Who can be a researcher?

One of the things children derive from fictional and non-fictional TV programmes is images of who does research, and what science is. Media analyses and studies from the US show that, for younger adolescents, the people doing science and research are mainly white and male (cf. Steinke et al., 2007; Long et al., 2010).

Children adopt images of researchers and science

US studies suggest that fictional and non-fictional TV programmes can change this stereotypical image of the white, male scientist. Students were asked to draw a scientist ("Draw-a-Scientist" test, cf. Jones/Bangert, 2006; Steinke et al., 2007). The drawings of the older students often contained a stereotypical male "mad scientist" with glasses and unruly hair, standing in a laboratory. The 13-year-old girls, on the other hand, drew women as scientists. In doing so they referred for example to popular shows such as *CSI*. In this crime series, experimental laboratory work is a job done by women, not just men. Fictional programmes which show scientists operating in interaction with others in an appealing story (and do not just introduce them in a matter-of-fact way with their area of expertise), are particularly likely to be perceived as role models by older girls (Long et al., 2010, p. 20).

Do children notice who is introducing research to them?

In a study, 165 9- to 13-year-olds from Germany were asked to draw and describe a researcher (male or female) whom they knew from television (cf. Schlote/Renatus, 2010).

Screenshot from *Geolino tv* © Nickelodeon

Ill. 1: **Saffrin (11 years old) remembers visual details like the hairstyle about "the researcher in charge of the bones", i.e. a female palaeontologist**

Screenshot from *Wissen macht Ah!* © WDR

Ill. 2: **"Ralph and Shary carry out experiments", Joana (10 years old) is a fan of the knowledge programme *Wissen macht Ah!* and its black co-presenter**

Those who had watched a knowledge programme for children beforehand were able to draw more researchers from television, and drew more girls/women as researchers (40 % female figures compared to 10 % female TV figures in the group who had not watched one of the programmes). There were hardly any drawings of "mad male scientists". Instead, the images conveyed in the programmes stimulated the children's imagination in many cases, particularly when it came to areas of research of great interest to children, e.g. dinosaurs (see ill. 1).

Children are fascinated by research in everyday contexts

Knowledge programmes for children are particularly well suited to give a variety of representations of research and researchers and thus help to diversify images. Some of the children in the study drew protagonists from the knowledge programmes shown, e.g. presenters (see ill. 2), or children conducting experiments. Here too, children take note of who is being depicted as an active protagonist, and situate themselves in relation to him/her. These representations can also inspire children to conduct their own research projects (cf. Schlote in this issue).

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