

Heike Sistig

# The programme with the elephant

## A new programme concept for preschool children

Starting on September 10, 2007 the German “Mouse Family” from *Die Sendung mit der Maus* (transl.: *The programme with the mouse*, WDR) is going to have a “baby brother”: *Die Sendung mit dem Elefanten* (*The programme with the elephant*) on the German preschool channel KI.KA.

In contrast to *The programme with the mouse*, which in a miraculous manner always manages to reunite the whole family in front of the television set, *The programme with the elephant* is geared specifically towards children between 2 and 6 years of age. At the same time, the programme should be appealing enough so that adults can enjoy watching it with their young children. The programme is led by the little blue elephant from *The programme with the mouse* and his new playmate, an athletic pink bunny. Together they experience fun adventures that easily tie into the young children’s experience of the world. The approved method of mixing stories to laugh at and stories about how things work remains intact and incorporates themes that are geared towards the cognitive abilities of 2- to 6-year-olds. Every episode looks at a specific topic in an associative way, e. g., water, noise, or “colourful”. The pedagogical concept: Allowing children time to understand and inquire, get a good look at everyday occurrences, encourage them to think for themselves, discover and learn about life.

### Observing and discovering

The “stories on how things work” show all there is to discover when you

take your time and really look at things. According to the “school of seeing”, pictures tell more than words can. Be it a balloon bursting in slow motion, an ice cream melting in a time lapse, or the camera angled from an unusual perspective, children have most likely never before observed their everyday world in such a manner.

### Thinking, guessing, being active

The little elephant also presents animal stories, picture puzzles, simple how-to stories and children’s portraits. Children are accompanied on daily activities, introduce their parents’ jobs, or recount what affects them. In addition, there are studio sequences with Tanja Mairhofer and André Gatzke, who present simple games, arts and crafts, experiments, co-ordination exercises, puns and riddles. They address the audience directly and with a sincere child-typical manner of speaking, they invite viewers to join in the fun and games. They help children orientate themselves, become more active and broaden their movement and perception radius. Sing-along songs encourage activity and increase children’s rhythmic and musical development.

### Dreaming, finding oneself in the programme

In the “funny story” section, the children can reconnect with beloved characters such as Petzi bear, Janosch’s tiger and bear, or the girl pig Peppa, as well as newer animation series such as the philosophical friendship stories of *Lenny and Twiek* or *Mira and Marie*. The picture stories and

poems deal with emotional and social topics such as courage, tolerance, friendship, quarrelling and forgiving. Children have many opportunities to tie their own feelings and problems into those of the protagonists.

### Hearing new languages

To introduce preschool children to foreign languages and to increase their interest in them, animated programmes such as *Peppa Pig* and other specially designed studio productions are shown first in English and then repeated in German. Children’s passive vocabulary command and their listening and viewing comprehension skills are broadened in a playful manner (cf. Kirch/Speck-Hamdan in this issue). *The programme with the elephant* was created in close co-operation with pedagogues and researchers. The newest insights into the advancement of preschool children go into the programme and thus complement the 36-year tradition of *The programme with the mouse*. ■

### THE AUTHOR

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