Lernen aus der Geschichte

LaG - Magazin

Discrimination in the past and present

- an international youth work topic

01/2015

January 28, 2015

Content

Introduction

For discussion

Project

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Educational strategies against anti-Semitism

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Among educators engaged in educational work that critically addresses anti-Semitism, there is a relatively high level of agreement on the following observations:

- that exposure to history, in particular to Holocaust and Nazi history, is not effective against present-day anti-Semitism;

- that "anti-Semitism without Jews" exists;

- that anti-Semitism is a worldview which offers supposed explanations for many prevailing problems, feeds on projections, and has an identity-defining function, creating a feeling of group cohesiveness;

- that today, the issue is not so much extreme-right variants of anti-Semitism, but rather subtle, sometimes open anti-Semitism, "after or despite Auschwitz," marked by resentment and conspiracy theories;

- that anti-Semitism has many forms and versions and that anti-Semitism can be concealed in critiques of capitalism, critiques of the nation of Israel, and critiques of cosmopolitanism.

- that in connection with the conflict in the Middle East, anti-Semitism is being politicized, which can contribute to people framing themselves as victims of the "overly powerful Jews" and make educational work more difficult.

Four educational strategies against anti-Semitism

In the past few years, four educational strategies have been identified and will be discussed here. They consider different interconnected aspects in different ways and respond especially to the following aspects of anti-Semitism:

- Recognizing and deconstructing anti-Semitism as a constellations of discursive schema;

- anti-Semitism as experience in the whole realm of racism/discrimination — thus, an intervention in close social proximity

- anti-Semitism as intergroup conflict — thus, an exchange project on the basis of the contact hypothesis;

- anti-Semitism as global and local history — thus, work with history and memory.

So let's take a closer look at these four educational strategies, their possibilities, limitations and particular challenges:

Deconstructing anti-Semitic images and discursive schema

In this approach, the idea is to first recognize anti-Semitic schema and preconceived images as such, then to analyze and deconstruct these images and discourses, and critically question anti-Semitic thought patterns. Thus, it is a primarily cognitive way of approaching the subject. This is work with representations, practiced in the classroom as well as at youth meeting centers. The content of these preconceived images has to do with conspiracy theories and fan-

tasies of power, rumors about "the Jews," who are paradoxically alleged to be endowed with superiority while also being perpetual victims. In this context, one can observe "anti-Semitism without Jews," because these images exist in many contexts, even without Jewish people being present. This is not just about hateful images of the other, but also a worldview that can offer explanatory schema for everything.

The aim of this approach is to strengthen young people's cultural and cognitive skills such as media criticism, critical analysis of comics, consciously noticing anti-Semitism on the Internet, etc., so that they learn to see through stereotypes and their mechanisms.

With this approach, the challenge is that the preconceived images addressed are deeply anchored in culture and society and they only change very slowly, if at all. In working with these images and representations, there is also the risk of perpetuating them. The goal is to expose schema and, in deconstructing them, to strengthen argumentation skills.

Anti-Semitism as an experience in the close social environment

The second approach is quite different: anti-Semitism is approached as an experience in the close social environment, in the context of the increasing ethnicization of social conflicts. An experience which all participants have experienced in the realm of their daily lives, in its dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, is to be shared with awareness. This educational strategy aims, in groups or

in workshops, to address and share personal experiences of violence and discrimination. The focus on the dimension of personal experience requires that the experiences of all participants be expressed, whether of anti-Semitism or one of the many forms of racism, including anti-Muslim or anti-Romani racism. In such workshops, other categories of discrimination such as homophobia or sexism are also considered.

This is an approach which is well-known in anti-discrimination education and which does not hierarchize or place value judgments on the incidents. It offers each person the opportunity to express personal experiences of being affected by prejudice, e.g. resentments, indignities and discrimination in daily life. Social and locational disadvantages, which, depending on the context, the young people may experience as perpetrators, as victims or as bystanders, are also discussed. Having acknowledged these experiences, the next step is to collaboratively find strategies to counteract discrimination and hate, and to act in solidarity. The goal of these educational programs is to encourage everyone to take responsibility.

For this approach, it makes a big difference whether Jewish young people are participating. When no Jewish participants are present, one danger is that the educators might take on a representational role. This assumption of the role of Jewish victims, however, can be seen by the other young people as moralizing, often eliciting defensive reactions or worsening existing

resistance.

This approach comes from social pedagogy and tends to be practiced in situations outside the framework of school.

Intercultural encounters: dialogue projects on anti-Semitism

In this educational approach, anti-Semitism is defined as an intergroup relationship; contact is encouraged between groups with negative feelings towards each other. These considerations have led to exchange projects between Jewish and non-Jewish young people, intended to counteract anti-Semitism.

However, intergroup contact and encounters can only have a positive effect if certain conditions are kept in mind. These conditions have led to different models for exchanges. Their common denominator is that the encounter requires very thorough preparation and follow-up; that groups brought together are as comparable as possible (in terms of number of participants, status or level of education), and that both groups need co-moderation by educators.

One of the goals of exchange education is to reduce prejudices and stereotypes through experiencing "the others" — often imagined without being known in reality — in their specifics but also their general human nature. However, insufficiently thought-out exchange projects can actually increase intergroup hostility, working against their educational intent.

Numerous exchange projects are also dialogue projects, in which questions are posed to "the others," but personal prejudices are also questioned. In the best case, dialogue leads to understanding of "the others," or also possibly, sparked by critique from "the others," to a critical perception of "the own," that is, to reflection or even self-critique.

But exchanged projects about anti-Semitism involve a risk, namely that of asymmetry. If anti-Semitism were to be the only topic addressed, the Jewish participants would automatically be reduced to the position of victims and the non-Jewish participants would be assigned the position of perpetrators. From the debate over anti-racism pedagogy, it is known that this kind of asymmetry can trigger defensive reactions and resentment and lead to deadlock. Without reciprocity, exchange education is not possible. That certainly does not mean we should fall into the trap of a well-known anti-Semitic topos: we should not, instead, collectively label the Jewish people as perpetrators, but rather, we must see them as individuals, who, like all other people, can be the cause of racist opinions, thoughts, images or prejudices, which are, after all, supposed to be analyzed in these exchanges.

However, can exchange and dialogue projects specifically aimed against anti-Semitism really be built on the principles of reciprocity? And what does that mean exactly — who would exchange with whom? If anti-Semitism is a construct or a rumor, which can exist without the real people affected, there is no partner for exchange. After all, one can hardly create dialogue projects

between "anti-Semites" and "Jews." And if the question of anti-Semitism is not made explicit, the question remains open: what is the justification and the topic of the proposed dialogue? An exception is projects in which the aim is solidarity with the people affected — whether it is against racism or anti-Semitism.

Working with history and memory

Anti-Semitism today is based neither exclusively nor directly on history. It is confirmed repeatedly again by educators that knowledge about the annihilation of the Jews is not effective against present-day anti-Semitism. Still, considering the past can bring important new insights. Above all, approaches based on history and remembrance work in the local context provide interesting perspectives on education work to counter anti-Semitism. These are not just concerned with history from the Nazi period, but also with history that encompasses the perspectives of majorities and as well as minorities.

Engaging with local context and investigating the traces of daily life events as well as exceptional ones requires an awareness of the connection between local and global history and of the diversity of society yesterday and today. On the one hand, the idea is to engage with memories from one's own family — finding biographical connections to migration, war, flight, exile, or to the history of the realm of daily life and work. On the other hand, how Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors live

together should also be addressed. All of this can take place based on buildings, streets, archives and places.

In other words, it is a territorial approach, in which the focus is on citoyenneté in the sense of belonging to a place, and on the active participation of all those involved. Here, for example, the topic of how Sinti and Roma belong to local place could also offer interesting perspectives.

In this approach, anti-Semitism is not necessarily the primary topic, but rather, becomes relevant in the context of the history of the neighborhood, borough, or village. An inclusive consideration of the history of the relationships between majorities and minorities can also help us to question, in a concrete way, how stereotypes and the categorizing assumptions made between "us" and "the others" arise and develop.

Conclusion

These four educational strategies do not, in any way, stand in opposition to one another. It should always be considered how they might complement each other.

They have in common that education against anti-Semitism always demands a lot of educators, who are required again and again to position themselves between banalizing and overdramatizing the subject. Also, the deconstruction of stereotypes, that is, of collective preconceived notions, is sometimes met with resistance. This resistance is even stronger in the case of established representations of an abstract

category, to which great power is attributed, as is the case with Jewish people, who, for hundreds of years, have been accused of secret ambitions for power.

It is often useful to work with dissonances. Discovering contradictions in one's own ideas or in the narrative of one's own ingroup, whether they be socio-cognitive or normative, can be a valuable motive for changing minds. It is also worth observing specific situations: "critical incidents" that were experienced by the participants themselves. These force people to consider actual incidents, to avoid general statements about "the Jews," "the Turks," "the others," and thus to explore concrete experiences and possibilities for action.

In these four educational approaches, there are different ways of dealing with the question of whether different forms of anti-Semitism and racism should be addressed together or separately. In the first approach, anti-Semitism is often addressed separately, but there is no reason not to evaluate racist and anti-Semitic images at the same time. Approaches two and three work with collective experiences of hate and discrimination, and in the fourth approach all memories and stories are expressed. This is not about pedagogical opportunism, but rather, about treating all the members of a society equally, regardless of what group they belong to, and about their right to contribute their experiences in the educational framework without trivialization or hierarchization.

It's important to develop non-accusatory educational perspectives against anti-Semitism, perspectives which foster self-reflection and are based on an inclusive perspective — without an implicit or explicit categorization of "good" and "evil," anti-Semites and non-anti-Semites, racists and non-racists. Within the framework of education, this means we must walk a fine line, addressing the many forms of anti-Semitism — in close social environments in the context of different racisms — as well as personal phenomena with their specific situations and relationships.

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The next magazine "Den Holocaust erzählen?" will be published on February 25, 2015.