

You are strong when you find your own way

A conversation with Eva Radlicki*

There is this boy who loves ballet dancing, or this girl who does not like being a girl because “girls are always so cowardly”. No doubt, we show children in our series *Stark! (Strong!)* who break out of their stereotypical gender roles. We have no fixed rule on how often to deal with the topic of gender roles in *Stark!*, though. However, showing a child who does something extraordinary for his or her gender once in a while is something I consider very important.

We sometimes show children who break out of their stereotypical gender roles

Still, I would never overload the series with these stories because I would be afraid that the viewers only speak of “this programme which only deals with special children who don’t have much to do with me”. Yet, if such programmes are broadcast between others they stand for the diversity of children’s lives. Our primary goal in the series is to encourage tolerance among one another and to stay clear of voyeurism.

As the title *Stark! (Strong!)* reveals, the series deals with children who have great strength – even in situations in which they are actually weak,

for instance during an illness. What is more, the title should come across as an appellative: Look how strong we really are!

Common topics of the programme are turning points, decisions or challenges. *Stark!* is a documentary format, and this is an important aspect. Our experience has it that children like to compare themselves with others; and due to that it is good to

tegrating commentator. Again, this refers to the title of the series. You do not always need a grown-up person who explains how a child is feeling at the moment; children are great in doing it themselves.

With regard to traditional role behaviour the title *Stark!* also carries the notion that one does not have to be streamlined but that everyone should find his or her individual way.

A while ago, for example, we introduced a girl who wanted to become a Catholic altar server, although everyone else was laughing about her and her plans. Another girl was not happy about the fact that her mother would have another baby.

This kind of behaviour is again contrary to the ‘normal’ gender role expectations. It is good, when children say: “Maybe I am different in what I do, but it is important that I do it anyway because I want to do it from the bottom of my heart.”

The episode *Kevin – lasst mich reden (Kevin – hear me out)* also deals with the fact of being different. 13-year-old Kevin stutters and he has tried many therapies, unfortunately without any success. His last hope would be a

10-day speech therapy in the Netherlands.

In Kevin’s case we did not ask the gender question in the first place, either. But in the end we were very



Kevin – hear me out: Kevin during the workshop

know for them that the leading character is a “real” child.

The protagonists come from various countries and tell their story without the background voice of an adult in-

lucky to find a boy like him who is able to talk about his feelings – unlike many other children of his age – and who even allowed us to show scenes where we can see him crying.

*From a gender perspective,
Kevin is simply
a perfect mix*

Most boys would probably have said: “I don’t like that to be taken into the film.” In this respect Kevin was different.

Of course, we couldn’t plan this in the first place, and it has also to do with trust between author and pro-

The TV programme *Kevin – lasst mich reden* (*Kevin – hear me out*) is an episode of the ZDF series *Stark! (Strong!)*. This 15-minute episode received the much-coveted TV award Prix Jeunesse 2006 for the age group 12 to 15 years. Although the film does not intentionally work with a concept of gender roles, this documentary introduces a boy who diverges from traditional role behaviour: Kevin openly talks about his struggle with his painful stutter and we witness how he takes part in a speech training course.

tagonist. The child must be assured that the broadcasting of a scene which might even be a little embarrassing for him will not cause any mockery about him.

To avoid this, the viewers need to be familiarised with the protagonist so that they understand his situation. Only then they will be able to bear and to get emotionally involved into extreme and emotional scenes.

Beyond his problems of stuttering, Kevin is also shown motorcycling or kart driving. The film benefits from the contrast between Kevin’s rather typical masculine hobbies and his

simple a perfect mix. He is very brave, curious, impatient, thoughtful but also wild and full of spirits.

He also comes across very honestly. It is an extraordinary achievement how much he has opened up and how he has made it possible for the viewers to reflect their own behaviour towards a stutterer.

Of course, it is sad to see him sit there and cry. By the way, he does not stutter in that situation. Whenever his emotions run high he seems to overcome a mental block.

As an adult viewer it gave me goose-pimples when I saw that. Then again,



Kevin – hear me out: Kevin does a breathing exercise

sensitive and emotional side.

We didn’t want to give the impression that Kevin is only focussed on his stuttering and that he therefore cannot enjoy life. In reality, he is a boy with a lot of energy who likes to romp. However, even if he had a typical female hobby we would have shown that as well.

From a gender perspective I would say, for a boy Kevin is

I had to laugh when he was supposed to approach some girls in the park and said: “I can’t simply chat them up, can I?!” Seeing the wit in his eyes, when he said that, and at the same time this strong will to manage this difficult situation; personally, I thought that was very touching.

*Kevin is
a great role model
for others*

All in all, thanks to his charisma Kevin is a great role model for others. As for myself, I can only recommend him to all boys. ■

*A summary of a conversation of Genia Baranowski with Eva Radlicki, Head of the department of children’s information programmes at the public broadcaster Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), Mainz, Germany. She is in charge e. g. for the programmes *logo!*, *PuR*, *Löwenzahn*, *Stark!*, and *Wombaz*.

