

Faustlos: Evaluation of a curriculum to prevent violence in elementary schools

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Abstract

The “Faustlos”¹ curriculum, an adaptation of the American Second Step program, for the prevention of aggressive behaviors of elementary school children was evaluated in a 3-year control group study (30 classes served as an experimental group, 14 classes as a control group). The results show significant changes in the emotional competences and prosocial developments of children aged 6–9 years. Children who participated in the “Faustlos” lessons showed significantly reduced anxiety and internalizing behaviors compared with the control group. The parents’ ratings of their children’s behavior (according to the Child Behavior Checklist) provided clear evidence of improved social behavior outside the school environment.

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Violence and aggression amongst pupils have become a major issue of public interest and scientific discussions. As results of several studies show, the quality and intensity of violent behaviors have increased and the climate of violence in schools has changed (see Bründel, 1994; Cierpka, 1999; Hurrelmann, 1992). The conclusions also indicate that there is no general augmentation of aggressive behaviors amongst pupils, but rather that a minority of children demonstrate increasingly intense and intolerably violent behaviors (Hurrelmann, 1994). According to the research work of Olweus (1995) in Norway, about 5–10% of the pupils appear as notorious attackers (“bullies”). With less severe criteria the prevalence rates for the German speaking countries have been determined to range between 10 and 20% (Klipcera & Gasteiger-Klipcera, 1996). This disconcerting development calls for solutions in terms of intervention and primarily in terms of prevention programs, since preventive concepts appear more effective in the long run and are significantly more cost effective than intervention measures (see

Bruene-Butler, Hampson, Elias, Clabby, & Schuyler, 1997; Slaby, 1998; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995).

Preventive concepts can vary considerably in their approach (for a survey see Schick & Ott, 2002). They can focus on the child’s development, on fostering the parenting competences, on the promotion of the competences of educators and teachers to build strong and supportive relationships, or they can try to positively influence the psychosocial environment of children and their families. Primary universal prevention can start with the expectant parents as early as in the first weeks of the mother’s pregnancy, or support the parents at a later point of their children’s education.

Preventive strategies first of all have to reach those, who are most desperately in need of support. Very often families with severe violence problems find it difficult to accept help due to feelings of shame or mistrust in public institutions. To adequately support these families and children, opportunities outside the family environment must also be taken. For example, all children can be reached through school programs. To reach as many children as possible, and most of all children of families suffering from violence, different parties recommend the conducting of violence prevention programs in and through schools. Schools are especially suited for the conduction of long-term curricula and allow a direct and

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¹ “Faustlos” is German for “without fists”.

permanent transfer of the learned competences to real life situations (Henrich, Brown, & Aber, 1999; Walker et al., 1996; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

In the last decades several highly structured long-term violence prevention curricula have been developed in the USA. Most of them have been evaluated as called for by several institutions (Gainer, Webster, & Champion, 1993; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). Results of these studies prove the violence reduction and prevention effects of the programs (Wilson, Lipsey, & Derzon, 2003). US American research in the field of social-emotional learning laid the foundations for the consensus resolution of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on the following guidelines of social-emotional learning. Accordingly, the curricula should:

- be based on recognized educational theories;
- be appropriate for the age and the developmental phase of the children;
- incorporate concepts for the promotion of the children's self-esteem, so that they are more capable of dealing with potentially dangerous situations and protecting themselves;
- include multiple modules which build on each other over a period of several years;
- be taught by qualified trainers and include role-plays.

The violence prevention program Second Step (Beland, 1988a) fulfills these criteria and its effectiveness is proved by several evaluation studies. The pilot studies for the original Second Step curriculum have already shown that the program promotes violence prevention skills (Beland, 1988b) as e.g. the prediction of consequences, anger management and brainstorming abilities. Grossman et al. (1997; see also Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000) found that the participation in the Second Step program reduced the children's physical and verbal aggression and led to an enhancement of prosocial and neutral interactions.

Empirical research in the German speaking countries in the field of violence prevention is still in its infancy. Petermann et al. (2002) found significant effects on the behaviors of children (teachers' assessment) after the completion of a behavioral training in a controlled study, which, among other topics, promoted emotion regulation competences. The participation of the school beginners in 26 training sessions led to improved social behavior and reduction of attention deficits. The financial support of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Baden-Württemberg enabled the realization of a corresponding evaluation study of the violence prevention curriculum Faustlos.

1. Method

1.1. The Faustlos curriculum

Faustlos (Cierpka, 2001) is the first comprehensive and differentiated German-language curriculum for the preven-

tion of children's aggressive and violent behaviors. It has been specifically developed for use in elementary schools. Faustlos is the German version of the Second Step program, which was developed by the Committee for Children (Beland, 1988a, 1988b). The contents of the Faustlos program have been derived from research findings and developmental-psychological theories on the deficits of aggressive children. According to these results aggressive children have deficits in the areas of empathy, impulse control, and anger management (see Cierpka, 2001). Therefore the 51 lessons of the curriculum are divided into the three units: empathy, impulse control and anger management. Teachers, who have previously attended a 1-day training course, teach the program. The lessons start in grade one and continue throughout grade three. The teachers are provided with thoroughly optimized and adapted materials covering the practical learning objectives.

1.2. Study design and sample

This study is based on a pre–post evaluation design with a control group. It describes the developments from the pre-test data collection in spring 1999 to the post-test data collection in fall 2000,² when teachers had conducted 35 (from 51) lessons on average and had therefore completed nearly all the grade two lessons. The sample contains 21 elementary schools from the school districts of Heidelberg and Mannheim. Fourteen elementary schools (30 classes, 496 pupils) were randomly assigned to an experimental group, seven elementary schools (14 classes, 222 pupils) to a control group. In addition to the parents and the teachers two children from each class (one girl and one boy, who were randomly selected and whose parents had given their informed consent) were also interviewed (EG: 60 pupils, CG: 28 pupils). Whereas the children were questioned in a structured interview, the parents and the teachers received questionnaires. In the post-test, 335 parent questionnaires were returned. Also, 56 children could be re-interviewed during the post-test and 23 teacher questionnaires were returned. This corresponds to a feedback rate of 47% for the parent questionnaires (335/718), 64% for the child interviews (56/88) and 66% for the teacher questionnaires (23/35). A complete pre–post data set was available for 64% of the children. At the time of the post-test 17% of the children were aged 5–6 years, 74% were aged 7–8 years and 7% were older than 8 years. In total, a complete pre–post data set was available for 161 girls and 174 boys.

² After grade two, the main class teacher who conducted the curriculum changed in many of the participating schools. This led to a selective sample reduction. The children, for whom data for the last data collection point (Summer 2001) were also available, already differed significantly concerning the extent of behavioral problems at the time of pre-study data collection (in contrast to all other data collection points). Because of these inhomogeneous starting conditions and the less than optimal sample size the data from the last data collection point were excluded from the analysis.

The unsatisfactory rate of complete pre–post data of the interviewed children was primarily due to the fact that some children had left their classes at the time of the post-interview (e.g. because the family had relocated, children had repeated a class or had moved to a different third grade class). Thorough analysis showed that this phenomenon did not coincide with systematic effects, which could have influenced the results. We could not find significant differences between children who had left the study for the above-mentioned reasons and children, who had completed the study, concerning socio-demographic data or the behavioral assessments of the children or parents.

The results of the 13 comparisons of the socio-demographic data from control group and experimental group show, that the groups only differed significantly concerning the children's gender ($\chi^2(1) = 10.36, p = .001$) and the school qualification of the mothers ($\chi^2(5) = 11.29, p = .046$). The control group contained more boys than girls, whereas the experimental group comprised more girls than boys. The mothers' level of education was higher in the experimental group.

1.3. Research goals

The pilot study of the first German version of the curriculum supports the findings of the US studies on the effectiveness of Second Step. Outcomes show, that the program improved the social competences of the children and that the children increasingly refused to use violent behaviors as a means of conflict resolution (see [Hahlweg, Hoyer, Naumann, & Ruschke, 1998](#)). Our study expands the existing research spectrum of the Second Step curriculum in two aspects: (1) gender-specific effects are explored, and (2) in addition to effects on the behavioral level, potential effects on the emotional level were investigated. Here, the focus was on the emotional aspects, which assumingly correlate with aggressive behaviors. For example, psychoanalytic theories, attachment theory and learning theories postulate a close connection between aggression and anxiety (e.g. [Bandura, 1986](#); [Bowlby, 1973](#); [Freud, 1936](#)). Numerous studies show that aggressive behaviors are negatively correlated with empathy (see e.g. [Miller & Eisenberg, 1988](#)), and many authors relate children's self-esteem very closely to their aggressive behaviors (see e.g. [Cierpka, 1999](#)). The study therefore explores the following effects of Faustlos:

1. Changes on the behavioral level (improving social competences and reducing aggressive behavior).
2. Changes on the emotional level (effects on emotions correlated with aggressive behavior).
3. Gender specific effects.

1.4. Survey procedure

The extent of behavioral problems was assessed by the parents using the German version of the Child Behav-

ior Checklist ([Döpfner, Schmeck, & Berner, 1994](#); for the measurement criteria of the German version see [Döpfner, Schmeck, Berner, Lehmkuhl, & Poustka, 1994](#); [Remschmidt & Walter, 1990](#)). The social competences of the children were measured using the items of the scales "self-control" ($\alpha = .76$, 8 items), "assertiveness" ($\alpha = .79$, 8 items), "perspective taking" ($\alpha = .78$, 8 items) and "cooperation/social rules" ($\alpha = .79$, 8 items) of the Heidelberg Competence Inventory (HKI; [Holtz, Eberle, Hillig, & Marker, 1998](#)) in a different sequence and with a four- instead of a five-point scale.

To assess the effects of the Faustlos program from the children's perspective a structured interview was developed based on items from different questionnaires. For this reason the original items were often slightly modified (e.g. changes from "I" statements to "you" statements as the items were read aloud), and for time and content reasons some of the original items were omitted. The resulting interview remained unchanged throughout the study period. The empathic competences of the children were assessed with the questionnaire for the assessment of empathy (FEAS) ([Meindl, 1998](#)). The empathy scale, which consisted of 30 items, had an internal consistency of $\alpha = .78$ at the time of the pre-test. Self-esteem and competence of the children were assessed with a German-language version of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPP) by [Harter \(1985\)](#). In this study only the scales "peer acceptance" ($\alpha = .50$, 6 items), "self-confidence" ($\alpha = .54$, 6 items) and "self-esteem" ($\alpha = .64$, 8 items) modified by [Schick \(2000\)](#) were used. For the assessment of the children's aggressive behaviors the questionnaire for the assessment of aggressive behaviors in concrete situations (EAS; [Petermann & Petermann, 1996](#)) was used. The EAS was especially developed for children aged 9–13 and is available in gender-specific versions with 22 items each for boys (EAS-J) and for girls (EAS-M). For the purposes of this study all of the original items were used and the internal consistencies computed were $\alpha = .82$ (EAS-J) and $\alpha = .83$ (EAS-M). The anxiety of the children was assessed with the General Anxiety Scale for Children (GASC; [Sarason, Davidson, Lighthall, Waite, & Ruebush, 1971](#)) as modified by [Schick \(2000\)](#). Factor analysis with the 32 items resulted in three scales labeled "fear of being injured" ($\alpha = .79$, 8 items), "fear of bad things to happen" ($\alpha = .75$, 7 items) and "fear of loss of control" ($\alpha = .72$, 5 items).

To assess the effects of the curriculum on the class as a whole, the teachers were given the six sub-scales "extent of clique formation" ($\alpha = .75$, 10 items), "readiness to help classmates" ($\alpha = .78$, 8 items), "aggression against classmates" ($\alpha = .83$, 7 items), "discrimination against classmates" ($\alpha = .82$, 6 items), "contentedness with classmates" ($\alpha = .81$, 9 items) and "rivalry between classmates" ($\alpha = .78$, 7 items) from the Landau scales of social climate in the classes (LASSO 4-13; [Saldern & Littig, 1987](#)). A special questionnaire was developed to assess the degree to which the teachers followed the instructions of the Faustlos curriculum and to evaluate the curriculum as a whole.

Table 1
Teachers' self-assessment of implementation exactness

Items	M	S.D.
1. I have read the preparation section before each lesson	1.36	.63
2. I have showed the picture and have told the respective story in each lesson	1.29	.47
3. I have posed the respective questions and have discussed them with the children	1.86	.66
4. I have presented the model role-plays (☺)	2.43	.76
5. The children have performed a role-play (or an exercise) according to the instructions	1.93	.73
6. I have developed several transfer possibilities with the children for each case	1.86	.77
7. I have handed out the work sheets to the children (homework)	3.00	1.08
8. How closely did you follow the instructions of the Faustlos curriculum? (%)	73.93	12.43

Note: 1 = always, 2 = most of the time, 3 = sometimes, 4 = never.

2. Results

As the results in Table 1 show, the teachers largely followed the essential instructions of the curriculum. It was noted, that the model role-plays were not conducted consistently and the work sheets were not handed out to the children as the manual proposes. However, during the supervisory sessions teachers suggested that they did not believe the work sheets to be helpful. They also anticipated, based on their experience, that the parents would not complete the work sheets due to the time that they would need to spend on them. Based on this expert judgment we decided to omit the work sheets from the final version of the Faustlos materials.

2.1. Interviews with the children

The development of the children from their own perspective (interviews with two randomly selected children of each class) was examined by two-factorial analyses of variance with repeated measurement. As the results in Table 2 show, the “group \times time” interaction for the GASC-scale “fear of loss of control” became significant. This result can be explained by the fact, that the fear of loss of control was only significantly reduced in the experimental group ($F(1,35)=5.40, p=.026$) with a weak or medium effect ($\eta^2=.13$). Significant group effects could be found for the scales “peer acceptance” and “aggression of girls”, and for the scales “aggression of girls” and “aggression of boys” the time factor became significant. The children in the control group felt more accepted by their peers than the children of the experimental group, and the girls of the experimental group assessed themselves as being more aggressive than the girls of the control group. The significant time

effects indicated a decrease of aggressive behaviors irrespective of affiliation with the control or the experimental group.

2.2. Parent ratings of children's behavior

The development of the children from their parents' perspective was also examined with two-factorial analyses of variance with repeated measurement. Outcomes of these analyses are depicted in Table 3. As can be seen in the column “group \times time” interactions, these effects became significant for the CBCL-scales “anxiety/depression” and “internalizing”. The anxiety/depression subscale however is one of the three subscales that comprise the internalizing scale. Therefore the changes in the internalizing scale may be accounted for by changes in the anxiety/depression subscale. For some of the CBCL-scales and for all of the competence scales the time factor became significant. Further analyses demonstrated that the extent of anxiety/depression and internalizing behaviors decreased only in the experimental group (anxiety/depression: $F(1,230)=7.28, p=.007, \eta^2=.03$; internalizing: $F(1,230)=9.85, p=.002, \eta^2=.04$), whereas the control group showed a slight increase.

2.3. Teacher ratings of children's behavior

The development of the children in the light of the teachers' assessments was also examined with two-factorial analyses of variance with repeated measurement. Table 4 shows that there were no significant interaction effects until the post-curriculum data collection. Only the time effect for the scale “discrimination against classmates” became significant. Therefore, in the second grade the extent of the discrimination against classmates had decreased in both groups.

2.4. Gender-specific effects

Further analytical steps were performed to examine if boys and girls gained to a different extent from the Faustlos lessons. For this purpose three-factorial analyses of variance (“group \times time \times gender”) with repeated measurement on the basis of the children's assessments were conducted. These analyses showed no significant three-way interactions. This means that from the children's perspective no gender-specific effects could be found, but this might also have been attributable to the in some cases very small sub-sample sizes. When the analyses were conducted on the behavioral assessments of the parents, the three-way interactions for the CBCL-scale “externalizing” ($F(1,323)=7.24, p=.008$) and for the HKI scales “assertiveness” ($F(1,322)=4.12, p=.043$), “perspective taking” ($F(1,322)=5.12, p=.024$) and “cooperation/social rules” ($F(1,322)=8.55, p=.004$) became significant. Further analyses demonstrated that the extent of externalizing behaviors decreased in both groups among the boys (EG: $F(1,104)=21.87, p=.000, \eta^2=.17$;

Table 2

Results of the two-factorial analyses of variance with repeated measurement and the children's self-assessment (interview) as dependent variables

Dependent variables	Means				F values			$\eta^2(t)$	
	EG (n = 37)		CG (n = 19)		g	t	g × t	EG	CG
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post					
Questionnaire on the assessment of empathy (FEAS) (min = 1, max = 2)									
Empathy	1.78	1.81	1.75	1.75	1.87	.47	.25	.04	.00
Self-perception profile for children (SPP) (min = 1, max = 4)									
Peer acceptance	2.62	2.72	2.94	3.08	4.80*	1.00	.03	.01	.06
Self-confidence	2.77	2.76	2.71	2.82	.00	.23	.33	.00	.03
Self-esteem	3.08	3.18	3.15	3.09	.00	.06	.85	.03	.01
General anxiety scale for children (GASC) (min = 1, max = 2)									
Fear of being injured	1.42	1.50	1.49	1.54	.55	1.97	.11	.06	.03
Fear of bad things to happen	1.56	1.62	1.67	1.71	1.89	.62	.03	.02	.01
Fear of loss of control	1.28	1.18	1.14	1.21	.82	.17	4.63*	.13	.06
Questionnaire for the assessment of aggression in concrete situations (EAS) (min = 1, max = 3)									
	EG (n _g = 20, n _b = 17)		CG (n _g = 10, n _b = 9)						
Girls' aggression	1.51	1.34	1.26	1.14	4.26*	4.71*	.14	.23	.15
Boys' aggression	1.56	1.29	1.59	1.46	.82	4.50*	.58	.59	.04

Note: EG = experimental group, CG = control group, g = group, t = time. * $p \leq .05$.

CG: $F(1,62) = 8.04$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .12$), whereas among the girls there was only a significant reduction of externalizing behaviors in the experimental group ($F(1,125) = 22.50$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .15$). In the control group however the extent of externalizing behaviors had risen significantly. This pattern of change could also be found for “perspective

taking” and “cooperation/social rules”. Among the boys, perspective taking abilities improved in the experimental group ($F(1,106) = 12.39$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$) and the control group ($F(1,62) = 9.79$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .14$). Among the girls however, there was only a significant improvement in the experimental group ($F(1,123) = 10.81$, $p = .001$,

Table 3

Results of the two-factorial analyses of variance with repeated measurement and the parents' assessments as dependent variables

Dependent variables	Means				F values			$\eta^2(t)$	
	EG (n = 238)		CG (n = 97)		g	t	g × t	EG	CG
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post					
Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (T values)									
Social withdrawal	53.84	53.62	53.16	53.41	.44	.00	.57	.00	.00
Somatic complaints	53.78	53.53	53.13	53.63	.20	.13	1.17	.00	.01
Anxiety/depression	53.87	52.96	52.87	53.28	.23	.68	4.74*	.03	.01
Social problems	51.94	51.99	52.04	52.00	.01	.00	.03	.00	.00
Thought problems	52.72	52.41	52.39	51.97	.52	1.24	.03	.00	.01
Attention problems	52.37	52.46	52.63	52.26	.00	.25	.66	.00	.01
Delinquent behavior	53.10	52.00	53.79	52.10	.45	19.35**	.89	.05	.08
Aggressive behavior	52.65	51.75	53.09	52.20	.52	13.06***	.00	.06	.03
Internalizing	49.24	47.56	47.90	48.39	.05	1.35	4.54*	.04	.00
Externalizing	46.72	43.88	47.10	45.95	1.21	20.88***	3.71	.16	.02
Total CBCL score	47.01	44.18	47.00	45.70	.40	20.37***	2.82	.14	.02
Heidelberg Competence Inventory (HKI) (min = 1, max = 4)									
Self-control	3.06	3.17	3.07	3.19	.07	22.36***	.04	.07	.08
Assertiveness	3.11	3.17	3.14	3.25	1.45	12.64***	1.55	.02	.08
Perspective taking	3.15	3.28	3.23	3.31	1.26	17.73***	.93	.09	.04
Cooperation/social rules	3.09	3.26	3.12	3.29	.41	49.25***	.00	.16	.15

Note: EG = experimental group, CG = control group, g = group, t = time.

* $p \leq .05$.

** $p \leq .01$.

*** $p \leq .001$.

Table 4

Results of the two-factorial analysis of variance with repeated measurement and the teachers' assessments as dependent variables

Dependent variables	Means				F values			$\eta^2(t)$	
	EG (n = 16)		CG (n = 7)		g	t	g × t	EG	CG
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post					
Landau scales of social climate in the class (LASSO) (min = 1, max = 4)									
Extent of clique formation	2.28	2.17	2.46	2.42	1.11	.37	.08	.05	.01
Readiness to help classmates	2.91	3.11	2.70	2.83	2.22	2.07	.11	.18	.10
Aggression against classmates	2.14	1.99	2.71	2.31	2.99	4.01	.81	.07	.52
Discrimination against classmates	2.34	2.13	2.80	2.47	3.61	7.59*	.38	.28	.39
Contentedness with classmates	3.04	3.18	2.89	2.98	.96	.73	.03	.07	.05
Rivalry between classmates	2.03	2.19	2.23	2.31	.74	1.14	.12	.17	.02

Note: EG = experimental group, CG = control group, g = group, t = time. * $p \leq .05$.

$\eta^2 = .08$). Cooperative behaviors of boys were also promoted in both groups (EG: $F(1,106) = 15.45$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .13$; CG: $F(1,62) = 22.96$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .27$), whereas among the girls it improved only in the experimental group ($F(1,123) = 28.81$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .19$). Assertiveness increased only among the boys in the control group (assessed from the parents' perspective) ($F(1,62) = 13.72$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .18$).

2.5. Assessment of the curriculum

Apart from examination of the effectiveness measured through the children's behaviors and emotionality, as described above, teachers were asked to assess the Faustlos curriculum after the completion of their lessons. Thirty teachers completed and returned the final assessment questionnaire. The results of this overall evaluation are depicted in Table 5.

As can be seen in Table 5, teachers assessed the Faustlos materials and the role-plays entirely as "very good" to "good". Both they and their pupils thought the program was overall "very good" to "good". Teachers reported that the Faustlos lessons improved the social behavior of the pupils, and that they also had positive effects on the children's aggressive behaviors. This very positive feedback was also reflected by the fact, that 77% of the teachers stated they would use Faustlos in future classes. They said that this was primarily due to the noticeably positive effect of the Faustlos lessons on the atmosphere in the classes and on the social behavior of the pupils. The teachers believed these effects to be the reason for the perceived improvement of the learning climate in the classes. Because of these positive evaluations, 77% of the teachers had recommended the Faustlos program to colleagues. Moreover, some teachers commented that the Faustlos program had also been a "helpful and enriching" experience for themselves. They suggested that the Faustlos curriculum should be incorporated as "a mandatory part of the educational program for German elementary and secondary schools" and were strongly interested in further in-depth continuing education for teachers on this topic.

3. Discussion

In summary the outcomes of this study show, that the first 35 from 51 Faustlos lessons – particularly from the parents' perspective – have initiated some behavioral and emotional changes in the children. The most evident changes could be found for anxiety/depression and internalizing behaviors (demonstrated by significant "group × time" interactions on the corresponding CBCL scales). Only the children in the experimental group increasingly gave up their anxious/depressive behaviors and appeared less shy and withdrawn to their parents, whereas this effect could not be found in the control group, which received regular school lessons. However, as all of the scores on the scales and subscales of the CBCL were within the normal range, the statistically significant change found for anxious/depressive behaviors is not clinically significant. The CBCL outcomes on the other hand clearly indicate transfer effects of the curriculum, since the parents assessed the behavior of their children at home. This is also noteworthy, as Grossman et al. (1997), who also used the CBCL, found no behavioral changes from the parents' perspective. However, in the Grossman study the 30 lessons were conducted over a period of only 6 months, whereas the Faustlos lessons in this study took place over 18 months. Perhaps these results reflect the fact, that children need sufficient time to experiment with their new competences and to integrate them gradually into their daily lives.

Concerning anxiety the parents' assessments corresponded with those of their children. The children in the experimental group assessed their "fear of loss of control" in the final interview as significantly less strong, whereas the children of the control group did not. Under consideration of the items of this scale, this effect can be interpreted as follows: the children in the experimental group learned to better verbalize their feelings in situations, which they perceived as uncontrollable and frightening, e.g. medical appointments and thunderstorms (which is an essential goal of the empathy lessons). They also applied the problem solving steps from the impulse control lessons and used the calming down techniques taught in the anger management lessons.

In contrast to the widely held opinion that girls have higher levels of social competences due to their socialization (e.g.

Table 5
Results of the teachers' final assessment of the Faustlos curriculum

Assessment criteria	<i>M</i> (min = 1, max = 5 ^a)	S.D.
Clarity/comprehensibility of the <i>manual</i>	1.50	.63
Suitability of the <i>manual</i> for imparting background knowledge	1.63	.61
Suitability of the <i>manual</i> as a preparation aid for the lessons	1.83	.70
Suitability of the <i>manual</i> as a teaching aid for the lessons	1.90	.80
Clarity/comprehensibility of the <i>instruction booklet</i>	1.62	.62
Suitability of the <i>instruction booklet</i> as a teaching aid for the lessons	1.83	.66
Suitability of language and stories in the <i>instruction booklet</i> for children's age	2.14	.79
Extend to which the role-plays in the <i>instruction booklet</i> correspond to real-life situations	1.97	.63
User friendliness of the <i>instruction booklet</i> when used during lessons	2.18	.77
Image quality of the <i>overheads</i>	2.20	.92
Expressiveness/clarity of the <i>overheads</i>	2.07	.69
Extend to which the <i>overheads</i> correspond to real-life situations	1.80	.55
Extend to which the situations in the <i>role-plays</i> correspond to real-life situations	1.77	.57
Comprehensibility of the situations in the <i>role-plays</i>	1.79	.62
Effectiveness of the <i>role-plays</i> (in respect to learning objectives)	2.31	.66
Assessment criteria	<i>M</i> (min = 1, max = 4 ^b)	S.D.
How suitable are the <i>overheads</i> as an instruction means?	1.93	.69
How suitable are the <i>role-plays</i> to impart the learning objectives of the lessons?	1.93	.58
How well did you feel supported by the project team?	1.93	.66
What do the <i>pupils</i> think of the Faustlos program (in your opinion)?	1.70	.60
What do you <i>personally</i> think of the Faustlos program?	1.57	.57
How effective is Faustlos regarding the promotion of the <i>prosocial behavior</i> of pupils?	1.77	.57
How effective is Faustlos regarding the prevention of <i>aggressive behaviors</i> of pupils?	2.14	.64
Assessment criteria	<i>M</i> (min = 1, max = 4 ^c)	S.D.
Did the prosocial behavior of the pupils improve?	1.90	.49
Did the Faustlos program prevent aggressive behaviors of the pupils?	2.31	.81
Assessment criteria	Yes	No
Will you continue conducting Faustlos lessons beyond the project duration?	77%	23%
Did you recommend Faustlos to colleagues?	77%	23%

^a 1 = very good, 2 = quite good, 3 = neither good nor bad, 4 = quite bad, 5 = very bad.

^b 1 = very good, 2 = quite good, 3 = not too good, 4 = not good at all.

^c 1 = yes, very much, 2 = yes, somewhat, 3 = no, rather not, 4 = no, not at all.

empathy, adaptability) compared with boys and therefore do not require additional support, the gender-specific outcomes of this study indicate that specific promotion can be particularly helpful for the cooperation and perspective taking competences of girls. Boys seem to profit from Faustlos as well as from regular school lessons, as far as externalizing behaviors, perspective taking and cooperation are concerned. Girls however appear not to receive sufficient support in these areas through regular school lessons. The gender-specific effects concerning assertiveness skills however showed a different pattern. Only the boys in the control group improved their assertiveness (from the parents' perspective). This may be interpreted as an indication for an increasing uncertainty of the Faustlos boys, who were not yet completely familiar with their newly learned skills, but increasingly refrained from using aggressive means to reach their goals. Because of the rather small sub-sample sizes these gender-specific effects can however only be interpreted as potential tendencies and must be replicated with bigger sample sizes before definite final conclusions can be drawn.

In summary the Faustlos curriculum initiated specific behavioral changes and emotional development of the children. However, as expected and as it is true for most of the programs for the promotion of social competences, the effects were rather small (see e.g. Beelmann, Pfungsten, & Lösel, 1994). It is important to consider however, that the effectiveness of the program was examined with distal indicators like the extent of internalizing and externalizing behaviors rather than with indicators which were closely adapted to the contents of the curriculum (for which greater effect sizes might have been anticipated). Moreover, the outcomes only reflect the effect of 2/3 of the complete set of lessons, which could also explain the fact, that only a small number of interaction effects became significant.

The modest effects, identified above, must not simply be interpreted as evidence for a potential insignificant effectiveness of violence prevention programs in general and the Faustlos curriculum in particular, because "since participants in primary prevention programs are functioning in the normal range to begin with and thus should not be expected to

change dramatically” (Durlak & Wells, 1997, p. 137). This is particularly noteworthy as the Faustlos lessons demonstrated their anxiety-reducing impact. This shows that the program is effective on the level of emotional experience, which is difficult to access and to alter. From the perspective of emotion psychology a broad spectrum of particularly sustained behavioral changes is to be anticipated here. According to Webster-Stratton (2000) an improvement of emotion regulation strategies will lead to an improvement of social behavior.

The effects noted should now be examined regarding their stability and general validity, which are the ultimate measures for the benefits of violence prevention means. Based on the present results it appears promising to continue observing the emotional changes and in particular the effects on the children’s anxiety. Apart from questionnaires and interviews, additional studies should also include behavioral observations as a more objective means of data collection. Because the behavioral and emotional indicators to be examined in the field of prevention strategies are always found within the “normal” range per definition, and dramatic changes are hardly to be expected, the development of special survey means for the evaluation of (violence) prevention programs is suggested as a future research topic. For a “fair” assessment of the effects of violence prevention programs measurement instruments with a very “high resolution” are needed, which are sensitive to the smallest changes. Since many of teachers commented, that the training and the use of the Faustlos materials also had positive effects on their own social competence, it is recommended that future studies investigate these effects on the teachers in more depth.

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