

## Guten Tag, it's Deutsch time!

### EDUCATION

Sunday, 19 Nov 2017

By Sharon Ovinis



Annadurai (right) presenting the trio (last row, from left) – Florian, Klier and Johannes. With them are Hemavarshini (centre, in pinafore), and her schoolmates.

THE ancient art of shadow play took a playful spin recently when 146 students from SMK Damansara Utama, Petaling Jaya, were feted to a paper theatre performance by Papiertheater Nuremberg from Germany.

The students, aged between 13 and 17, are learning the German language as an additional subject in school. They were thrilled to watch the three-man group perform *Cave Allegory* led by founder and director Johannes Volkmann which included his brother Florian, a musician, and Stephan Klier.

The 25-minute improvised performance – using paper, shadow and light – tickled funny bones with antics that incorporated shadow play, wriggling toes and paper chomping.

Not all was play though as students were asked to understand the presentation from a broader perspective. Young people are still blinded to many of the world's pressing issues.

“Children are usually our main audience,” said Johannes adding that they performed regularly at “festivals, theatres and churches upon invitation”.

Educational expert at Goethe Institut, Ute Dieng, said that the group which was on its first visit to Malaysia, was able to showcase German culture to the school and at the recent Children's Conference supported and organised by Goethe Institut and Deutsche Schule of Kuala Lumpur (DSKL, or the German School of KL).

The Children's Conference is a worldwide project that started in 2014. The mini conferences will culminate with the World Children's Summit in 2018 in Nuremberg themed the “Street of Human Rights”.

Young people will be invited to present their creative ideas and address their many causes to society and politicians.

Dieng said the theatre group was invited by PASCH or Schools: Partners for the Future, a global initiative by the German government. She said that the objective was to showcase Germany's richness in theatre, education and culture.

“The performance was held in English so that the younger students who do not have a good grasp of German can still understand and enjoy it,” added Dieng.

SMK Damansara Utama was the first national school in Selangor to teach the German language. Teacher K.A.S. Annadurai, who speaks seven languages including Arabic and Japanese, began teaching German at the school in 2009 when it was first introduced. He taught Bahasa Malaysia and Tamil in his early years of teaching.

“Students must look for social networks to join. There are many activities that are organised by Goethe Institute as well as DSKL,” he said, when asked how students could improve their command of the German language.

Annadurai added that creative writing contests and poetry slams were organised in German from time to time, urging students to look out for them. Goethe Institute, he said, also sponsored teachers yearly for a four-week course in Germany.

Annadurai's student Hemavarshini Murugiah, 15, has been learning German over the last 18 months. She joined the class on her father's encouragement.

“I didn't know anything about the language when I first started. I found the language tough because of the characters of the words.”

She and seven other schoolmates joined the Children's Conference in DSKL recently. It changed her perspective as it was "more fun trying to learn a language in context" she said.

"I began to enjoy the sounds of the language after being at the Children's Conference. It was great to hear others speak German. It wasn't like language learning in a classroom," added Hemavarshini.

"Having an interest in a language you want to pick up isn't enough. I think you must have a love for it."

**TAGS / KEYWORDS:**

**Education , Smk Damansara Utama , Goethe Institut , German Language , Papiertheatre Nuremberg**

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