



DROP THE LABEL!

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS, RESPECTING DIVERSITY.

What children and young people say about bullying, gender equality,
diversity and well-being in school



Youth MIND Education: Youth Migrants'/Minorities' Inclusion, Non-violence, Diversity Education (yMIND), Projekt No 580232-EPP-1-2016-1-DE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN



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Original idea and co-ordination: Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann, SPI Forschung gGmbH

Editors: Elfriede Steffan and Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann, SPI Forschung gGmbH

Text: Dr. Ilona Zeuch-Wiese

Sonderbeitrag: Dr. Colin Isham, CSKN CIC, Externer Projektevaluator

Design: Tina Steffan

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Picture: Boy, 15, Germany

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WE ARE ALL
THE SAME AND
YET DIFFERENT.

YOU ARE
DIFFERENT
FROM ME.

WELCOME TO YMIND

While it may seem obvious to you that these statements imply understanding and respect for others, this is far from the case in everyday school life. Rather, they are often the trigger for feelings of alienation. They increase the uncertainty among those they refer to, contribute to conflict and provoke bullying and discriminatory behaviour towards others.

How can schools help change perceptions of diversity, so that it is regarded as a resource for bringing people together rather than as a problem? How can we better work with differences in school life? How can children and young people contribute as partners to help shape practices to accommodate diversity?

These are the topics of our Youth MIND Education (yMIND) project, which has brought together four European countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Greece – to work together with children and young people on **diversity in schools**.

Although diversity has long been a central theme both in the classroom as well as school life as a whole, given the many demands on schools today, diversity is not always a priority. Teachers and learners need enough time and space to deal with growing diversity, so they can create structures which facilitate positive outcomes. If this can

happen, there is an opportunity for the development of a diverse culture characterized by mutual respect, appreciation and equality.

Our main aim is to promote an open school culture, to engage everyone in diversity-aware cooperation and help schools develop this culture further – creating an integrative learning environment that promotes acceptance and respect for others.

„Understanding others, respecting diversity“ is the motto we have adopted to sum up the content and aim of our project. To achieve this, we have collaborated with more than 360 children and young people from 18 schools in the four countries. We have encouraged them to become experts in their own right, and to present their perspectives and opinions on complex social issues such as bullying and violence, gender and gender equality, diversity and racism. In this way, they have become important partners in identifying issues and shaping the way forward. They have been empowered to better understand diversity, actively engage with stereotypes, adopt a clear stance against discrimination, and practice respect and moral courage.

Who did we have in mind when creating this brochure for?

We have compiled and designed it for:

- **children and young people** to pay tribute to their experience and expertise. This booklet is something we have created together. Without their valuable narratives, thoughts, drawings and quotes it could not have come about. The brochure should show their classmates and all their peers that their reflections, experiences and opinions are important and have to be taken into account when changes are made.
- **teaching professionals, pedagogues and parents.** We hope the brochure conveys the importance of child-centred approaches which integrate the resources of children and young people, so that they develop and strengthen their ability to deal with issues and find solutions.
- **school leaders** to show them how participative engagement can be achieved by involving children as partners to shape diverse schools. In this way, schools can become a „place of well-being and positive learning“ (Olweus et al., 2010)
- and last but not least, for **co-researchers** who are interested in how participatory methods of research and prevention can be effectively implemented with young people.



We have learned a lot from the children and young people we have worked with. We have benefited from their expectations, needs and creative ideas and have been able to incorporate much of what we have learned into our work with participating schools. We hope that the brochure gives you ideas for how you can use the yMIND model and stimulates your thinking. We hand it over to you, may it, do trial these practices for yourself:

yMIND comes highly recommended

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The EU's Youth MIND Education (yMIND) project comprises a multinational team of researchers, prevention and education experts working together in different countries in schools and selected communities. These include Roma communities in Bulgaria and Greece, and an Afghan community in Austria / Vienna. The focus is on children, young people and teaching staff. The duration of the project supported by the European Commission (Erasmus+ Programme) is two years: December 2016 to November 2018.

yMIND has been developed and implemented by SPI Research gGmbH Berlin together with:

- the Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF, Austria),
- the Health and Social Development Foundation (HESED, Bulgaria), and
- ACTION Synergy S.A. (Greece)- lead organisation for the project.

In Germany, SPI Forschung gGmbH works together with „Grenzläufer e.V.“, a provider of child and youth welfare services in Berlin and Brandenburg.

Another 22 partner institutions work alongside us and support our work, including schools, school authorities, youth organizations, refugee organizations, and migrant communities.

Our starting point

The project originated amidst the many new challenges presented by the growing number of migrants and asylum seekers entering Europe's education systems. As well as finding places for these additional children and young people, school authorities and teaching staff also need to find structural and curriculum solutions appropriate to the increasingly multiethnic nature of the student body. A fundamental task here is the creation of a diversity-sensitive school climate. Developing this requires the involvement of all student groups. While such a task that cannot be solved by a project alone, such student involvement can also give a new impetus to find solutions, and test together what is feasible. Schools can make good use of any support provided by outside partners, who can contribute to school effectiveness through practical and easy-to-implement training opportunities. This is exactly where our project comes in: we want to raise awareness among schools and educational professionals about the issues of diversity and offer the support to address them.

Wir sind eine Schule
und halten zusammen!



Picture: Boy, 11, Germany / „We are one school and we stick together!”

Our objective

is the development of children and young people's social skills through participative and innovative methods focusing on:

- Preventing bullying and violence, raising awareness and developing a clear stance against discrimination
- Gender roles, gender expectations and gender equality
- Diversity competence, respect and appreciation of different identities and ways of life

Our Offer

is a practical approach that has been tested with the participating schools and subject to ongoing analysis by an external evaluation.

Under the title „**Diversity Training**“ we have merged the three core topics into a holistic training model for school prevention:

1. prevention of bullying and violence
2. promotion of gender equality and prevention of gender discrimination
3. understanding of diversity as well as respect for differences and multi-ethnicity



A synopsis of the approach and a discussion of the individual steps for implementation are available on the yMIND Website¹¹. The synopsis includes definitions of the terms 'diversity', 'gender' and 'bullying', suggestions for further reading, a module toolkit, as well as suggestions for implementing the approach, with descriptions of classroom activities.

The following chapter briefly describes the particular characteristics of the yMIND model: the child-centered, participative approach we use to engage children and young people.

¹¹ <http://www.youth-mind.eu/index.php/products>

Our contributors are

- Children and young people (6 to 18 years) from 18 primary and secondary schools as well as a kindergarten; Since our project focuses on diversity and intercultural understanding, we have mainly included students from 'welcome classes'² (Germany), integration classes (Austria) and multiethnic classes (Bulgaria, Greece and Germany). Refugees, migrants and ethnic minorities (including Roma) have become contributors to yMIND through our participatory approach. This has taken the project beyond the core nationalities of **Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Greece**, to include representation of participants' countries of origin, including: **Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Brazil, China, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sudan, Syria, Turkey and Vietnam.**
- School leaders, teaching professionals, social workers and other educational staff; Without the commitment and reliability of teaching staff, who have been actively involved in the project and open to new approaches, its implementation would not have been possible. Regional and local education authorities, specialists in school prevention, regional training courses and other educational experts; Thanks to their professional support, we were also able to conduct advanced training courses for teachers alongside the school workshops.
- Parents.

² Classes established to facilitate the integration of children and young people new to the German school system.



Picture: Girl, 7, Greece

PUTTING yMIND INTO PRACTICE

The focus is on the young person

Ensuring they can engage in their own interests, have a say, tackle problems and develop creative solutions to conflict - this is the goal of our work with children and young people. To do this, we set out to build their self-confidence and enable them to organize themselves, articulate their own desires and suggestions and actively participate in shaping their world and their day-to-day life at school.

At the centre of our research questions on the theme diversity and of the learning objectives of the Diversity Training is the perspective of young people. In order to encourage them to articulate their perceptions, feelings and needs regarding existing differences, discrimination, bullying and gender equality, we have used methods of participatory research and interactive group work as we have trialed the yMIND approach.

Group discussions and school workshops have provided the girls and boys with the necessary space to actively contribute their own ideas, share their opinions, develop new skills and practice in a safe environment. Self-confidence and trust, communication and conflict-resolution skills and the ability to empathize with others have been developed in a sustainable way. The most important goal is the promotion among all children and young people of empathy, sensitivity, tolerance for diversity, respect for other cultures, gender equality and a non-violent approach to resolving problematic situations.

In each of our 18 partner schools, we talked in advance with the teaching professionals and school leaders about current needs and issues most important for the respective student groups. On this basis, a bespoke focus for each of the school workshops were developed and implemented with the children and young people.

Learning objectives of the workshops were, for example:

creating a secure space where participants can express without fear their ideas and needs on topics such as bullying, similarities and differences, being excluded and discrimination;

understanding how members of a group can affect each other through their own behavior and reactions; developing self-awareness and group awareness;

raise awareness of social tensions within the class, encouraging students to engage in an open, respectful discussion and motivating them to work for a better social climate in the class /school.

To achieve workshop goals, we used the graphic-creative methods and the interactive methods of group work from the wide range of participatory approaches compiled for yMIND:

Graphic-creative methods:

- Drawing, modeling, crafting, creating body images;
- Creating collages from magazines to reflect the feelings of being bullied / discriminated against;
- Painting pictures or posters of specific topics, e.g. : „A world without bullying“; „School of Diversity“; „My super school.

Interactive methods of group work:

- Various exercises in the areas of social skills and teamwork, e.g. Self-awareness and perception of others, self-esteem, empathy, trust and empowerment of the group, communication and conflict resolution;
- Role play and drama methods from drama in education approaches.

In total, more than 25 school workshops were held in 18 schools, in which more than 360 students actively participated:

- Austria: 59 pupils in three schools in Vienna.
- Bulgaria: 49 pupils in three schools in Sofia and Kyustendil
- Germany: 122 pupils in five schools in Berlin and Brandenburg
- Greece: 137 students in seven schools in Athens, Peania-Athens, Sparta-Lakonia, Vlachioti-Lakonia, Molaous-Lakonia

In several schools the workshops were followed by focus group discussions with 8-10 pupils each, which continued the creative exchange and deepened the discussion of particular topics. The questions we asked related to the content of the creative work, to the oral and pictorial narratives of our young participants. As our partners, they also identified in this context which topics were important and should be discussed.

The questions discussed, but above all the wide range of answers, perspectives and suggestions of our project participants, were not only paid a great deal of attention during our practical work - they also form the main part of this brochure. The following chapter is devoted to the voices and opinions of children and young people - **in pictures and words!**



Picture: Girl, 12, Germany

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Picture: Boy, 6, Greece

BULLYING AND VIOLENCE

Bullying: „A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students ... It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contact, words or in other ways.“ (Olweus, 1993)

What bullying means to children and young people

All children and young people, whether from Austria, Bulgaria, Greece or Germany, were familiar with the term bullying when we asked them, „What does bullying mean to you?“ They used the term to describe their own painful experiences at school or their own actions against classmates. The range of actions young people described, had suffered themselves or even inflicted on others was broad. Their experiences ranged from personal insults, insults against family members, humiliation, social exclusion and cyberbullying to sexualized harassment, extortion and violence.

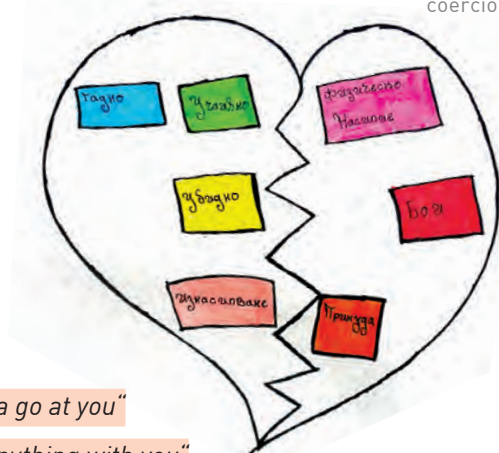
For children and teenagers in Bulgaria in particular, school bullying was a „normal“ thing: „This is our everyday life“ they said and „We see it every day“. However, unlike students in the other three countries, some young people rarely distinguish between „bullying“ and „violence.“ This could be due

to the fact that the awareness of the topic of „bullying“ in their schools is not yet so pronounced.

For many of the participating Bulgarian students, the term bullying was associated with violence such as beatings, coercion and rape. From everyday life at school, they were aware of acts such as biting, tormenting and being „systematically blackmailed for money“. Sexualized violence was also named: Bulgarian girls openly discussed personal experiences and recalled unwanted physical harassment from boys - „when they grab hold of me“ - in connection with bullying.

Beyond specifically violent experiences, it can be stated: Bulgarian, Greek and German children and young people have not only had comparable experiences in school - their feelings are identical as well: they all suffered equally as victims of bullying.

Picture:
Girl, 15, Bulgaria
Left: disgusting,
discouraged,
insulting, rape
right: physical
violence, beating,
coercion



What does bullying mean for you?

„Video clips and jokes on the Internet“

„Insults and swearing, humiliation and abuse“

„Being made a fool of“

„If nobody helps you“.

„Not respecting the personal boundaries of others“.

[Girls and boys from Kyustendil, 12-13 years, and from Sofia, 13-15 years, Bulgaria]

Some of the Bulgarian students talked in particular about verbal attacks, insults and discriminatory remarks against their own family: „The insults are against their family and are especially bad and offensive“ (girl)

„Bullying is when everyone in the class is against you and sets out to upset you. For example, they hit you, or give you horrible nicknames, you are always the last one to be chosen for the team. „

„Everyone always has a go at you“

„Nobody wants to do anything with you“

„When everyone is mean to you, pushes, beats, insults you“.

„When somebody is teased about his / her appearance.“

[Boys and girls of a Berlin primary school, 10-11 years, Germany]

The boys and girls of a secondary school in Greece have found two widespread forms of bullying particularly painful: on the one hand, cyberbullying, that is, the use of the Internet to bully a person; on the other social exclusion in the form of being laughed at or tormented. The group of students from Sparta had observed that girls in particular are affected by this form of bullying.

SPARTA

How do children feel who are being bullied?

.... sad, unhappy, lonely, offended, downcast, ashamed and sullied“

„I cannot stand it when someone insults my family. Then I feel very bad“

(Girls and boys, 13-14 years, from Sofia, Bulgaria)

A Bulgarian student describes feelings like anger and rage: „I'm not letting others treat me badly.“

„I feel like dirt“

„They all look at me“

„They want me to disappear“

(Boys and girls of a high school, Greece)

Overall, the Greek boys and girls described a vicious cycle triggered by bullying: According to them, bullied children:

- became introverted, withdrawn,
- were intimidated because their persecutors threatened them so they would not tell anyone
- were ashamed of their fear because they really wanted to be brave, and
- were afraid to talk to the parents:

Ich will sterben!

Picture: Boy, Germany
„You're stupid“, „Anorexic“, „Your look!“



Picture: Girl, 10, Germany / „You look funny“, „Go away“, „We don't want you here“, You're stupid“, „You're mean“

- so as not to burden them with their own problems and worries,
- because they feared their reaction,
- because they feared that their parents might go to the school principal, who would then confront their persecutors, which would result in their being further tormented, compounding their fear even further.

„Then this person feels very, very sad, and that's not nice. They want to kill themselves or throw themselves off a high place.“

„It is stupid that there are children who like to bully others. It makes children afraid to go to school, or even scared to step out of the door, or they self-harm or do other stupid stuff.“

(Boys and girls of a Berlin primary school, 10-11 years, Germany)

But what do those who actively bully their classmates say? Why do they do it? What do they feel when they are bullying others?

„It means I belong somewhere“

„It means I'm on the side of the strong ones“

are the answers of Greek youths, making it clear that children and young people who bully hope to achieve increased strength and popularity in their peer group.

What do you need in school to feel safe and at ease?

During discussions, participants in all four countries made it clear that they are sometimes exposed to situations in school that are depressing and likely to negatively affect their enjoyment of school and learning. First of all then, the discussions focused on students' needs for protection and well-being in school.

After the workshops and group discussions 18 Austrian students and their teachers from integration class in Vienna developed a screenplay for a video on bullying: "Bullying – more than a fight".

For **Bulgarian children and young people**, teachers and parents clearly had a duty to improve their situation in school.

- They wanted more attention from their teachers so they „understand us children and young people better“.
- Others said they wanted teachers to shout at them and insult them less.
- Parents needed to become more involved with the school and to work together with teachers and students to improve the class climate.

But there were also voices that saw no point in breaking the spiral of conflict, but instead considered revenge to be the appropriate response for victims of bullying:

„I'll give as good as I get!“ (boy)

Participants from a **primary school in Germany** (10-11 years) saw things quite differently. For them it was clear: As a class you have to work problems through. Young people have to learn to argue, to resolve conflicts, and they have to offer support to those who are being bullied!



Picture: Girl, 14, Bulgaria
„What do you need in school to feel safe and at ease?“ – „Friends“

In their own words, quarrels among boys, for example, mostly end in a fight:

„Boys who prefer to fight, will just fight“ (boy)

„We prefer not to insult each other. So there might be one or two insults, and then fists start flying.“ (boy)

Strategies already tried with some success in this case were: either a third pupil moved between the combatants, or someone was chosen to get the class representative or teacher to do this.

„Usually the boys are fighting, then we hold them back until the teachers come.“ (boy)

„Then the boys always say: class representative, you have to get between them.“ (boy)



Picture: Girl, 7, Greece / „You're tiny, you dwarf!“, „Hey! Don't talk to me like that!“

Girls reported that quarrels among them never went beyond verbal exchanges and were resolved verbally. The girls tried to develop resolution strategies through conversation and also tried to resolve conflicts on their own:

„For us girls, it's often like that [...] because we avoid each other and try to solve [the problem] on our own.“ (girl)

„I think it's actually quite good to sort out [the problem] with your friends alone.“ (girl)

„Then we just say ‚sorry‘ and let bygones be bygones.“ (girl)

It also became clear in the conversations with the Berlin children that boys and girls do not seem to get into arguments when they are working together in the class.

„I do not know a situation where there are arguments between boys and girls“. (boy)

„It just seemed to me that whenever we were with the boys, when we played as a whole class, we argued less“. (girl)

„I also think that we argued less and had more fun. [...] it was a bit better than normal“. (girl)

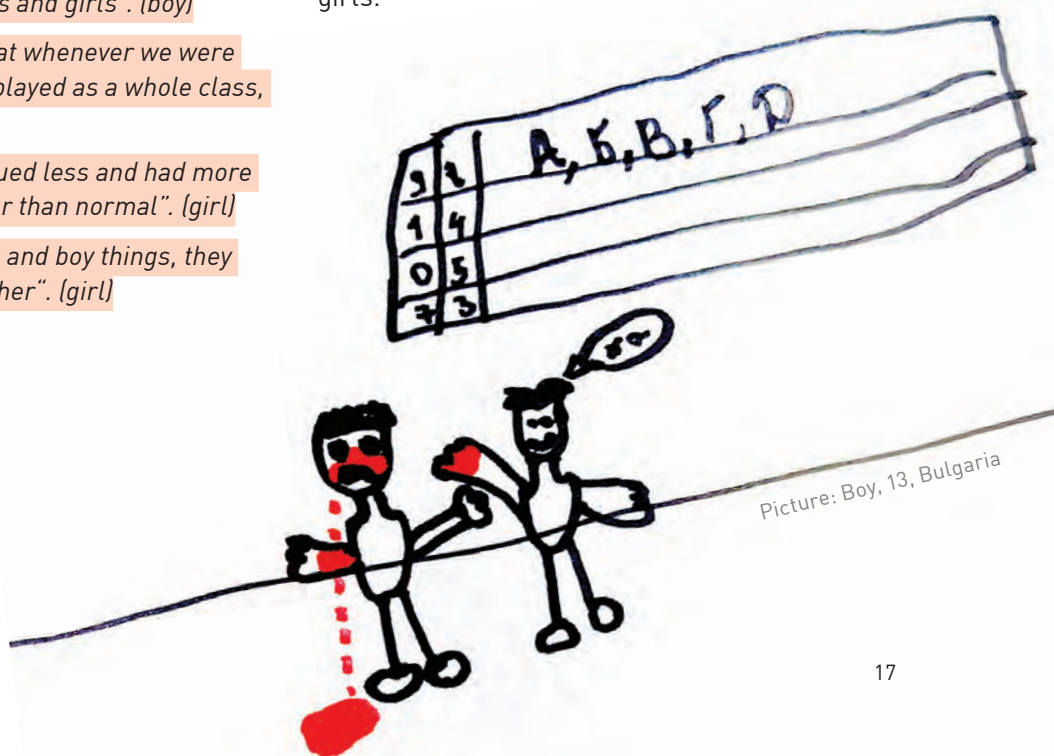
„There are no girl things and boy things, they can just support each other“. (girl)



Picture: Girl, 7, Greece / Bullying „Don't make fun of children from other countries!!!“

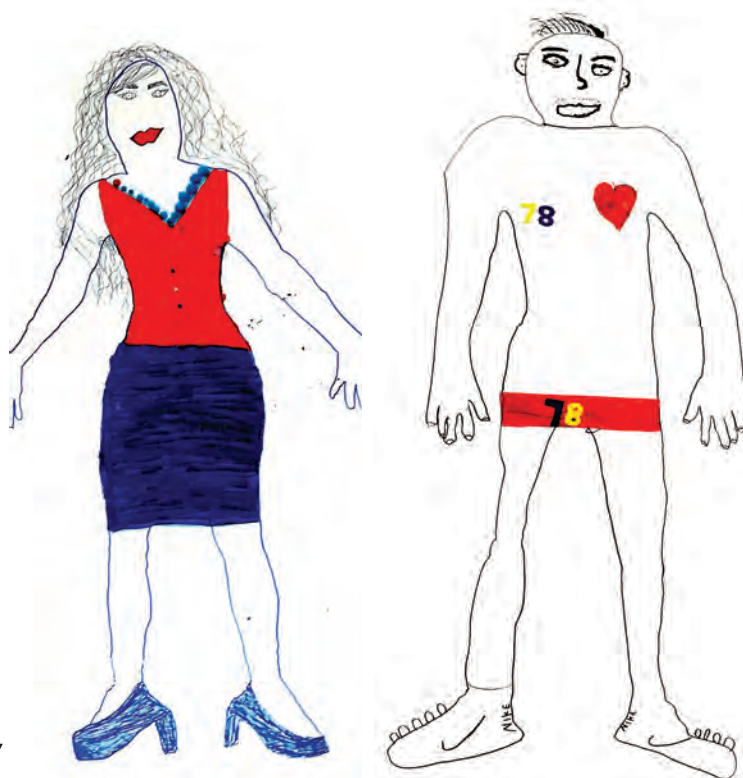
If we want to draw a general lesson from the experience of this class in handling conflicts caused, among other things, by bullying, we might summarise a successful strategy in these terms:

It is important to use and strengthen the resources students have at their disposal, and to develop as a class a sense of awareness for others - girls for boys and boys for girls.



Picture: Boy, 13, Bulgaria

GENDER AND GENDER EQUALITY



Pictures: Girl, 13, Germany / Boy, 18, Germany

Gender: “means the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men... Gender refers to the social differences between women and men that have been learned; are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.” (Council of Europe, 2014)

Gender equality: “means equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. It also means an equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men”. (Ibid.)

Much has happened in recent decades: Women occupy high-ranking posts in politics and business, exert influence on the most diverse areas of society and have jobs that were formerly the preserve exclusively of men. Men carry out household tasks and are involved in child rearing, go on parental leave and support their partners in their work. So has gender equality prevailed, or does it just seem that way? To answer this question, we need to take a closer look: Do men and women have equal rights? Do they earn the same money for the same job? Do men do the same in terms of running the household and parenting as women? Have expectations of gender roles in new fields of activity actually changed - or do they still exist, the old stereotypes?

In the group discussions and school workshops in Austria and Germany, „gender“ and „gender equality“ were topics that were dealt with in particular depth. Among other things, we wanted to know from the girls and

boys: How do you see your respective gender role? What advantages and disadvantages do you experience being a boy or a girl? What are your expectations of the opposite sex? Is there gender equality?

Lively debates took place, which showed how dominant and stereotyped role models still are with many boys and girls today. But they also showed that children and young people were well aware that they were able to deal with the issue of gender equality, that they were able to recognize social reality, and slowly articulated the need for change.

In **Austria / Vienna** we talked with young people between 12 and 17 years. They all attended integration and multicultural classes and mostly came from migrant backgrounds.

In **Germany / Berlin**, girls and boys between the ages of eight and 17 engaged in our conversations. The younger group was made up of primary pupils, the older ones were girls from a high school welcome class.

TEENAGER ABOUT GENDER AND GENDER EQUALITY

Perception of gender roles

Why do you like being a girl / a boy?

In the answers to these questions, the 12 to 17-year-old girls and boys expressed traditional role models and ideas: girls are beautiful, can show emotions, make themselves pretty and have children - boys are strong, masculine and do not cry.

„Because I can put on make-up.“

„[Because I] can give birth and have children.“

„[Because I can] put on beautiful clothes.“

„Because you can wear a headscarf.“

[Girls, 12-14 years, Austria]

„We can wear shoes with heels, dresses and make-up.“

„Girls can, for example, cry, boys cannot do that ... “

„Girls have a big heart. This world is not beautiful without them. “

[Girls, 13-17 years, Germany]

„To be strong, because I can be stronger.“

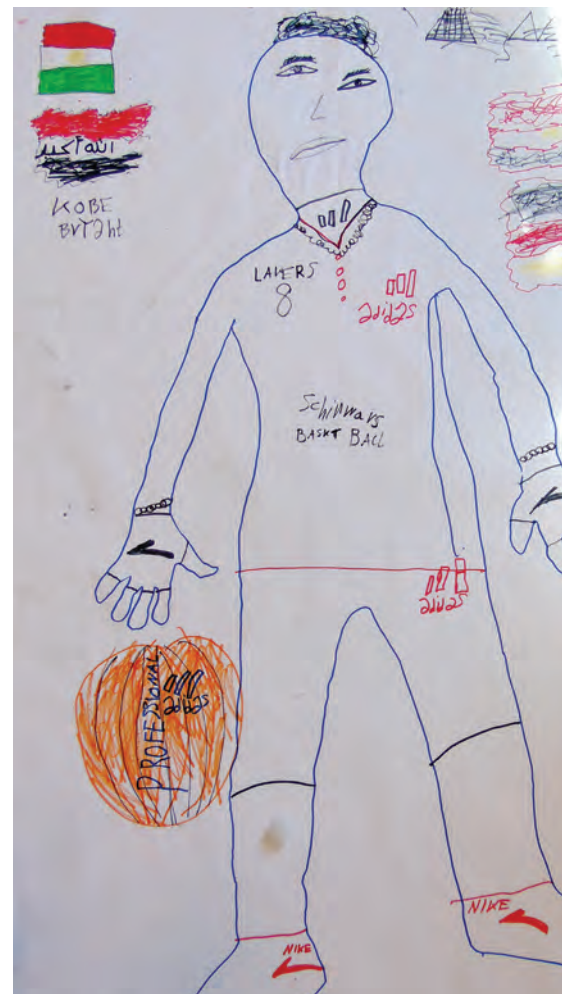
„Because I do not have to give birth. Because we don't have to undergo pain, because I do not have to have children. “

„Because boys are more sporty.“

[Boys, 12-14 years, Austria]



Picture: Girl, 12, Germany



Picture: Boy, 12, Germany

What are the advantages and disadvantages of female and male roles?

In the ideas that the young people expressed about their role as a boy or a man and as a girl or a woman, we also encountered mostly traditional views about gender. The boys also saw as a consequence of their role as a strong man, the exclusion of the showing of feelings. In response to the question of why they like being a girl or a boy, the young people barely mentioned new role models. The stereotypical role attributions „man = protector“ - „woman = protected“ were not questioned, but rather confirmed by both the girls and the boys. Noticeable in the focus group discussions was the atmosphere of trust that helped some girls talk openly about gender-based violence.

„... women have a better physique, ... a nice figure.“

„It is an advantage that we are protected and that we can give birth.“

„Sometimes, though, boys do that [exercise gender-based violence]. Sometimes that happens. Sometimes every day. „

[Girls, 12-14 years, Austria]

„In our country, it's an advantage for men to protect women.“

„Men are physically stronger so they can protect women.“

„You must not harass and attack girls.“

„I cannot show feelings. I can only show feelings for girls. „

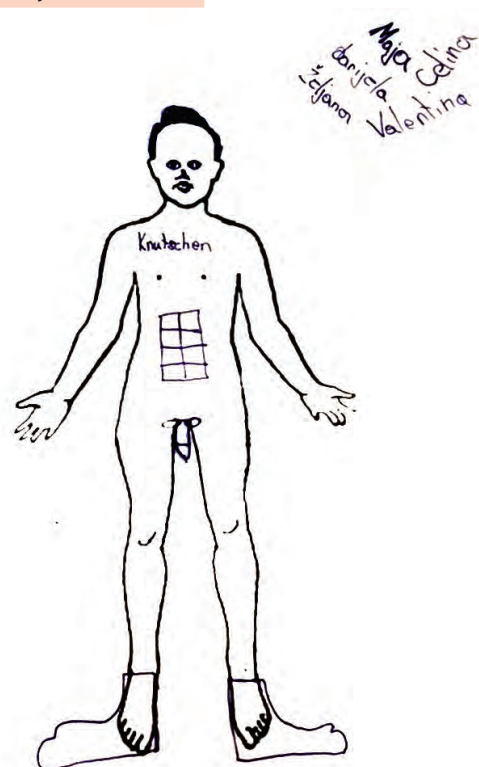
„I cannot cry when boys cry, it's so feminine. „

„We say when you cry, you're like a woman ... It's not nice when a boy cries. That's kind of unmanly. „

[Boys, 12-14 years, Austria]



Picture: Girl, 15, Austria / „I like to dance. I'm very good.“, „I like to hear music.“



Picture: Boy, 14, Austria / „Kissing“

What expectations do young people have of the opposite sex?

The expectations of male and female roles reflected social reality – women's double burden. On the one hand, the boys described the traditional tasks of women – looking after the home and parenting – on the other, which today is largely taken for granted: women's employment.

„Women need to keep things tidy, they need to be able to cook well, they are raised to look after the house and look after children.“

„She has to be able to work, but she also has to work at home.“

„I want to have a wife who can look after and educate the children and can be independent, without relying on me“.

[Boys, 12-14 years, Austria]



Equality between the sexes

In Germany, the discussion around the advantages and disadvantages of being a boy or a girl was also a question of equal rights. Comparisons were made between what are girls allowed to do, and what are boys allowed to do. The girls in one welcome class from a variety of countries expressed their desire for change: Given the day-to-day freedoms granted to boys, they felt unequally treated and trapped in their traditional role as women.

„.... Girls have to do the cleaning. Girls have to do more work than boys.“

„All boys can do sports, but girls can't.“

„Some say to their daughter: ‚You must wear a headscarf‘. She does not want to though. Boys do not have to wear a headscarf, girls do. “

„Well, in my country, girls do not have the same rights as boys, e.g. a girl may... not go out alone. The girls are not allowed to play football in a club like Barcelona. And the boys are ‚kings‘, the boys can always make up their own minds. Many girls not. The boys think the girls cannot decide for themselves because they can't think properly. “

„Girls always have to ask, e.g. what they are allowed to do. Boys don't have to do that. Girls always have to ask parents, like me, e.g. if I want to go out with my friend. “

[Girls, 13-17 years, Germany]

Is there gender equality?

Despite recent opportunities for girls and boys to enter new occupational and family roles, the young people were well aware of existing social injustices and discussed them.

„Women earn less money than men. That's unfair.“ (boy)

„Women also find it harder to return to work after parental leave because they often have to work part-time.“ (girl)

„Women can already become pilots, conductors and politicians.“ (boy)

„But few become mechatronics technicians, mechanics or technicians.“ (girl)

„But there are still few men who become midwives. Or kindergarten teachers.“ (girl)
(Girls and boys, 12-14 years, Austria)

Gender and sexual identity

Artists and politicians come out, talk openly about their homosexuality, engage in same-sex marriages and adopt children. Are different forms of sexual diversity respected? We wanted to find out what influences the opinions of young people, whether prejudices are on their way out, and discrimination and violence brought into question.

Discussing „Sexual Identity and Diversity“

The lively debates around these questions in Austria were a reflection of existing social positions. They ranged from rejection to tolerance of homosexuality to empathy and defense of the rights of homosexuals.

„I have nothing against gays, once there was a man standing outside our school who was carrying a purple bag and everyone bullied him.“ (boy)

„[Homosexual people] are normal people, but they should not marry.“ (girl)

(Boys and girls, 12-14 years, Austria)

The rights of homosexual couples to become parents were particularly strongly debated:

„You can marry, but you should not have children.“

„Why are you against [homosexual couples becoming parents]? If they want a child, why not? „

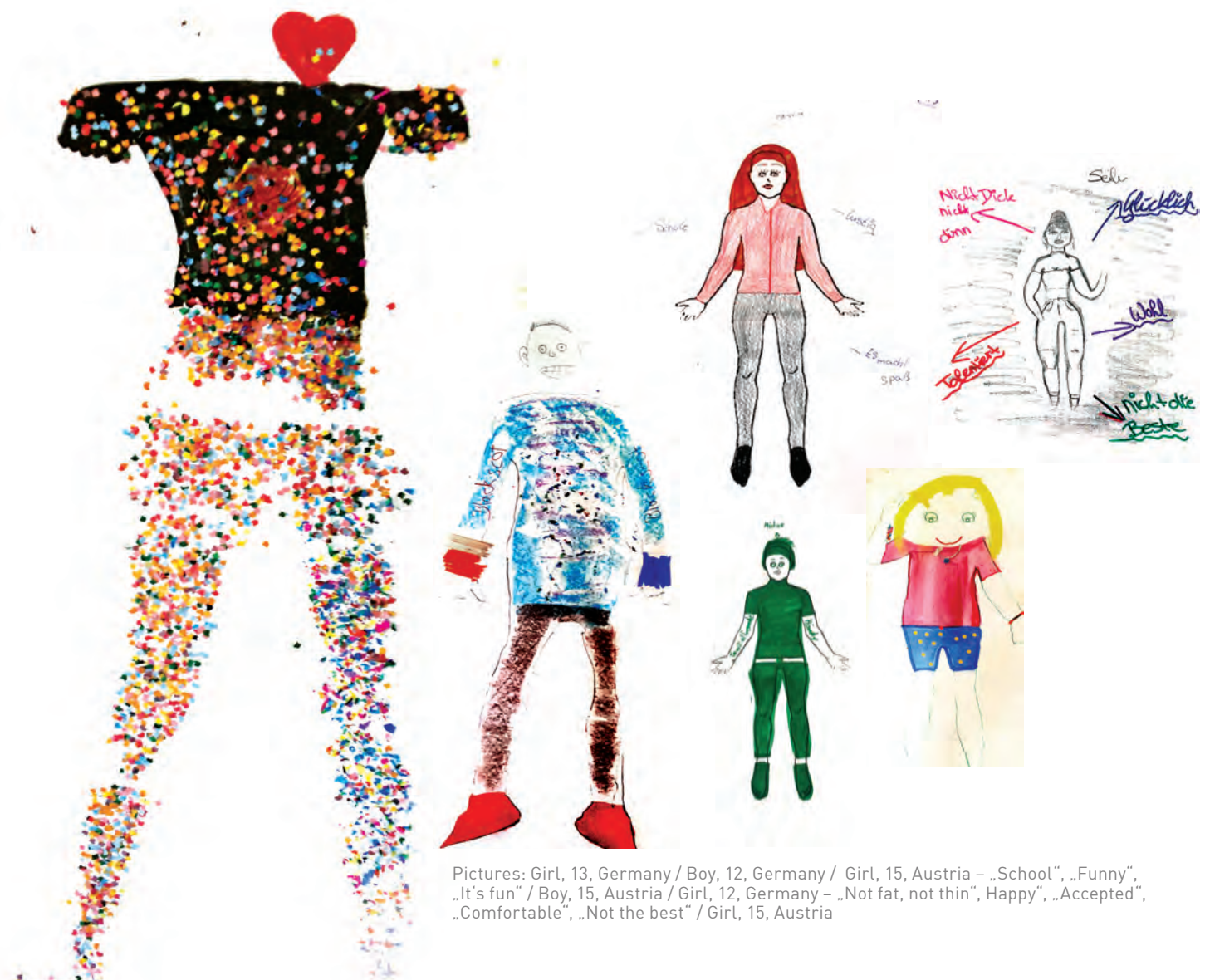
„I think many children are better off being looked after by gay couples than living in a children's home.“

„What would you prefer: parents who abuse or beat their children all the time, or gay parents?“

„It does not matter if gay or straight. Children need loving parents. „

(Discussion among girls, 12-14 years, Austria)

Based on this controversial discussion, the relevance of the need to foster gender equality in school becomes even clearer. Questioning and deconstructing negative gender stereotypes is the key to preventing gender-based discrimination and promoting gender equality and sexual identities.



Pictures: Girl, 13, Germany / Boy, 12, Germany / Girl, 15, Austria – „School“, „Funny“, „It's fun“ / Boy, 15, Austria / Girl, 12, Germany – „Not fat, not thin“, Happy“, „Accepted“, „Comfortable“, „Not the best“ / Girl, 15, Austria

CHILDREN ABOUT GENDER AND GENDER EQUALITY

How do younger students approaching puberty see their later role as a man or a woman? Is their understanding of roles different from that of older students?

Girls and boys from two primary schools in Berlin with some multicultural classes discussed this topic with us. It turned out that some of them had not yet committed to a particular position and were flexible with regard gender roles:

„I would like to be both.“ (girl)

„I am a boy and a girl.“ (girl)

„You can pretend to be a girl and a boy.“ (boy)

Girls have already experienced that their gender is associated with certain stereotypical attributes such as „girls are slow“, „girls are weak“. They felt „labelled“ by this, felt they were always on the defensive and had to prove themselves:

„I say that it is not true [being weak and slow]. Because there are strong girls who are quick too.“ (girl)

„There are also slow boys, girls just don't always want to make the effort.“ (girl)

„It's not at all true that girls are slower than boys. There are even some girls who are faster than older boys.“ (girl)

Even these young girls found that girls being defined by their clothes was an advantage and a privilege:

„But I also think it's good to be a girl because a girl can wear trousers and a dress.“

One girl's objection that boys too could put on skirts was dismissed by another girl:

„But then they look ridiculous“.

Football: Discussing „Equality“

No opinion is stronger than the view that girls and football do not mix. Even the 10-11 year old boys had already internalized this stereotype. For them, it was clear which sports were appropriate for girls and which for boys:

„But football is pretty hard for girls most of the time. That's why I would take up handball or water polo [if I were a girl]. ..“

„When a girl plays football, a lot of boys in the class say, 'oh god, a girl playing football'. That's probably bad. ..“

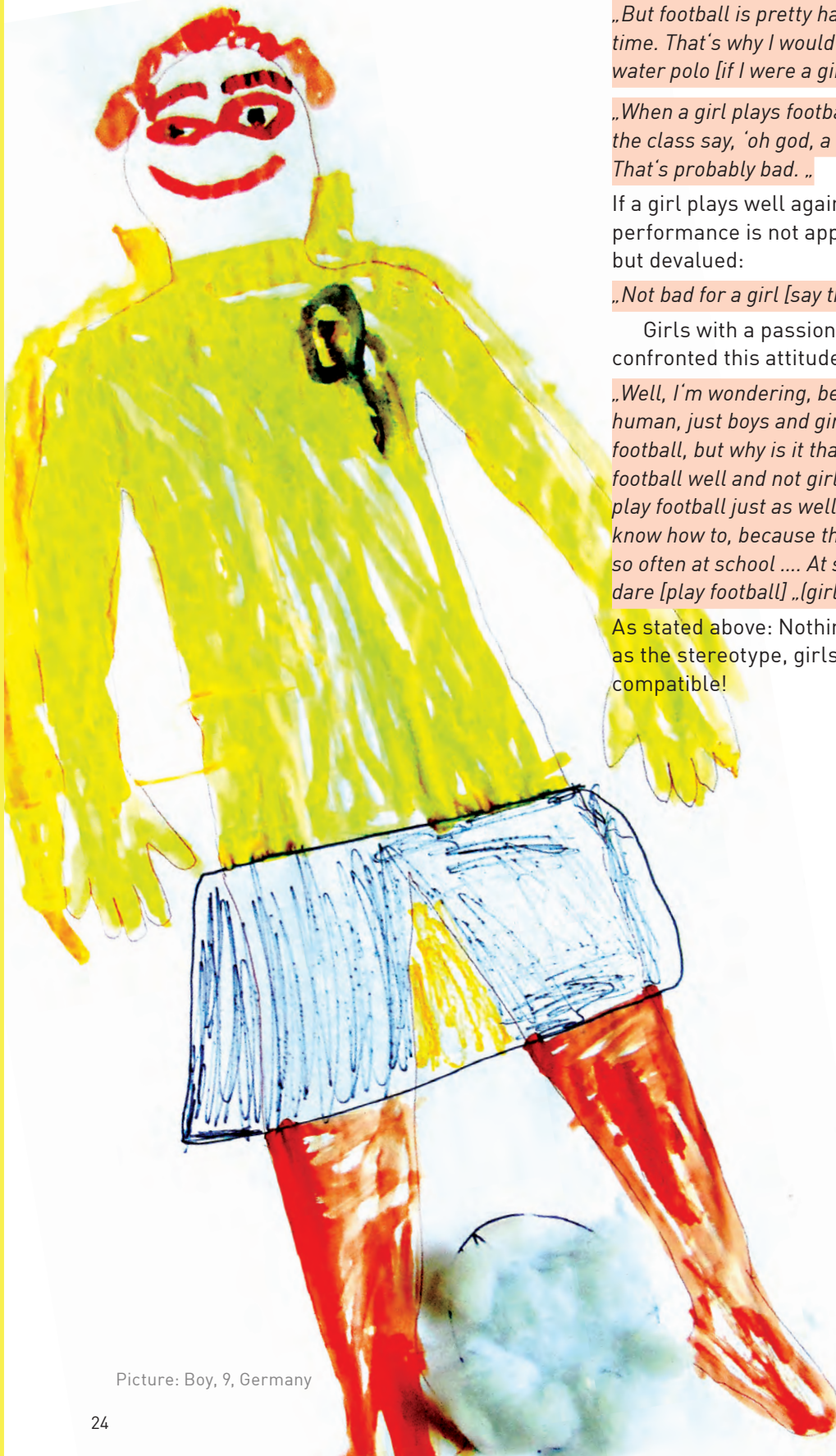
If a girl plays well against expectations, her performance is not applauded by the boys, but devalued:

„Not bad for a girl [say the boys].“

Girls with a passion for playing football confronted this attitude by the boys:

„Well, I'm wondering, because we're all human, just boys and girls: ... anybody can play football, but why is it that only boys can play football well and not girls? ... Maybe girls can play football just as well, but they just don't know how to, because they do not play football so often at school At school, I often don't dare [play football] ..[girl]“

As stated above: Nothing holds as strong as the stereotype, girls and football are not compatible!



Picture: Boy, 9, Germany

Is there justice between the sexes?

For the girls, this question was directly related to the stereotypical idea that girls are weaker than boys. It is precisely this that would lead to the boys' respect for girls. It can be assumed that the experience behind this is that strong girls can quickly become outsiders if they do not conform to common gender stereotypes. The behavior of these girls especially unsettles those who have internalized very rigid beliefs about the behavior of the sexes:

„... because you always think girls are weaker than boys.“

„You are more respected because you think the boys are stronger and faster than girls.“

The presumed weakness of girls is also mentioned as a reason for insults, which boys use to single out girls:

„I would like to be a boy, because then you don't get insulted as being slow, even though you aren't that slow.“

„[Guys get insulted] ... but not as much as girls.“

[Girls can be offensive too] ... but not as much as boys.“

When considering gender equality boys referred to the supposedly better treatment of girls by teachers. Also, they considered girls achievements in school to be better than those of boys. It seems boys suffer from

being in the shadow of girls at school. A boy therefore found the idea of being a girl quite attractive:

„But girls are also always lucky, because they don't get punished by teachers.“

„It would be really good if I could do better at school.“

Is there a consensus of beliefs that could describe the relationships between the sexes from a neutral position and justify their equality? This question was also discussed by the boys and girls. The statement from one boy serves as an example:

„What girls and boys have in common is that they are all different [personalities] and ... some are just helpful and some are not, boys and girls have that in common. And some are nice and some are not nice or some mean or some fun or some are always helping others.“

Everyone is the same - yet different! With this statement, we have also formulated the transition to our next chapter, which will be about „diversity“. There we expand our view, and bring it into sharper relief, and focus on the uniqueness and value of each individual, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, social background, sexual identity, religion or political views.

Picture: Girl, 11, Germany / „Everyone is the same - yet different!“



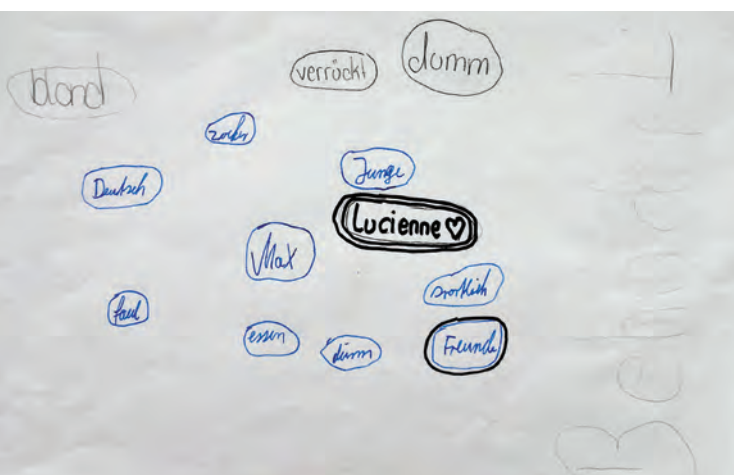
DIVERSITY

Diversity means „to consist of different elements, facets and characteristics, diversity in terms of ethnic origin, gender, culture, etc.“ (Save the Children UK, 2005).

„Diversity is a concept for distinguishing and recognizing group and individual characteristics as well as for accepting one's own personality, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, social background, sexual identity, religion or political views.“ (Winkelmann, 2014)

Drop the label! This was the aim of our work with the young project participants from Austria and Germany aged 8 to 17 years. First, we wanted to know about them: what does diversity mean to you and what does „belonging“ mean? What do you need in order to be accepted? What would you regard as school embracing diversity? In the workshops, which left space for free artistic-creative association work, young people were encouraged to focus on their own thoughts and ideas on diversity and thus become aware of the complexity of the topic. A first important step was the conscious perception of one's own person. By designing real-body body images they were encouraged to become aware of themselves and to answer the questions: „What sort of person am I?“, „What makes me me?“, „What makes me unique?“, „What's so special about me?“ The necessary reflection, thinking about

oneself, was a novel experience to many young people, they did not find it easy and it took time. The subsequent discussions confirmed, however, that the creative work had supported them in answering these questions. They were able to recognize that the desire to belong to a peer group is strong and important. In addition, they surfaced their affiliation with many different groups. These included family, friends, country of origin, skin colour, language, religion or gender. Based on this self-knowledge, we talked about the different facets of diversity. In Austria, the questions „What is otherness?“ and „similarities and differences“ were at the centre of the discussion. In Germany, discussions focused on what „diversity“ means for students, whether and what „experiences of discrimination and racism“ they have already had, and what „a school embracing diversity“ would look like for them.



Picture: Boy, 13, Germany

ΕΛΛΕΝ



Picture: Girl, 6, Greece



Picture: Girl, 13, Greece

What is being different for you?

The answers of the Austrian pupils to this question suggest that they had already had experience of being different: they stressed the need for understanding and respect for others and pointed out that they are all different:

„We have to accept the others. Acceptance is important. When newcomers come to class, we have to be polite, show respect, be nice.“

„We are all foreigners [in Austria] in the class. Acceptance is important because they are from different cultures.“

„We have different cultures and different traditions. We have different colour hair and skin.“

[Girls and boys, 12 to 14 years, Austria]

Similarities and differences

For many young people from families with an intercultural background, ethnicity and religion were hallmarks of community and at the same time crucial for belonging to a group:

„If he is Turk, then he belongs to us.“

„If he is Serb, he belongs to me.“

„If he's Afghani, then he joins Afghanistan football club.“

[Boys, 14-15 years, Austria]

What is diversity for you?

The drawing of a girl which she gave the title „All the same and yet different“ sparked in **Germany** a lively discussion on „diversity“ among the group of 8-10 year old children and showed their respect for supposed others.

Everyone quickly agreed: every person is unique!!

„Well, I think [...] that we are ... all human beings, but nevertheless every human being is different and unique in his own way.“

„Everyone is different and good in their own way. It's not how you look, but how you are on the inside. And even if you do not like an individual, you should not upset or bully him/her. We are all the same and yet different!“

„It is not appearance that makes a person, but the heart, how the person is, whether they are nice, how they treat you“

„It does not matter which skin colour you have, because ... we're all human and we all understand each other.“

[Boys and girls, 8 to 11 years, Germany]

A boy from this group chose a metaphor from the world of music to illustrate his idea of diversity:

„I mean, when some play one instrument but everyone plays different piece of music“, and „... everyone plays an instrument, but they make other music or something.“

Also in the group of Austrian pupils there were comparable statements. As part of the diversity discussions, some boys (14-15 years) and one girl (15-17 years) emphasized the equality of all people:

„For me, the attitude is: a person is a person“. (boy)

„We also have young women wearing a headscarf in our class. We have boys and men from other countries, that is not a problem, we are good friends with everyone“. (boy)

„But for me all people are the same. You should treat everyone the same, no matter what he or she looks like.“ (girl)

What is it like to feel different from the majority in a group?

In our conversations about the perception of „others“ and how to deal with them, we identified a readiness among the children and young people in Austria and Germany to regard diversity among people as a positive, and could see themselves as part of this diversity. But what about feelings? Is „being different“ a problem?

He feels „really very different ... maybe it's just because of my mother“, said a 10-year-old dark-skinned boy in Germany, addressing a sensitive facet of diversity in childhood and adolescence: skin colour / ethnicity.

Boys in a **Berlin welcome class** (15-16 years) expressed their desire for closeness and togetherness in a group – a protection against the feeling of being foreign:

„What's special about the class in this school for me is that we are all friends. I see everyone as my brothers and we are also a good team and I like it a lot. We always have to be a team and that's good.“

„Yes, if we are friends, I feel really good.“

„When I go to another school, I want [someone] to come and say ‚what do you need, I can help you‘. And that I do not think: ‚I am very different from the other students‘, because maybe I'm going to a German class.“



Picture: Boy, 15, Germany



Picture: Boy, 9, Germany

Experience of discrimination and racism

The feeling of being different and feeling excluded is painful. This pain is intensified when someone is discriminated against because of their skin colour and is exposed to racist remarks.

In the day-to-day life of the pupils of a German multicultural primary school, experiences of discrimination and racism seem to be part of everyday life, as the eight-year-olds said:

„They [pupils of the neighbouring school] have said that the blacks look like sh ... and the whites are much nicer.“

[Girls and boys, 8-9 years, Germany]

To defend themselves, but also to channel anger over utterances like these, some resort to equivalent insults or hit back:

„When I hear that I want to hit them. ... sometimes I do it too. Really.“ [girl]

Others tried to actively reverse the racist insults in order to show their solidarity with their classmates:

„Those who have heard that, who are brown-skinned, have gone to the other brown-skinned children and repeated those words, and they in turn have said to them that they are white chocolate.“ (girl)

The opportunity to speak with the children about this topic opened up in response to a drawing by one of the children in the class, which he gave the title „No Racism“. It initiated the whole conversation about the different experiences, opinions and behaviour of the children. Children's contributions to this discussion showed that not only did they know exactly what the term „racism“ meant, but also took a clear stance against it:

„Racism is when people say you're brown, we do not want you, or you're white, we do not want you, we just want to stay with whites. And they say, no, you look so sh ... we do not want you.“

„It also happens when you say, for example, you look so Indian, I do not want to hang around with you.“

„So I think that you should respect others and not insult them because they are different.“

(Girls and boys, 8-9 years, Germany)



Picture: Boy, 8, Germany

To be successful, diversity-oriented educational work with children and young people should start early in school, consciously raising their awareness of otherness, always sensitizing them to stereotypes and prejudices, and consistently combatting discrimination and racism. Because diversity competence can only be promoted where a clear stand is taken against discrimination.

What should a school that embraces diversity look like?

What could a school look like, that embraces diversity - in which every child, regardless of their origin and colour, their religion and gender, looks and feels good about themselves, accepted and secure, curious and happy to go to school ready to learn?

A girl from Germany, 10 years old, put it in a nutshell:

„A school where everyone can be who they are! For me, this is a school where every person is different but all are nice to each other. You can dress the way you want, you do not follow trends that you do not like, and everyone is accepted as they are. We are all the same and yet different!“



Picture: Girl, 11, Germany „No matter how you are, you're always beautiful with a smile on your lips.“



Picture: Girl, 6, Griechenland

IN SUMMARY: THE yMIND MODEL AS AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH FOR SCHOOLS!

A perspective from the external evaluation

Helping children and young people develop skills in intercultural understanding and combatting discrimination has never been more important, in Europe as across the world. yMIND activities have provided a framework for children to engage in conversation about issues concerning them: bullying, sexual harassment, domestic violence, racial discrimination. Through yMIND young people have developed skills in communication, debate and critical thinking to address real problems in their lives, and to start finding solutions.

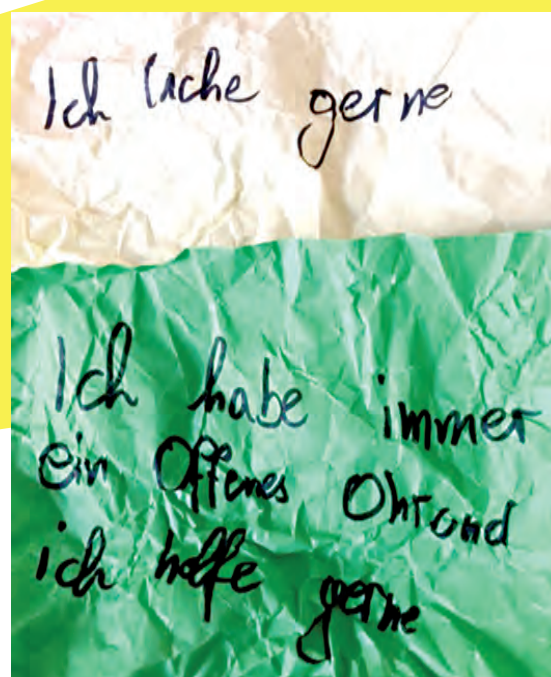
Developing learner voice in this way has been a revelation, not just for the adults who work with them, but for the children and young people themselves. Within the project, some have taken action in their personal lives to counter the discrimination they have faced.

For practitioners too, the value of learner voice has been reinforced. It has not been for the teacher to impose a moral framework

on their students: rather, by bringing young people's perspectives to the fore, it has been clear they already have a moral framework of their own, with an acute sense of what is right and wrong.

Often, it is co-operation from the adult world young people have needed to help put things right – yMIND has helped close that gap. The interventions have shown the potential to build a consensus among peers against bullying and discrimination, given the time for reflection, and guidance in dialogue and debate.

As learners have been given freedom to discuss, they have also had to learn appropriate behaviours, such as not interrupting and showing respect for others' points of view. This has been the most challenging part of the project for practitioners and trainers, and yet the part of yMIND which offers the most value. With improved skills in communication, children and young people are better



able not only to address the issues covered by yMIND, but these skills have the potential to support their learning more broadly.

For the practitioner, yMIND activities align closely with the evidence base for effective pedagogy³, developing good habits for learning, such as collaboration, activating learners as owners of their own learning, and making links between learning and their lives outside of school. In itself, it makes a useful strand for any school or authority's professional development and learning offer. Where schools and policy makers have equality and diversity on the agenda, are acting to reduce bullying and gender discrimination, and are looking to bring children and young people of different ethnicity and religions, yMIND provides valuable strategies.

Dr Colin Isham (Project Evaluator)

³ A summary of the evidence base is available on the yMIND website: www.youth-mind.eu/images/products/evidence-based%20principles%20for%20effective%20T&L%20for%20website.pdf



Picture: Boy, 9, Germany



Picture: Boy, 12, Germany

CONTINUE READING

PARTNER IN GERMANY

SPI Forschung

SPI Research gGmbH is a non-profit institute for applied social research, formerly the research area of the SPI Foundation. Since its founding in Berlin in 1987, it has contributed its expertise through various EU programmes (Public Health, Daphne, Justice, Erasmus +), international (GIZ, GFATM, IOM) and national (BMG, BMFSFJ) tasks. The team of social scientists has many years of experience in social and health-related social research and evaluation using qualitative, participatory and quantitative methods. The focus of the work is on health promotion, sexual health, violence prevention, gender equality as well as diversity and promotion of social integration.

The main target groups are women, children and young people in an in- and extra-curricular setting, migrants, ethnic minorities and particularly vulnerable groups (eg sex workers, drug users). In all projects, the promotion of participation and empowerment of the target groups and the strengthening of civil society is a guiding idea.

From 2009 to 2011, SPI Forschung gGmbH implemented the international project „Awareness of Gender Equality for the Prevention of Violence in Intimate Relations“. (GEAR - Gender Equality Awareness Raising and prevention of intimate partner violence, EU-Daphne Program). Based on the results, follow-up projects have been carried out since 2011 with the support of the Brandenburg Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Health, Women and Family. These deal with gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence among secondary school students. Seminars for school professionals and workshops for pupils are offered in cooperation with "Grenzläufer e.V.", a provider of child and youth welfare (www.grenzlaeuer-ev.de).

In Germany, SPI Forschung gGmbH coordinated the implementation of the European partner project „Prevention and Early Identification of bullying in school settings“ (EU-Daphne Program, <http://listen.animu-sassociation.org>). The current EU project yMIND (www.youth-mind.eu) implements SPI research in Berlin with the support of the regional advanced training unit (Verbund 3) of the Senate Department for Education, Youth, and Science Berlin and the SIBUZ Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Berlin.

For more information about SPI Forschung gGmbH visit:
www.spi-research.eu

Kontakt:

SPI Forschung gGmbH

Kottbusser Damm 79, 10967 Berlin

Tel: +49 30 252 16 19

E-mail: spi@spi-research.de

Coordination:

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann

t.arsova.netzelmann@web.de

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PROJECT PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

ACTION Synergy S.A. (project leader), Greece, www.action.gr

Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser (AÖF), Austria, www.aof.at

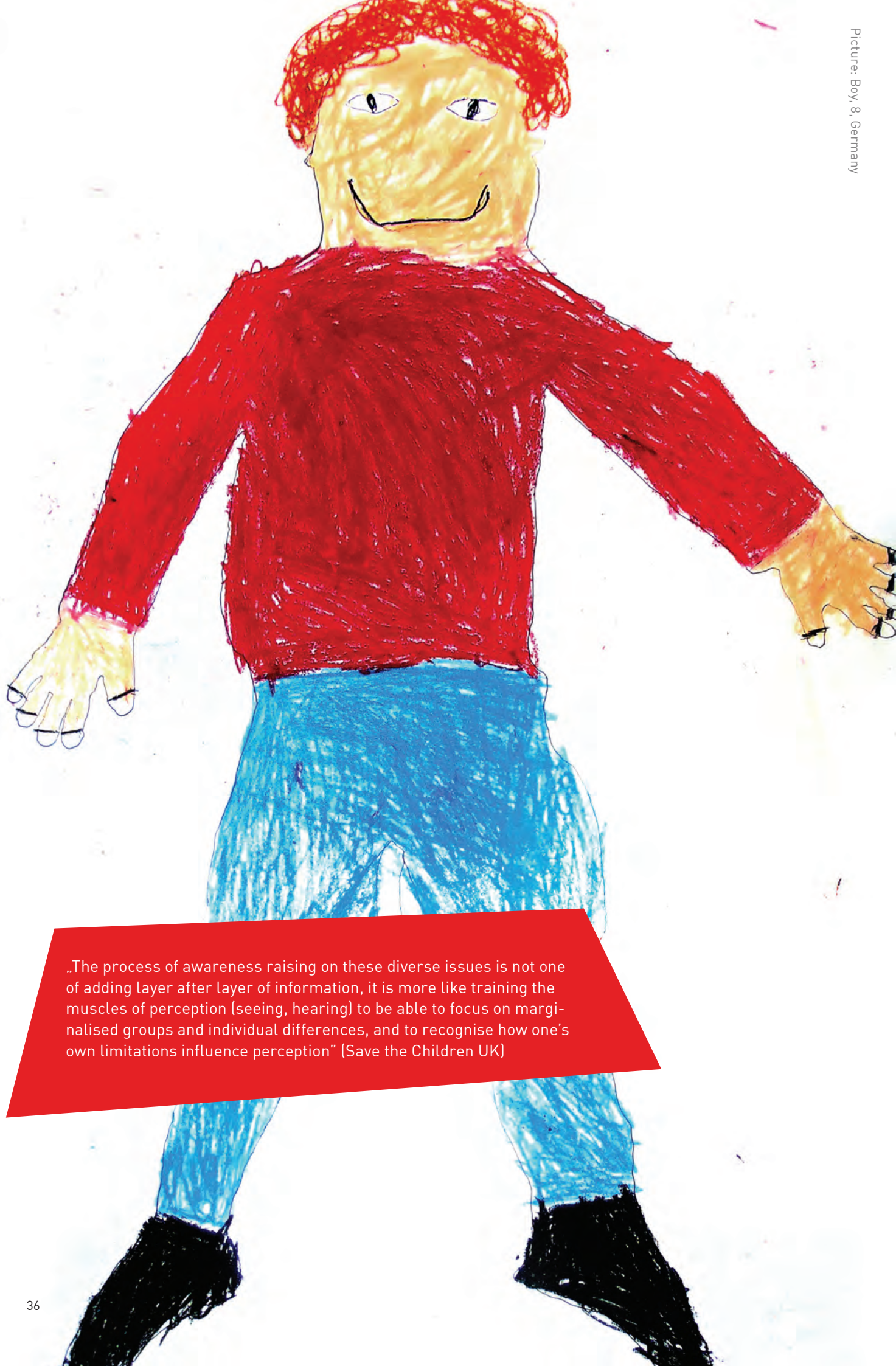
Health and Social Development Foundation (HESED), Bulgaria, www.hesed.bg

SPI Forschung gGmbH (SPI, project applicant and technical coordinator), Germany, www.spi-research.eu



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„The process of awareness raising on these diverse issues is not one of adding layer after layer of information, it is more like training the muscles of perception (seeing, hearing) to be able to focus on marginalised groups and individual differences, and to recognise how one's own limitations influence perception” (Save the Children UK)