

Section 7

Your project is running - how to coach it?

Racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia and other related forms of intolerance are forms of prejudice and discrimination. Dealing with these issues can be a challenge and at the same time a great opportunity for learning and sharing. Dealing with these issues can raise very sensitive and emotional issues. Grief about suffering from discrimination might surface; rage, anger, shame and tears might be shed and shared. Much the same can happen as it does in AIDS-prevention or alcohol-prevention peer group education projects.

For all the participants the peer group education project itself can become a process of learning much about life and about themselves. As in any on-going process it is natural that there will be times of stress and difficulties that might not have not been foreseen at first thought.

They can vary according to:

- the nature of the project
- the phase it is going through
- the subject being dealt with
- the number of people involved
- the environment
- the structure of the peer group
- leadership among the youth.

In the examples of good practice quoted in this book (section 5) some of the most difficult moments were described by those who contributed.

The following core problems can be cited (and surely some more may be found):

- exhaustion
- confrontation with unfamiliar tasks
- pressure of administrative work load
- financial and funding problems
- growth of project into unknown dimensions
- not enough assistance provided
- leadership problems, in-group quarrels, team problems
- gender problems
- dealing with strong emotions in yourself and in others

When I hear the word racism, a lot of things pop into my head. One thing that is common when I hear, feel or see racism is irritation. Racism is a product of lack of awareness, lack of information, media manipulation and the solution to it is tolerance.

Andre Simonsen,
18 years, Jewish, Polish,
lives in Denmark



- need to help and comfort people; limitations to do so
- confrontation with expectations of others
- disturbing influences from outside groups or authorities
- boredom
- risky or dangerous situations
- dealing with the media
- drop-outs

As youth worker, school master or trainer involved in a peer group education project you may be happy and proud to have launched such a project in your environment. You will want the project to become a success. You will want the young people to feel comfortable with it. You want to coach them, but in a very unobtrusive way, leaving the peers to their own devices as much as possible.

How do you go about this in a creative way?

It is useful to bear in mind the starting points of your peer group education project.

As a coach you will want to empower young people:

- by encouraging them to identify their goals
- by helping them to make informed choices
- by teaching and practicing the necessary skills
- by fostering mutual support, tolerance and emotional healing in the group
- by creating a positive environment for their activities
- by defending their rights
- by assisting them emotionally
- by expressing faith in their capabilities
- by creating structures and systems for decision-making that bring in diverging view-points, heighten perception and lead to effective use of information and experience

to promote the message against racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism:

- by providing useful materials
- by helping to network some other similar or adjacent projects
- by making yourself more knowledgeable about racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance

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- by learning from the day-to-day experience of young people
- by recruiting a diverse team of youth
- by respecting diversity and diverse needs
- by treating everybody equally.

More practically speaking you might consider the following suggestions:

12 Points for the supportive and non-authoritarian coach

1. General

Different coaches have different styles. But there are a few key points for coaches:

- They support the team spirit and co-operation.
- They must recognize the skills of the different partners involved and put them in the right positions.

The team will sometimes not act as planned or expected. The coach helps the peers reflect on their experience so they are ready to act better next time. During the practical work, the coach is on the sideline. At practice, the coach plays different roles.

Identify leaders in the group and help them before and between meetings to plan meetings, develop strategy proposals, lead meetings, and anticipate problems. Youth leaders need support and training so that they can lead other youth. Without training and support they risk 'burn out'.

Discuss the establishment of a routine of weekly or bi-weekly meetings where brain-storming, re-considering, re-evaluating can be done in a quiet setting. Set up flip chart or black board where everything that happened, can be continuously noted down in an easy way, what worked, what didn't work, what could be improved. Keep findings; "What went well?", "What could be better?" "What needs further discussion/evaluation?" as the barometer of the development of the project and as the basis of group discussions. Always start with a positive feed-back "What went well? What have we/you as the group and you as individuals achieved?" Be prepared not to be needed when you might want to teach something, but be always there when you are needed.

2. Expectations and aims. Activism and burn out.

The coaches cannot achieve the aims themselves. The team will have into work to achieve the aims. do that. The coach should inject realism in the project without breaking idealism.



Burn out is a common result of activism. To prevent this working suggest; cherishing each other, taking a rest, bringing in more people, delegating tasks, setting realistic aims, finding enough resources (helpers, money, etc). The topic of your peer group education programme, fighting racism and xenophobia has to be treated seriously. Working on projects and programmes can be fun and rewarding for young people and their coaches.

3. Administration and planning

Assign a person that is ready to assist the peer group with administration matters. The person should offer regular visiting hours every week which can be used without pressure of other work. Make office space and office equipment available at certain times of the week.

Organise a session with the peer group dealing with planning instruments. Make an exercise how to use annual and weekly planners. Have a 'pro' and 'contra' discussion about 'planned' versus 'spontaneous' action. Ask the group to decide who will be in charge with keeping up the agenda. Discuss what the prospective phases of the project will be, i.e. for organising a camp, an event, creating educational materials etc.

4. Finances and funding

Offer a session to the peer group on the topic 'money' and its value in our society. Discuss volunteer and paid work engagements. Discuss what funding means and how funds greatly determine the size of the project. Discuss prospective sponsors.

Use 'role play' to develop skills in convincing a potential sponsor and getting across the importance and uniqueness of the project to him/her. Explain different options of budgeting, i.e. that even without huge funds a great deal can be achieved. Work on methods for drawing up budgets. Help looking for sponsors and promoters of the campaign.

5. Growth of the project

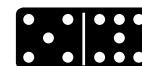
Discuss how the project went so far. Until now, can distinctive phases be named?

- What are the implications when a new phase of the project development is reached?
- What needs to be done next?
- Who looks forward to the new challenge, who is a little scared about it? Why?
- How can we support each other? Do we need more people in the project, more participants, or more support from the outside?

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Racism for me is when it is harder for me to get a job, not because of my qualifications and grades but because of my foreign name. That's racism.

Aisha Ahmad, 19 years,
Pakistani living in Denmark



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6. Leadership problems, team problems

What do you as coach do when you disagree with the group? How quickly do you show opposition? Which mistakes are learning experiences for the youth? Which ones endanger the project? Are you sure you know better? How can you communicate your information in a way that is not 'adultist' ("When you're older you'll know that..." or "Have you considered what will happen if...").

Generally give support to the youth leader and do not allow the leader to be heavily criticised or oppressed. Accept criticism from the group for your work as long as it is not destructive. Ask for respect just as you would be respectful to others.

Use a variety of educational tools; questionnaires, dilemma boards, newspaper cuts, etc. for exercises that deal with the following questions:

- What does leadership mean?
- Who wants to fulfill that role? Why? Who does not want such a role? Why?
- Are there only advantages about being a leader (admiration, power, fulfillment, pride) or can there be disadvantages as well (workload, leading eats up energy, exhaustion, burn-out).
- Can there be alternative leadership models? Shared leadership? Leadership on rotation?
- What is a team? Why are we a team? What are our goals? Why could we be divided, which are the disturbing factors?
- How do we deal with divisions early and openly in a healing way?
- How do we say good-bye to disruptive people?

7. Gender problems

Use educational tools to tackle the following questions:

- We have launched a project against racism and intolerance. Does racism and intolerance have anything to do with sexism or (vice versa)?
- Racism and intolerance also touches our individual feelings. How do young people in our group feel about their individual identity and about their role in society? How did we, as girls and boys, learn about our life roles in childhood?
- Do girls of different ethnic groups feel differently about their position in society?
- Can we fight discrimination on the outside of our group if there is discrimination within our group?

Consider breaking up the group in a female and male sub-group. Let them first work separately, then together. Let them discuss if such a separation would be the right thing for ethnic groups as well.

8. Dealing with emotions

Use different educational tools to evaluate:

- What are emotions? How do they influence us?
- What does society (family, friends, lovers, teachers, TV, movies, our boss) tell us about emotions?
- Are there situations when emotions are “allowed” and when they are not “allowed”?
- When we look at other cultures - are emotions lived in another way?
- Who finds it easy to show emotions? Who doesn't?
- Do boys and girls express emotions in different ways?
- Why could emotions scare us?
- What do emotions have to do with discrimination?
- What does discrimination do to us?
- How does it feel to be discriminated? Do we know this feeling?
- When we felt bad about something in our life, who was the person that would comfort us? How? In the past? Who is it now?
- How can we comfort somebody who expresses sorrow, pain or sadness?
- Can we exercise how to comfort and soothe? Do we go about it in different ways (For boys and girls, taking on board the need to respect a persons sexual orientation, cultures, religion, etc)?

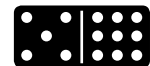
9. Dealing with outside pressure

Institutions and individuals - this could be the parents of the young people taking part, a funding body or other groups - might try to disturb and cut short your peer group education project. What can you and the group do to counter this outside pressure? As the coach you will defend your project and your group in the best way you can. This could be done by making a presentation to an important board or an influential individual or with your superior or manager.

At the same time it might be useful to discuss with your group power, pressure and counter-pressure and the role of pressure groups. It is important that young people know their rights and can exercise them.

- Who has power in our society? Why?
- How is power connected to racism?
- Where can we make out counter-powers? Or where is there a balance of power? How can a compromise be reached?
- What are the expectations that we have to other sectors of our society? (Institutions,

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People say there is a little racist hidden in every human being. I say; if that's a fact some people exaggerate. Most of the racists in my town seem to have their own reasons for being who they are and most of the reasons are stupidity and envy.

Rene Maarlain, 21 years, Spain

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school, youth club etc).

- How far does the group want to yield? What are the conditions for compromising?
- How can one be diplomatic - and reach most of your goals
- Do the members of the group have less rights than adults because they are young?

10. Risky or dangerous situations

Your peer group may encounter resistance or aggression of racist, anti-semitic or xenophobic groups or individuals. Discuss what is considered to be risky or dangerous. Discuss what could be the outcome of an encounter with racist or aggressive groups.

- Would it be useful for the project to encounter such a confrontation?
- What would help to reach our goals without too many risks?

Maybe you want to add a discussion about violence, what is violence in its different forms. How does it relate to racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance?

11. Contacts with the media

Contacts with the media are important for your project and for the group members as well. Discuss the role of the media.

- How do the media influence our perception of the world?
- Why is media coverage important for our project?
- Do we need to appoint a 'media specialist' in the group?
- Do we need a policy on working with the media?

Offer exercises in how to write a letter to the editor, how to answer at an interview. How will the answers be reproduced by the media?

12. Drop-outs and how to 'keep the flame on'

There might be moments when some people want to leave the project. Discuss and explore with the group through exercises the impact of people dropping out. Maybe you want to use role-plays.

- How do different members of the group feel about it?
- What might be the reason to stop with the engagement? Burn-out? Other new interests? Do they have anything to do with the project?
- Is this a natural thing that happens, or are the drop-out somehow considered to be traitorous to the group?

- How can the project live on?
- How can successors be found? Could it be negotiated that people leave from the project only when new persons are ready to come in for them?
- Do new-comers offer new chances, new insights?

And finally

How can you and the peer group measure the success of your project? You might have reached other people, you might have shared stories of discrimination, you might have stood up against racist jokes and slurs, you might have organized an event, you might have embarked for further goals and activities, you might have built a network, you might have changed the atmosphere within your group or youth club, or school.

As the Taoist say: the way is the goal.

Everything that happens by doing such a project can be a worthwhile development if

- it does not destroy or endanger the project or burn out the young people or yourself
- it does not go against the aims you have set for the project
- it does not hurt people involved in an inadequate manner
- the group learns by mistakes.

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