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Introduction

If the behaviour of children or young people at school does not meet the expectations of the adults working there professionally, it is described as challenging. If pupils' behaviour restricts their own learning or development opportunities or endangers themselves or others, intervention is required to protect them and ensure the well-being of all those involved (Becker 2019c, Hurrelmann 2018, Luder 2019, Werning 2015).

This book is aimed at teachers and educational professionals who are confronted with challenging behaviour in the course of their work. It is intended to provide help

- for customised educational action in difficult situations and conflicts,
- for the development of school policies and school regulations for the prevention of challenging behaviour, conflicts and violence,
- for the inclusive support of pupils with impairments in emotional development.

This book brings together the author's professional experience as a teacher, head teacher and researcher as well as findings from socialisation research, psychology and research into special needs and inclusive education. Case studies are presented that are constructed in a realistic way and describe and justify tried and tested solutions for difficult situations in everyday school life. Any similarities with living persons are purely coincidental.

The case studies show how teachers and educational professionals can approach children and young people in difficult educational situations. Some of the case studies presented in this book were selected by the Helga Breuninger Foundation for the filming of *staged videos* for training and further education.

The book was started at the beginning of March 2022, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic and shortly after the start of the war in Ukraine. The comments on the social background relate primarily to the period from March 2022 to March 2023. During this year, many educators were primarily concerned with the educational challenges resulting from the current social crises. That is why I have prefaced the central theme of this book, *Managing Challenging Behaviour in Schools, with* Chapter 1 *Education in times of social crisis.*

Irrespective of the current social crises, teachers are particularly affected by educational situations in which they are exposed to aggressive behaviour. Chapter 2 is therefore dedicated to understanding such situations on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, ten tools are presented in the form of the *Cuts,* which enable difficult educational situations to be ended quickly.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with understanding cases of children and young people who harm others or themselves. In these chapters, readers are presented with case-specific solutions.

Teachers and educational professionals often have the impression that parents[1] are difficult for them to reach. However, if children and young people find themselves in emotional distress, counselling with parents is crucial for finding solutions. When conducting joint counselling sessions with parents, appreciation is the key to success. Chapter 5 presents a possible process for designing appreciative counselling sessions with parents.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the prevention of conflicts and challenging behaviour at school. It provides impulses for shaping life in the school community that can help to promote the well-being of pupils in such a way that conflicts, discrimination and challenging behaviour are reduced to a minimum. The development of a school policy, school rules and classroom management play a key role in this.

In order to support and encourage children and young people with impairments in emotional and social development, space and time are needed for relationship work. Chapter 7 presents how supportive relationships can be formed with the pupils concerned in order to support ego-integration and thus promote learning, well-being and social participation.

In 1998, the author developed the *Transition project* support approach, which has since been successfully implemented in Hamburg, Bremen, Berlin and individual schools in other federal states. This support approach is described in Chapters 7.2 and 7.3.

1. Education in times of social crisis

1.1 Psychosocial situation of children and adolescents against the background of social crises

In recent decades, there have only been a few overall social events in Germany that have been so overwhelming that they have had an impact on the interaction between children, young people and adults (Luhmann 1988a and Nassehi/Nollmann 2016, Nassehi 2022). The coronavirus pandemic, the climate crisis and wars and terror must be mentioned when listing the crises that are currently influencing the way children and young people in Germany grow up. The current war in Ukraine is an example of other armed conflicts in other countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Last but not least, the Middle East conflict must also be mentioned.

In November 2022, around 89 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced from crisis regions or are refugees, half of whom are under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2023a). Between 2015 and 2017, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees registered almost 500,000 initial applications for asylum for minors in Germany. In 2018 and 2019, there were around 150,000 and in 2021 there were 73,281 first-time applications for asylum for minors. The age group of 0 to 4-year-olds dominated. An initial application for asylum was made for 38,799 children in this age group. By January 2023, around 17.6 million people had already fled Ukraine (border crossings), around one million of whom live in Germany, including around 350,000 children and young people (Mediendienst Integration 2023, UNHCR 2023a). Of these, 208,897 children and young people had been admitted to schools in Germany by 2 April 2023 (KMK 2023) Many children and young people in Germany are in a difficult life situation after experiencing flight.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on social life has been overwhelming and so drastic that it has not only changed the rules for socialising at school due to the coronavirus, but has also influenced interactions between teachers and pupils in particular. Presumably, the behaviour of all actors at school has changed in such a way that anxieties and depressive symptoms are more evident in children, while aggressive and violent behaviour is less frequently perceived by teachers (Becker 2022b). The current situation in society as a whole and the behaviour of pupils and teachers at school are examples of how the three relationships of micro, meso and macro are systemically interconnected (Bronfenbrenner 1981, Luhmann 1988a).

The coronavirus pandemic meant that schools in Germany were closed for an extended period of time for the first time since the Second World War. The

results of studies conducted during the coronavirus pandemic show that the suspension of face-to-face teaching has had a major impact on the psychosocial situation of children and young people (Andresen et al. 2020; Andresen et al. 2022; Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2022b). The causes are manifold and range from the restriction of social contacts to an increase in incidents of violence against children and adolescents. The results of statistical analyses and selected scientific studies on the psychosocial situation of children and adolescents are presented below.

Psychosocial situation of children and adolescents

The statistics from the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA 2021, Maywald 2021) clearly show the extent to which offences against children have increased in Germany in the first year of the pandemic: 152 children were killed by violence, a third more than in the previous year. 115 of them were under the age of six. There were 49,128 cases of child abuse in 2020, an increase of ten per cent compared to the previous year. The number of cases of child abuse rose by 6.8 per cent to over 14,500 cases. The distribution, acquisition, possession and production of sexual abuse images, known as child pornography, increased by 53 per cent to 18,761 cases.

To gain initial international insights into the psychosocial situation of children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic, UNICEF conducted a study in 21 countries in 2020. 19 per cent of participants said they felt depressed and had no interest in activities. In Germany, the proportion was as high as 24 per cent of young people (UNICEF 2021).

A study by the German Youth Institute shows that 82 per cent of families in Germany with stable material and social living conditions were able to cope well with the coronavirus pandemic. In families with social or material problems and conflicts, the figure was only 47 per cent (Langmeyer et al. 2020a, 2020b).

The KIGGS study (Robert Koch Institute 2018) shows that even before the pandemic, 16.9 per cent of children and young people in Germany had mental health problems between 2014 and 2017. In the age groups of 3 to 14-year-olds, 19.1 per cent of boys and 14.5 per cent of girls were affected during this period. Children and young people growing up with a low socio-economic status were twice as likely to show mental health problems.

The COPSY study, in which a total of 2,471 children and adolescents aged 7 to 17 years (including 1,673 aged 11 to 17 years) and around 2,319 legal guardians of children aged 7 to 17 years took part in a total of five surveys, provides an insight into the development of children's well-being during the pandemic (Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2022b, Kaman et al. 2023). The results of the COPSY study found that in the period from December 2020 to January 2021, 30.4 per cent of the children and adolescents surveyed or the children of the

parents surveyed showed mental health problems. In December 2020 to the end of January 2021, the figure was 31 per cent (Ravens-Sieberer et al. 2022a). In the third survey period, September and October 2022, the figure was 27 per cent. In the fourth survey period, in February 2022, the respondents made statements indicating that 28.5 per cent of children and adolescents showed mental health problems at that time (Kaman et al. 2023). In the fifth survey period, in October 2022, the figure was 25 per cent (Kaman et al. 2023). The proportion was therefore higher than before the coronavirus pandemic (Kaman et al. 2023).

In the COPSY study, the periods in which the children felt a particularly high level of stress corresponded significantly with the times when there were no face-to-face lessons. The coronavirus pandemic makes it clear how important school is for the well-being of children and young people, as school is an important place for social communication and relationships. Material problems and social conflicts at home can be partially compensated for.

The results of the studies mentioned here lead to the following conclusion: "When difficult living conditions, stressed parents and children in need of support come together, existing disadvantages are exacerbated. During a crisis, the well-being of children depends even more than usual on the living conditions in the family. This is particularly worrying in the context of child protection. The influencing factors in the family increase when children – due to their own infection or due to cases of infection in the daycare centre group or class – have to go into quarantine" (Langmeyer 2020b, 1) [translated by the author].

With the start of the pandemic-related school closures, research into the learning status of pupils has exploded. In an overview published on 10 February 2021, Fickermann and Edelstein present more than 50 studies (Fickermann/Edelstein 2021). The initial results of this research during the coronavirus pandemic assumed that around 20 per cent of children and young people have pandemic-related learning deficits. For this reason, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research launched the federal-state programme *Catching up after coronavirus for children and young people* with funding of two billion euros. The programme started in June 2021 and the project period ends on 30.09.2023.

It can be assumed that the 20 per cent of pupils affected are those who grow up in stressful life situations. This hypothesis is supported by a Dutch study. Engzell, Frey and Verhagen were able to access a sample of 350,000 pupils. In the Netherlands, the school closure lasted eight weeks and the researchers were able to take advantage of the fact that regular national surveys on learning status were conducted before and after the school closure as part of the state education monitoring programme. The results of the Dutch study indicate that pupils made little or no progress in learning at a distance (Engzell/Frey/Verhagen 2020).

To date, research has largely neglected the connection between the psychological situation of learners and the results of learning status surveys (Kamm/Duveneck/Hoffmeister/Becker 2023). In the study by Helbig (Helbig 2021) on the learning status before and during the coronavirus pandemic, it was found that some students only completed a few tasks during the test. The author suspects that this is due to a lack of subject-specific skills and a lack of motivation to learn on the part of the pupils. Research is pending to investigate whether and how anxious and depressive moods in children and young people contribute to the fact that previously acquired knowledge and cognitive skills cannot be demonstrated in learning assessments or class tests.

Challenging behaviour at school during the coronavirus pandemic

In recent decades, teachers have observed an increasing tendency towards challenging behaviour in the classroom. Further training and specialist days on the topics of *behavioural disorders*, *challenging behaviour* or *behavioural problems* were in demand, and case consultations or supervision sessions were dominated by cases involving violent behaviour by children or young people towards classmates or teachers.

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, these issues have taken a back seat. The reduction in challenging behaviour in the classroom is primarily due to the temporary suspension of face-to-face teaching. Even after returning to face-to-face teaching, teachers report that anxious and depressive symptoms tend to be more prominent in children. It can be assumed that aggressive behaviour at school will increase again a few months after the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

Challenging behaviour arises at the micro level in the interaction between teachers and pupils. Institutional effects are assigned to the meso level and influence the behaviour of teachers and pupils. Institutional effects can encourage, reinforce or reduce challenging behaviour.

1.2 School as a resilience factor

During the coronavirus pandemic, pupils temporarily learnt at a distance. This was increasingly done digitally. The results of the Ravens-Sieberer study (2021, 2022a, 2022b and 2022c) show a temporal correlation between the deterioration in the well-being of children and adolescents and the suspension of face-to-face teaching. With the increasing return of face-to-face teaching, the well-being of pupils increases again (Kaman et al. 2023).

On the one hand, the school serves to impart knowledge. However, it is also an important place for social communication and at the same time has an