
EARA Newsletter

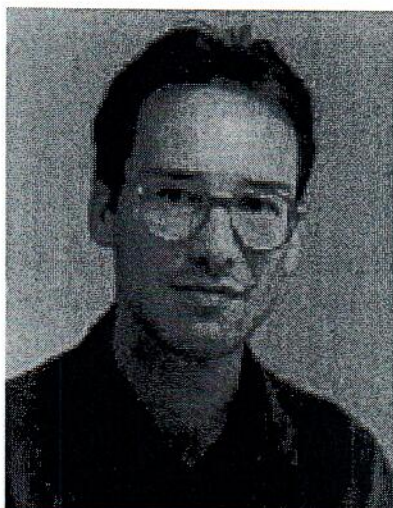
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Pedagogical Programs for Right-wing Extremist Youth: Experiences and Challenges

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The German Youth Institute investigated a line of educational programmes to deal with youngsters at the extreme right of the political spectrum¹. Data from more than 30 projects and programs all over Germany were included in the study, working under different circumstances and following different approaches. The research is based on in-depth interviews with pedagogues and employees of social services working mainly with young males aged 14 - 18 years, but also with younger children, young women, and young adults up to 30.



The research indicates a number of shortcomings in the educational programs. Although right-wing juveniles are interested in political discussions, they cannot be reached by traditional educational work. Special programs and activities easy to attend are needed which fit into the everyday life schedule of the youngsters who do not join traditional seminars. A better cooperation between schools and educational projects is needed. For the development of suitable pedagogical concepts, experiences and requirements of practitioners should be taken into consideration.

Pedagogical programs addressing right-wing extremist youth often experience disapproval by people within the local community as well as by the professional community. Social workers dealing with such groups are sometimes even suspected to support right-wing extremist organisations. Mistrust and low acceptance is a substantial

problem in this field. Social workers have to compete with right-wing extremist organisations recruiting children and youth with specially designed activities. While these activities attract children and youth by way of mysterious and illegal enterprises, social and educational programs have a chance to attract youth via respectability and professional assistance. Social workers are not always aware of their resources and means by which they could attract youth associated with the right-wing extremist scene. An intensive exchange of information and cooperation is badly needed.

Social workers report about difficulties establishing professional relations with right wing youth. It is difficult to find an appropriate balance between supporting these youngsters on the one side and setting limits to destructive or illegal behaviour on the other. Social workers must handle contradictory expectations of various parties. The aims of these pedagogical interventions are often too diffuse and lack clear achievement indicators. Thus, sometimes establishing a professional social relation to right wing youth becomes an aim in itself without any further educational planning. Practitioners are in need of regular supervision and the possibility to reconsider their work as well as personal aspects of their professional relationships.

So far, clearly defined criteria for the assessment of quality and efficacy of pedagogical interventions with right-wing extremist youth are missing. A systematic documentation and a professional evaluation of pedagogical interventions is needed in order to provide educators and social workers with the needed knowledge, to improve their qualification and to support the development of more effective pedagogical programs.

¹ The project "Right-wing Extremism and Xenophobia – Political and Pedagogical Challenges" was administered from 2000 to 2003 by Andrea Pingel, Peter Rieker and Renate Schulze at the Leipzig branch of the German Youth Institute. It was supported by a grant of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth. A research-report is available providing information about methods and results of the project: Andrea Pingel; Peter Rieker: Pädagogik mit rechtsextrem orientierten Jugendlichen. Anstöße und Erfahrungen in der Jugendarbeit. Deutsches Jugendinstitut, Leipzig 2002.