

Markus Schächter

*logo!*¹

War, terror and other catastrophes on children's television

Reporting for children must not ignore crisis situations. It is precisely in such situations that *logo!* provides support by means of explanatory units and help to put events in their proper perspective. Dramatisation and sensationalism are deliberately avoided.

In a world of wars and terror attacks it is the pious wish of many parents to protect their children against these atrocities. That was no different in the case of the Iraq War. Beyond daily realities perhaps many parents so strongly want a better and peaceful world for their children that they believe that if their children did not view the news on television this illusion might be preserved for a longer time. But to only tell children about chains of lights or prayers for peace would mean to shamefacedly conceal from them a good part of the truth. Shamefacedly because it is, after all, the adults who shape this world every day.

The psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim, who over 20 years ago provocatively formulated the thesis: "Children need fairy tales", also postulates that children need reality, even when it is violent. Every child has to learn why there is violence and how to handle it in itself and in others. It is the duty of adults to put events into perspective and to explain them, so that the children do not make wrong judgments, have unjustified concerns or very deep feelings of fear. What chil-



Markus Schächter, Director-General of ZDF

dren can put in perspective and place in relation to their reality of life prevents diffuse fears, which can quickly become too great in the children's fantasies.

These are good reasons that corroborate our opinion that we should make a children's news programme like *logo!*. *logo!* is up-to-date every day, the main news of the adults are also to be found here, but the news is put into perspective and the background is explained. *logo!* provides young viewers with an alignment of the news item with their own life-world and experience of it. Placing a news item into an explanatory context has priority over topicality. A terrible event that might have come in from the agencies just before transmission would be reported only briefly, if at

all, with the remark that the children would hear more about it in the next day's broadcast. Unlike many topical broadcasts, *logo!*, as a children's programme, can afford to react without any excitement and to refer to explanations that put the news item into perspective next day.

logo! is guided by children's questions, especially when they are concerned with far-reaching and devastating news. After 11th September, but also on the occasion of the Iraq War, the production team was inundated with a flood of questions by e-mail, post and telephone. *logo!* could answer many of these questions next day in the programme.

We attach great importance to *logo!* avoiding any emotionalisation and images which could give the children nightmares. Many of the highly dramatised, inappropriately emotional reports in *Explosiv* on RTL or in *Blitz* on SAT.1² from everyday life are definitely more frightening for children than an explanatory unit on *logo!* about Saddam Hussein. We do not have any dramatising texts or music. *logo!* looks for suitable images, and in a report on the risks of the reporter's profession in the war zone shows no journalists who have been killed. Instead we see a picture of the ZDF correspondent Tilgner in Baghdad, who pulls down his head, startled by a loud noise. That explains the dangerous nature of the situation in a way appropriate for children, understandable and without any sensationalism. As we know, children distinguish

quite clearly between fictitious and real-life violence. Non-fiction TV clearly shocks them more than fictional programmes. Excessively violent images block and prevent the acquisition of information; here children and adults react in the same way, although the threshold is lower in children. As *logo!* wants to offer information as an aid to anxiety management, for this reason alone excessively violent images are out of the question.

Another important function of *logo!* is to give children a say. When the dramatic events are accompanied by children's original sound, this not only shows that here their opinion is being heard, but also that no child has to feel that it is alone with its fears.

In the programme the children's original sound communicates that many children react or are dismayed in a similar way. Another plus point for our children's news is that *logo!* always offers advice on how children can deal with their rage or fear caused by current events.

Incidentally, children generally have a very good feeling for what they can put up with and what not. In the case of *logo!* they know what awaits them and that they will not be surprised by shocking images. That is why they trust this programme. *logo!* is quite rightly an authority to which children can turn, which takes children abso-



War reporting on *logo!*

lutely seriously and supports them in their development.

What I highly appreciate about *logo!* in crisis situations is not only the reporting on current events but also the fact that the programme conveys the idea that there is still another life beyond the dramatic news or world events and that one can enjoy beautiful things in the world.

As we know, *logo!* is also watched by many parents with their children. I naturally welcome this at times of crisis. For no television programme for children – however admirably and responsibly it is made – replaces talking to parents. Being a child also means being afraid: afraid of dark, evil powers or real-life events. Being a parent means taking children's fears seriously, alleviating and explaining them and embracing their children. ■

Translated by Geoffrey P. Burwell

NOTES

¹ A special news programme for children by ZDF German Television (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*) which is broadcast on the German children's channel KI.KA.

² *Explosiv* and *Blitz* are (*boulevard*) magazine programmes on the channels of the private German broadcasting corporations RTL and SAT.

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