen)

Narration

This is the Hauptschule Herbertskaul in Frechen near Cologne. We followed the 10 to 12 yer old children downstairs to an underground hall of the school. The hall had no chairs or any tables. We were asked to take off our coats and shoes – ...the coats I could understand but not the shoes. Nonetheless we were then lead to the Kess-lessson room where the idea of anti-violence exercises were developed. The author of the handbook Kess-Unterricht and teacher at the school explained the program...

Christa Wächtler

The KESS-lessons were born out of the normal German curriculum and the choice-lesson-classes where pupils can choose to attend a class for example in art or dance. Ms Wächtler found that many children preferred the yoga lessons. This lead to the self-awareness idea through relaxation. This also included small theater type of rol plays. All of this culminated into the KESS-programm. – the K stands for „Körperwahrnehmungen“ or self awareness, the E for Entspannung or Relaxation and both remainig S's for „szenisches Spiel“ or milleu or mock-scene games.

In the Kess children learn to experience different aspects of pease, noise, movement and stilness. So it's a spectrum of playing, playing with a friend and rolplaying as well as imaginging rol reversals. To act out the feeling of being sad, or happy. Afterwards the children describe their physical feelings of the different rol-playing emotions.

Atmo hochziehen: Kinder im Raum – ganz langweilig, ganz traurig, ganz wütend, ganz freudig

These rolplaying emotions also change to being very bored, or very angry or having fun. In these different tasks children experience a large variety of emotions. What feelings one may have if another looks at one in anger or friendly. Within these emotions the child also learns to express his or her feelings more clearly. There are still some children who have trouble expressing themselves. Often these are hauptschule pupils who have difficulty expressing them selves.

Atmo: Kinder erzählen, wie sie sich gefühlt haben (fest auf dem Boden stehen, Kopfschmerzen, Schilf im Wind, Wind im Gesicht)

The children attend the Kess classes for 2 hours a week and at the end of the year a play is written for them..

Atmo: Musik, Ich bin super, Wir sind super, Musik

There is also an educational starting point for her where one learns that saying that there is always a „happy-ending“ would be false, but never the less the plays do have a specific direction. In this way problem solving strategies are explored through theater. About 3 years ago there was an Indian girl in the school who was slightly dark-skinned. One one day a teacher broke up a fight in front of the theater room. The Indian girl was being called a slab of chocolate. In that case the normal Theater lesson had to be changed totally. The children had to discuss and rol play the fight to have more understanding of the problem. This lead to the „you blonde and you slab of chocolate“-insults being discussed. In reality the children found a solution on stage through their rol playing...where a problem can be transfered to the charater...thus creating better understanding of the problem.

Interview nach der Theaterübung: Es war peinlich usw.

What has also been seen in the instances when the children act out being the class-clown, the super-macho, being chaotic or aggressive, they, on-stage, often say that they were afraid of being laughed at. And everone else thus realises that they too may have felt the same and this creates a little more understanding but also self confidence. Many of the children may also have the secret desire to get on stage, but want to be asked. In this way one can gauge a child's courage. This courage-gauging is often sought with children and violence is a form of courage testing. In this case one tries through games to strengthen a childs courage though in a more positive way.

KESS-Kinder

Ich finde den KESS-Unterricht toll, weil... Ich gehe gerne zur Schule.

Christa Wächtler

In the Kess-lesson a speech-stone is passed along so that children have the opportunity to say what they feel while the others have to listen. What one finds is that children on monday mornings after the weekend surprisingly say that they are happy to be back in school. They have been watching television all weekend and by monday they feel pent up with frustration because of the boring weekend. One can imagine sitting in front of the television for the whole weekend doing nothing else...that all this builds up and normally finds a vent in some form in school on Mondays.

Atmo: Fernsehgeräusche im Hintergrund

Narration

There is a lot of debate about the influence television, movies, the internet, computer games, music and other media containing violence can have on the psyche and behaviour of a child in situations that he or she can not cope with. According to Steffen Hildebrandt, the focus is on when a child is unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy.....

Steffen Hildebrand

The influence media containing violent themes has on a child also depends on the child's family environment and background. Whether open communication exists, what sort of upbringing the child has had and his or her idea of reality. One is cautious to put all the blame on media, though this issue should be debated much further. What is of importance is the family structure. A child is more prone to influence by media containing violent themes if the family structures and upbringing is weak. A good upbringing or strong family structure builds a strong „personal immune system“...but where one does not have a firm structure or upbringing one's personal immune system is too weak for the influences the media can have. With a strong system one can then distinguish between what is real or false, and what is wrong or right on the screen.

Narration

In the Kess program an important aim is to create better understanding of differences between reality and fantasy....

Christa Wächtler

[...] Reality is felt through your body. One experiences reality through pain and through this one knows that you have a body. One has a sense of existence, a sense of self and this is normal. The aim is to let children realise what the borders of reality are. Some children show some understanding of what they have learned in Kess, yet one can only guess to what extent this is true for other children and how they use these ideas.

Narration

Some parents feel that what a child sees on a television or computer screen usually robs a child of the full range of human emotions and expression that different situations can evoke....

Parents

/ female

Parents have been thinking about violent behaviour and how children learn it. There are those who do feel that there is real danger in computer games or violent movies. In contrast others parents are of the opinion that closer family bonds is a better approach. They feel that a child has to learn empathy. Trying to feel what others may feel.

Narration

Despite all these violence-prevention programs a study by the Criminal Research institute of Lower-Saxony 33% of school children in Cologne in the 9th class bring knives to school, 25 % have gas-pistols while 14% have been found to carry a gun to school.

Although Germany has been spared the spate of violent shooting incidents as in the US; parents, teachers and educators realise the potential danger that these figures represent.

The Streitschlichter and Kess programs are two of many other programs with similar aims of preventing the sort of tragedy that was experienced at Erfurt. In most of these programs the key element is communication...learning children to express themselves and to find different solutions for conflicts than resorting to violence.

Christa Wächtler

In retrospect one can not eradicate violence...this will always be the impossible, but one hopes that children learn and are able to say that---no! Violence is never a solution---no!

music

Fade in...“las das“

Narration

You were listening to “Ich bin super!”, a Co-production between Deutsche Welle and the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation in the series “Crisis and Conflict resolution”. The producers were Nolito Marques and Katharina Borchardt.

music

End...“las dass“