

# Re-Thinking Swimming



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## Introduction

Swimming used to be a physical activity, in Germany learned at pre-school-age by parents or in peer groups in an informal way. However, that has changed. You can realize it, if you look at primary schools. A huge number of pupils in the 3rd form – kids are 8 to 9 years old than –, when swimming is on the agenda of PE, are not familiar with water at all and are far away from passing the first badge, called seahorse.



That badge indicates that a child can jump into the water and can manage to reach the other side of the pool. Furthermore the child has to dive for an object in shoulder-deep water.

The aim of the badge is to motivate the child to take part in a swimming training.

*He has neither learned to read nor swim.*

(Attic saying, quote see Stadelmann: Erziehung und Unterricht bei Griechen und Römern. 1891, S. 70)

Swimming is part of physical literacy. FoSS, the research center of PE and sports for children and adolescents, want children to be aware of their individual responsibility. They should become familiar with methods and means to prevent themselves from drowning, whenever they are close to or in the water.

## Strategies

1. In Germany primary schools we have the concept of one teacher for all subjects – even for PE. FoSS invented a 15-weeks-programm – so called *SchwimmFix* – for non-swimmers, simultaneously to regular swimming lesson, to train the pupils until they can pass the badge *seahorse*. In Karlsruhe, the evaluated program, which is sponsored by local financiers, is running since 2011/2012 successfully.

2. One big problem in Germany seems to be, that a lot of public swimming pools are closing down, because maintenance is too expensive. If you take a closer look on the numbers and compare the sheet of water per city, you might come up with other results: old pools are closing down, but modern ones expand their sheet of water. Yet, the approach to the pool might differ ... . In Norway, they follow a special concept: they use wetsuits from the very beginning to teach the kids how to swim open-water, right away. It is even cheaper to do it that way and the kids have to cope with environment from the start. Is this concept transferable to German conditions? We tried it out and organized a *field day* with a 9<sup>th</sup> form at a lake, teaching them stand-up paddling.

3. This year the topic of the presentation during the KIT-KinderUni, which is offered for kids between 6 to 14 years, was *We go swimming – the theory behind the exercise*.

4. It is useful to sensitize all target groups for swimming as physical literacy:

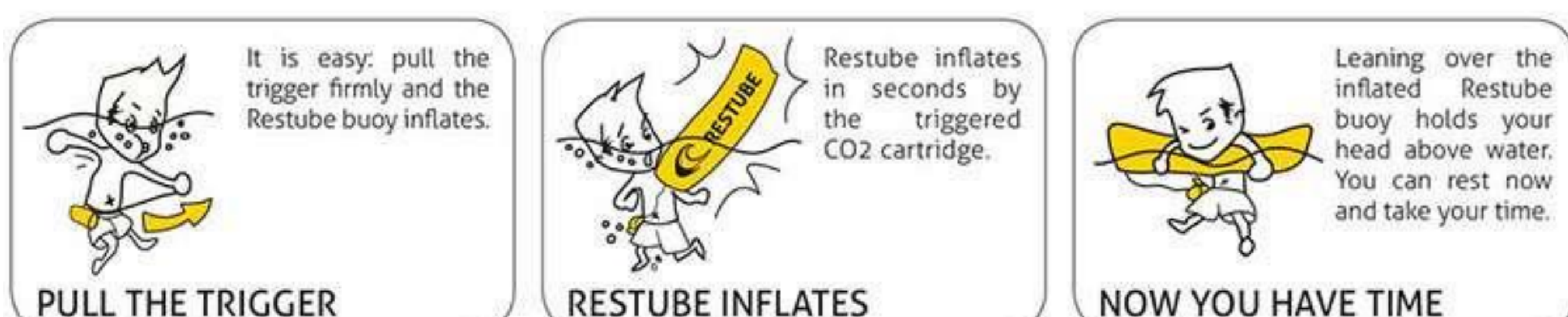
With *SchwimmFix*, offered in obligatory PE, we try to catch every pupil and – may be – the teachers also.



The question of the sheet of water is addressed to local affairs. Learning to swim in open water gives parents the chance to chose the sea when they think about where to go on holidays with the kids. To be

### RESTUBE Core Functionality

Our innovative design advances convenience and versatility for water safety.



## Results

### 1. Success of SchwimmFix

school year	percentage of non-swimmers before joining SchwimmFix	percentage of non-swimmers after passing SchwimmFix
2017/2018	30,5	16,7
2018/2019	31,5	15,4

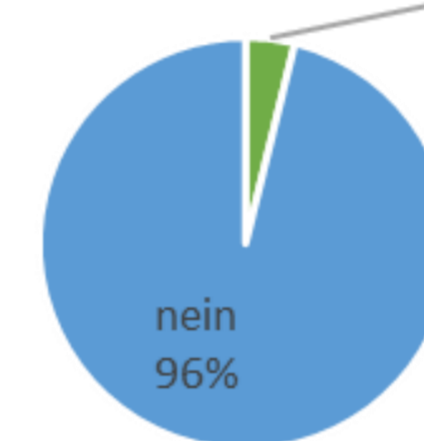
Every primary school in Karlsruhe is joining the program.

2. There is no common comprehension concerning *I can swim!* as we realized, when we asked pupil of the 9th form. By the way, everybody *could* swim – this was the prerequisite for the field day at the lake.

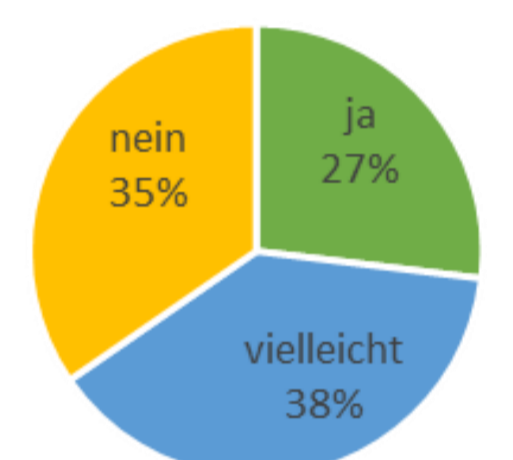
If they could chose, they would prefer to swim in a lake, second best would be the sea, third place open-air swimming-pool.

During the *field day* pupils became aware of their individual responsibility and of safety strategies.

Restube habe ich vorher schon gekannt



Restube würde ich gerne immer am Wasser dabei haben



### DROWNING CHAIN OF SURVIVAL



3. You can sensitize even kids for green exercise. If they regard swimming as a natural movement, that is needed in a certain environment, they will start to train it, to be physical literate.

## Conclusion

In Germany the numbers of people drowning is not a question of swimming or of migrants, but of underestimated conditions. The capability to swim in a pool in a line – as they experience at school – is only the first (important) step in the chain of survival. People have to realize that water is part of their environment and that they have to adapt to the different environmental conditions to survive. (In the Netherlands, children are trained in swimming fully dressed, to adapt to environmental conditions).

Environmental conditions may change when you bath in a pool without a teacher, or even open water or when swimming is the only physical activity to survive, after you fell into the water when doing stand-up paddling or canoeing.

After all, everyone has to take over the responsibility for his or her own life and have to follow safety strategies – that goes far beyond the re-thinking of swimming (bathing rules are only the start). Realizing the current situation and self-estimation of his or her capability is much more important to survive. So the FoSS will carry on to teach risk-management – the *field day* was the pre-test for a new program for children and adolescents.

In Germany, we have to re-think swimming to get back to see this as a physical activity like all-day-movements. However, it is not the task of PE to teach all-day-movements, but swimming styles.