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Violence Prevention Strategies in the Field of Child Day-Care Centres in Germany

Centre for the Prevention of Youth Crime (ed.)



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Arbeitsstelle Kinder- und
Jugendkriminalitätsprävention

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1 The field of action of day-care centres for children and forms of “violence”

In recent years, “things have started moving” in the field of child day-care supervision (see Deutsches Jugendinstitut 2005: 9)¹. This applies both to quantitative development as well as to efforts for improving quality. The growth in public awareness about the preventive and compensatory significance of early support and education for children is expressed in slogans such as “Everything depends on the start” and “Invest early instead of making good later on”.

1.1 Differentiation and specific features of the field

1.1.1 Age groups in day-care centres

In Germany, about 55% of all children of the age group up to six years of age are supervised outside the family in a publicly funded institution (see Bien 2005: 3)². The availability of places shows considerable regional and Länder-specific differences as well as a marked East-West gap. However, day-care centres for the age group of four- to six-year-olds are accessed overall by 90% of families. Parents with an ethnic background and low income use the service less (see Deutscher Bundestag 2005: 195).

The age group under supervision in day-care centres is changing and is becoming younger overall. Places becoming available due to the falling birth rate are increasingly held for one- and two-year-old children, the age at which children start school is earlier, and the availability of all-day schools leads to the reduction of places in day-centres for school children. In the medium term, therefore, day-care centres could evolve into service for one- to five-year-olds. The glaring shortage of supervision places in the western federal states of Germany for children under the age of three years is to be alleviated during the years ahead by increasing the quota of supervision places from currently 8.6% (see Deutsches Jugendinstitut 2005: 48) to an average of 20% in 2010 (see Deutscher Bundestag 2005: 198).

Contrary to the outmoded conceptual as well as administrative and institutional separation of places of education, there are currently definite trends for more closely integrating developments in the fields of work of child day-care centres and primary schools. This is evident in the education curricula of the federal states, in curricular and cooperative approaches, as well as in efforts to introduce more academic training for the profession of child care workers. There-

1 Download: www.bmfsfj.de/Publikationen/zahlenspiegel2005/root.html

2 Download: www.dji.de/bibs/390_1_Ergebnisse_Kinderbetreuungsstudiekorr5TR.pdf

fore with regard to children's consistent educational and developmental trajectories, it seems hardly sensible in the long run to discuss strategies of violence prevention divided by educational institutions, especially given the many common issues that emerge in the development phases of early and middle childhood.

1.1.2 Institutional forms of day-care supervision

The heterogeneous structure of day-care centre providers is reflected in a multiplicity of institutional forms and educational concepts. This heterogeneity means that day-care supervision involves very different experiences for a child, depending on whether, for instance, the child only stays at the centre on some mornings or up to ten hours a day, whether he or she attends a single-group parent's initiative or a centre for all ages with 250 other children, whether he or she was already supervised as a toddler or only from the age of five years, and so forth. The educational quality of nursery school provision has a proven differential influence on child development, especially for coping with situations in life, language development, and social skills (cf. Tietze 1998). At the same time only about one third of centres fulfils the requirements of good process quality (see Tietze 1998: 351). In the years ahead, the structure and process quality of institutional supervision, education, and child rearing of children under three years will require particular attention. The objective of a rapid increase in the number of places is presently disproportionate to the necessary investment in the qualification of education professionals, the facilities, as well as conceptual changes regarding the particular needs of this age group.

In future, *Tagespflege* (professional day care within a domestic sphere) will become more important for the supervision of children of the under-three age group. Due to its special features as a similar form of supervision to family care and due to the service's still mainly informal structure within a domestic sphere, *Tagespflege* is distinguished from child day-care centres and, with respect to violence prevention, merits analysis in its own right. The present difficulty of achieving an overview as well as the lack of empirical studies make it difficult to provide statements about the *Tagespflege*. The assumption is that the current shortcomings of this type of supervision – such as in many places the lack of monitoring *Tagespflege* workers' professional suitability, inadequate training and continued professional development, instability of day-care relationships (see Deutscher Bundestag 2005: 185) – could entail risks for the development of the children under supervision. Measures and projects for the orientation of *Tagespflege* according to specific quality criteria, associations of childminders, qualification, and networking, in particular with child day-care centres are important steps for the improvement and assurance of educational quality of this form of supervision (cf. Tietze 2005; www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de; www.paedquis.de).

1.1.3 Group forms and informal groupings of children

Institutional day-care supervision is group supervision. In the context of a wide variety of concepts, alongside the traditional nursery school group led by a child care worker (with varying child-to-carer ratios, and regulations about supply workers in the federal states) highly diverse forms have been established. These range from work across groups to completely “open” activities and project work, whereby each day children can choose the activities, rooms, and care worker.

Within the institutionally defined group forms and mix of age groups, everyday life is shaped according to a multiplicity of playgroups that are informal and predominantly initiated by the children themselves. Children of this age generally play in twos or threes and prefer same-age play partners, and as they get older also same-gender partners.

1.1.4 The role of supervising adults and the importance of peers

Nursery education theory oscillates within a set of tensions from children’s needs for attachment and autonomy. During their first years in life, children depend on the reliable care and a close emotional relationship to their parents or guardians. For the small child, adults fulfil the function of a “safe basis” for exploring his or her environment at their own initiative. Secure attachments are positively connected to the development of self-esteem and social and emotional skills, whereas highly unstable attachments at an early age are a factor predicting aggressive behaviour at pre-school age (cf. Ziegenhain 2003)³. For their well-being, children, especially those under three years, need a secure attachment to a supervising adult at the day-care centre. Hence this transition already has preventive significance. Children who attend a crèche and who have a negative relationship with their mothers, fathers, or qualified child care workers, more frequently show insecure and aggressive behaviour. Additional risk factors are discontinuities in the supervision setting and the frequent change of supervising adults.

From the viewpoint of the child’s welfare, here, a conflict arises between the child’s needs for attachment and reliability and the increasing flexibilisation of working hours for parents. For that reason, adjusting the opening hours and supervision times of day-care centres to the requirements of the working world cannot merely be one-sided; the quid pro quo in companies must be far-reaching measures to balance family and professional life as, for example, by family-friendly working hours.

3 Download: www.isa-muenster.de/publikationen

It is in day-care centres that most children, for the first time, spend longer periods away from their parents and in the company of other children. The child group is therefore an important social trial and testing ground: here, the child learns a sense of belonging, acknowledgement or rejection from his or her “peers”, and experiences dominance and subordination. At pre-school age, physical conflict resolution is appropriate for the age and level of development. In cases of conflict the children often turn to the qualified child care worker, since generally his or her authority is not called into question. The professionalism of the education professionals is evident insofar as each qualified child care worker maintains contact with each individual child as well as having a differentiated awareness of group processes, intervening in an appropriate manner for the situation and the level of development, and in doing so taking into account the children’s efforts to win attachment and autonomy.

1.2 The incidence of aggression, conflict, and “violence” at day-care centres

1.2.1 On the use of the term violence and manifestation forms of “violence”

If the increase in publications, continued professional development courses, and professional policy statements is an indicator, then “violence” became a topic of professional practice in the 1990s (cf. Dittrich et al. 1996). During this time the media have also used labels such as “nursery-school Rambo” (*Kinder-garten-Rambo*, cf. Sommerfeld 1996) in reports about an alleged increase in acts of aggression at nursery schools.

Previously, since the 1970s, the subject of conflict training had been at the forefront of the field of action. Training the ability to cope with conflict was not originally understood as a contribution to violence prevention, but to the democratisation of society and participation of children (see Dittrich et al. 1996: 8). Social learning since then has been a primary objective of nursery education. Since the 1990s publications on social and emotional training have frequently included the subtitle “a contribution to violence prevention”. Conversely, titles such as “education against violence” include suggestions for practice that in previous years would have been included in publications on social education.

In the informed debate the focus is not on massive violence or violence that is uncontrollable by professionals. Rather “violence” is a catch-all term for a wide range of socially undesirable behaviour, which is nevertheless typical for the age group, and also includes destructive patterns of behaviour that can hardly be appropriately managed in a conventional day-care centre. In this regard, the discussion focuses on cases of the assumed increase of “problem children”

through changes in the way children are raised and social problems (“children as a poverty risk”), as well as so-called “new children’s illnesses” (for example, perception disorders, ADHS syndrome). Auto-aggressive ways of behaviour are also included in the manifestation forms of “violence”. Child care workers rarely mention these, though they are possibly given less attention than destructive behaviour within interactions.

According to statistics provided by the statutory accident insurers, in 2004, for every 1,000 children 3.4 so-called “accidents related to scuffles” occurred at day-care centres (these must be registered due to their treatment by a doctor), two-thirds of which occurred among children from the age of five years and upwards (by comparison: 4.9 accidents occurred in primary schools). Since their collection from 1990, the numbers have stagnated. 70% of those affected were boys (unpublished statistical material of accident insurers). Qualified child care workers also report in surveys that “violent” behaviour most frequently occurs with five- and six-year-old children and among boys. Opinions are divided among education professionals: 59% of those interviewed regard the incidence of “violent acts” at day-care centres as no or hardly a problem, while 41% regarded this as a severe problem (quoted in Dittrich/Schneider 1996: 190).

The public and professional policy debate on violence almost exclusively focuses on the children’s behaviour. Links or interactions with institutional conditions – as forms of structural violence – are rarely reconstructed. Likewise, violence exerted by education professionals in the form of coercion, punishment, humiliation, or other humiliating practices is only noticed in extreme cases. The honest confrontation of “soft violence”, with which adults as more powerful individuals can coerce the good conduct of small children, requires willingness for self-reflection on the part of child care workers, and for employers to make available and implement regular periods for reflection (for supervision or advice). However, neither of these is currently standard in this field.

1.2.2 Interactionist or normative view of violence and aggression

Scarcely any publication omits to observe that aggression is part of a basic human disposition and can be constructive as well as destructive. The child’s active engagement with the world implies aggressive components from the moment of birth. For parents and qualified child care workers, self-assertion and assertiveness are key educative goals. Nevertheless, in the field of day-care centres, the term “aggressive” is primarily used to imply its negative connotation of deliberate harm.

Normative studies classify ways of behaviour such as “kicking, hitting, biting, and boxing” as destructive, irrespective of the context. If qualified child care workers and the children are interviewed in this context about whether and how often this behaviour appears among the children, the outcome is high

evidence of the use of violence (cf. Rohrman/Thoma 1997). “If you only measure the frequency of direct aggressive acts such as biting, stealing, and hitting, four-year-olds are the most aggressive population group!”⁴.

In individualising explanatory models, these ways of behaviour are regarded as deficits of a “child offender” in relation to socially agreed norms (cf. for example the picture book commissioned by the police for nursery schools entitled, “*Bobby, hör auf!*” [“Bobby, stop it!”] 1999). The professional role of the educationalist consists in communicating and implementing social norms such as, for example, verbal confrontations instead of physical conflict resolution.

In contrast, an interactionist viewpoint regards behaviour as part of a communicative process. The intentions and aims of those involved only become comprehensible in the context and course of interaction (cf. Dittrich et al. 2001; Sommerfeld 1996). Although all theories treat the exertion of power and harm caused to others as attributes of violence, the interactionist viewpoint poses the question about the motive and objective. Physical attacks, for instance, frequently occur among small children (cf. Wüstenberg 1992). Developmental psychologists speak of “innocent aggression” (cf. Hacker 1985) with which a small child explores the boundaries between the self and his or her environment. In interactive processes among children, the use of violence frequently stands for “failed negotiations” (cf. Krappmann 1994) between constructive intent and harmful actions. Interactionist models also differentiate between self-perception and perception of others in conflicts. Children often evaluate their violent confrontations differently from adults (cf. van Dieken 2004).

The interactionist perspective corresponds with the further development of childhood research. Today, children are no longer regarded as objects of adults’ “socialisation messages”, but rather as subjects who construct their own reality in their interactions (see Dittrich et al. 2001: 26). Interaction between children is seen as a process of negotiation with multifaceted signs and symbolic actions which are not always immediately accessible to adults. In the eyes of the children, mutual consent or an “aggressive balance” can even exist in the case of physical or verbal attacks (cf. Rohrman/Thoma 1997). On the other hand, if childhood is primarily regarded as a preliminary stage of adulthood, then physical conflict resolution models are merely immature and deficient ways of behaviour.

The increasing institutionalisation and educationalisation of childhood reduces the possibilities for an autonomous childhood. Yet children need a field of experimentation for communication among their peers in which they experience power and differences of interest and in which they can test out different strategies for action. “Violence” in child-to-child interaction can there-

4 Download: www.sturzbecher.de/download-vortrag-081105-koeln.ppt

fore not be pinned down to fixed ways of behaviour, but is rather related to the asymmetry of situations, which, for the party involved, implies no freedom of actions and experience (cf. Dittrich et al. 2001). Again and again, acknowledging the children's independent social world is a balancing act in the everyday routine of qualified child care workers at day-care centres, where they have to balance children's needs and perspectives with the requirements of the institution and with parent's expectations.

In the context of a theory of childhood, the use of the term "violence" to describe the behaviour of pre-school age children is problematic. This label neither does justice to the wide spectrum of behaviour summarised under it, nor is it suitable as a starting point for preventive strategies. The latter need a differentiated approach and an empirical research basis that makes available a broader data basis and explains the connections.

1.2.3 Causes of aggression and violence

The widespread assumption among education professionals that the causes of childhood disruptive behaviour are primarily to be attributed to the family environment is supported by numerous studies on the influence for personality development of the family atmosphere, parental rearing style, media consumption in the home etc. However, an analytical approach that takes into account multiple factors goes further and considers institutional conditions such as challenging situations of transition and separation, group sizes and constellations, unsuitable rooms and programmes, as well as the behaviour of qualified child care workers. The one-sided attribution of causes to the family is oriented towards the ideal of an "ordinary well-functioning family" and neglects the question of how day-care centres must change in order to do justice to children's and families' needs in highly diverse life circumstances.

The orientation of educative action towards the ideal of a "normal" child is equally problematic. This has a considerable influence – often unreflected, and implicitly in the sense of a "hidden curriculum" – on the daily routine, equipment, educational programmes, as well as the institution's overall work. Everyday theories and discussions among education professionals about disruptive behaviour are frequently oriented towards a child's presumed deficiencies in terms of unquestioned norms. Thus, a local survey of qualified child care workers showed that they regarded more than half of the children, who were not fluent in German, as displaying behavioural problems (cf. Ministerium, no year). Education professionals perceive themselves rather as sufferers, yet hardly as co-active in the emergence of childhood behavioural problems. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that a lack of sensitivity for a child's individuality as well as the inability to cope with a multiplicity of norms and cultures can be a cause of behavioural problems, or at least stabilise them.

1.2.4 Violence prevention as part of the mandate of day-care centres

Child day-care centres have a public mandate to support every child in the development of his or her personality to act with personal responsibility, to be capable of living in a community, and to counteract disadvantages (Social Code Book VIII.). The social consensus, which has grown in recent decades, about the rights of children and the changing ideas about education are expressed in the *Gesetz zur Ächtung der Gewalt in der Erziehung* (Act Outlawing Violence in the Upbringing of Children) (cf. Bundesministerium 2003). On the one hand, this mandate has been structured and put into practice by the Criteria Catalogues on the Educational Quality of Child Day-Care Centres published in recent years (cf. Tietze 2002/Preissing 2003) and, on the other hand, by the Education Programmes of the German Federal States for the elementary school sector. The prevention strategies outlined in the following sections essentially adopt the basic ideas of these works, especially as regards respect for children's individuality and self-learning processes, the significance of a challenging learning environment, as well as the cultivation of relationships that are supportive of development on the part of those professionals who work in the day-care centres.

2 Professional practice strategies for violence prevention

On the basis of the available data, no "violence issue" can be verified for child day-care centres. However, the perception of qualified child care workers is that childhood behavioural problems as well as parent's problems in rearing their children have substantially increased. The classification of both manifestation forms is allocated differently in terms of the social environment; moreover, it is highly subjective and partially questionable as to exactly what qualified child care workers understand by this. Due to the existing lack of research in the field of early childhood education and upbringing, such assessments can neither be confirmed nor refuted. However, it would be too simple to treat them merely as a distorted picture of reality which in fact gives cause for satisfaction. Rather in this regard, the examples frequently outlined suggest that increasing diversity within society and the increase in precarious living conditions are reflected in manifold ways in the everyday life of day-care centres; moreover, they have a threatening effect on education professionals because outdated concepts and modes of response can no longer be applied. To this extent, the statements made by qualified child care workers could be regarded as weak signals for developments, which could intensify, if no counter measures are implemented.

This field of action has gained special significance with regard to violence prevention due to the recognition that day-care centres offer children and families support, assistance, and back-up at a very early stage and thus can act as potential protective functions against the emergence of a propensity for violence. However, only good quality day-care contributes to the development of resilience. Thus, this mandate conflicts with the further professionalism of education specialists and the structural conditions within this field. Since in early childhood, especially the basic experiences of resonance, encouragement, and reliable relationships contribute to children's positive self-image, the personal competence of the education professionals is of central importance.

This field's heterogeneity produces multiple approaches to violence prevention. These can hardly be collated in their entirety, since the field of action is traditionally influenced by projects of individual centres or providers at the local or regional level. Furthermore, the decision about a violence prevention programme is also dependent on professionals' access to information and arises from local contacts. The "grey literature" –i.e. assessment reports and concepts in own publications or on websites of day-care centres – includes numerous examples of such projects on the topics of conflict, aggression, and violence. In this context, the level of commitment on the part of education professionals becomes apparent, however, the effects of such measures are only verified in a few cases.

In recent years, the educational and political discourse of the profession has moved on. The fixation in the 1990s on symptoms such as "problem children" and "helpless educationalists" has been superseded by active coping strategies which promote social skills and prevent or reduce disadvantages (for example, integration and good performance at school through targeted language development at the nursery level), thus having a violence-preventive effect over the longer term.

Preventive strategy is understood as the considered and deliberate action on the part of education professionals, both as professionally justified individual interventions as well as action concepts of the centres and in conjunction with various partner agencies.

The spectrum outlined below incorporates on the one hand strategies aimed at all children, and on the other hand, specific concepts for certain target groups and problem areas. Although in systematic terms the prevention strategies have a reciprocal effect on each other, for reasons of clarity they are divided up in the following target groups:

- girls and boys in day-care centres (individual children, partial groups, day-care centre group),
- education professionals,
- parents.

2.1 Child-related prevention strategies

Here, the focus is both on the everyday organisation of communicative and interactive situations as well as planned activities and programmes. At the centre there is support for social and emotional skills, yet also for strategies that allow for the child's desire for playful aggression within the institutional context.

Under the structural conditions of conventional nursery schools, professionals are often overburdened and cannot do justice to the individual children's particular needs for attention and support. Here, diagnostic assessment and special support services are required in consultation with the parents and in cooperation with the specialised education professionals and partner agencies.

2.1.1 Design of educational processes by education professionals in situative interactions

The often open situations and possibilities for choice at child day-care centres lead on a daily basis to numerous conflicts of interest among children. For example, there are disputes about inclusion and belonging to playgroups, play ideas and roles, or among various small groups, for example, about space and materials. The children also provoke each other and test their relationships, thus their interactions are oriented towards the boundary between light-hearted fun and seriousness (cf. Dittrich et al. 2001). In terms of developmental psychology, these conflicts are an expression of the topics that the children require to develop their identity and skills of building relationships. Many of these conflicts are only short-lived and alternate with cooperative actions. They require no intervention from adults, rather the implicit learning opportunities would not be exhausted if adults were to "interfere".

Additionally, there are destructive actions and courses of conflict, frequently involving those children who have difficulty finding playmates or who are quickly frustrated and who seek the attention of other children or adults by means of destructive behaviour. Such asymmetrical interactions escalate more towards the use of violence. Education professionals intervene in these situations in order to de-escalate matters by separating the opponents, calming down the children, offering reconciliation rituals, mediating in the conflict, or also ending it with the "voice of authority". Observational and continued professional development studies show that in everyday school life, education professionals do not always notice the children's need for support, nor respond appropriately.

Rather, they intervene only when they notice specific signs (volume, crying, etc.), or even negatively reinforce the behaviour of certain children (cf. Dittrich 2001; Rohrman 1997). If conflict regulation and violence prevention are to

fulfil more than a “fire brigade” function, professionals must have differentiated skills of observation and reflection, not least in order to recognise subjective involvements and their own entanglement, and to avoid labelling individual children. In this context, the observational approach is of fundamental importance for professional action. For educationalists at elementary school level, observational techniques specific to each field have now been developed. They do not focus on behavioural deficiencies, but record childhood development topics and skills as a basis for designing interactions and educational activities (cf. Viernickel/Völkel 2005).

This professional approach has now been accepted and is defined in law, in education curricula, and syllabuses of vocational training colleges. Nevertheless, considerable continued professional development efforts as well as structural investments are required (for instance, for periods of reflection without child supervision duties), in order that this approach can be adopted as standard all over Germany.

2.1.2 Participation of children

Participation helps children to experience their self-efficacy. In this respect, everyday life at the day-care centre offers numerous opportunities in addition to formalised participation such as children’s conferences and discussion circles. Initially, supporting participation solves many interpersonal conflicts, as the qualified child care workers do not decide for the children, but invite them to solve problems themselves or to negotiate with each other. These situations also offer the best learning opportunities. Successful experiences of participation are positively correlated with the development of socio-emotional and cognitive skills. The acquisition of empathy is therefore especially important for the development of an ability to cope with conflict. Conversely, aggressive behaviour occurs more frequently when attempts to become involved fail (cf. Sturzbecher/Großmann 2003). Aggressive behaviour is therefore frequently a consequence of social helplessness and exclusion. If such behavioural patterns become a habit, adults’ interventions are made difficult. Hence it is important to give “well-measured support” based on observations as well as interventions which are in accordance with a child’s intellectual and social skills and which lead to short-term successes.

Children’s behaviour is essentially influenced by parental rearing style and the behaviour of individuals in charge of education. Taking children’s basic right of participation seriously makes the children’s own expectations of their qualified child care workers important, for instance, as regards conflict situations, and how they assess their behaviour. This can be learned by directly interviewing the qualified child care workers. However, standardised play-based survey procedures are also available to record children’s subjective concepts of the interaction between the child care worker and the child. Empirical results show that

in conflicts children do not always gain the desired support from their adult supervisors. Some of the qualified child care workers behave, in the eyes of the children, inconsistently or respond mainly with restrictions and sanctions (cf. Sturzbecher 2001).

2.1.3 Educational programmes and projects

Alongside situative interventions, qualified child care workers also initiate programmes and projects. In accordance with the understanding of early childhood learning processes, the focus here is not on “teaching” the children, but on observing and adopting children’s topics by monitoring the play and interaction processes and through dialogue with the children. As regards the prevention of “violence” the primary objectives are:

- reinforcing the children’s self-esteem,
- their perception of and coping with emotions,
- their identity as a boy or a girl,
- their physical and motor experience,
- their stress regulations and relaxation techniques.

A multiplicity of specialist books and project materials are available on these topics as well as games, children’s illustrated books, and reference media for qualified child care workers.

The specified topics are also the context for special concepts and curricula that are discussed in further detail below.

2.1.4 Coping with difference

At the day-care centre a child’s family culture and that of his or her parents comes into contact with a variety of other cultures. This not only refers to ethnic affiliation, but in a wider sense to the most diverse ways of life and life circumstances of families. In their early childhood experiences with equality and difference, small children develop “pre-prejudices” as a basis for their later attitudes. The experience, for example, that the child’s own skin and hair colour is neither represented on dolls nor in pictures and books, or that the symbols and rituals practised within the family are not replicated at the day-care centre, is absorbed into a child’s self-concept and can lead to a feeling of not belonging or that ‘something about them is not right’. A monocultural orientation of day-care centres is an early sign to small children that cultures and lifestyles have differing values. Linguistic and cultural barriers of education professionals can reinforce this deficient perspective, thus already contributing to marginalisation and isolation processes at pre-school institutions.

To establish a positive self-image, in addition to reinforcing their self-identity, children also need esteem and contact with their peer groups. Family cultures can, for instance, become visible on photo walls about the children’s families.

Reading-aloud sessions with parents or grandparents in the family's languages convey acceptance of different languages, while at the same time being a key basis for the acquisition of German as a second language. People's different backgrounds as well as their individual and cultural distinctiveness can be characterised with "persona dolls". In dialogue, initiated by the qualified child care worker, the doll talks about the children's experiences of prejudice and discrimination and enables them to adopt various perspectives (cf. Wagner et al. 2006).

Intercultural competence has long since ceased to be a requirement for only those education professionals who work in social environments with a high proportion of families with a non-native German background. In a wider sense, concepts for a "prejudice-aware education and training" are aimed at sensitising education professionals to their own and the institution's dominant behaviour, and to equip them to cultivate relationships with the children and parents on the basis of mutual respect and a stance that embraces dialogue.

2.1.5 Gender-related approaches: boys and girls

Observational studies as well as surveys of qualified child care workers confirm that already at pre-school age children behave typically for their sex: girls tend to react in a verbally aggressive way and attempt to control relationships, whereas among boys the "right of the (physically) stronger" is not uncommon (cf. Rohrmann/Thoma 1997). In this field of work, which is dominated by women, qualified child care workers are often a role model for girls. However, according to their own statements, they tend to avoid conflict (cf. Dittrich et al. 2001; van Dieken 2004).

Unlike the girls, boys tend to conform less to the instructions given by qualified child care workers. Older boys especially form gender-homogenous "peer groups" and attempt to withdraw from supervision. Although at nursery school a wide range of different forms of "masculinity" are identifiable, for individual boys behaviour can already be observed "which precedes the manifestation of typically masculine forms of aggressive behaviour: exaggerated self-portrayal, exclusion of outsiders, degradation, physical confrontation, and suppression of feelings." (see Rohrmann 1997: 307). However, at pre-school age, gender-stereotypical behaviour is not yet stable. This represents an opportunity, if education professionals are sensitive to gender questions – also with respect to their own individual identity. In contrast, a barrier is often represented by the "ideology of equality" that is common among education professionals (cf. Permien/Frank 1995). Many qualified child care workers attach little importance to gender differences: in their self-perception, they treat girls and boys in the same way (cf. Rohrmann/Thoma 1997). However, the observation and reflection of the interaction between the child care worker and the child reveals a different picture: girls receive plenty of acknowledgement

for sensitive and helpful behaviour and often support the education professional, thus leading their self-assertion behaviour to be described as “catty”. In contrast, the “aggressive child” introduced in case discussions is primarily male. Many female professionals regard typical activities of boys such as getting into scuffles, rowdiness, and fighting as inherently “aggressive” and threatening. In educational programmes, boys’ interests are insufficiently taken into account; and in rooms and play materials, masculine attributes and symbols are underrepresented. Girls and boys require adults’ acceptance for typical gender behaviour as well as encouragement to behave differently. For girls, it is normal to define and assert themselves. For boys, the important point is to observe their vulnerable sides and to recognise uncertainty and helplessness concealed by disruptive behaviour.

The perception and assessment of children’s behaviour is heavily influenced by one’s personal gender socialisation. Therefore, biographical elements play an important role in continued professional development training and advisory support. Over the longer term, training male professionals would not only bring male role models into nursery schools, but also modify the engagement with the issue of “gender and aggression” among colleagues.

2.1.6 Support of motor function and body perception

The negative consequences of motor deprivation in early childhood have repeatedly been confirmed for almost all areas of childhood development. Deficiencies in a child’s motor functions are closely correlated with perception disorders that lead to inappropriate assessments of their own as well as others’ behaviour, and can involve destructive reactions. The regulation of feelings of tension and the control of impulses are also managed by body perception and physical activities.

Exercise as a basic need of children, at many day-care centres, need not be promoted, but must be facilitated in the first place. Opportunities to pursue spontaneous motor needs at any time are more important than planned activities. Restlessness, lack of concentration, or general destructiveness frequently point to an imbalance and deficiencies in the spatial and material facilities of the day-care centre. Spatial concepts which do not take into account the exercise needs of pre-school age children, often lead to unintentional disruptions or demand regimes that cause the children to react in a frustrated way. Educational concepts such as a “exercise nursery school”, sport-educational approaches or “forest nursery school” take such aspects into account.

Studies on aggression in play (cf. Wegener-Spöhring 1993) differentiate between aggressive behaviour and games with aggressive content (scuffle or combat games, imitation of media violence, toys with aggressive symbolism). Aggressive games are defined largely by the equality of the playing partners who attempt to avoid pain and injuries. Behavioural researchers such as play

therapists attribute a positive function to scuffle and combat games as socially appropriate, ritualistic forms of aggression. Violence could be avoided if children train their motor-function agility and learn through clear rules to respect the opponent's limits. The integration of elements of combative sport in regular games and sports lessons has the same objective (cf. Olivier 1995), as well as the equipment of child day-care centres with the relevant kit (e.g. a punching bag). However, the primarily female professionals do not always share this viewpoint. Qualified child care workers (both men and women) frequently report that when they intervene in a supposedly violent situation, the fighting children explain: "We were only playing."

2.1.7 Curricular and standardised programmes

For nursery schools, there are now various standardised and manually implemented curricula (cf. e.g. www.papilio.de; www.faustlos.de). Based on the findings of learning theory and communication psychology, these programmes are aimed at training pro-social behaviour and violence-free conflict resolution or amending children's undesirable ways of behaviour. These programmes have in common (albeit with differing individual scope and content):

- Qualified child care workers, who are familiar to the children, implement the programme and are key individuals promoting success. Training for professionals therefore is of key importance.
- They are aimed at supporting children's socio-emotional and cognitive skills. The children should learn to perceive their own emotions, to develop empathy, and to cope with rage, fear, and disappointment without the use of violence.
- Interventions are aimed at the group of children as a whole, not at individual "disruptive" children, and take place over a longer period of time at the child day-care centre. Efforts are made to repeat or continue the initiative at a later stage.
- The programmes adopt methods and media that are age-appropriate. For example, socially desirable or undesirable ways of behaviour are personified with animal characters or dolls, (illustrated) stories focus on social conflicts that are typical of the age group, and the children devise conflict resolutions through role-play. Rituals, songs, and set phrases are supposed to ensure that the children remember problem-solving strategies.

Curricula and programmes are distinguished:

- by the duration of professionals' continued professional development course (from only one to several days);
- by the type of programme and forms of additional support (through collective supervision, case discussions, individual coaching);
- by the orientation of the continued professional development course towards individual qualified child care workers or a centre's entire team;

- by the scope in which parents are to be reached. This ranges from individual parent's evenings, which tend to be more suited to promote acceptance for the programme, to qualifying child care workers to independently implement training for parents.

Many of these learning programmes have their roots in the USA, where instructive teaching in the form of lessons is also widespread in nursery schools. In Germany, on the other hand, a child-centred and situation-oriented nursery school education theory has become established. Reports of first-hand experience, however, give no indication that this discrepancy is perceived as a problem among users. Rather, they show that the programmes have an effect as "empowerment" and, in addition to the prescribed approach, can release independent initiative and fresh ideas.

2.1.8 Concepts from communication psychology

Various other concepts are less heavily structured and instructive, although they partially adopt similar theoretical roots and objectives. Concepts such as "violence-free communication" (cf. www.gewaltfrei.de) are widespread in the USA and in nursery schools and educational institutions in other countries. In Germany, too, continued professional development courses are made available for educational professionals. These include training in techniques of empathetic behaviour and moderating conversations that can result in "win-win solutions" in cases of conflict, and applying these to communication with children.

Mediation was also originally developed for other contexts and conceptually adapted to the field of action of day-care centres at a later date (cf. Faller 2002).

In continued professional development courses, qualified child care workers learn mediation techniques for conflict mediation among children. Reports of first-hand experience emphasise the importance of the child care worker's attitude to conflicts as well as the conflict culture of the centre and its team of educators for the effectiveness of such techniques. An integral part of this sort of conflict culture is, for instance, regular children's conferences. In this instance, education professionals use dolls or other methods to relate current conflicts of interest within the children's group and they encourage the children to adopt different perspectives and suggest solutions. Thus, the professional workers release themselves from the sense of "total accountability" that many qualified child care workers accept for conflicts among children and instead entrust them with self-responsibility. Children of pre-school age are – in contrast to school – not trained as "conflict mediators", however, the child care worker positively reinforces a child's behaviour, if the child attempts to mediate in cases of conflicts among his or her peers.

Evaluation studies are only available for a few violence prevention programmes (for instance, "Faustlos" ("No Fists"), "Papilio"). With respect to

many behavioural aspects, the intervention groups – in comparison to the control groups – show significant differences. Furthermore, violence-preventive programmes can improve the job satisfaction of qualified child care workers. However, to date long-term studies are lacking, so that no satisfactory statements can be made with regard to the stability and generalisation of results. For changes that are effective in the long term the decisive factors should be the success of the transfer of training contents to everyday processes, and whether a consistent use of the procedures occurs in the daily interaction of the qualified child care workers and children and in the primarily open situations in nursery schools.

2.2 Prevention strategies oriented towards education professionals

The statements about child-related prevention strategies suggest that the qualification of education professionals plays a key role in prevention. This yields fundamental questions about monitoring suitability for the profession as well as training and continued professional development for professionals. Alongside processing the substantial growth in knowledge about early childhood, the role of training and continued professional development courses is primarily to contribute to the development of qualified child care workers' personal and social key skills. Professional policy strategies are only a recent development. These sub-categorise professional requirements as continued professional development modules, with which professionals can record their career progress as a part of their longer term further education biography.

Professional requirements of employees in this field of action have been raised. As regards the function of the day-care centre as a part of a “social early warning system”, the understanding of the professional role understanding has expanded toward the “family worker”. On the foundation of basic skills, in future, educational teams will be comprised of professionals with various additional qualifications and will be obliged to cooperate on an interdisciplinary basis with other professions.

2.2.1 Training

Professional competence can by no means be reduced to formal qualifications. In the public debate about the training reform for child care workers, however, it is rarely mentioned that a quite substantial number of educational employees only have qualifications below vocational training college level. Another cause for concern is that the pivotal importance of early childhood has so far neither been sufficiently reflected in syllabuses nor in occupational profiles for the supervision of children of the under-three-year-olds.

According to the framework agreement on vocational colleges, qualified child care workers should be able “to empathise with children and young people as well as adults, to assert themselves, and to organise processes of mediation and negotiation”, as well as having an aptitude for communication, and being able to offer support in conflict situations⁵. This objective is considered differently in the syllabuses of the Länder and the various training providers. Additionally, main emphases and methodological approaches are heavily dependent on teaching staff, so that a compulsory elective course such as “mediation” (cf. e.g. Faller 1998) is not generally available. Orientation of classroom practice towards subject areas and fields of responsibility will in future offer better opportunities to process critical professional situations from multiple perspectives, and with a focus on practical action.

More important than theoretical instruction is how real conflict situations, which students encounter during teaching practice as an element of their training course – partly as a “reality shock” – can be processed, for instance, in case discussions with practice instructors. However, the question arises as to what extent the training phase can prepare for the occupational field’s growing and complex requirements. New entrants to the profession in particular need problem-oriented continued professional development and timely possibilities for reflection through supervision and advice “on the spot”.

2.2.2 Continued professional development and advisory support

Studies on the effect of child rearing styles on children’s conflict and cooperative behaviour arrive at the unanimous conclusion that an encouraging, emotionally engaged approach on the part of the qualified child care worker is to be regarded as an essential condition for children’s pro-social behaviour (cf. Dittrich et al. 1996). Equally, empirical studies also show that supervising adults frequently do not represent any appropriate model for competent behaviour in situations of conflict. The educational goal of “constructive conflict resolution” is not reflected in their personal behaviour. Qualified child care workers frequently give “helplessness” and “feelings of powerlessness” as motives for taking part in continued professional development courses on the subject of “aggression and violence”. These feelings lead to a restricted spectrum of response which oscillates between rigid intervention or a despirited laissez-faire attitude. These patterns cannot be altered by the schematic application of behavioural rules. The demand for continued professional development courses with a simple formula is high, especially for short courses. The predominance of continued professional development courses that last one to a maximum five days reflects the difficult structural and financial conditions in this field, yet also meets the needs of many education professionals. Short

5 Download: www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/Bildung/BeruflicheBildung/rvfachschul.pdf

training courses can only introduce information and concepts. However, processing individual experiences of violence, power, and powerlessness, one's own gender socialisation as well as the confrontation of idealisations of childhood, family, and education needs a framework, which gives room for personal experience and working through the individual biography. Education professionals, who have participated in long-term and part-time continued professional development courses, dealing with topics of "conflict, aggression, and violence" report in programme evaluations about a greater acceptance and sense of security when coping with conflicts among children. The precise observation of play and interaction situations enables them to differentiate better between the children's need for assistance and competent behaviour, and also expands their own behavioural repertoire (cf. van Dieken 2004; Dittrich et al. 2001). Media-assisted forms such as accompanying video-interaction (cf. www.spindeutschland.de; Besancon 2005) enable the qualified child care worker to observe him or herself interacting with a "difficult" child, and to observe the child's unnoticed or inappropriately answered needs for attention and support. Practice reports point to the high intensity of this form of resource-oriented advisory support, and processing scenes of successful communication quickly leads to rapid and effective modifications of the child care worker's behaviour. Developing the skill of observation, in particular, requires forms of work related to individual concerns, including regular case discussions, inter-collegial advice in the team at the day-care centre and advice on teaching practice and supervision. At present, resources of most day-care centre providers as well as projected staffing costs rarely facilitate this, so that frequently advisory support can only be sought in crisis situations.

Because qualified child care workers do not work with children on a one-to-one basis, but are rather integrated into diverse team processes and open situations, the transfer processes from continued professional development to the occupational field are highly significant. These processes are rarely evaluated, however, education professionals frequently report that they are not successful in implementing the content of the training courses accordingly. There is much to be said for the closer integration of continued professional development and advisory support at the work place and involving the entire team (cf. van Dieken 2004).

In view of the increased networking and further development of day-care centres' understanding of their own function, there is a growing need for continued professional development as regards interdisciplinary cooperation and advisory support for the family.

2.2.3 Cooperation and networking

Within the scope of their orientation towards the social environment, many day-care centres cooperate with other providers of child and youth services,

advice agencies, the police, and authorities in the area of violence prevention. The forms of work are, for example, regularly held “round table” discussions, joint events or violence prevention concepts for a city or region. If no statutory forms of cooperation are set out as, for instance, participation in the proceedings for child rearing support (Galm et al. 2009)⁶, these are highly dependent on local circumstances and the personal commitment of individual managers and professionals.

In cases of behavioural problems, networking within the social environment can both facilitate easier access of parents and children to the suitable support services, as well as assist qualified child care workers via interdisciplinary work. One barrier is that the education professionals do not always sense adequate recognition for their skills, and communication is made more difficult due to different professional approaches. This certainly depends also on their lower professional status in comparison to the academic professions. These difficulties make efforts for cooperation partially ineffective.

2.3 Family and parent-related prevention strategies

The communication and cooperation between parents and qualified child care workers is of fundamental importance for the well-being and development of children. As one parent generally brings the children and another collects them, a daily, uncomplicated form of contact and exchange emerges. This is a good basis for cause- and problem-related discussions. For most parents, the qualified child care worker is a person they trust to whom they can also turn with their uncertainties about their own child rearing behaviour and even with personal problems. Many parents desire the support of the day-care centre if their child has behavioural problems (cf. Ministerium, no year). On the other hand, many education professionals feel insufficiently equipped and overtaxed to provide this. Unclear and unrealistic expectations lead to mutual attributions of guilt and dissociations (cf. Sommerfeld 1996; Prott 2004).

Fundamental for a positive relationship are the model of a “partnership in education”, with which the day-care centre acknowledges that the parents are experts in rearing their children, and a variety of communication forms and forms of encounter that parents can become involved with using their skills. However, this approach must not select those parents who are in agreement with the attitudes of the professionals. Rather it is important to involve parents with low education or from marginalised social classes, and to seek cooperation on an equal footing, according to the principle “every mother, and every father can be a teacher in some area” (see Prott 2004: 36).

6 Download: www.dji.de/bibs/jugendkriminalitaet/Child_Welfare.pdf or www.dji.de/youthcrime

Some professionals have unrealistic expectations of subject-oriented parents' evenings, where external experts give lectures on educational topics such as "conflict among siblings" or "media consumption and violence". Although such events are among the accepted services offered by most day-care centres, according to statements made by the educationalists, they do not reach the parents "who need it most". Modifying problematic parental behaviour cannot be expected from such forms of parental education. Moreover, it seems that the parents also know how to evade this form of instruction. Individual day-care centres cooperate with other providers of child and youth services – such as family education centres – on parental education matters and offer, for example, training courses on child rearing skills. Recent developments tend towards a modified understanding of the day-care centre as a family centre that facilitates a low-threshold service for education, advisory support, and getting together for families within their locality. The fundamental principle in this instance should be that the day-care centre's ethos of integration and mutual respect is maintained and children as well as families are not identified in a one-sided manner as "clients" and "in need of support".

2.4 Institution-oriented prevention strategies

The institution's understanding of its function for child rearing and child education, the values represented in institutional guidelines, as well as management practice and team work fundamentally define the "educational climate" and the type and course of conflicts (cf. Rohrmann 1998). In contrast, many qualified child care workers seem to consider dealing with conflicts and aggressions mainly as an individual task and less within an institutional context. It is astonishing that although the "ability to cope with conflict" is mentioned as a key learning objective in many educational concepts of day-care centres, the teams hardly define any fixed written guidelines and action strategies. Although rules are established for the children ("we don't hit"), these nevertheless remain appeals, as long as ideas are absent about how to reasonably implement these rules. The formulation of professionally argued and reliably implemented maxims for action could make professional action more transparent for parents, and be a basis for dialogue and agreements with them.

There are strategies for the development of violence-preventive institutional concepts on the theoretical basis of the mediation approach, and they have been successfully implemented (cf. Faller 1995).

2.5 Risk group-oriented prevention strategies

Research results about the development of the propensity for violence highlight the risk factors in early childhood. Children from violent families run a higher risk of becoming perpetrators as well as victims of violence themselves during the course of their development. However, risks may not be reduced to this aspect and the causes are rather more complex in nature. Qualified child care workers report frequent occurrences of disruptive behaviour, if the children's social environment reveals problems of an extraordinary degree (cf. Ministerium, no year). Therefore, not only individuals but also social environments can become points of reference for violence-preventive measures.

The results of research into resilience demonstrate that children from a disadvantaged background develop coping strategies, if they are supported by sensitive, engaged, and reliable development mentors and they can even compensate for less reliable relationships within the family with other experiences (cf. Schneider 2004)⁷. Not all qualified child care workers succeed in this compensatory achievement, as shown by surveys in which children, who assess the behaviour of their parents as restrictive and sanctioning, also assess their child care workers in the same way – and more often than is attributable to pure chance (Sturzbecher 2001). Children with negative expectations of their environment often test the sustainability of relationships by disruptive behaviour. To avoid such cumulative effects, professional youth workers need relief, professional support, and structural assistance. Risk group-oriented prevention, however, is not only related to the children, but targets the entire family system. Day-care centres boast particularly favourable conditions: in no other field of child and youth services is there such natural, non-selective daily contact between risk groups and professional support workers. However, children of socially disadvantaged groups such as immigrant children attend day-care centres less frequently and educational managers regard language barriers as a major problem in the communication with parents (cf. Deutsches Jugendinstitut 2002).⁸

Day-care centres could play a central role within “early warning systems”, however, in the context of present structural conditions qualified child care workers have restricted freedom of action to respond in a timely and effective manner. If they suspect a slower development or imminent disability, they can recommend to the parents to apply for rehabilitation aid which is granted in the form of additional personal support and therapeutic services at the day-care centre or by attending an integrative institution. However, some parents refuse to accept counselling or therapeutic support (cf. Leuzinger-Bohleber 2006). In

7 Download: www.beta-diakonie.de/cms/041112_Schneider.pdf

8 Download: www.dji.de/bibs/zahlenspiegel_gesamt.pdf

this case or in other cases of disruptive behaviour, the professional youth workers are themselves largely left alone with a child's permanent difficult behaviour. While partner agencies such as the *Allgemeine Soziale Dienst* (General Social Services), education and family advice points, early support services, and many more are basically prepared to advise qualified child care workers, there are limits to their service because general counselling advice is not funded in the run-up to accepting case work. Thus, frequently more binding forms of cooperation only occur on an individual case basis and when crises are intensified. Media reports about especially spectacular cases of child neglect bemoan the lack of, or the unsuccessful, cooperation, and the early symptoms being overlooked on the part of professional support workers.

Various model projects highlight the necessary changes and have tested effective strategies for this (cf. among others www.sigmund-freud-institut.de; Ministerium, no year):

- networking of the various services from different social environments on a joint working basis, development of a joint understanding for multi-professional cooperation with joint criteria for the perception of problem cases, among others, by cooperative extended education courses,
- extension of counselling and supervision within proximity to the work place,
- development of instruments to observe behavioural problems,
- aid and support tools, which define the specific interventions by professional youth workers if a child exhibits behavioural problems, and informing about contact persons for support services outside the day-care centre, so that educationalists can direct and refer parents to adequate assistances (cf. Esch 2004).

Working with deprived families requires a level of professionalism that can neither be taken for granted for managers nor for qualified child care workers. These parents' ideas about education and educational practices frequently differ from those of the day-care institution. The rejection of parents by qualified child care workers has the effect of the withdrawal of the former and can involve a child in loyalty conflicts. Preventive work must therefore start with existing resources and parent's skills. Integrated concepts with supervision, counselling, and support service programmes "under a single roof" follow this objective. This includes both fixed as well as open groups for children of various ages, parent-child groups, parent groups, as well as various leisure programmes and programmes for material support (for example, clothes shops, furniture stores, lunch service). The "Sure Start" programmes in English regions of poverty are among the models for these concepts⁹. These provide for parents to participate in multiple ways in the education and child rearing in

9 Download: www.britishcouncil.de/d/education/eccec.htm

cooperation with the professional youth workers, thus developing parenting skills. At the same time, extensive participation opportunities work against the social isolation of disadvantaged and often unemployed parents. Furthermore, in view of the recently formulated pressure for political action and the pace with which day-care centres are expanding their concepts, it seems reasonable to develop quality criteria for these concepts and to verify them in the field (cf. Deutscher Kinderschutzbund 2001; www.familienzentrum.nrw.de).

3 Summary: needs and further outlook

Due to their self-understanding as well as their low-threshold and non-selective approach, day-care centres are places of primary prevention. This is increasingly acknowledged within society.

To this end, professional practice develops concepts and procedures, which are relevant to the field of action, in particular for mentoring and supporting children's individual development. Despite the numerous pioneering projects and the commitment of many professional youth workers, it cannot be assumed that qualified child care workers can fulfil the growing requirements of their professional role without improved training and continued professional development as well as, in future, upgrading and expanding their professional image as a "qualified child care worker". With respect to violence prevention cooperation with families and networking with other social services are especially worthy of mention.

In this field of action, research and evaluation need to catch up, as questions about the long-term impact of measures can scarcely be answered. However, for this field of action, it is safe to say that long-term strategies and the integration within an overall concept as well as qualification of professional youth workers represent the key factors for success.

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