

# Here's my story

## CAN AN EDUCATIONAL MEDIA PROJECT STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE?

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**A study of 99 participants on the *Here's my story* project in Germany was used to evaluate whether their self-esteem and resilience benefited from the project.**

### WHERE AM I FROM, WHERE AM I GOING?

"Where am I going?" This is a question all young people find themselves confronted with on the threshold between school and work. The media education project *Here's my story* supplements this with another question: "where am I from?" Some of the young people who took part have recently fled from their home country, while others have lived in Germany for a longer period or for their whole lives. Most of them have more than one home country. For many of them, thinking about the right career also means grappling with the ideas and expectations of those around them. Many businesses in Germany complain that school leavers lack the necessary maturity for certain positions, and in 2016, around 1 in 5 apprentices either broke off their training early or switched to a different occupation.<sup>1</sup> As such, it is important to support young people in recognising their own strengths so that they can make an informed choice about their own careers and to boost their self-esteem and resilience, since these factors help to ensure that they persevere in their chosen training.

*Here's my story* is a Bavaria-wide media project conducted by Bayerischer Rundfunk (Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation) and the Zuhören Foundation, supported by the Bavarian Industry Association. Over the course of 6 years, more than 1,000 young people between the ages of 13 and 25 from secondary general schools and job-integration classes from throughout Bavaria have taken part. The task: with the support of media professionals, to create an individual, autobiographical video clip over the course of a week that will be published online (Ill. 1).



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Ill. 1: In the media project *Here's my story* young people from secondary general schools and job-integration classes created an individual autobiographical video clip

### EVALUATION

Educational media projects are rarely scientifically evaluated. The IZI assessed 99 young people before and after they took part in the project. The central question was whether young people's self-esteem and resilience benefited from the project.

### THE STUDY

Using pre- and post-questionnaires, the IZI questioned a total of 99 young people (38 girls, 61 boys) between the ages of 13 and 23 from 6 different schools in Bavaria which took part in the project.<sup>2</sup> For the pre-study, the young people were asked to fill out a 3 page questionnaire before the project began. Alongside general sociodemographic details, it contained (among other items) the Rosenberg Scale with 10 items concerning self-esteem;<sup>3</sup> the short form of the Resilience Scale with 13 statements;<sup>4</sup> 2 statements concerning their own understanding of their problems; and 3 statements concerning cultural sensitivity and tolerance.<sup>5</sup> After the week-long project, the young people were given the same questionnaire again – supplemented by an assessment of the project week.

### INITIAL SITUATION

Resilience is the ability of an individual not to break down in a crisis, but instead

– after a reasonable period of processing – to return to full strength and psychological health, and to be capable of taking the necessary action. For the quantitative analysis of resilience, the modified short form RS-13 by Leppert et al. (2008) was employed. In total, the average resilience of the high school students questioned before the beginning of the project was 66.8,

somewhat low in comparison with the German national average for the same age group. The individuals questioned have too little confidence in their own self-efficacy, have the feeling that they are easily thrown off course, and cannot get enthusiastic about things that fall slightly beyond their familiar horizons. These young people are not yet optimally psychologically prepared for the transition to working life, nor for any setbacks or troubles they may face.

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### WHO AM I, AND WHAT MAKES ME WHO I AM?

The project week begins with the so-called “identity workshop”. In 3 steps, the participants create a picture of themselves and their strengths – literally, as their first task is to draw an outline of themselves with their distinguishing features (haircut, pose etc.). Over the course of the morning, these silhouettes are filled out with the properties which define them.

**Step 1: my values.** The project leaders approach this question indirectly. Psychologist Robert Johnson<sup>6</sup> claims that people often first recognise their own character traits in other people before identifying them as their own. For this reason, the project leaders ask: who do you admire? What qualities do you admire in this person? How much of yourself do you see in others? In this way, the silhouette is gradually filled up with values.

**Step 2: my abilities.** What am I good at? What other abilities does this ability imply? I’m good at football – am I a good forward, who quickly recognises chances and seizes on them fearlessly? Or am I more of a midfield strategist, retaining an overview and organising the team? I play an instrument – am I disciplined, practicing regularly and sticking at it even when it isn’t fun? The findings are then added to the silhouettes.

**Step 3: my experiences.** On what occasions have I realised that I am capable

of more than I thought? When have I surpassed myself, moving out of my comfort zone, and when have I succeeded? What helped me with this process?

The multifaceted picture of a person painted in this process is full of stories waiting to be told – stories that make us stronger on the way to a career, and on the way to adult life. The young people then select one of these stories, reciting it on camera.

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### MY STORY IN MY HANDS

For the duration of the project week, a personal iPad is made available to all participants. This gives them control over their stories, allowing them to collect photos, videos and sounds, thereby helping them to produce their own story. They are supported in this process by an inter-disciplinary coaching team of media educators, radio, print and TV journalists, sound designers and photographers.

The young people tell stories of refugee life and broken and dispersed families. They tell of the prejudices they encounter, of the balancing act between different cultures, and of the ruptures in their lives. But they also talk about strength and courage, goals and dreams, solidarity and friendship. They reveal themselves to be young people searching for their way into the world of work. They are thoughtful, vulnerable, idealistic and strong. This gives rise to a completely unique picture of a generation of young people. The young people come to realise that their story is worth telling.

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## RESULTS

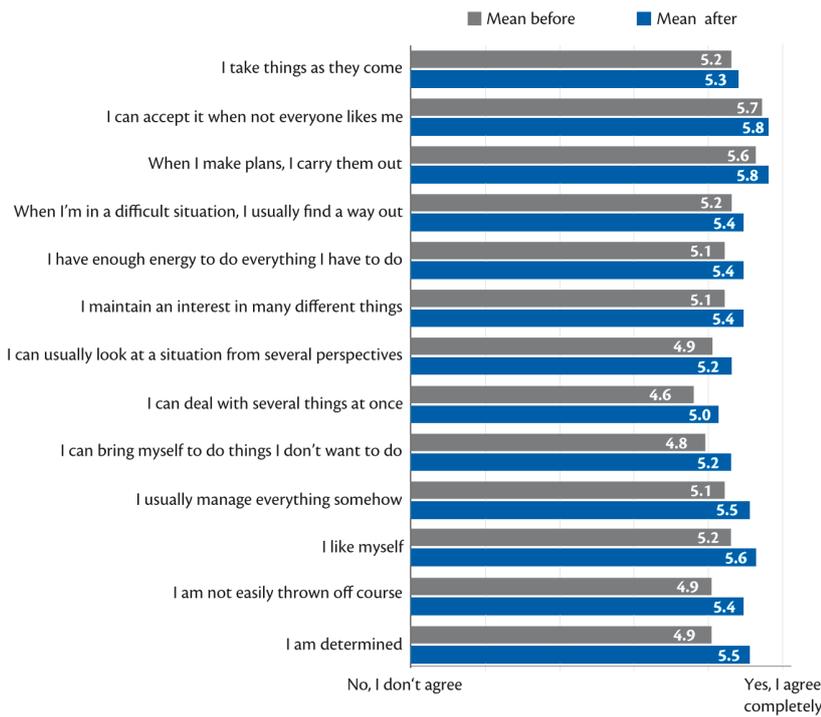
### Promoting resilience among young people

After the project week, the resilience values rose to an at least moderate level of 70.5. The young people realised that it is worthwhile to try out new and un-

familiar things, that they are capable of doing several things at once, are more crisis-proof than they perhaps realised, and are entirely capable of dealing with the difficulties they face if they want to. With their low level of education, these young people are still not optimally prepared for the transition to the world of work – but it is an important first step. The young participants who profited the most were those who had come to perceive themselves as underachievers – not least owing to the German school system, with its 3 (or in some regions even 4) tier structure. They came to the project with the lowest resilience levels. These levels increased significantly over the course of the week, but still remained the lowest values. These findings are significant for secondary general schools pedagogy, since without sufficient resilience, these young people have considerably worse chances of success in both their education and the transition to the world of work.

“I never saw myself like that before. I like white-water rafting because it is adventurous and unpredictable, and I love being at the wheel of the boat. Maybe I should take more risks in my life as well, and trust myself more? And take the wheel in my own hands?” (girl, aged 15)

The biggest increase came in agreement with the statement “I am determined”. The proportion of those who agreed with the statement rose from 60 % to 78 % (Ill. 2). The increase was especially sharp among the over 15-year-olds, with an increase of around 30 %. Young people born outside of Germany benefited even more clearly. For them, their perception of their own determination rose as much as 46 %. The project allowed young people to experience their own self-efficacy. They planned their own projects independently, dealing with content-related issues and technical difficulties, and managing to create a respectable result. This process gives them strength, leaving them determined to continue to engage and apply themselves in more projects throughout their lives.



Ill. 2: Change to the agreement rate with regards to resilience in the pre- and post-questionnaires (n = 99)

the project (from an average of 30 to 31) (Ill. 3). The increase was especially sharp among young people with refugee backgrounds, and generally among those who were not born in Germany. Before the project, these groups exhibited considerably lower self-worth than the other young people. After the project, self-worth within these 2 groups increased comparatively sharply, though it still remained below average. Above all, agreement rates with the statement “From time to time, I feel I am useless” decreased. While before the project, almost half (44 %) of those not born in Germany claimed to sometimes feel useless, this proportion sank to 15 % after the project. General levels of satisfaction with oneself (“All in all, I am satisfied with myself”) and of a positive attitude toward oneself (“I have developed a positive attitude toward myself”) increased comparatively sharply among young people born outside of Germany. A low sense of self-worth is not only one of the most consistent variables in psychosomatic disorders (depression, eating disorders etc.), but also seems to lead to an increased disposition to aggression.<sup>9</sup> As such, the project’s impact on feelings of self-worth can be considered extremely positive. The project gives young people the chance to tell their own stories, to discover their individuality and identity, and above all to show their strengths and weaknesses. In the context of positive psychology, this process of self-discovery already goes a long way toward an increase in feelings of self-worth. If the young people then also get the chance to share their stories with others and receive positive feedback, the feeling of being appreciated is very beneficial, especially for those from marginalised groups. Their intensive focus on a particularly strong moment from their own life, combined with the non-judgmental and respectful responses of the other participants, significantly strengthens the young people’s sense of sense-worth. As the feedback forms show, the young peo-

### An increase in self-esteem among girls

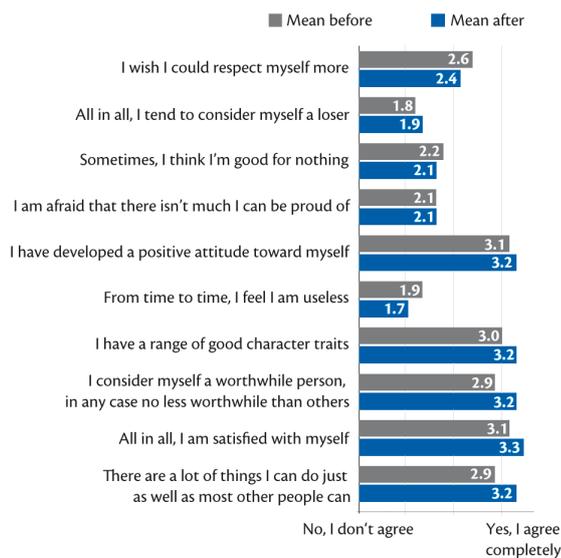
Self-esteem, i.e. a positive attitude towards oneself, was assessed using the questionnaire item “I like myself”. Before the project, approximately two thirds of the young people agreed with the statement; after the project, this rose to three quarters. Self-esteem increased most significantly among girls. Before the project, the proportion of girls who reported that they liked themselves stood at 58 % – a very low figure compared to 71 % of boys. By the end of the project, more than three quarters of girls (76 %) agreed with the statement. The proportion of girls who were generally satisfied with themselves (agreement with the statement “All in all, I am satisfied with myself”) also rose following the one-week project – though at 84 %, it was still considerably lower than among boys (agreement of 93 %). As various studies have shown, girls in particular feel less content as they grow older.<sup>7</sup> They grow increasingly dissatisfied

with themselves, their self-confidence declines, and they worry about their bodies and their appearance. In the week-long project, the young people had the chance to concentrate on their own stories, and to work out their own strengths. The girls in particular found an opportunity to recognise strengths independent of their appearance.

“I really didn’t realise that what I can do was anything special – for me it was normal, I thought I couldn’t do anything.” (girl, aged 16)

### A slight increase in self-worth among all young people

Another area which saw improvement over the course of the project week was the feeling of self-worth. A stable sense of self-worth makes it possible to like and accurately assess oneself, as well as making us more resistant to external influences. In the questionnaire, self-worth was measured according to 10 statements. Overall, average self-worth<sup>8</sup> increased modestly across all groups following



Ill. 3: Change to the agreement rate regarding self-worth in the pre- and post-questionnaires (n = 99)

with the stories of their classmates – some of whom come from other cultures – teaches understanding and empathy. This can help them to understand the background and significance of different cultural rituals, and to discover the cultural context of one another's life stories, things which otherwise would have remained hidden.

"We understand now which things we shouldn't joke about, because we can tell what is hurtful for the others." (girl, aged 16)

ple felt they were taken seriously by the coaches, and were well supervised throughout. Young people from outside Germany in particular benefited from the experience, with their sense of self-worth receiving a boost.

### Increased cultural sensitivity

Young people were also asked to respond to questions about their cultural sensitivity. This included questions designed to assess their awareness of their own norms and values, their openness and understanding for other cultures, and their readiness to be tolerant and to engage with other cultures. We used several items to investigate the question of cultural sensitivity. The project was shown to result in an increase in cultural sensitivity among the young people who took part.

Overall, agreement with the statement "I find it important to learn about as many cultures as possible" increased. The biggest increase came among the under 16-year-olds and those participants who were born in Germany, rising from a low to a moderate level. As such, the project can be seen to promote openness to other cultures. The process of confronting young people

## CONCLUSION

Overall, all of the young people who took part benefited from the project *Here's my story*. The project left them psychologically better prepared for the transition to work, even if still not optimally so. Girls benefited particularly in relation to their self-esteem and their satisfaction with themselves. All of the young people underwent an increase in self-worth through the examination of their own strengths, and especially through the multimedia presentation of their stories. The young people's stories are presented in a non-judgmental and open environment. For young people born outside of Germany, the project offers an opportunity to increase their (often) low sense of self-worth. Through the varied content of the stories, based on the real experiences of their classmates, the young people have the opportunity to engage intensively with other people and cultures, and to develop empathy for them. This increases individual cultural sensitivity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.bibb.de/bibbtools/tools/dazubi/data/Z/B/9/99600000.pdf> [22.03.2018]

<sup>2</sup> Adalbert-Stifter-Schule Nürnberg, Mittelschule Pressig, Europa-Berufsschule Weiden, Mittelschule Untermeitingen, Mittelschule Gochsheim, Berufliches Schulzentrum Kelheim (refugee class)

<sup>3</sup> In the revised version by von Collani & Herzberg (2003)

<sup>4</sup> Developed by Leppert et al. (2008)

<sup>5</sup> The answers were measured using the Likert format with the responses ranging from "No. I disagree"/"strongly disagree" to "Yes. I agree completely"/"strongly agree". The answer categories for the Rosenberg Scale and the questions on career choices were broken into 4 response levels, while 7 levels were used for all other statements.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Johnson (2013)

<sup>7</sup> For example World Vision Deutschland e.V. (2018)

<sup>8</sup> The self-worth index was created using the sum of the responses to the 10 items after negatively formulated items had been converted. Accordingly, possible values ranged from 10 to 40.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Berndt (2014)

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