
Articles School / Sociology News

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Personal and social skills can be taught and learnt

Results from a three decades empirical research in schools show strong positive effects.

With the use of standardised methods, it was shown that after impartation of personal and social skills, 91% of school children and young people gladly attend school. Furthermore, it leads to improved learning outcomes as well as taking joy in learning. Further positive effects include reduced fears and nightmares, children find their own order and significantly love being with their parents, they feel healthier and eventually find their own individual ways according to the long-term studies. In addition, they autonomously meet decisions as opposed to peer pressure - for example, which friends suit them or increase their frustration tolerance as well as learn to accept a "no".

Acquired competences not only increase individual happiness and success in life but also produce positive effects for the family, community and work environment . At the same time, it serves as prevention of drugs, other addictions and violence. These surprisingly strong effects have been confirmed over and over again in research studies of more than 100 schools.

Since 1972, educational and training Institute „Kutschera“ systematically collaborates with parents, children and teachers to collectively examine how a school, in which children and teachers feel comfortable can be created for the purpose of effective learning. Years of experience show barriers at the beginning of intervention specifically a great deal of uncertainty and often helplessness among all participants in dealing with ever increasing school-day's problems. These barriers are based more on lack of information than on psychological motives. Desperate parents profess: "I know it is my Fault, but no one tells me what I can do" , similarly, teachers complain of an increasing situation of more and more children in classes, who either hardly follow normal instructions or massively disrupt lessons. For one thing, their is lack of meaning and confidence for the future just as lack of practical instructions and

methodological tools that provide a protective framework and starting points for everyday life development. At the same time, there are no lessons or rather guidelines and certificates in favour of personal and social skills in contrast to many disciplines.

“Kutschera” Institute has been researching Since 1986 under the framework of "resonance Foundation" in Germany; "resonance-association" in Austria; and the TAK (talents Academy) in Austria on how to operationalize knowledge from various theories and concepts in the fields of communication and psychotherapy in a way that it can not only be taught but also be learned within the shortest time possible. Therefore, it is of great importance that these theoretical findings are "learnable".

Through personal and social skills training, acquisition of any expertise also improves indirectly. When children gain access to their inner strengths and are equipped with confidence, they become not only more successful in school but also find a better chance in life as well as develop themselves further. It is therefore up to parents and teachers to empower children not to mention impart a positive attitude to them, so that they can look forward to any form of challenge in school and life. This calls for new "soft skills" expertise, specifically well trained and experienced teachers. In this case, it delivers little success, when, for example, mathematics teachers teach conflict management – or as in the following German-language example: Many can speak German well, but few can teach it. Hence, the need for competent training and qualification.

The curriculum used to teach these personal and social skills together with evaluation methods, are described based on a European secondary school known as “Mödling.” Based on additional findings, these curriculum was verified and differentiated over a number of years for further school types. The aim was and still is not only to reduce vast diversity of methods in scientifically based models but also to methodically simplify them to an extent that they are easily understandable and applicable for children, teachers and parents.

Teaching Design: personal and social skills at school

The school pilot project, "teaching of personal and social competence", was first implemented and evaluated to a greater extent during the school Academic year 2002/03 at European secondary School (EHS) Mödling under the direction of Sabine Moldan.

The aim was and still is to create a standardized teaching flow model and to constantly evaluate it scientifically. Results recurrence should be additionally guaranteed by the fact that all trainers deployed have a 5- to 7-year training. In order to assure additional quality, all trainers must attend annual professional training. So far, more than 16,000 people in Austria, Germany and Switzerland have visited the already mentioned Kutschera Institute's offered training seminars specifically in extracurricular training seminars.

Results obtained will subsequently be evaluated by use of a pre- and post-full-scale survey in the form of a standardized questionnaire. Due to its procedural characteristic, Personal and social skills curriculum has since been subsequently adapted and customized to other types of institutions. The following hypothesis underlie the investigation:

- If children do learn self-confidence and social skills in addition to academic subjects, they will be more successful, enthusiastic and motivated in everything.
- An increase in personal and social competence is positively correlated to technical skills.
- An increase in personal and social skills also improves other areas of life.

Contents

The main topics of personal and social skills-teaching are:

- Meaning and confidence for the future
- Courage to use one's own hidden potentials - "our own sun to bring the rays"
- Introduction to "power of thought"

- Solution-oriented thinking
- Bringing "dualisms of life" in balance
- Conflict Resolution
- Equal value and cooperation: defining and filling five roles (individual person, husband / wife, hierarchy, games, environment)

With these skills, children should be able to present themselves and what they have learned well, find inspiring hobbies, develop visions for their future partnerships in addition to a better access to a healthy body, mind and soul.

Moreover, they should learn to deal with teachers, parents and other authorities in a confident but respectful manner. Learning deficits like reading or spelling¹, dyscalculia², impaired concentration³ and ADHS⁴ should be corrected.

An additional research question is how teaching of social skills and self-confidence can be integrated into usual and familiar lessons. This poses a further challenge to all participants because highly interactive training methods differ greatly from the usual lessons.

Time Setting

Three temporal teaching options were tested in smaller settings in pilot project Mödling. In this case, block-instruction method was used in two school classes at the beginning of the school year, in the middle and at the end of the school year. The outcome proved to be particularly promising and since then, this form

¹ Cf. Mann, Christine (2010): Strategiebasiertes Rechtschreiben. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz.

² Cf. De Smedt, B.; Verschaffel, L.; Ghesquiere, P. (2009): The predictive value of numerical magnitude comparison for individual differences in mathematics achievement. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 103, S. 469–479.

³ Cf. Lauth, Gerhard; Schlotke, Peter (2002): Training mit aufmerksamkeitsgestörten Kindern. Weinheim: Beltz.

⁴ Cf. Naumann, Kerstin (2000): Multimodale Therapie und deren Evaluation bei Aufmerksamkeitsdefizit-/ Hyperaktivitätsstörungen. In: Skrodzki Klaus und Mertens Krista (Hrsg.) *Hyperaktivität: Aufmerksamkeitsstörung oder Kreativitätszeichen?* Dortmund: Borgmann publishing, S. 211–220.

has been successfully applied in more than 100 other schools⁵. Through a standardized inventory, all previously evaluated results are comparable.

Methodology

One of the two questionnaires used was developed by Kutschera Institute in collaboration with sociologists namely Dr. Michael Waidhofer and Prof. Dr. Klaus Zapotozcky (University of Linz) together with 1,000 participants from Kutschera Institute trainee groups. This Questionnaire is a selection from sociological, psychological, educational, social-psychological, communication- and behavioural science models⁶, which were didactically and methodically prepared for over ten years. A further questionnaire, that serves as “a collection of health issues,” was developed by Prof. Dr. Petra Kollip (Bielefeld University) based on fundamental survey with 2,000 students.

All participants, that is parents, teachers, schoolchildren and trainers, fill out identical standardized questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of survey. Six months later, a first follow-up takes place. Eventually, these questionnaires are evaluated based on integration of results in the ongoing work.

The follow-up studies significantly confirmed the results to be true right after the end of the project week. This is due to the fact that a large part of learning time requires integration into daily behaviour.

Results of the pilot study Mödling

Overall, 460 questionnaires were evaluated, of which 198 were worked out by children, and 159 of them were completely filled out. The interviewed children and adolescents, between 7 and 17 years of age. 90 Out of the 159 children were boys and 69 girls. 98% of these children stated that they lived with their

⁵ The list is located in the Institute and can be requested

⁶ For example Aronson, Bandura, Ebbinghausen, Ericsson, Goffman, Heider, Herzberg, Lewin, Milgram, Schultz von Thun, Sherif, Watzlawick, Zimbardo

mothers while 71% of 159 children lived together with their fathers. Below is a brief explanation and description of various topics whose main results and changes give amazingly high effects.

Self competence

Self competence means to find one's own "resonance" and to live it. Children are not given a guarantee to professional and personal development. However, they can be strengthened with self-competence, be stabilised emotionally in order to ensure good-temper. In this way, they get the confidence to be able to find one's place in the future. Individual items provided the following results:

"I look forward to growing up" rose from 46% to 60%.

- "I feel as a child-free and secure" increased from 20% to 50%.
- "I have fears" dropped from 74% to 9% (see chart)

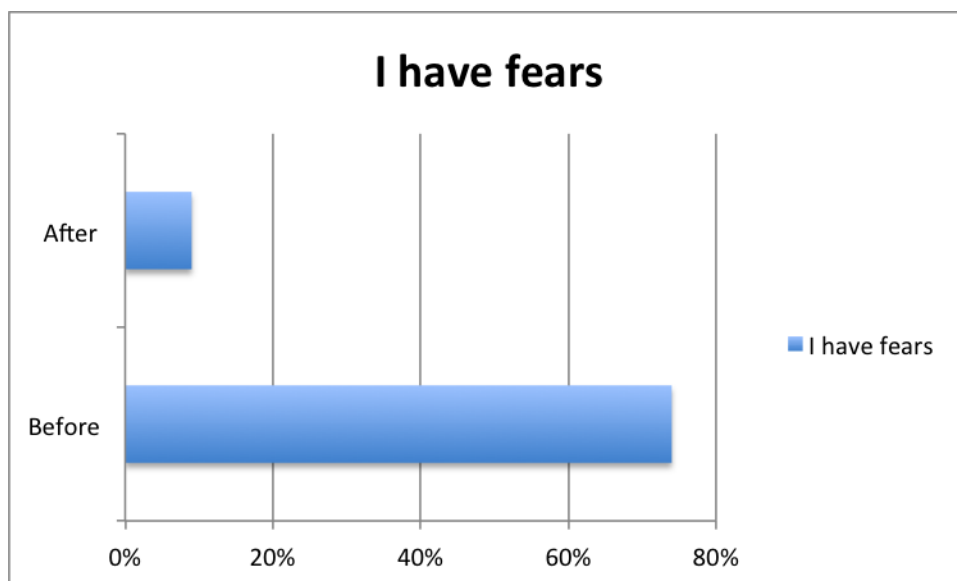


Table 1 I have Fears

Personal Responsibility

When children feel physically balanced and at ease, their self-esteem increases which consequently improves their personal responsibility and social

skills. They know what is good for them hence they meet decisions autonomously and rely less on feedback and recognition from others.

- "I can personally evaluate based on the feeling I have during a Test/school work, without waiting for teachers' marks" increased from 64% to 76%
- "I like myself the way I am" rose from 53% to 100% (see chart).
- "I am satisfied with my grades in school" rose from 19% to 75%.
- "There is nothing that can work me out" rose from 28% to 43%.

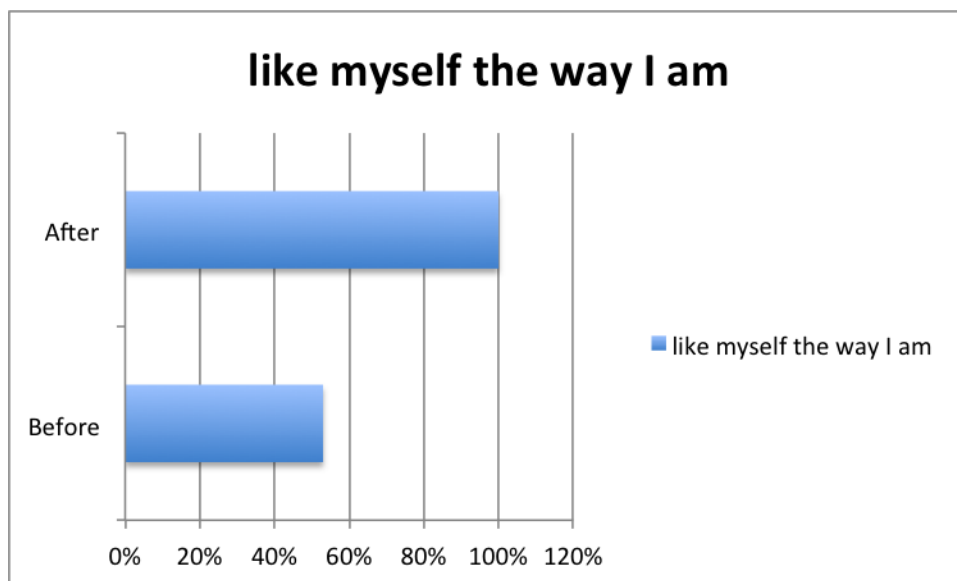


Table 2: I like myself the way I am

Health

The number of children without symptoms of disease increased from 10% to 30%. A reduction in the number of lower abdominal area pain complains from 38% to 19% was observed. Likewise, Complaints on Spinal pain fell from 11% to 4%.

- "I pay attention to my health" increased from 59% to 69%.
- "I have a headache" decreases from 68% to 21% (see chart).
- "I often have nightmares" decreased from 74% to 14% (see chart).

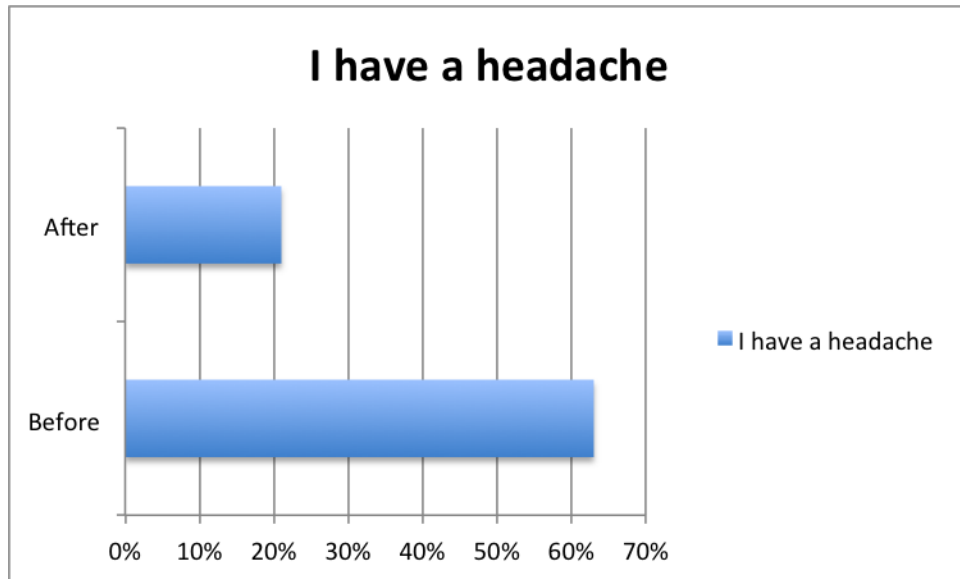


Table 3: I have a headache

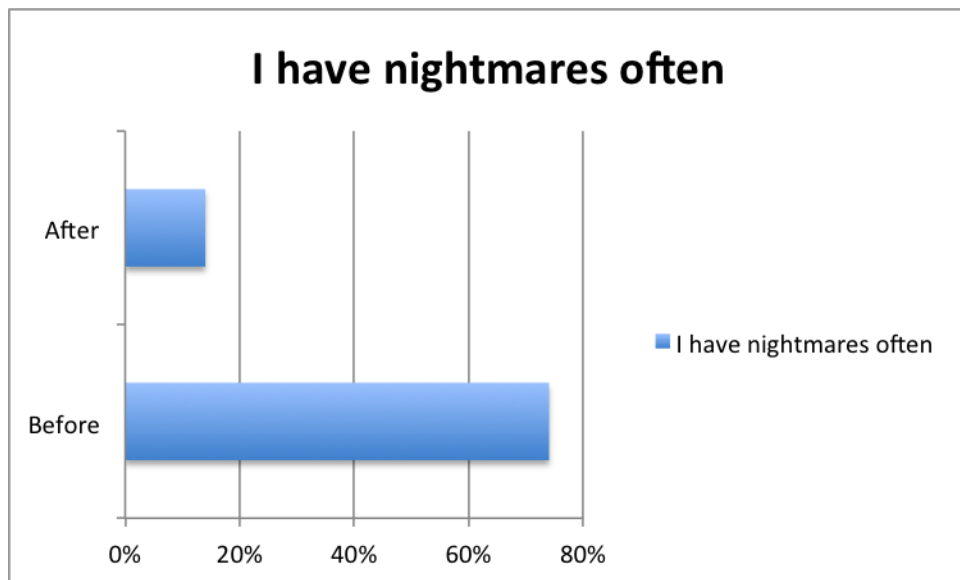


Table 4: I have nightmares often

Social skills

A rise in self-esteem is positively correlated with an established social behaviour. Social skills include all abilities that help in finding a balance between personal interests and those of fellow human beings, as well as promote interpersonal relationships. These include, for example, conflict and communication skills.

When the life of schoolchildren is healthy, internally strengthened and balanced, then they have a significantly lesser extent to aggressive behaviour (taunts, physical violence or bullying / Bullying⁷) delivered to each other. They have learned that this aggressive behaviour has nothing to do with themselves, but with the imbalance of the aggressor. This step, allowing the person to be separated from their behaviour⁸, is essential for social skills and provides a respectful interaction, which is no longer dominated by daily version of people. Expression of these findings are expressions such as: "He is doing very bad again today!" Teachers are also given a difficult day: "Leave them in peace, it's just bad! This has nothing to do with you!" Therefore, children learn to respect others through being aware of self-declaration level⁹.

Peer pressure and bullying

Peer pressure and bullying can be significantly reduced through training as illustrated in detail in the following results:

- "Classmates do not talk behind my back or play tricks on me" increased from 53% to 62%
- "I'm weirdly looked at / laughed at" decreased from 68% to 57%
- "Classmates are physically aggressive to me" fell from 66% to 58%
- "My life is organized as" increased from 2% to 54% (see chart)

⁷ Cf. Essau, Cecilia; Conrad, Judith (2004): Aggression bei Kindern und Jugendlichen. München: UTB.

⁸ Cf. Adler, Eric (2012): Schlüsselfaktor Sozialkompetenz: Was uns allen fehlt und wir noch lernen können. Berlin: Ullstein.

⁹ Cf. Schulz von Thun, Friedemann (1981): Miteinander reden: Störungen und Klärungen. Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rohwolt.

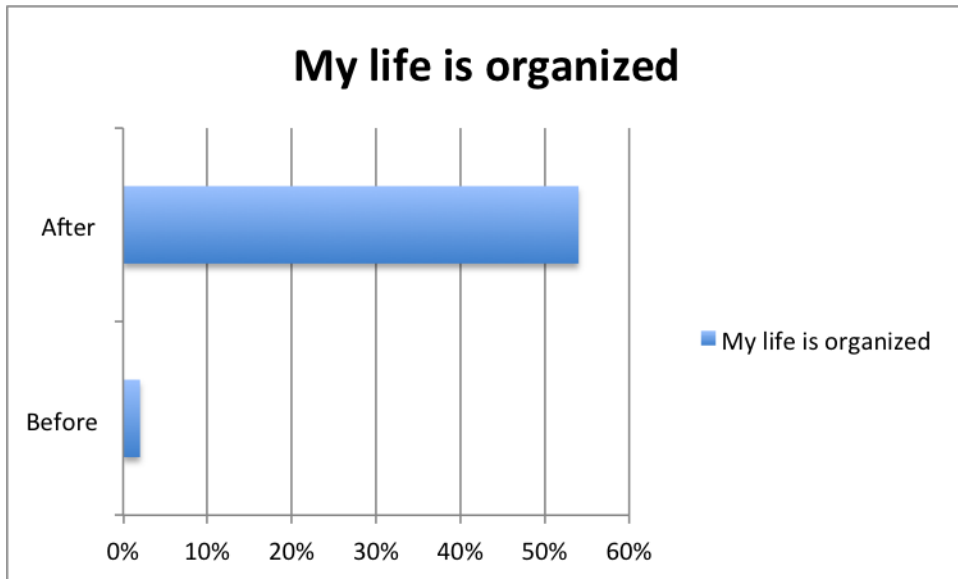


Table 5: My life ist organized

Self-confidence as a boy or girl

The following four items show the measurement results with respect to an increase in self-consciousness:

- "I'm perceived as a boy / girl" rose from 77% to 87%.
- "I come out as cool" rose from 36% to 49% (see chart)
- "I can moderate /take care of myself" rose from 61% to 67%
- I can be good/ helpful to others "rose from 65% to 71%

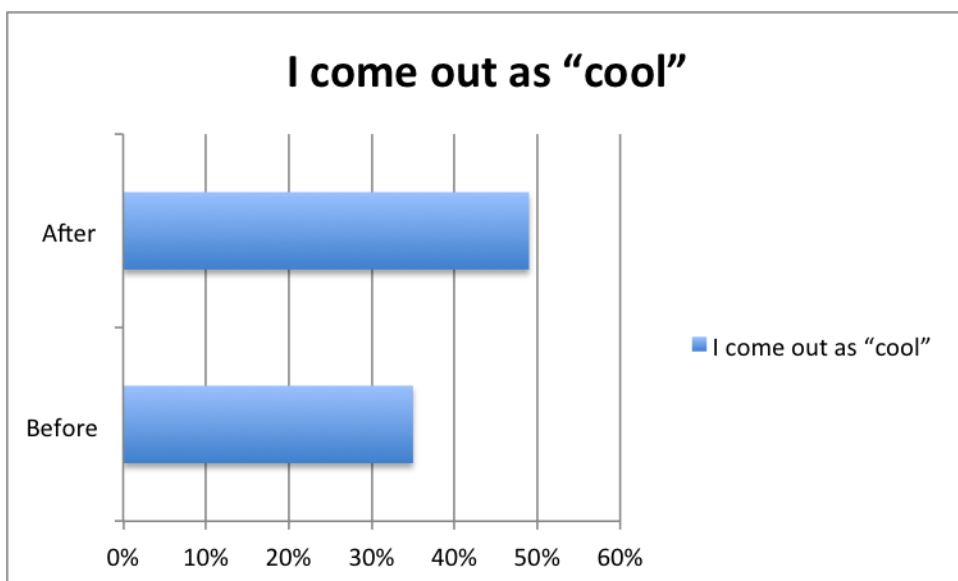


Table 6: I come out aa cool

Relationship with parents

Intra-familial effects also confirm the success of these curriculum. Satisfaction with the relationship to mother rose from 89% to 93% while satisfaction with the relationship father rose from 77% to 83%.

Other effects of the results

on the above presented research results with reference to individual item, constructive effects, which have have a significant and lasting impact on performance results; satisfaction; happiness and life success of schoolchildren, can be deduced.

More performance through "resonance-condition"

In any sport, it is important that individual skills are learned and practised. In a competition, these individual parts have to be available as a whole. The same applies to tests in school context. It is important that what is learned (painfully and patchy) be available as a whole as opposed to linear access in individual parts. Sportsmen and sportswomen know that this relaxed, yet highly concentrated state - the so-called resonance-state¹⁰, is a prerequisite for any form of peak performance. Children learn to have this resonance condition in self-competence training for their personal excellence, especially to do their best in lectures, tests, etc.. At the same time, they get learning strategies so that practising and learning becomes more fun and they can look forward to the attained progress - similarly to pleasure-oriented sports and learning an instrument.

¹⁰ Cf. Kutschera, Gundl (1994): Tanz zwischen Bewusst-sein und Unbewusstsein: NLP-Arbeits- und Übungsbuch, Paderborn: Junfermann.

Drug Prevention

Because drugs of all kinds (alcohol, tablets and hard drugs) are nowadays relatively easily to children and adolescents, it is important that they learn how to deal with this "offer". All trained skills are essential factors for drug prevention. School children can autonomously decide not take drugs but at the same time be part of the group anyway because their decisions are not dependant on "peer pressure" effect.

When children learn to have conscious, reflected contact with their resonance, they feel they no longer need the help of other people or substitutes to "sense". They learn to feel physically feel good. Another important step in this direction is set when the children learn to define different feelings and to develop strategies to live this: What's to be happy? What's love?

Frustration tolerance, and work with parents

Frustration tolerance in adolescents and children decreased in the course of recent social developments¹¹. Quite a number of them can barely cope with disappointments or a "No." In addition, a disturbing trend of Egoism is noticeable in 16- to 18-year-olds. Besides negligent upbringing, children learn that they can achieve their goals through "Misbehaving and whining long enough," in absence of predefined framework of rules too. Eventually, it remains difficult for these children and adolescents to endure a "no" in the course of life. It is therefore important to include parents in the program, so that they too are strengthened, to say "no" and to set rules with consequences. Parents learn that sometimes love means "tough". Decades experience show that children and young people can learn that a consistent "no" can be a sign of affection and care.

¹¹ Cf. Petermann, Franz und Ulrike (2010): Training mit Jugendlichen: Aufbau von Arbeits- und Sozialverhalten. Göttingen et al.: Hogrefe.

Own-trained teachers for personal and social skills - trainers and coaches

Young people coaching is not new – just as best ranked sport without a coach has long been unthinkable, so too is cooperation of body, mind and soul in "learning resonate" important. In order for children to be active and empowered members of the society, it is necessary to armour them with soft skills like personal and social skills in addition to academic disciplines. On that account, it is essential to expand parents' and educators' role. They can also learn new ways of dealing with children. Research results show that personal and social skills learning is most sustainable when teachers and parents also go through the program.

"Learning in resonance" is also suited to children and adolescents who suffer among others from ADHD, behavioural abnormalities, Autoaggressions- and autoimmune reaction, eating disorders, hypersensitivity, school phobia and problematic behaviour. Since gifted children have social behaviour problems, it is very important that they acquire personal and social skills if they are to assume leadership positions in future so as to use their talents in an adequate manner. In addition, many children with learning disorders latently gifted or exceptionally creative get bored in classroom. In training educators will learn how to use their skills in the classroom better.

Further studies

Further studies were carried out from Upper Austrian Provincial Government under within the framework of "Innovative Upper Austria" and University of Linz. In this research project, an experiment of the similar setting in all types of schools (preschool, primary school, secondary school, junior and senior high school, higher vocational educational institutions) was conducted. The results broadly correspond to those of pilot study "Mödling," whereby a questionnaire on additional survey items such as burnout among teachers, Talents- and boosting creativity was completed. Highly significant results were achieved.

In collaboration with the "Fund for a Healthy Austria" further studies were conducted. In particular, school classes were analysed in several federal states, in which the teachers had difficulties.

The most recent project for all pre-school children of municipal nursery schools was conducted in Kapfenberg city. The city suffers from high unemployment and a high number of migrants, in a secondary school, there were repeated stabbings. Again tell the children in the course of personal and social competence training of significant improvements in dealing with themselves and others.

Result of the research activities are also a theory book and textbooks for self- and social competence and related worksheets for teachers of different types of schools that can be obtained through the Institute Kutschera.

The high relevance of strengthening the personal and social skills, the individual benefits in terms of a happier, healthier, harmonious and successful life as well as the positive social effects of family, community and working life are the basis and motivation for further research. In order to create an appropriate framework to further current and future-oriented issues are studied in research projects at the private university Kutschera, which is currently in the start-up phase.

RESOURCES

1) Mann, Christine (2010): *Strategiebasiertes Rechtschreiben*. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz

2) De Smedt, B.; Verschaffel, L.; Ghesquiere, P. (2009): The predictive value of numerical magnitude comparison for individual differences in mathematics achievement. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 103, S. 469–479.

3) Lauth, Gerhard; Schlottke, Peter (2002): *Training mit aufmerksamkeitsgestörten Kindern*. Weinheim: Beltz.

4) Naumann, Kerstin (2000): *Multimodale Therapie und deren Evaluation bei Aufmerksamkeitsdefizit-/ Hyperaktivitätsstörungen*. In: Skrodzki Klaus und

Mertens Krista (Hrsg.) Hyperaktivität: Aufmerksamkeitsstörung oder Kreativitätszeichen? Dortmund: Borgmann publishing, S. 211–220.

6) Essau, Cecilia; Conrad, Judith (2004): Aggression bei Kindern und Jugendlichen. München: UTB.

7) Adler, Eric (2012): Schlüsselfaktor Sozialkompetenz: Was uns allen fehlt und wir noch lernen können. Berlin: Ullstein.

8) Schulz von Thun, Friedemann (1981): Miteinander reden: Störungen und Klärungen. Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rohwolt.

9) Kutschera, Gundl (1994): Tanz zwischen Bewusst-sein und Unbewusstsein: NLP-Arbeits- und Übungsbuch, Paderborn: Junfermann.

10) Petermann, Franz und Ulrike (2010): Training mit Jugendlichen: Aufbau von Arbeits- und Sozialverhalten. Göttingen et al.: Hogrefe.