

# FINDING WAYS OF CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE IN POLARIZED SOCIETIES

Guidelines and toolkit for teachers  
and educators based on the project  
of the Terezín Initiative Institute



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## Terezín Initiative Institute

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## INTRODUCTION

The project of the Czech Terezín Initiative Institute called "Searching for constructive dialogue in polarized society" aims to decrease polarization within the public debate on diversity in society in Central and Western Europe, and to change the narrative based on hate speech used in public discourse towards constructive dialogue. In this project cooperate four partners from four countries.

- Terezín Initiative Institute (CZ), Anne Frank House (NL), Anne Frank Zentrum (DE) and Milan Šimečka Foundation (SK). The project partners use the story of Anne Frank to show how polarization of society contributes to discrimination, violation of equal rights and to the rise of authoritarian and totalitarian society. We tried to search for ways how to work and open the topic of polarization with the youth, but without hatred and prejudices. We are searching for way how to move from hate speech to constructive dialogue. The project's objectives were:

- to create an expert group consisting of historians, sociologists, methodologists and other relevant stakeholders from participating countries,

- to create an educator group consisting of primary and secondary teachers, trainers, lecturers and other persons working in the educational field,

- work with youth - targeting pupils who are 14 to 20 years old.

Project activities reflected on the topics of propaganda, discrimination, radicalization, equal rights, identities and other relevant topics. They were based on reflection on the well-known story of Anne Frank and its extension to local and European context, as well as on further stories of holocaust victims and different victims of discrimination. The project was based on the principles of appreciation of different value perspectives, use of comparative approach and sharing experience of different European countries (CZ, SK, NL, DE). The outcomes of the project are:

- guidelines and toolkit including recommendations from experts, students and teachers on how to handle potentially polarizing topics in classrooms and public discourse;

- **180** youth (students and pupils) trained in techniques of nonviolent communication;

- **30** teachers trained in how to address polarizing topics in classes;

- **4400** visitors of the Anne Frank exhibition sensitized towards the diversity of society.

## WHAT IS POLARIZATION?

Polarization is the act of dividing human society, especially that contains different people or opinions or disagreements, into two completely opposing groups. Examples of polarization within the society might be political, racial, economical, religious, geographical or any other. Our project started before the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, and this new threat brought even bigger gaps between polarized groups in our societies. The polarization has been an increasing topic of concern for people in many areas of their lives, rearing its head in everything from family to workplace relationships and up to election campaigns and politics.

Our main focus was on youth and educators who can cope with these topics and help to create a more sensitive and healthier class, school or society.

# PARTNERS

## INTRODUCTION

### **Terezín Initiative Institute (CZ)**

The Terezín Initiative Institute (TII) focuses on research, documentation and education in the field of modern history related to the Holocaust, its roots and legacy. Since 2008, it has been running the Database of Holocaust Victims, which is accessible to the public on the portal [www.holocaust.cz](http://www.holocaust.cz).

Since 2011, the TII has been organizing trainings for teachers and youth, educational programs and conferences focused on modern history and relations between the majority and minorities. In its educational programs, it uses modern educational methods, mainly based at Facing History and Ourselves. Activities are built on own archival research of TII and work with sources. Institute also cooperates with the so-called second generation of Holocaust survivors in education and in research.

Terezín Initiative Institute also deals with the topics of Nazi forced labor. Between 2017 and 2022 arranged the traveling exhibition Anne Frank House Let me be myself with a focus on peer education.

TII annually organizes the commemorative event „Public reading of the names of Holocaust victims - Yom Hashoah“ and operates a public specialist library.

[www.terezinstudies.cz](http://www.terezinstudies.cz)

### **Anne Frank House (NL)**

The Anne Frank House (AFH), established in 1957, is an independent non-profit organisation entrusted with the care of the Secret Annexe, the place where Anne Frank went into hiding during World War II and where she wrote her diary. The aim of the Anne Frank House is the preservation of Anne Frank's hiding place in order to stimulate a broad international public – young people in

particular – to reflect on the dangers of antisemitism, prejudice and discrimination, but also to inspire them towards active citizenship by highlighting the positive examples of helpers. More than a million people visit the Anne Frank House each year. Globally, tens of thousands of young people participate in the educational programmes organised by the House. The AFH develops and disseminates pedagogical materials and runs educational projects internationally, aiming to combat present-day forms of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, and to contribute to the building of a pluralistic and democratic society. Our most used product is a travelling exhibition about the life of Anne Frank on the backdrop of the Holocaust and WWII, using which young volunteer peer-guides connect the historical context with contemporary human rights issues, explore the concept of identity and learn to take action for a more inclusive, connected society.

[www.annefrank.org](http://www.annefrank.org)

### **Anne Frank Zentrum (DE)**

The Anne Frank Zentrum (AFZ) is the German partner organization of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. The Centre reminds visitors of Anne Frank and her diary with exhibitions and an array of educational programs. It facilitates learning opportunities in which children and young people can examine history and link it to the world in which they live today. They learn how to take on social responsibility, and how to engage with freedom, equal rights and democracy.

The Anne Frank Zentrum's exhibition "All about Anne" is presented at Hackescher Markt in Berlin-Mitte. The exhibition tells the story of Anne Frank's life and informs about the time in which she lived. It explains why Anne Frank's diary is so well-known today and shows that her thoughts are still relevant. The exhibition "All About Anne" addresses this in a unique way. It is the only ex-

hibition on the history of Nazi rule in Berlin that is specifically aimed at children, young people and families.

[www.annefrank.de](http://www.annefrank.de)

### **Milan Šimečka Foundation (SK)**

Milan Šimečka Foundation (MSF) is one of the oldest non-governmental organizations in Slovakia. Since 1991 it focuses on human rights and intercultural issues. Areas of the Foundations work include development and delivery of educational programs and several research, awareness-raising and advocacy activities on local, national and international levels. For several years the MSF runs research and educational projects dealing with the Holocaust and anti-Semitism in Slovakia. The remembrance educational program strives to promote human rights, active citizenship and cultivation of democratic principles. The Foundation has successfully delivered the peer-education project with the travelling exhibition 'Anne Frank. A History for Today' at Slovak schools continuously from 2005. It also has developed the Slovak version of teaching materials to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance which were authorized by the national Ministry of Education. The main activities are educational programs for teachers, schools, and students in the field of identity, migration, diversity, discrimination, prejudices, Holocaust, totalitarian regime, value-based and remembrance education. Every year MSF runs a traveling exhibition of Anne Frank in 10 schools. The Foundation offers advanced training for students in Anne Frank Youth Network to support their civic engagement and collaborates on a webpage with educational tool for teacher called "Stories that Move", that works with peer education in topics of discrimination. The MSF has developed an interactive walk using Holocaust survivors' testimony called "IWalk" in

the cities Bratislava and Košice. For 5 years the Foundation is leading an e-learning course for teachers about „How to teach about Holocaust today?“. Other programs of Milan Šimečka Foundation include multi-genre festivals [fjuzn] across Slovakia to empower the new minorities and inclusion. It also carries out research and supports schools and municipalities in inclusion and integration.

[www.nadaciamilanasecku.sk](http://www.nadaciamilanasecku.sk)

## METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

This part of our guidelines brings examples from all 4 partner organizations involved in the project. We will introduce three methods and several activities used by our organizations - Facing History and Ourselves, Deep Democracy and Stories that Move. The last one is available in many languages online, so we have dedicated a chapter to it. We illustrate the methods by activities "ready to use" for teachers and educators. The article about an online tool Stories that Move is sharing best practices. It is also "ready to use" in class or for non-formal educators who want to work with discrimination topics.

## FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

TEREZÍN INITIATIVE INSTITUTE (CZ)

*A man makes a decision.  
Decisions make history.*

In the Facing History and Ourselves method, you will find several ways to use history to get students to think about the current situation of minorities in society and to take responsibility for their own actions. In doing so, we try to get them to see problems from many sides, to try to understand the problem from many poles, to form their own opinion based on the facts and to look for solutions.

The „Facing History“ method originated in 1976 in the United States to address racism, anti-Semitism and prejudice at key moments of history. It helps students make connections between decisions made in the past and those they will face in their lives. Using this method, we educate students to be curious, to create space for empathy and kindness, we teach them to listen actively and stand up for those who are oppressed.

We follow five educational modules when we work (with) the Facing History method:

- 1 The individual and society
- 2 We and They
- 3 History
- 4 Judgment, memory and legacy
- 5 Choosing to participate

The modules build on each other, but also intersect with each other.

When we decide to address controversial contemporary issues in the classroom, we can start by working with examples in history when people have been forced to make difficult decisions. Through the activities, we try to understand their motivations. In doing so, students learn to examine an issue from many sides and think critically about it. Examples from history show us the possibilities of finding ways of dialogue even between groups with different values and opposing positions.

This method helps to cope with tragic moments of history on a personal and social level, on the side of the victims, the guilty and the uninvolved. The step-by-step method creates a safe environment for students to explore their own values and attitudes, test their theories and verbalize unpopular opinions.

In the method, we start with activities that are familiar to the pupils or are relatively simple and easy to follow and in which the pupils feel safe. Gradually, we involve more complex activities, demanding attention, analysis, empathy, involving multiple perspectives and the need to make decisions. Over time, pupils are able to recognize the consequences of individual decisions and how past events affect the world in which they live. They can define the changes they would like to achieve in their neighborhood or community and take responsibility for their implementation and impact. The steps of the method are complementary, build on each other, and in many cases may even overlap. In particular, we use historical studies throughout the learning process.



Of course, the model can be used in a wide range of subjects, but it is most likely to be used in history, civics, language and classroom lessons.

In describing the individual modules of the Facing History method, we give as an example several activities that bring closer the situation of Jews before the war and after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and before they were deported to ghettos and concentration camps.

### ■ THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

In the first step, we look at the place of the individual in society, how the group and society can and does affect the individual.

In this exploration, we start with ourselves – who I am, what I identify with, what shapes my identity, how it is influenced by my environment – family, school/work, formal and informal groups I am a member of. Which of these matters to me, what I can change and what I cannot influence? We look at how an individual's identity changes over time, depending on life situations, the society that surrounds us, the people we meet.

We explore where our limits are, what is worth the effort and what we actually care about, what situations and events force us to reconsider our values and attitudes.

As an example, if someone is a fan of a sports club, he put an essential amount of his/her free time, spends money on it and also scarifies personal comfort. It might become the person's identity and it perhaps influences him/her in choosing friends. Someone else might not be able to relate to the same or the importance of it for this person.

### ■ WE AND THEY

In the next module we trace the principles and patterns by which society is divided into different groups, how they are formed, what their interrelationships are and how they influence each other. We look at the relationship between groups, including minorities or political groups, what these relationships are like in a democracy and how they differ from totalitarian relationships. We look at situations where society is divided into us and them. For example, within the classroom (in various situations), between supporters of different sports clubs, political views, or attitudes towards vaccination or war.

We can also think about the advantages and disadvantages of democracy. We explore totalitarianism and how (not only) totalitarian propaganda can divide people and societies, and why totalitarianism is so attractive to some.

We look for ways to communicate so that people and groups with fundamentally different views, values, attitudes are able to get along. We are looking for ways to work towards common goals, and we are also exploring the consequences of failing to do so

Related activity "[Golden Arrows](#)"

### ■ HISTORY

Through history we look at human action. In particular, we focus on how people made decisions in tense moments, what impact this had on their lives and the lives of others, and, where appropriate, how the decisions of individuals affected the course of history.

We use documents and personal stories to explore what individuals did at turning points in history. We use critical thinking and/or dramati-

zation methods, studying what the consequences of their decisions and actions have been in the past and, where appropriate, the implications for the present. In this way, the topics become more comprehensible to students and they are able to find parallels with the present in relevant cases, which they also do spontaneously in our experience.

Related activity "[Just a normal day](#)"

### ■ JUDGMENT, MEMORY AND LEGACY

Part of learning not about history but from history is the process of coming to terms with the past. Taking historical responsibility and bearing the consequences for our decisions, or even those of our ancestors, is a difficult and often painful process that can distort our self-image. It does not matter whether we were on the side of the victims, the guilty, those who chose to help the disadvantaged or those who did not actively participate. Part of it is punishing the guilty and accepting the punishment, but also forgiving others and ourselves.

Here we can look at the trials of the aggressors (the Nuremberg trials, the trials of concentration camp guards, the instigators of political trials in the 1950s, etc.). We can discuss whether the punishments were fair and proportionate - both from today's perspective and from the perspective of the legislation of the time.

We can talk about which topics we have closed to ourselves and which still arouse our emotions.

In our activities in this section, we invite a Holocaust survivor or someone from the second generation to talk to us. The meeting itself is preceded by preparation that leads the pupils to understand the events and the position of a

particular person in this particular historical framework.

Related activity "[Living Library](#)"

### ■ CHOOSING TO PARTICIPATE

The last module of the method is the decision to commit to a cause, person or group. We can look at how people got involved in the past. We lead students, but also adults, to think about how they can be active themselves. The ideal outcome is a project of their own. We recommend that pupils start by looking for something that is realistic and where they have a chance to see the outcome quickly. Engaged pupils and teachers often come up with long-term projects at the end of this learning cycle that they then try to implement.

This also brings us back to the beginning of the cycle. We can ask how the program has changed ourself. Are my priorities, views, attitudes still the same? Have I understood other people more – their feelings, attitudes, decisions? Can I accept them now? And if not – why not and what to do in this situation?

# JUST A NORMAL DAY

ANNE FRANK ZENTRUM (DE)

The method "Just a normal day" addresses the systematic exclusion of the Jewish population in Germany by the National Socialist Party during the Nazi time. It enables the students to see how the systematic exclusion would also have affected their own life, if they would have lived as Jewish Persons in that period. The method is a good tool to prevent the relativization or even the denial of the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews in the Nazi period. To address these issues is important because in Germany Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread. According to a representative survey conducted by the World Jewish Congress (WJC) in 2019, 28 percent of the so-called elite (university graduates with an annual income of at least 100,000 euros, according to the study) claim Jews have too much power in business. 26 percent attest Jews "too much power in world politics." Almost half of them (48 percent) claim that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Germany. The WJC had 1,300 people surveyed for this in summer 2019. Due to the resistance of the measurements against the Corona pandemic in Germany there is another rise of Anti-Semitic incidents. At demonstrations often the Corona measurements are compared to racist and Anti-Semitic laws against Jews or demonstrators compare themselves to victims of the Holocaust. The here described method can help the participants/students to get an insight into the systematic and excluding proceeding of the Nazis by using laws in order to exclude the Jewish population from German society and eventually persecute and murder them. Since the method succeeds to establish a relation to the daily life of the participants it is a strong tool to enhance the knowledge of the participants about this period of time, to raise awareness and sympathy for the people who experienced this exclusion and helps to work against polarized debates.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

### Addressed topics

Antisemitism, discrimination, group-based misanthropy, historical persecution, human rights, historical context, sensitization, National Socialism, everyday history

### Age range

11 onwards

### Duration

90-120 minutes

### Materials needed

Printout of the anti-Jewish laws, large white paper in portrait format, divided into three sections, labeled morning, noon, and night, thick pens in two colors, space for a circle

### Objective

This method shows the gradual exclusion of Jews from society regulated by laws and ordinances from 1933 until the deportations from Germany in 1941/1942. It illuminates the perspective of the persecuted and makes clear that the crimes were not clandestine, perhaps even illegal acts of a few, but part of state action, against which only isolated opposition arose from the non-Jewish population. It helps students to reflect on the discriminatory effect of anti-Jewish laws, to deal with a central element of the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi state, to become aware of how laws restrict the movement of individuals in public space and what would it have done to oneself being in this situation.

### Course of Action

Explain that the exclusion and persecution of the Jews in Germany took place over a period of several years and that during this time more than 2,000 laws and ordinances were passed.



# LIST OF ANTI-JEWISH LAWS

## SHORT SUMMARY

Explain further that the students will learn about some of the laws and examine the effects of these laws on a normal daily routine.

To begin with, you as the trainer ask the participants: What is the function of laws? Why do they exist? You can collect the answers on a large sheet of paper or write them on charts, which enables you to hang the collection up in the room so that it is clearly visible.

In a next step create together with the participants a normal daily routine on a large sheet of paper. The day begins with getting up and ends in the evening or at night with going to bed. The routines might consist of going to the movies, going to school, playing soccer in a soccer club, eating ice cream etc.

Optionally, the participants can also write down their own daily routine. After that consider together what activities would not have been possible in the 1930s for example surfing the Internet or exchanging cell phone messages. Put these activities in square brackets. If necessary, find alternatives that were possible at the time, and write them down. Then you will pass out the anti-Jewish laws. Each person receives a card with one of the laws. If necessary, distribute the laws so that they affect the young people's lives. The participants then sort themselves according to the chronological order of the laws by standing in a line or circle. The students read the laws aloud in order. Clarify questions of understanding immediately.

After each law, participants review their shared daily routine. If a law prohibits or makes impossible an activity from the daily routine, the student cross out that item in the daily routine.

After reading out a few laws, look with the participants at the functions of laws you collected

at the beginning of the exercise. Do these laws fulfill the functions that the participants generally attribute to laws? If not, cross out the corresponding term so that the function is no longer visible. Repeat this process after more laws have been read.

### Evaluation

Once all laws have been read aloud, participants look at their constrained daily routine. The evaluation discussion can move along the following questions:

- What is left of the daily routine?
- What would your day look like if these laws applied to you? Would you add new „routines“?
- What would take up more time?
- What would become more important in your day than it is now?
- Which of the laws or prohibitions is most memorable to you? Why?

For the final discussion with the participants, you can ask the following questions:

- Which of the functions of laws that were mentioned at the beginning are left now?
- As a conclusion, what were the goals and effects of the laws read aloud?

**March 22, 1933** only honorable people of German or kindred blood can become allotment gardeners.

**April 25, 1933** Jews are excluded from sports and gymnastics clubs.

**May 4, 1933** All Jewish workers and employees of public authorities are dismissed.

**August 22, 1933** Jews are banned from bathing at the Wannsee lido.

**July 10, 1935** Young Jews are forbidden to participate in walks with a group of more than 20 people.

**August 17, 1938** Jews must use the name „Israel,“ Jewish women the name „Sara“ as an additional first name.

**November 12, 1938** Jews are forbidden to attend cinemas, theaters, opera and concerts.

**November 15, 1938** Jewish children are no longer allowed to attend public schools.

**September 1, 1939** Jews are not allowed on the streets between 8 p.m. (9 p.m. in summer) and 6 a.m.

**September 23, 1939** Jews must turn in their radio sets.

# LIST OF ANTI-JEWISH LAWS

## SHORT SUMMARY

**July 4, 1940** The hour of 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. is set in Berlin for the purchase of food by and for Jews.

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**July 19, 1940** Jews are excluded as telephone subscribers.

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**August 2, 1941** Jews are not allowed to use general lending libraries.

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**September 1, 1941** All Jews older than 6 years must wear the yellow star with the inscription „Jew.“

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**September 18, 1941** Jews require police permit to leave their place of residence.

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**October 23, 1941** Jews are not allowed to emigrate.

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**February 14, 1942** Signs are to be posted in bakeries and pastry shops stating that cakes will not be sold to Jews and Poles.

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**February 17, 1942** Jews are no longer allowed to buy newspapers and magazines.

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**March 26, 1942** Apartments of Jewish families must be marked with the ' „Jewish star.“

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**April 24, 1942** Jews are no longer allowed to use public transportation.

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# LIST OF ANTI-JEWISH LAWS

## SHORT SUMMARY

**May 15, 1942** Jews are no longer allowed to keep pets.

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**June 11, 1942** Jews no longer receive cigarettes and cigars.

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**June 12, 1942** Jews must turn in their electrical and optical equipment, bicycles, typewriters and records.

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**June 20, 1942** Attendance at school is forbidden for Jews.

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**June 26, 1942** Usage of ticket machines is forbidden for Jews.

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**July 10, 1942** No fresh milk for Jews.

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**August 7, 1942** Poles and Jews are not heard in court as witnesses against Germans.

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**October 9, 1942** Jews are no longer allowed to buy books.

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**February 16, 1945** Files whose subject matter is anti-Jewish activities are to be destroyed.

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# LIVING LIBRARY

## TEREZÍN INITIATIVE INSTITUTE (CZ)

### Impact

From our experience with this method it works best, when students already know the group they are working with and the activity takes place in a safe space and in a wholehearted atmosphere, where the student are free and willing to share their daily routines with each other. It is helpful if some knowledge about the Nazi period is given beforehand. This can be done by working on a biography of a person that was persecuted in the Holocaust or by simply creating together a mind map about the subject to see what knowledge the students already bring with them on the subject. For the trainer it is important to have some ground knowledge about this period in Germany in order to be able to contextualize some questions of the participants.

The outcome of the method is mostly that the students are motivated to think about the situation Jews lived in this period. It raises empathy for the people who experienced these laws. By connecting these restrictions to their daily routine of the students, they develop a sense of knowledge how the mechanism of laws impacted the live of the people and how they might have felt in such a situation.

As an effect on polarized discussions it makes very clear how severe the freedom of action was reduced and the method does not leave space for arguments that want to show the »other side« or disbelief of facts.

Do you meet people who are distant from you in opinion, attitude, values? Do you talk to them about topics on which you disagree, or do you rather avoid them? Do you meet people from minority groups? Can you establish a relationship with them without fear or prejudice?

One way to safely share the unshareable in the classroom is to „open“ a Living Library, if only for a day. In this library, instead of books, there are people who are willing to share their lives, experiences, opinions and attitudes with others. A „Living Book“ can be a contemporary witness, a professional, an activist or someone who is partially or completely excluded from mainstream society because of their nationality, disability, sexual orientation or beliefs.

The Living Library concept was launched in Denmark in 2000 and has been gradually implemented by most member countries of the Council of Europe. In the Czech Republic, the concept was first introduced in 2007 by the Organization for the Promotion and Integration of Minorities (OPIM). Gradually, the model was adapted by other organizations; besides OPIM, the best-known Living Library in the Czech Republic is covered by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International and other organizations working with the Living Library concept for a long time can recommend a trained volunteer who has experience with this format. Or invite someone in your area who has experience with the topic you want to address.

### Methodology and preparation procedure:

When trying to understand a phenomenon, to learn about an event, to understand how events, circumstances or decisions affect the life of an individual and society as a whole, you can study a lot of literature and form an opinion based on theories or statistics. However, dry facts lack any engaging power for students. The story of a person they have met makes it easier for pupils to acquire knowledge or take a stand, to confront information from theory or the media with their own empirical experience.

You can also „visit“ the Living Library when you want to convey to your students multi-layered, theoretically difficult to grasp and ambiguous topics. Choose „books“ that bring different perspectives and experiences or even completely opposing views. Be sure to treat the situation in such a way that the students do not argue with the guests, or the guests do not argue with each other. The optimum number of „Living Books“ that a pupil will meet in one event is three.

As a Living Book, we invite people who are personally involved in the chosen topic: it can be a member of the chosen minority (national, religious, sexual or other), a Holocaust survivor or his descendants, a person who is intensively involved in the topic, for example a historian or an artist. The Living Book doesn't have to be an expert, what matters is his unique life experience.

If you open a Living Library in your school and invite a guest, whether an expert, a contemporary witness or an activist, it can greatly contribute to the success of the activity if the students, but the „readers“ should get prepared for the conversation in advance.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

### Age range

11 onwards

### Duration

90 minutes

### Materials needed

Printed worksheet with the medallion of the "living book", pens,

### Course of Action

#### ■ Choose a topic

Before you interview someone, it's a good idea to prepare yourself in theory. Students should know something about the topic, period or issue. This will help them ask follow-up questions and give them a better understanding of the context of the conversation.

Some possible topics:

- (daily) life of minorities
- situation of refugees (in your country, region...)
- LGBT+ issues
- modern history
- regional issues
- political, religious, social issues
- any topic that divides the class

#### ■ Select the Living Books

You can choose from an organization's „catalogue" (e.g. Amnesty International) or approach suitable guests yourself. Get a short biographical portrait from each Living Book. At the same time inform the guests of the rules of this talk format.

#### ■ What it takes to prepare a Living Library

Securing the space. Expect three or more talks to run in parallel. Choose the spaces for each talk in a way, that they do not disturb each other.

Preparation of guest biographies. The portrait should include basic information - how old the guest is, where he or she is from, if relevant, what his or her occupation or cultural background is or was, what topics or what periods of modern history his or her story relates to. The medallion should be no longer than half a page.

#### Example of a fictional portrait:

"Josef Novák was born in 1927 in Chrudim. His father ran a small drug store there. Josef studied at the business academy and then joined his father's shop. During World War II, they sheltered a Jewish family of three. Both families survived the war. In 1952, the family lost the store. In 1969 Josef emigrated and lived in Austria until 1991. Now he lives partly in Chrudim and in Graz, Austria."

Moderation. A moderator for each guest (see box) is important, especially on controversial topics where there is a risk of conflict.

#### Tips for the moderator

You may need to moderate the conversation. Use simple and clear questions. Do not insert answers into the questions, do not impose your opinions or expectations. If you ask the question "What was your childhood like?" you'll probably learn more than in response to "You probably had a difficult childhood, didn't you?"

You'll also need questions to clarify what part of the story the guest is in. For example, "Could you remember what year this happened?"

It is a good idea to have a few questions in your inventory, but use them carefully: for example, if you want to bring the Living Book back on topic,

if it strays too far, or if you're interested in something specific. It also happens that someone prefers to answer questions rather than choose the direction of the conversation.

Open-ended questions that ask for the live book's feelings, ratings, and opinions are also helpful. For example, "How did that make you feel?" Phrase questions that the guest might perceive as criticism carefully.

The question "Do you think today / in hindsight that you could have done something differently in this situation?" is better and less dangerous than "Why didn't you do something?"

Guide for the guests. His/her role is to provide comfort for the "Living Books" - welcome, seating, refreshments, tour guide, etc. This role can be taken on by the presenter or one of the pupils.

Exact schedule. It is important that everyone knows - students and guests alike - when and where to be.

#### ■ Time management

Preparation for the talk (45 min): can take place on another day before the planned talk. The preparation includes dividing the pupils into groups and familiarizing them with the rules of the talk.

Discussion (90 - 110 min): we expect everyone to visit three Living Books. They each have 20 - 30 minutes. It is important that the time is given in advance and that the students and guests know that they cannot exceed this time. We keep this time even if the guest speaks very interestingly and there are unanswered questions. All talks must end at the same time and it is possible to move on to the next "book". In total, the

library visit should not exceed 90 minutes. After this time, guests and students become tired and gradually lose attention. When planning a Living Library, be sure to include "book exchange" breaks in the total time.

Reflection (45 min): we can choose to reflect together with the guests, but in any case, we need to come back to the activity after the guests leave or the next day/teaching lesson.

#### ■ Preparing students to visit a "Living Library"

Announce to pupils that you have invited guests to the school to give them the opportunity to explore the events or phenomena you are dealing with in class from the perspective of someone who has experienced or is experiencing them. Say that these people are like books whose story has already been written, you cannot change it, but you can learn much more than what is obvious at first glance. And also, that you need to prepare for a Living Book interview.

Divide the pupils into suitable working groups according to their experience (pairs, triplets...). Each pupil will be given a short biography of all the guests and a worksheet, or they can create one themselves. Adjust the rows as necessary.

Invite students to complete the worksheet based on the provided biographies.

Read together the guest portrait - an annotation of the "Living Book". In the left column of the worksheet table, students write down as many events from the guest's life as possible. When was he an adult? When did important events in his life happen?

In the second column, they will write down events in history or society that may have affected the guest's life or views (outbreak of war,



revolution, flood, passage or repeal of relevant laws and ordinances, etc.) Allow them to research available resources. The events in the right-hand column should correspond with what they have read in the short-bio.

Invite students to prepare a set of questions (at least two) for the guest. Inspiration may come from the following headings:

- the guest's childhood (in relation to the events or phenomena involved in the meeting),
- daily life (work, family, leisure...),
- his/her perception and experience of certain events related to the chosen topic,
- his/her retrospective evaluation of certain events,
- the guest's motivation to deal with the topic.

Next, the students formulate an appropriate request to return to the topic if the guest strays too far from the topic or gets carried away and starts to moralize, criticize, etc.

Complete the worksheet for each guest separately.

Before the meeting, explain the rules of the meeting to the students:

- Do not interrupt a Living Book insensitively while narrating.
- Don't ask too many questions. Your intention is to let the guest talk or encourage them to talk.
- Listen carefully and maintain eye contact, nod occasionally. Be relaxed, take your time.
- Do not, under any circumstances, get into an argument! The aim of the conversation is not to argue with, lecture or persuade the living book.
- Respect the trust the person has shown by being open about their life. As soon as you sense that there might be a conflict, back off. A person cannot change the past or many things in their life that are determined by whe-

re, when and to whom they were born, their health, even the decisions they have made in the past.

- If the guest has a preconceived notion, you can ask why he or she thinks that, but don't try to disprove it. You can't change a book you've written.

#### ■ Meeting with "Living Books".

The moderator or a designated student will welcome the guests and seat them in the area where the discussion will take place. He/she will ensure that the guests are comfortable in the form of a drink and, if necessary, a small snack.

He introduces the guest and asks for a short introduction. Keep track of time. Moments before the end, warns of the end of the time limit.

Decide in advance whether guests or groups are crossing and ensure synchronized transitions.

Everything that Living Books share with us, whether they are memoirs, people who are part of a minority or experts, is a mixture of facts and opinions. Both are important. The way people understand events, the way they remember them, the way they experience them, is itself very important. When we interview a living book, it's important to assure the guest that it's their view of events, their individual experience, that we're interested in hearing their story.

When the talk is over, say thank you and assure the guest that it was an interesting encounter. Perhaps the guest will want to learn something about you. It's polite to reply; he has told you a lot about himself, too. If the meeting with the guest is to produce an output (a recording, a report, an interview for the school magazine, etc.), tell them how and what you will use the output for. Assure them that you will provide your work if they are interested.

After the library has closed (guests have left), return to what you have heard with the pupils with at least a short reflection. Give pupils space to express their feelings and thoughts in a way that is safe for them. You may choose some form of reflection in a circle or they may use a form of free writing or short essay to organize their thoughts. As a form of follow-up, you can compare the information from the Living Book with professional literature, archives, etc.

#### Remarks

- The individual steps of the activity can be shortened or reduced, but it is good to have them all as part of the preparation. You can create context with a short explanation. However, familiarizing yourself with the portrait and preparing questions are important because some people start with a short introduction and then prefer to answer the learners' questions.

- Others, on the other hand, talk at length. It is then a good idea to stop the guest before the end of the allotted time and give the students time to ask the guest questions, either from the prepared questions or ones that respond to the guest's talk.

- Sometimes it happens that a guest is historically or factually inaccurate. Add the correct information to the students in the next class, never correct the guest. If necessary, formulate the different information into a question.

- Especially in the case of complex, polarizing topics, it is advisable to have a moderator with each Living Book who can ensure neutrality and avoid potential conflict.

- We can use similar preparation when we are preparing a talk with a single guest. In the same way, we get acquainted with the guest's medalli-

on, prepare questions, and familiarize the students with the rules of the interview. The short preparation and the actual discussion with the guest can then be done in 90 minutes.

#### Impact

We use the Living Library as an important source of information in longer educational projects. Especially with more complex, polarized topics, the encounter with the Living Books becomes not only a way to become aware, but also a moment when some are able to accept otherness, to ask for causes and solutions. Sometimes these encounters can even lead to new perspectives on other people and on one's own life situation.

*"I remember a classroom with many pupils with educational and upbringing problems and several pupils with openly right-wing extremist attitudes. The second half of the six-part program included a Living Library where they met a Holocaust survivor, a Roma activist and an engaged student working with disadvantaged youth. One of the students wrote to us after the last meeting to say that it was thanks to the Living Library that he realized that he would not change what had happened in the past or the grades he already had on his report card. But he can't blame others. He has to work to make something of his life himself. He can graduate from high school and maybe even go to college."*

Especially among people from marginalized groups, the phrase "If he did it, I can do it" appears in the feedback. We include the Living Library in seminars for students and in seminars for teachers. As they themselves say, "Such direct testimony leaves much more than any theory."

# WORKSHEET

## EXAMPLE

### Portrait of Mr Josef Novák

Josef Novák was born in 1927 in Chrudim. His father ran a small drug store there. Josef studied at the business academy and then joined his father's shop. During the Second World War they sheltered a Jewish family of three. Both families survived the war. In 1952, the family lost the store. In 1969 Josef emigrated and lived in Austria until 1991. Now he lives partly in Chrudim and in Graz, Austria.

	Events from Josef Novák's life	Events of greater history
1930 – 1939		
1940 – 1949		
1950 – 1959		
1960 – 1969		
1970 – 1989		
After 1990		

I would like to ask Mr Josef Novák

1).....

2).....

## WHEN THERE IS TENSION IN THE CLASSROOM - DEEP DEMOCRACY

ANNE FRANK HOUSE (NL), INSTITUTE OF TEREZÍN INITIATIVE (CZ)

What can we do when there is disharmony in the group? When students stand at opposite poles and can't find a common language? Or when we want to discuss an issue that divides society? Do we have a tool to talk about these things safely, so that there is room even for unpopular opinions? Can a teacher work with complex questions without first becoming an expert on them?

When Apartheid ceased to be state policy in South Africa in 1994, society could not have been more polarized. It was necessary to find ways to work towards a common goal in a divided society, how to define this goal at all, and how to talk about painful topics that are still alive. One of the methods was created and verified by Myrna Lewis and her husband. She called it Deep Democracy. Because a vote, that decides in the traditional conception of democracy, allows the majority to override the minority. But this minority will not disappear. And if minorities are not given a voice, their problems, fears and hopes will remain a hidden force that has the potential to challenge, destabilize or boycott the decisions of the majority. This happens in any community – class, school, family or the country. Myrna says about it "the minority will consolidate and gain strength and try to undermine the majority position, it will go underground. Thus the value of listening and including the agenda of the minority is to contribute to wider ownership of the outcome and more sustainable decision-making."

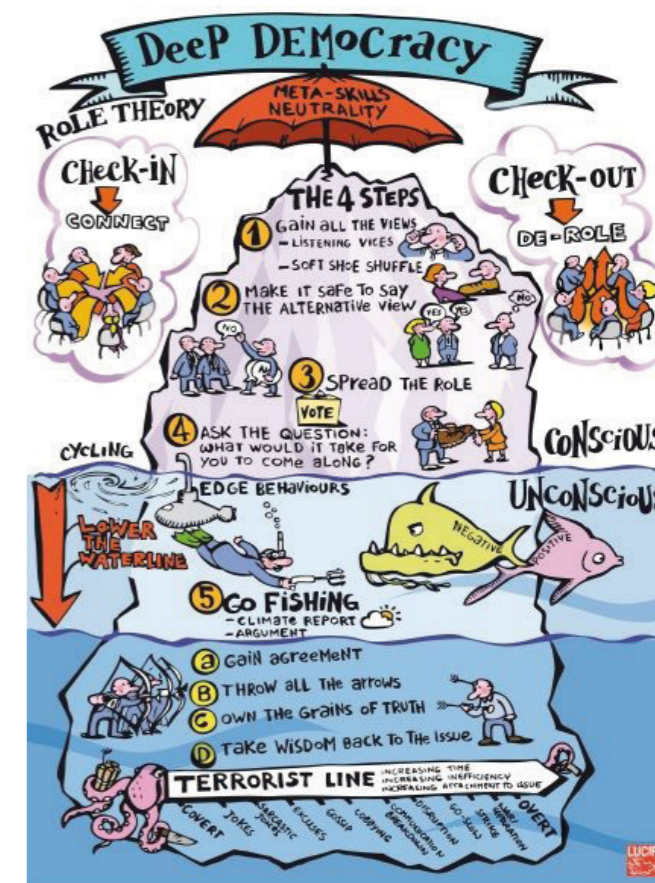
### How does it work?

The Deep Democracy method focuses on the group dynamics. If there is a conflict within the group, it can be a source of growth for the group and its individual members. On the other hand, an unresolved conflict that remains under the surface is capable to question all the decisions that have been made. Openly expressed opinions and feelings in a group are influenced

by unconscious or at least uncommunicated hopes, fears and preferences.

Each community/group has its own unique dynamic and atmosphere. What is accepted or even preferred in one group may be something that is undesirable in another group. „How groups make decisions and how they conduct discussions shapes the culture they have, and if people feel they are not being heard or it is not safe for them to speak, they refuse to make decisions or not participate in activities.“ The main purpose of Deep Democracy tools is the ability to safely say everything that needs to be said. It may be uncomfortable, but it's harder to deal with the consequences of not talking about it.

The group and the processes that take place in it can be represented as an iceberg.



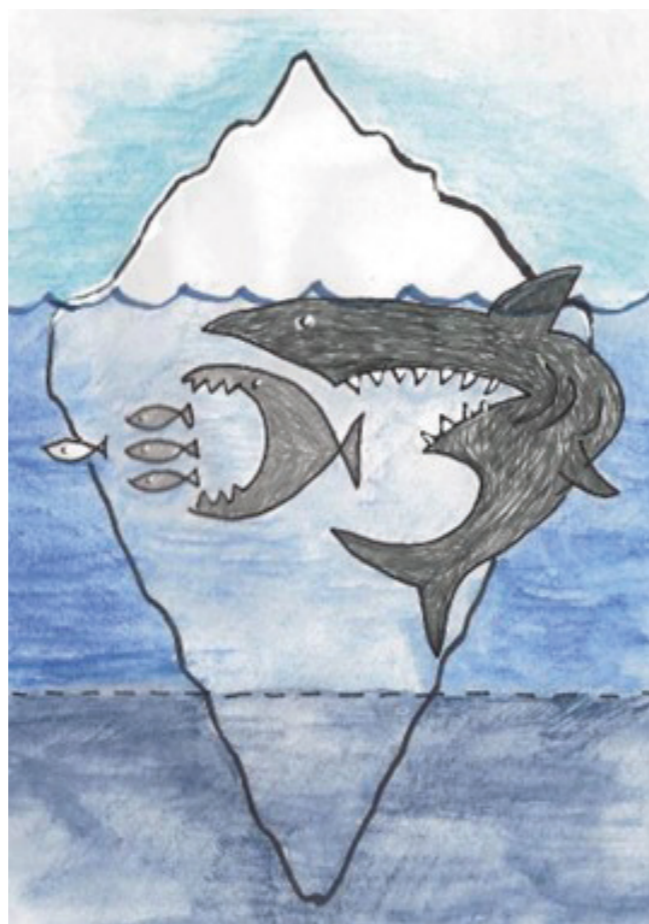


■ What is above the surface is conscious, known to each member of the group. It includes rational and cognitive aspects (knowledge, declared values, written/agreed rules and procedures, ...)

But under the surface there is even more.

■ In the group's subconscious, there are unspoken or unconscious aspects that influence group dynamics. At Deep Democracy we refer to these as the fish that swim below the surface – unspoken thoughts, irritations, personal interests and issues. If we do not notice them, they will gradually grow until the small fish turn into huge dangerous shark.

■ Deep down, in the dark waters below the line of resistance, lies the unconscious wisdom of the group, the potential of what needs to be named. The emotions that are hidden beneath this surface are often not even able to be named by those who bring them. When we encounter a line of resistance during activities, we can tell by the group's avoidance of the topic—jokes, sarcasm, excuses, inappropriate laughter, gossip, inattention, boycott of activities, or open conflict. To reveal the group's potential and make sustainable decisions that are respected by all group members, we must go below the surface. We need to find small (and big) fishes, give them a safe space to express themselves and incorporate their needs into decision-making.



What can we do to catch this fishes?

- 1 Collect all views in the group.**
- 2 Look for alternative view(s)**
- 3 Spread alternative view(s).**
- 4 Add the wisdom of the alternative / minority view to the decision.**

One of the methods we can use to catch the fish are "Golden Arrows". This method can be used to find the right decisions, but also to analyze complex problems with the potential for conflict.

## GOLDEN ARROWS

### ANNE FRANK HOUSE (NL)

The exercise "golden arrows" is used when there is a debate about a topic where a normal conversation is not enough and emotions are running high.

Although harsh opinions and feelings can be difficult to hear, the structure from the exercise will give the ability to really hear the other voices and actually listen to each other. Surprisingly most times it actually helps to say what everybody has been feeling underneath because it gives a feeling of relief and a sense of liberation.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

##### Addressed topics

You can pick any topic where there is a debate about, to practice with this exercise we advise you to start with a simple topic like for instance: if it is nice weather, we should have class outside. Just to get to know the exercise. Always make it a statement so you can look at both sides of the argument.

When students are familiar with the activity you can do this with any polarizing topic.

##### Age range

11 onwards

##### Duration

depending on how many arguments there are but 60 minutes max.

##### Materials needed

chairs, statements on polarizing topics. You can do this in any room possible, even outside.

##### ■ Safety principals:

Start with deciding the safety principals. Do we really want to have this conversation? If you do not have consent of everybody than maybe it is better to postpone the conversation. Decide what everybody needs to feel safe and comfortable to be able to say everything that they want. Everything is possible, as long as everybody agrees. For instance, consider following rules: no shouting, no walking away, we do not use curse words, if you don't want you don't have to say anything, etc.

##### ■ Say everything:

Explain the exercise: We are going to talk about a topic and are saying everything we are thinking and feeling about this topic. We will speak on turns, so let everybody speak their minds. One is talking and telling everything he or she is thinking of or how he or she feels. Use your own arguments or any argument you can imagine that could be said in this position. The others are listening, not responding (also not in body language) and not asking questions. When one is done, the other starts. Keep repeating this until everything has been said.

You as a teacher can notice this when people are repeating the same arguments or when the tension is getting less. They do not have to be polite in their answers, they can be sharp and very clear.

As a teacher do not give your own opinion, attack or defend any argument during this exercise. However, if you feel that you can help the conversation by stating another argument you can do that.

## ■ steps

### 1) Examining the statement

As a teacher you speak out loud the statement they are going to talk about. (you can decide with the group which topic it will be, but you can also come up with a statement.)

- State what the sides are (in the example: if the weather is nice, we should have class outside – you will look at the sides: why should you have class outside and why should you not have class outside).
- Pick two opposite walls which represent the two different sides of the topic
- Let all the students stand in front of one wall
- Let them throw all their imaginary “arrows” arguments about that side of the topic – towards you
- Make sure they know that it does not have to be their own argument, if they find it hard to come up with a statement.
- Speak out loud all views on one side, then swap to the other side
- Exhaust all views, throw all the arrows
- Keep them brief and to the point
- Do not respond on any view that is being said
- Go to each side at least two times, you can also do more if there are more arguments.
- If you feel that all views are spoken out, you stop the exercise
- Go sit in a circle of chairs (still say nothing)

### 2) Reflection

After you sit in a circle of chairs it is really important to reflect on what has been said. You do this with the question:

Which statement moved you or deeply touched you?

Some things that others have said moved you. You feel that they are true, you feel a physical reaction or something that gives you a new insight.

Let the students take a moment to think about a statement that moved them. Then share with each other which statement moved them and why. It might be not exactly the statement that has been said but comparable. Make sure that everybody starts from their own view, so starting the sentence with: “I ...”. Everybody should have at least one statement that moved them or gave them a new insight. This part is not up for discussion so make sure that students listen to each other and not respond. You go around the circle where everybody gives their answers to this question and the other students listen. You as a teacher are validating the student that is speaking by nodding and thanking them for their answer.

### 3) Resolve

Back to the original question. If we know all this about ourselves and each other what do we decide? How do we look at the original question or statement with the information we gathered from the arrows and from the reflection?

This part could be about new safety rules in class. For instance, you decide that because harsh statements or certain words or topics really hurt each other as a class you will not use them anymore. It is also enough if the students are more

aware of people having different views and that it could enrich their class and enrich themselves. It is also fine if they still think exactly the same about the topic as before, because tension will be less if they have everything out in the open and they have heard the different views.

### Best practices / Remarks from practice

From our experience with this method it works best, when students already know the group they are working with and the activity takes place in a safe space and in a wholehearted atmosphere, where the student are free and willing to share their views and feelings with each other. The outcome of the method is mostly that the students are motivated to think about the different views of the polarizing topics and to really listen to each other. It raises empathy for each other or for the opposite groups, most times the minority group. By allowing students openly express their thoughts and feelings tension is flowing away because they feel that they can say everything that needs to be said. Students learn more about other views on one topic and also learn that statements can move them and reflect on why this moves them.

This method gives space for other views and therefore space to the minority voice that often is not heard.

### Important recommendation for the facilitator

- Always keep the safety of the students in mind.
- It is important to keep the role as facilitator and guider, not so much joining in on the exercise.

## THE METHOD OF DEEP DEMOCRACY ADDRESSES

### Summary

- the ability to effectively gain all the views within a group and why this is invaluable
- the ability to recognize the minority voice, create and hold the space for its expression, and add its value into majority decision making
- knowing how, when and why decision-making processes build resistance
- understanding group dynamics
- the ability to facilitate processes that support groups to engage with tension and experience the transformative potential of conflict
- insights into how to apply and use the theory and tools in your facilitation and consulting work as well as in your personal life
- it enables students to listen to the minority voice and open up to other views
- it is a strong tool for creating the best group dynamics so that nobody ever feels excluded from the group
- this method helps to create a dialogue between two opposite sides of the conversation, thereby it works to fight polarization.

Additional information on Deep Democracy Website of Lewis Deep Democracy and info on certified trainers/bureaus throughout the world: [www.lewisdeepdemocracy.com](http://www.lewisdeepdemocracy.com)

## HOW CAN AN ONLINE TOOL CONTRIBUTE TO DEPOLARIZATION? STORIES THAT MOVE. TOOLBOX AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

MILAN ŠIMEČKA FOUNDATION (SK)

*Should schools deal with sensitive issues? Are teachers willing and equipped to deal with topics like identity, diversity, and discrimination? Do they have ready-to-use tools which are also attractive and informative for their students?*

These have been some of the guiding questions of the international project team throughout the development of the unique online learning tool Stories that Move – Toolbox against discrimination. Quite soon we realized we did not want to provide definite answers or to convey theories. We rather want to create space for questions, raise curiosity, steer discussion, and encourage active learning and sharing.

Polarization was not a concept that the developing team explicitly worked with, but if you were to ask the international group of pedagogues that worked on Stories that Move: Should social polarization be addressed when it is manifested in the classroom? the answer would surely be positive.

Experiences with exclusion, inequality, injustice, and hate are all factors that contribute to a polarized atmosphere, in society as a whole and in classrooms too. Teachers confirm that addressing these topics can have a depolarizing effect.

Understanding the concepts of stereotypes and prejudice and all the “-isms” that together contribute to the multifaceted term discrimination does not come through memorizing definitions. It comes through identifying and reflecting their occurrences and consequences in real life situations. Therefore, to grasp them fully some kind of “bridge” is needed. In Stories that Move we chose storytelling to make learning about sensitive issues more accessible, comprehensible, and, indeed, more enjoyable.

As a result, on the website you can meet Robin from the Netherlands who reflects on her Jewish identity or Alyona from Ukraine talking about the importance of her Roma ancestry for who she is, what she feels and does. You can learn about the heart-breaking love story of Márk, a Roma from Hungary, and his non-Roma girlfriend or explore the example of racism in the classroom from the story of Tyrell. You can also see how Nick took an active stance on stereotyping and discrimination of LGBTQI+ people or how Landry copes with the questions like “where are you from?” and “how come you speak such good Slovak?” since he happens to be Black. You can watch Medine from Germany, herself of migrant background, talking about her own prejudices and discuss how easy it is to make assumptions about other people based solely on their appearance. Also included the tough stories of Anna from Denmark who witnessed murder out of hate, Wael from Syria talking about the hardships of being a refugee or Matej from Slovakia overcoming physical and social barriers due to his disability.

In short video clips these and many more stories of young people present their lived experience. They can be easily accessed and integrated into any classroom or educational activity. They can, at the same time, contribute to the aims of a concrete subject area like learning new vocabulary and concepts in the national or a foreign language, civic competencies, historical learning. Over the past years the team of developers has been surprised by the many ways in which the online tool has been used by educators to engage their students in meaningful exchanges on diversity and discrimination. The application is truly limitless. Besides the primary target group of 14- to 17-year-olds the stories and activities are also attractive for younger and older students, including trainee teachers and students in a wide variety of social studies.



The tool promotes blended learning, combining online and offline work in a flow that is exciting and supports the learning process. Students working on a tablet or laptop, start with an individual reflection on a topic and then work alternately in pairs and small groups, leading up to a classroom exchange on the outcomes of the exercises. The pedagogical concept behind the tool empowers learners to become “owners” of their learning process. It benefits from the methodology developed within the Project Zero at Harvard University which is based on “visible thinking” routines. The simple routine, “I used to know, now I know” starts with a reflection on what they already know about the topic at the start of a lesson and what they have learned at the end. This is just one example of how the learning process can be reflected and “routinized”. There are more routines using words and images, motivating to ask questions and reflect different points of view. In this way the use of the tool contributes to developing transversal skills such as critical thinking, appreciative inquiry, and argumentation.

In short, Stories that Move is an interactive online learning tool enabling learners and teachers to deal with sensitive topics such as identity, diversity, and discrimination through authentic stories of young people from various backgrounds. Educators have many options how to make use of it. They can simply play a pre-selected video that fits their lesson plan and ask follow-up questions. They can use the demo version to get to know the five learning paths (modules) in detail. On their personal ‘educator dashboard’ they can create virtual classes and choose one or more of the ready-to-use tracks to facilitate sessions for their students in a structured way, step-by-step.

The tool aims to contribute to authentic engagement and meaningful sessions by showing interesting stories relevant to the lives of young people and by opening “big questions”. At the same time, it is relevant to many parts of the curriculum. Perhaps most importantly, the tool triggers exchanges of views on a certain topic and motivates students to listen to different opinions and reflect on the diverse experiences of real people.

Besides the stories of young people and learning activities included in the learning paths educators can make use of the teachers’ guides, worksheets, and the glossary. They can also listen to reflections and advice from experts on various topics, including how to create safe space for sharing. By combining their own skills, expertise and the developed materials educators can run their classes smoothly, even if dealing with controversial issues, promote engagement, active learning, and sharing.

# Stories that Move

Toolbox against discrimination

## WHAT DO STORIES THAT MOVE OFFER

Five learning paths (a total of thirteen ready to use lessons):

- Seeing & being (on identity, diversity, prejudice);
- Facing discrimination (on mechanisms and everyday experiences of discrimination);
- Life stories (ten historical biographies representing diversity);
- Mastering the media (on our media bubbles, how stereotypes are part of advertising and propaganda);
- Taking action (reflecting on human rights and social engagement).

Other components of the tool:

- Demo class including all the learning paths;
- Guides for educators;
- Worksheets (interactive, ready-to-use PDFs);
- Expert voices on antisemitism, antigypsism, racism, discrimination against Muslims and LGBTQI+ people;
- Pedagogical approaches (visible thinking, creating safe space, blended learning);
- Glossary.

## EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS WHO USE STORIES THAT MOVE

### Karina from the Netherlands

Karina teaches at the Gerrit van der Veen College in Amsterdam. She uses Stories that Move for her 3rd grade students within Religious studies already for five years to discuss the topics discrimination and exclusion.

A strong focus point of the school is the celebration of purple Friday, a day to celebrate the rights of the LGBTQI+ community as there is a large population of non-binary and transgender students at her school and in her class.

What Karina finds great about the toolbox is that by using the stories you can attract attention of students by talking about their experiences about discrimination and diversity. The story about racism in the class by Tyrell, testimonies about antisemitism by Anna or LGBTQI+ stories work really well. Interestingly, stories about discrimination against Roma do not provoke similar reactions in her classes as students do not know anything about the Roma people.

What works well when using Stories that Move is when students in small groups can choose a story they like and then work on their presentation for the whole class. *"You can notice they like this assignment and take it seriously because they are focused, silent, they have their heads down and work with concentration."* According to Karina, it is because the stories relate to the worlds and experiences of students.

The historical stories (especially of Simone Veil) are truly moving for the students. They find these people from the past courageous and adventurous. Besides, historical biographies open the door to learning about different times when

discrimination happened and can connect to similar instances of discrimination happening nowadays.

What Karina would like to have more in the tool are stories of refugees as these can be powerful to understand different backgrounds, religions and regional contexts. Nowadays, this is unfortunately again a topic to deal with intensively.

Finally, for Karina *"Stories that Move was a savior during corona times!"* Indeed, when the decision of the international team to create an online learning tool back in 2013 was taken, nobody expected some day it can be the only way to educate.

### Martin from Germany in South Africa

Martin teaches at the German International School Cape Town in South Africa. He is a language teacher of German- and English-speaking classes and uses Stories that Move regularly. Together with the Anne Frank Zentrum in Berlin he organized a training to promote the learning tool among his colleagues. The school where Martin teaches is very diverse. There are teenagers with various backgrounds.

Martin described the opportunities of Stories that Move concerning depolarization: *"One of my classes has issues with discrimination, bullying and racism. Especially after we did the first track of the learning path 2 on discrimination, 'The machinery of discrimination', the learners used that to discuss specific South African issues, specific Cape Town issues, specific issues they have at our school amongst their peers and amongst other learners. South Africa is still very divided, unfortunately racism and discrimination are still part of daily life in this country. The same goes unfortunately for gender-based violence."*

Martin used the material in two of his 8th grade classes. He skipped the learning path 1 'Seeing & being' on identity and went on directly to the difficult issue of discrimination. *"This worked very well. I gained the experience that you don't have to use the tool from the beginning, but you can just pick and choose modules or tracks."*

Why the activities worked well? According to Martin because especially in his classrooms there are a lot of issues connected to the content of the tools. *"It really started a discussion within the class."*

However, Martin also mentions challenges when talking about discrimination as a teacher: *"As a teacher you need to be prepared to lead the discussion. But then at the same time you make yourself vulnerable because you need to listen, and you need to be part of the group and not above them."*

Stimulation of discussion, argumentation and empathy is an important feature of Stories that Move. The tool does not provide definite answers but does offer stories and activities to deepen knowledge through peer interaction, both online and in the classroom.

Martin felt well prepared before talking about these difficult topics: *"I didn't do too much preparatory work. I downloaded the manuals. I looked at them and I realized that I don't really have to do a lot in preparation. I just participated as a learner. I had my teachers account open and I put my screen on the big board. We watched the videos there. I participated as a learner and made myself part of the group. This was received positively by my students."*

Martin mentions different opportunities to integrate Stories that Move to different parts of

the curriculum: *"As a history teacher you can easily integrate the learning tool when you talk about Apartheid, for example. You can ask what effects it still has in this country today. Is there still racism and discrimination?"* And then students can see that South Africa is not the only country that has problems with discrimination. It is an issue worldwide and definitely not a new phenomenon. It can be easily integrated in history and social studies classes.

Martin also describes how some teachers may be hesitant to use the tool since they do not have time "to waste any lessons". According to him you can fulfill the curriculum through the topics covered by Stories that Move. Using the stories by more teachers for different subjects and classes is also possible. *"You just have to sit together and create a team."*

All in all, Martin experienced that Stories that Move helped his students to depolarize their conversations about racism and other forms of discrimination. *"I even had a learner who said, 'I didn't realize if I make these jokes and say these things that it has this impact', which was quite amazing. It is a mind switcher. Something has changed just by doing that."*

### Peter from Austria

Peter teaches at the Berufsschule für Gastgewerbe, a vocational school for chefs and waiters/waitresses in Vienna. His students are mostly between 15 and 20 years old, some are older. He works with very heterogenous groups, some of them already have a high-school diploma, some did not finish compulsory education successfully. Some of them speak three or more languages, others have started learning German just recently. Some are really interested in education, others dropped out of school because they had had enough and just want to work.

The legal framework for Berufsschule provides for 1260 school lessons within three years (6 semesters, 5 weeks per semester). More than half of the lessons are job related, 80 are dedicated to political education (Politische Bildung).

Peter used Stories that Move with a class of 20 students, mostly with lower educational achievement, around 19 years old. They were partly in a special educational program financed by the employment agency for young people that had dropped out of school and could not find a regular apprenticeship. The students had different national, religious, and cultural backgrounds. In general, they were interested in political education but lacked basic knowledge.

Peter decided to let his students work on the first module "Seeing & being" and gave them 50 minutes to finish the first part individually. About half of the students progressed without any difficulties, some had technical or understanding problems. With a little help everybody managed to do the assignments. The group work was challenging due to different progress of students. Also, everybody was immersed in his/her own work and felt a bit confused when asked to work with a classmate.

After this session Peter had another 50 minutes of "Politische Bildung" and decided to talk about the lessons from Stories that Move. He asked the students to print out their answers and bring them to the next session. Whereas the first part of letting the students work with the tool on their own was ambivalent to him, the second part went very well. Especially the task "Mysterious picture", where the students zoom out of a small detail to a complete picture of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. triggered a lot of discussion.

When students were working on the tasks on their own, they provided their experiences and answers. That was, perhaps, the reasons why everybody contributed to the discussion, including students who usually do not say much. Moreover, they asked more questions, for example about the two people on the picture. Other students answered these questions, leading to a high-quality learning process.

Peter concludes that his experience with Stories that Move was valuable and he will use it again. He would not let his students use the tool on their own. *"The discussion after the individual work was really important. I think the best way is to use a small part of the tool and discuss the learnings and experiences."*

According to Peter it is also crucial to think about the technical requirements. In his school nearly nobody owns a laptop or a tablet therefore students needed to go to the computer room. For initiating the discussion among students, a projector was used within the class.

#### **Barbara from Slovakia**

Barbara led the team of the INTERMIN project which tested the use of stories to reduce prejudice. According to her, the assumption that story-telling can have this effect inspired numerous interventions run by NGOs all around the world. It has also been tested and confirmed in several social psychology studies. It is not so frequent, at least not in Slovakia, that NGOs and academic institutions join forces.

In 2015-2019 a research project supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency was executed in Slovakia. The aim was to develop and experimentally test educational interventions to reduce prejudice against Roma and other stigmatized minorities. The team based

their interventions on four stories from Stories that Move and tested their effectiveness in elementary schools from different Slovak regions. They combined stories of young Roma with the stories about young people from other minorities. In this way they wanted to achieve a better sensitization to diversity.

Altogether, 482 students from seven Slovak primary schools took part in the research. 7th and 8th grade classes were randomly assigned to an experimental or a control group (14 classes each in total). Students from the classes in experimental group participated in an intervention program, which consisted of three 45-minute group activities carried out once a week. The activities focused on solving the problem of the relationship between a Roma boy and his non-Roma girlfriend, completing unfinished stories of young people of different origins, and analyzing a short video presenting the life experiences of a young Roma girl.

Students in both groups completed a pre-test questionnaire 5-10 days before the start of the intervention program, and a post-test questionnaire 5-10 days after the program completion. The questionnaires surveyed attitudes towards the Roma and other outgroups (refugees, Muslims, people of color, Hungarians, people with disabilities), as well as the level of trust, social distance, perceived anxiety and behavioral intentions (e.g. whether the students would engage in conversation with a new classmate). The team also asked about the quantity and quality of direct contact and about the school climate when it comes to promoting tolerant intergroup relations.

As proved by the post-test analysis, working with peer stories from Stories that Move managed to reduce social distance, increase trust and stren-

gthen positive behavioural intentions towards Roma. Interventions also improved attitudes towards people of colour and people with disabilities. However, secondary transfer of positive attitudes to other outgroups that were not mentioned in the stories was not observed. Anxiety of some students was also not overcome.

The more positive direct contact students had, for instance with Roma peers, the more positive their attitudes were towards them, the lower the social distance they had and the higher level of trust they felt after the intervention. Also, those students that perceived their school climate as promoting tolerance and respect reported lower anxiety after the intervention program completion.

As a result of the project, a toolkit (in Slovak language) for teachers and educators was developed in collaboration with the Milan Šimečka Foundation.

#### **Conclusion**

Contributing to depolarisation was not an explicit aim of Stories that Move. The developing team had the following aims:

- to 'move' young people to feel empathy for their peers who suffer from discrimination;
- to 'move' learners, bringing them new perspectives and a deeper understanding of the effects of discrimination;
- to motivate learners to take action within their own sphere of influence, to 'move' and contribute to change.

Many teachers have shared with us how enabling exchanges on sensitive topics based on stories of individuals lessened tensions in their classrooms and brought new, surprising perspectives. A good way to respond to conflicts in polarized societies therefore seems to be to create a space



for listening, sharing, and interaction of diverse voices.

Stories that Move offers a safe learning environment that sensitizes and empowers learners in exploration of themselves, others and the issues that need to be addressed in our societies. Raising awareness on identity, diversity and discrimination deepens respect and trust. Working with Stories that Move shows that these topics can and should be addressed in the classrooms and have deep impact.

### Updates

The pedagogical team and teachers using the online tool share their experiences and new developments on social media (Facebook and Instagram) and in newsletters:

- Join us on social media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)
- Subscribe to the newsletter: <https://www.storiesthatmove.org/en/updates/newsletter/>
- Register by making a free account: <https://olt.storiesthatmove.org/en/dashboard/>

## PANEL DISCUSSION

Finding Ways of Constructive Dialogue in Polarized Societies.



The panel discussion was held during the conference „Finding Ways of Constructive Dialogue in Polarising Societies“ on 6th June 2022 in Prague.

For the purpose of better reading and understanding editorial changes were made.

### PANELLIST PROFILES

**Zuzana Schreibrová** is the executive director of The Multicultural Center Prague – NGO engaged in the pursuit of educational and research activities in the fields of international migration, social inclusion of Roma, and global development. She received her bachelor degree in Liberal Arts from the Faculty of Humanities, where she focused her research on the contemporary Prague Jewish community. She continued with an M.A. degree in General Anthropology, where she specialized in historical anthropology, narrative analysis and memory studies.

**Sasha Lenhartz** is chief correspondent for Welt and Welt am Sonntag newspapers. Previously he was head of the foreign desk and spent six years as correspondent in France. He was editor on the FAZ and worked at SZ-Magazin. Lenhartz, who was born in 1969 in Remscheid, studied comparative literature in Paris, Berlin, Santa Barbara and New York and obtained his doctorate from Columbia University. In his book *Unter Galliern* he recounts his experiences in Paris as a newspaper correspondent and in *Global Players* tackles our society's obsession with youth, with humour and wit.

**Flavio Bollag** joined the Outward Bound Center for Peacebuilding as the Advancement Director in May 2015 and he has served as Executive Director since 2019. His roles at OBCP have included program leadership, development and oversight, fundraising and communications, and facilitation. All of which have given him the challenging and rewarding role of capturing and telling incredible stories of extraordinary people in our programs. Together with Ana Patel, he is the co-editor of *Experiential Peacebuilding*, and he has helped to develop and share experien-

tial activities on the topics of Positive Peace with numerous partner organizations including Rotary International.

**Emil Voráč** is the director of Khamoro o.p.s. This organization from Chodov in western Bohemia has been operating for 26 years. During that time, they came to the subconscious of the entire Czech Republic and even beyond the borders. Emil Voráč worked as a lecturer, he was a member of the Roma Government Council for two terms, three for the Regional Committee for Community and Other Bodies. He received several awards, including the „Laskavec roku“ [Kind Person of the Year] award in 2018 for his contribution to social policy from the Karel Janeček Foundation. He cooperates with many organizations in the Czech Republic and, among others, with the Terezín Initiative Institute, People in Need, Romodrom, Kotec, Světlo Kadaň, Romanonet and many others. He ran for the Greens political party several times, from municipal to European Parliament elections.

**Tomáš Kraus** is director of the Terezín Initiative Institute and moderator of the panel discussion.

## TRANSCRIPTION OF PANEL DISCUSSION

### SPEECHES

#### Zuzana Schreiberová

Good afternoon. My name is Zuzka Schreiberová, I am the director of the Multicultural Centre Prague. Since 2015, I have been involved in initiatives that have helped refugees who found themselves at Prague's Central Station.

Indeed, at the Central Station, we provided basic assistance to those arriving, this was in connection with the Syrian war and the war in Afghanistan. Later on, through this activist background, when I was working with the Hlavák\* initiative, we created an organization with which we helped more than nine hundred people. Of course, this organisation has not remained inactive even now in the context of the war in Ukraine.

\*Hlavák: The name refers to the main train station in Prague, where most refugees arrive

From this activist background I came to the Multicultural Centre Prague. The Multicultural Centre Prague has one goal, and that is to communicate the topics of migration and multiculturalism to Czech society. And if you perceived the social mood that was in 2015, 2016, for example, also in connection with the terrorist attacks\*, it was really not an easy topic and it was definitely a polarizing topic.

\*terrorist attacks: 7 January 2015, Paris, attack on the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo over cartoons of Mohammed.

14 and 15 February 2015 Copenhagen, Denmark. Krudttønden Cultural Centre, Great Synagogue. November 13, 2015, Paris, France. Coordinated attack at six locations, including a football stadium and the Bataclan concert hall at a concert by the Eagles of Death Metal, attended by about 1 500 spectators. 130 victims and more than 350 injured.

22 March 2016, Brussels, Belgium. Terrorist attacks at an airport and a metro station near European institutions. 35 dead and about 340 injured.

14 July 2016, Nice, France. A lorry ploughed into a crowd. 87 dead, more than 400 injured.

Dec. 19, 2016, Berlin, Germany. Truck attack on Advent market. 12 dead, 4 injured.

I would like to briefly share here what I learned, what worked, what didn't work, what consequences it had for the organization or even for my personal life.

When I talk about a divided society, I don't like to use black or white. I actually really like to use a range. It's really different shades, where the lightest one, the yellow one, denotes positive attitudes and active actions, and the red one, the dark red one, denotes negative attitudes and negative actions. This scale is based on the methodology of American researcher Rachel Brown, who started at the American Holocaust Museum and is the founder and CEO of Over Zero.

When I actually tried to communicate about migration, I tried to explain what a refugee is, that Molenbeek in Belgium\* is a neighbourhood like any other. Yes, unfortunate things have happened there, but it's a neighbourhood like any other. I started to explain what an NGO is and how NGOs are funded. And my impressions? It's not about the facts. It's just pure emotion. It's

about the words that are just a trigger, and those words in 2015, 2016, was refugee, was Islam, was non-profit. That is perhaps the difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia and Germany and the Netherlands. In our country there is really a huge distrust of non-profit organisations. In the Czech-Slovak narrative they are associated with various types of conspiracy theories. There is no social appreciation. This is an area where we still lack these forty years of democracy. Already a simple word can trigger a conflict.

\*A neighbourhood on the outskirts of Brussels inhabited mostly by poor immigrants. Terrorists convicted in the Brussels and Paris attacks lived here.

Another important lesson for me was that I learned the hard way that it is very easy to demonize my opponents and immediately relegate them to some category of stupid, hateful, evil people. That was a terribly important lesson for me: to learn that they are people who are afraid, who don't want to be primarily evil. Disinformationists, populist politicians, and all sorts of demagogues play on their fears and anxieties and actually positive values and caring about family and so on.

But then the question arises: if the fear of others can be understood, where is the line? Where ends one's concern and begins the own limitation of what should not be said?

I have two basic theses on this. The first limit is definitely what the Penal Code crosses. In the Czech Republic, we have some pretty good laws that are against hatred against groups of people. How they are applied is another matter. And then I am very fond of the Italian political sci-

entist Nadia Urbinati, who has many theories about non-directive management of society or access to democracy, and who says: Everyone has the right to enter the public space with his or her opinion if he or she does not prevent others from doing the same.

#### Sascha Lehnartz

Thank you very much for inviting me to this conference. Finding ways of constructive dialogue in polarized societies is, I believe, an enormous challenge and a crucial task in a time when our societies in Europe and also in a global scale seem to be on the exact opposite. They get more and more agitated, more polarized and the inability to negotiate socially challenges and differences through constructive dialogue becomes an increasingly threat to the functioning of our societies.

Let me make one disclaimer right at the start, in order to reduce perhaps the risk of disappointment after my remarks: I do not have a solution either to the problem that you have been analysing here for some time or going to be analysing for the next few days.

I cannot really tell you how to find ways of constructive dialogue in polarized societies, because I fear that one of the features of polarized society is, that a large number of members of that society have already given up on the very concept of constructive dialogue.

Let me briefly sketch out where I am coming from. I work as chief correspondent of the German daily Welt und Welt am Sonntag and their online TV station. For those of you who may not be entirely familiar with the German media market: the four five bigger quality dailies in Germany Die Welt is number three behind Sueddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.



When you count the circulation in paper we sank below 100.000 units daily, as most papers do these days. What consoles us is that among the quality dailies we are the number one on the digital market in Germany. Die Welt is published by Axel Springer, a liberal-conservative media house, that used to have a reputation for rather be fiercely anti-communist during the cold war. My experiences is based on roughly 14 years that I have been working for die Welt, first as correspondent in France and then as head of the foreign desk and lately as chief correspondent. Before that I also worked for a few years for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung und the Sueddeutsche Zeitung. With my more or less 25 years in the media world I can surely attest to the fact that the climate of debate hast not exactly improved. At the same time, I am hesitant to do what Boomers, like me, tend to do, which is to pretend that it used to be much better in the old days. Simply because the media landscape today is so fundamentally different from the media landscape 25 years ago, it is quite hard to make meaningful comparisons.

25 years ago, the only way for a reader to interact with a newspaper or any kind of media, was to sit down and write a letter to the editor, on paper of course, and send it in via "snail mail". The responsible editor for letters to the editor, which existed, would then every few days or so hand pick few of those letters, edit and shorten them, so that they would fit into print. That practice was perhaps not quite censorship yet, but an effective way to control and to limit that, which was deemed to be an exceptional form of public discus and debate. It would by design exclude what the editors of the news outlet would consider a fringe or radical opinion, and opinions with too many typographical errors.

An established newspaper or media outlet was not only an effective gatekeeper, because it was, apart from a few competitors, relatively alone in having the means to promote its own world view and to exclude others, but also because it had the power to exclude almost everybody else from the public debate. That gatekeeping power, for better or for worse, is gone now. Not only can readers or news sites almost everywhere respond and comment directly if the dislike what they read. The rise of social media and messenger channels allows basically everybody to be his or her own platform and to participate any debate they would like to engage.

That is a fundamental change, that has completely modified the rules of the game of political discourse and of the public debate. Simply because the so-called social media are not necessarily designed to strengthen social bonds through constructive dialogue between two opposing camps, but rather to create communities of followers, who, tend to have fairly monolithic world view.

One of the effects of that development is that traditional editorial disparately, called mainstream media have more and more difficulties to reach people, who have comfortable settled in echo chambers of their own beliefs. The idea that these mainstream media are, more or less, the equivalent of state media, controlled either by the government or alternatively by a woke, liberal, urban elite, seems to be finding an ever-growing degree of support.

Now if you want and easy explanation, you can blame that on a lot of things: a lack of media literacy, growing social pressures, the rise of irrational and conspiracy theories, the desire for easy solutions in an ever more complex world. However, that would be too simplistic, becau-

se established media have their own share in this development. Just take a look at a random sample major political development over the last six or seven years and forgive me as we can only skip through this, but take as example the Brexit referendum, the ascent of Donald Trump, in 2015 European refugee crises, caused by the war in Syria, COVID-19 pandemic and last but not least the Russian attack against Ukraine.

What do all of these events have more or less in common? The traditional media and their armies of experts either did not see them coming or failed and keep failing to describe and interpret them convincingly for other people.

That has certainly contributed to erosion of trust, that we as media are coping with today. In a recent survey, people in Europe were asked, how much they trust the written media. The results, for us, were quite sobering. The Netherlands is still quite trusting, with about 71% of people, who trust the media. In Germany and in the Czech Republic the rates show slightly more than 50%. That means that as media that refers to itself to be the fourth column of our democratic societies, besides legislative, judiciary and the executive, where we already have half of the population, who do not trust us and people that do not trust us are usually not extremely willing to be in constructive dialogue.

I suspect that it will be an enormous challenge to reverse that trend. To re-establish trust and to enable dialogue, the people within the media have to leave their own echo chambers and safe spaces in order to engage with people, who see the world differently than they do. That can be an extremely annoying, painful, and nerve-racking task, but I fear it will be necessary.

Then there is another aspect, one that cannot be covered by the media landscape alone. However, willing journalists might become, but to engage in dialogue with their audience. That other aspect is entirely educational: if we want our democracies to prevail, we need to train people to be able to cope with opinions that contradict their own. We need to encourage them to test their believes, to leave their save spaces and to expose themselves to opposing views. That requires probably a heavy investment into political education, in media literacy and last but not least in sustainable social reforms. I will stop here, although I just getting started.

#### **Flavio Bollag**

Good Afternoon, it is a pleasure to join you from the outside of New York City. My name is Flavio Bollag. I am the executive director of the Outward Bound Centre for Peacebuilding. Those of you, who may know Outward Bound either from Germany or Czech Republic or Slovakia or other places, we ware one of an international family of organizations, that works on outdoor, hands-on, what we call experiential learning, learning by doing.

We are a very small part of that family, but we focus on the idea of peacebuilding, on working together to address differences between leaders, between communities, between organizations.

What we do? We call ourself experiential peacebuilding, and what that means for us is that we work with people and with groups and we try to help those who want to, to build the will and the skill to address conflict without violence or the fear of violence.

Conflict is not the enemy that we approach. The enemy, the thing we want to work against, is violence or the fear of violence. Conflict is tota-

lly natural and normal for people, for communities, for families, for any of us. But what we want to do is work with groups of people, including those who would say they are polarized or marginalized or have nothing in common with other people, they have to interact with and find ways for them to build common ground and most importantly find ways for them to start to address the idea of trusting one another and communication with one another.

Both of my previous panellists mentioned the ideas of the difficulty of speaking, the difficulty of using language and the difficulty of finding trust. And we try to do that with using very different, very fond ways including some very hands-on ways, like going hiking together, paddling in a Kanu together, rock climbing with someone you might think of as being very different from yourself, but someone that you actually need to trust, to strand and form a human relationship.

One of the most important things, that we think about, when trying to create constructive dialogue, trying to allow communities to work together, is the space and the place that they are in. We always try to find situations where people, all people that we are going to involve, will feel safe and feel open. And that means always thinking about places that are neutral. We often do our work in the outdoors, because it is a change from our daily life. It is very easy when you are sitting in your office or in your school or in your classroom or in your house to be reminded about all the things that you think about every day. All the pieces of your identity, all the distractions from your phone and your family and your emails, but when you are outside, and a lot of research shows the benefits of spending time in the woods, or in the water or in the air, you find yourself in a different mindset, to connect to the people.

One of the most important things that we try to do, goes back to something that my first panellist talked about a lot and the second as well: the idea of language.

And so often when we work with communities that are in conflict with one another or find themselves to be polarized, there are first instincts that people think to need to talk more, but actually talking can be very difficult, even if there is not a real language barrier, because they speak the same language. Most of the time in our experience, groups that are polarized do not use the same words to mean the same thing. Even if they can understand each other's words, they have different meaning and different information.

And what we try to do is, we try to find a language that can be shared, that is set different from words, whether that means working together, building something together, cooking together, making art together, experiencing a physical challenge, like climbing over a wall. These are things we can do together with fellow people without needing to use a lot of language, and it becomes a way to start to build a trust and to get to know people on a much more human level.

They also create memories that we will hold for a long time and when we do find ourselves in a difficult conversation, it is much easier to try to find that trust again, if you have strong memories of times that you have spent with another person.

We form a lot of our work around, what we call activities, they are interactive things that we ask our participants to do in part of their learning process and I want to take you through two very quick activities, that we do all the time.

The first one is something that we call "Walking Questions". And a lot of times when groups feel like they are separate from someone or different from someone else, they are very curious, but they do not know how to ask each other questions. They do not know how to begin a dialogue. So what we do is we invite a group to sit together in a circle and we invite everyone to share a question or questions, that they are curious about the other members of the group. And it is very important that these questions are not asked to any one person, you are not looking across the circle and ask them a question. You are just sharing a question to the group and at the same time no one is allowed to answer the questions. You are just sharing questions and seeing what everyone is thinking about. What is everyone curious about.

And then, what we do, it could be right after the questions have been shared or it could be an hour later, three hours later, a day later, we invite people in the group to come together in groups of two or three or in pairs and to take a walk together. If we are out in the mountains, we actually go for a six-hour hike together, but it could also be a walk through town, a walk through the garden, a walk through the hallways of your school. And when you are walking next to someone, if you are comfortable, we ask people if they would think about answering one of the questions that they have heard in this session, what the group shared. And very, very often people will answer a question that their partner asked, and they feel much more comfortable doing so, than if they were sitting face-to-face across the table, feeling like they are being interrogated, feeling like they would be in danger. And it is really powerful little move, that people get to know one another, and start to connect to each other, as people, outside of the issues, that separate them in a very harmless way.

I am a very big advocate of walking with people, especially when we want to have a difficult conversation and we do not know where to start the dialogue. Walking next to somebody is very, very different from sitting down across the table from someone looking at their face. You are sharing an experience. You are feeling your body in the movement. You do not have to worry about looking them into the eye or where am I supposed to look. Should I be nodding, should I be saying something. You are simply walking next to each other and talking.

And there is a lot of new research now on the way. We learn that it says that, when you are in the fresh air and when we are breathing faster, when our body is exercising, you are actually making stronger connections in our brains. And so when you walk next to someone and talk to them, you are much more likely to remember what they say, because your whole body is engaged in the action. It is a very disarming way of beginning some of the conversations.

Another activity that we like to use, and all of these activities are available on our website, and I am happy to email them around – I do not expect everyone to remember or take all of these notes. That is something what we call "Fist to Five". And it is a way for groups to come to an agreement on an idea or a suggestion. It could be a very simple idea: What time are we going to have lunch? Where are we going to meet? Or it could be a very complicated idea. But to do so without needing a lot of words, without needing a lot of voting, without a lot of process, that can cause division or compulsory.

And the idea is very simple: one person in the group puts forward an idea or a solution to it and everybody brings their hand forward and raises their hand. And if you agree with the idea

very much, if you are ready to say “This is the best solution to the idea”, “I completely endorse it”, you put forward five fingers. And if you kind of like the idea, but you are not sure, you put forward four fingers. And then three fingers, if you really are „Meh“. And if you really do not like the idea, but you have a better idea, you do not put forward anything.

And the whole group shows their vote and looks what is going on. And those who put forward a closed fist, who do not like the idea or have a different idea, the only thing they have to say is, here is my oppose, addition or adding to the idea, „I want to change one thing about the solution and here is what I am suggesting“.

Give the group some time to think about it, and then again, people again start with the fingers: five fingers, four fingers, one person has one finger, a fist. And we go round after round after round.

It can take a long time sometimes, but it is a way for people to communicate, a way for people to respond to each other’s ideas without anyone feeling like they are the solution, or they are the problem. Everyone is allowed to put forward five fingers, everyone is allowed to put forward none. And it works very well.

I have seen groups all around the world, in the Middle East, in China, in Hong Kong in Mexico, here in the United States. Groups that had had no confidence that they would work together at all. Spend an hour or two on wards working this process, around and around that circle, and eventually coming to a point when everyone could put forward five fingers. It is that physical language, the ability to communicate differently than the way that we usually do, that can sometimes be a breakthrough.

The last comment that I will make, and then I want to leave plenty of room for everyone else, is in a world of trying to address, you know, polarized communities, address division, address concerns about violence, it is often overwhelming. And it is for us too. I will not say that I have the solutions or the answers. We just are one small organization, that works with other grass-roots and organizations and schools. But I think, often when we think of polarization the temptation is to think that we have to start with those forces that are dividing our communities. We have to start with those people that are creating the misinformation or that are sharing rumours and wrong information. And I would actually think about it the other way. I think about communities like fields of magnets. Some of the magnets are going to push each other apart, but some of the magnets are going to connect to each other and pull each other together. If we strengthen and if we put more time and more energy and more resources on all different magnets that hold together, eventually it does not matter how much some of the magnets are pushing apart. The field is strong enough to hold together.

It is not just a saying that we do not have to work on the things that divide us, but I like to begin and to focus more my time and energy on all the things that can connect us. Because when the connections, when the level of interconnection is stronger, the forces of division are much, much weaker.

Let me take a pause there and leave it and go back to the rest of the panel.

I am very happy to answer questions and to be part of the conversation. I put my email and my WhatsApp on screen, and I think it is in the materials for the conference as well. There is a lot more to the work that we do, we have a whole book with a lot of these kind of activities that I

am very happy if anyone be in touch with me at any time.

Thank you!

#### **Emil Voráč**

Hello, my name is Emil Voráč and I am the director of Khamoro charitable association. Khamoro is located in the Karlovy Vary Region and we are dedicated to the socially weak, socially disadvantaged and our biggest clientele are Roma, although we did not imagine it this way when we started. We thought that we would work with everyone without distinction. However, by having Roma come to us, non-Roma actually abdicated to our service until we set up a specialist social counselling service where we provided debt relief and financial counselling services in general. Because we provided this free of charge, then non-Roma clients started to visit us again.

I was invited to speak about how to unite people, how not to divide people, how to eliminate xenophobia in society. Almost thirty years ago I founded another association called the Roma Club without Human Relations. It’s a little bit telling that even then I was thinking about the need to unite the people. And I, as a representative of the Roma, had a lot of experience. Even in the former regime, I provided some services, because people turned to me when they needed help representing themselves before some institutions, when they needed to write various applications, appeals, and so on. So I decided to set up a non-profit organization and over time I registered services such as field social work, civic counselling and low-threshold facilities. And within these services, we were able to support children in a short period of time, for example in the low-threshold facility, and we came up with such ground-breaking elements as setting up a

children’s bank. We taught children how to economise in a non-violent way. Also we didn’t have a place to meet with the Roma, because if we wanted to meet with the Roma, it was a big problem, they wouldn’t rent us anything anywhere. So we came up with a big community tent. We equipped it with floors, beer sets, flipcharts etc. and portable space heaters so we can meet there in the winter.

There I decided that my team and I would focus on the largest excluded area in the Karlovy Vary Region, where ninety-seven percent of Romani people were unemployed. There was one percent non-Roma, but they were non-Roma in mixed marriages. After two years, I managed to employ ninety-three percent of that ninety-seven percent and prove that it is possible to work effectively with absolutely everyone.

Together with the residents of this excluded region, we have managed to revitalize the whole area. It has not been touched for twenty-two years, and you can imagine, when somewhere is not being invested in, not only in real estate, what it must look like. Nobody motivated these people to maintain their environment before. And we’ve shown that it’s possible and that these people are capable of maintaining their environment. Everybody on this planet has strengths. We need to focus on the strengths of those people, especially the children. We were focusing on those strengths and what we have found is that we had skilled painters who painted pictures and hiding them somewhere in their basements. They were weaving baskets and different products out of rods, so we did an exhibition of those works. It was visited by municipal representatives and from visitors from all over the Karlovy Vary region.



My phone rings almost all day long, twenty-four hours, and it's actually all about work, because we are now dealing with Ukrainian refugees, and as you know, there are approximately two and a half to three thousand Ukrainian Roma refugees, while there are around three hundred to three hundred and fifty thousand ethnic Ukrainians.

The Ukrainian Roma are in a way faceless. I decided to show that they are also normal people. I managed to find capable businessmen who rented space. We equipped the premises with everything necessary for normal life. We housed the people there and worked with them for a week, fifteen or sixteen hours per day. We educated them about what it's like in the Czech Republic. What you need to observe in the Czech Republic, how you need to take care of the property. Actually, we were with them all the time. We divided services for the kids. We spend time with the children in leisure activities, we teach them financial literacy, we do everything with them that is necessary to show that they are people like everyone else, even though they may have lived in Ukraine in excluded areas, which we don't know much about here in the Czech Republic, but many of us see it in the media. These are settlements similar to those in Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Yugoslavia. These are settlements where civilization has stopped, which are outside the infrastructure. It's actually similar to the Middle Ages. Ninety percent of the refugees we work with are uneducated, illiterate or semi-literate. They can't read, they can't write, even among very young people who are eighteen, twenty years old. But you can work with them.

We are now preparing a lecture for them, it will actually be an education. We managed to hire a Ukrainian professor who teaches languages in the Czech Republic, who has a lot of experien-

ce, both from working in Ukraine and with the people, with the mentality of our people.

I think we are pushing them in a way out of their comfort zone to show that they can be part of society, as well as that there is common ground with other, local people, which is especially important for conflict-free interaction. We are helping Ukrainians, so we should help all Ukrainians without discrimination. We in Khamoro are succeeding. The people are working, they are clean, they are following the rules that we set, and even the little kids, because we have kids from zero to seventeen years old there, are participating in this process.

But I mustn't forget that it's actually the environment that causes problems. Just two days ago I got a call from the police saying they were playing music and disturbing the neighbourhood. I asked what time they were playing music. They were playing it from 2:00 to 2:30 in the afternoon. So I asked whether they saw it as a problem. I invited the police to the place and showed them the only device they could use to play music. That machine puts out three decibels. I said it has a range of like four, five meters from this property, but it's obvious that it's a problem for some people.

Children are being prohibited from going to public playgrounds. There's a great police force there that didn't understand the exclusion either and told us, please let the kids go, it's a public playground. Just try to arrange some kind of escort with them at all times. They are not here as a punishment, they are not locked up here, and we need to create for them, at the very least, the same conditions as our society in the Czech Republic has.

There are more problems. I got a call the other day that some of the people in my care tried to take the train without paying. None of them have travelled by train. But I appreciated being informed by the institutions. This way we are able to find compromises when they are needed.

## DISCUSSION

### Zuzka Schreiberová

I would like to thank all my fellow panellists. I was very interested in what Flavio said and there are two things that I can definitely confirm. Firstly, that we are really already overwhelmed by words, especially with social media, and it makes a huge difference to do something together, maybe even to take a walk. In addition to that, I was interested in working with strengths, which is what Emil actually said, working with leaders, not just focusing on the troublemakers, but instead picking positive personalities and supporting those. And the last thing that I really like and that I think we have yet to discover as a society is that connection with physicality. An experience. Movement. It's those findings from neuroscience that say that we actually get our brain cells renewed when we move. We think of ourselves often only in terms of our heads. It's like we completely forget about our bodies. It's some shared experiences and incorporating some of that physical experience into the curriculum that breaks the ice. All of us who have been to Hlavák know that, because the contact really doesn't depend on language. When I teach people how to communicate with strangers, I say eighty percent is your tone of voice, your gestures, that you're calm, and now I'll also follow up with Emil, that these people feel that you mean well with them. And that's when you win. You can always explain yourself with your hands or a translator app. I thank Flavio very much for those insights, in terms of just doing

something together, not discussing for hours and hours, and for including that physical level.

### Sascha Lehnartz

Thank you very much for all your really interesting contributions from various fields. I might want to pick up perhaps one thing you said [Zuzana Schreiberová], because it would strike me as quite evident. I think at some point you have said: It is not about facts, it is about emotions.

And I think that is very crucial, that something that we all see in all our debates with enraged readers or people who attack our reporting, that you can try and try and try to come up with a more or less rational argument and insist on the facts, but you are not going to get a result in terms of convincing somebody who is deeply emotional about a certain issue.

Flavio said something that really struck me as convincing. I am just wondering, how could you possibly transpose that approach on a larger scale? I mean you work with people, take smaller groups and take them somewhere into the woods and create a situation that facilitates that. We are dealing mostly with people who sort of are mostly behind their screen at home and enraged. It is difficult to switch their setup, to change the situation, as well as it is hard to reach out to them.

I was wondering if Flavio could tell me, if it is possible to bring the methods to a larger scale, not just small groups, but to reach more people, to welcome people's vivid emotions and to create a situation where you can actually experiment with various forms where creating situational dialogue finally becomes possible. Or is there a physical limit?

I am just wondering what you can learn from those successful approaches and how you can move them on to another setup.

### Flavio Bollag

So the question is: How do you make it bigger? How do you move it to a larger scale? It is a very good question. It has been a big challenge for us to think that way. What we genuinely believe is that our job at this point is not for us to work only with small groups of people, but to train a lot of other partners: teachers, educators, people in non-profit organizations, government leaders, to take some of these techniques and be able to translate them more broadly.

It is very difficult to think about doing those kinds of work we do with thousand people at the same time on the same day. But we can teach hundred people to do it with ten or twenty people on remote, so it becomes smaller and smaller groups. And then together we got a bigger impact.

It is also part of our mission. We were founded by peace corps alumni. Our model is not to come in and take on a project and work on it for the next ten years. Our model is to come in and train local leaders, who want to do this work, so they can take these techniques forward and bring it to a much larger scale. But it is a brilliant question.

The other thing that I would comment on some of the other panellists and thank you everyone for your great work and great thoughts today. I think it is so important when we think about who we want to work with and to try to address polarization, that we think about everyone. Very often the temptation is to work with people in leadership positions in government, in business, in non-profit organizations. But I also

think, when we work with the leaders, we also have to work with those who are coming from the bottom. The conversation has to go top down and bottom up. And that is why it is so, so important that we also pay attention to women leaders, to leaders from smaller communities and to children. Very often when we work with communities we do projects specially for children in school, for young adults. There is so much that we can learn, when all groups and all people have the ability to lead.

### Emil Voráč

What is important to me is the belonging that has been talked about here. I was very interested in that. We just need to get as many people involved as possible. We know that in the Czech Republic, for example, there is a very high percentage of haters. We know that the SPD regularly gets around 14% of the vote in all elections, and that is a high number.

\*SPD: Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie) is a right-wing populist, nationalist political party in the Czech Republic, sometimes characterised as far-right.

### Tomáš Kraus

We all move in certain social structures, we move in certain bubbles and very often we don't have to convince ourselves because we are usually surrounded by people who more or less think the same.

What I want to ask is if we look at contemporary society through the prism of, for example, contemporary politics, to what extent can these rules be applied in this sense?

For example, when we were talking here about the possibility of convincing our opponents in some kind of constructive dialogue.

### Zuzka Schreiberová

I would like to point out that in the Czech Republic there has been such a development that those who were staunch Islamophobes in 2015, 2016, became opponents of vaccination during the pandemic and at the moment are pro-Kremlin trolls and it is the same group of people. They're associated in the same secret Facebook groups. I know them because they come to my organization's profile or my personal profile to „troll“. I know they're the same people and I see this development on a personal level. I have to say that there is no point in talking to them, because they do not show any willingness to engage in a constructive dialogue. When I used to try and get into discussions with them, and frankly I don't any more, it had two results.

They shared the statuses, commented on them, thereby increasing the virality of it, and they spread it from their relatively small but very vocal group to the orange group or the grey group. In a way they were advertising me or my ideas about human rights and migration and so on. So they were spreading my ideas to the group of people who don't have a strong opinion about the topic or who make situational decisions. And at the same time I know that even when it was in fact connected to cyberbullying, a lot of people said, „When we saw you explain this we finally understood it, we're rooting for you“ And that encouraged us.

So I'm definitely saying yes, talk. Defend yourself. They're few, but they're loud. But let's not focus on them as our target group. Let's try to get our message out to that grey area. Or to encourage the people who sympathize with us and maybe next time they won't be silent themselves.

### Tomáš Kraus

Thank you, that's exactly what I meant. I'll just add to Zuzana that the same people appear in our annual reports on anti-Semitism. It's the exact same group and we can also trace there, we started calling it pro-Kremlin sites sometime in 2018 and we can trace their thinking. It's maybe not so much the mindset, it's more of a political assignment, and we know where it's coming from.

### Sascha Lehnartz

Yeah, thank you very much. I think I absolutely share your point of view. I think it is a very interesting phenomenon what we see there. Basically the groups switch the topics, but they sort of remain relatively homogenous. That does not mean that they are exactly the same groups, there are certain overlaps and there are also various exchanges between groups, that were not part of the groups before.

We see that in Germany at certain points in the current debate, were you have a bizarre shift from one polarising topic to another one. You have the people, who were anti-immigrant, then they turned into being anti-COVID or critical of the government policies combating the pandemic and now they are basically the, what we call in Germany, so-called „Putin-Versteher“, the people who are trying to understand the really pathetic Russian positions.

The interesting switch that happens there, that in the refugee crisis you have had hardcore leftists, who are totally pro-immigration in Germany and who supported the government line, to summarize it, in the beginning „Be nice to immigrants“ and „We have everything under control“. The more and more people got the impression that the government maybe does not have everything under control, the more, like, weaker the

positions seem to become, and the more critical people became. And the more their trust in government information and also mainstream media were decreasing. Because, in the beginning it [the media] was also pretty much on the governmental line, in the most cases.

What we have now is that people from the leftist sphere ... Let me take one step back. At one point of course, right-wing people were anti-immigrant. What we have got now is, you have got people from the left sphere, moving into the right-wing camp, because where they meet is, basically, the sympathy for Putin and for Russia's positions.

That is sort of where their two ideological frameworks kind of match. So it is not entirely the same group, but in terms of their main pose, which has been critical, sceptical of everything that is sort of the official line of argument. And the official line of argument in the three cases was "Welcome the refugees", "Get vaccinated" and „Support Ukraine“.

These last three cases are the, let's say, more reasonable approach to those polarised topics. And some groups dislike being told that they have to adhere to those positions.

And that makes it, I think, pedagogical and also in terms of reporting extremely difficult, because even if you are in that position and you are like "Here are my arguments", "Here are the facts", „This is what the numbers are“, "This is what took place" and "This is what medicine and science say about vaccination and COVID", we do not reach these people with that kind of information.

#### **Emil Voráč**

I can only confirm. I'll tell you a recent experience. I was in a tv debate with Governor Schreke from the Vysočina region. After the heated talk, I received a phone call from a man who told me that if I was defending the Ukrainian Roma I should send them to Russia and they should die in the war, as well as I should and I should be hanged, because I was defending the Ukrainian Roma.

I gave the number to the computer specialists of the police, and they found out that more people had such calls. Also during Covid. So I can confirm that that is indeed the case.

#### **Participant**

Hi. Thank you very much. I have a question for Dr. Sasha Lehnartz. You have mentioned that journalists have to leave their echo chambers, find other perspectives and safe spaces. In your experience, how is the world dealing with that and making that happen?

#### **Sascha Lehnartz**

Well basically by going to demonstrations of people we do not agree with and then get beaten up by those people, who express their opinions there.

It is a complicated issue, because the atmosphere in a lot of these issues or theatres of political protest has entirely changed over the last six to ten years. It used to be the case, that we went to a demonstration, there were people, who were angry about something. Protesting either the media or mostly the government or some sort of government decision. We went there and you would ask: „Sir, what is your problem. What are you fighting for or against“ and they would tell you what they were feeling, because they hoped to be exposed in the media or written about or reported about, because

at that point the idea was we get more exposure for our issue and for our own cause. Nowadays they deeply mistrust us. We are part of the enemy. We are part of the sphere that is either cooperating with government or receiving orders from the government. The main idea is the government calls us every morning and tells us what to write and what to report. So if you go there it really becomes a lot of times problematic. On the other hand, if you go there you report about it and you raise the issue of maybe these people have a point, in your opinion section, for instance, you also cause a lot of trouble.

We have major debates within our paper but also with other leaders, how do we deal with the manifested fact that a lot of people are unhappy with the health politics of the government during the COVID-pandemic. And if you are not in total denial, but you are critical with various measures the government is deciding and you still feel there is no room for this disagreement or for that sort of opposition in the mainstream media, you become more and more sympathetic with groups and to bubbles that tend to have even more radical opinions.

That is part of the issue how do you establish that sort of constructive dialogue with people you deeply disagree with. But my job as a reporter is not to go there and tell people that I disagree and I feel they are all nutcases, that does not really get us in a situation where they will change their mind. I think what the responsibility of the media is still to sort of engage with those people, challenge them, report about them, but also be very clear on our understanding of the facts.

#### **Participant**

We're teachers here, youth workers. I'd like to ask what you think we can do, as in some daily

youth work with students. Something that can be done on some local level, at work.

#### **Zuzka Schreiberová**

I think youth work is probably the most important thing, and also in my opinion, the thing we still do not know how to handle in Czech and Slovak education. Because there is a huge fear among teachers to talk about politics at all, they perceive that they should be absolutely apolitical. I think this is not true, that on the contrary, it is absolutely right to talk about politics with pupils. Because, unfortunately, the Czech Republic has nothing like the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Centre for Political Education] and it is really lacking. So the first thing is not to be afraid to talk about politics.

And the second thing that we don't have, and which is also in Germany, is the Beutelsbacher Konsens [Beutelsbacher Konsens]. This was created after the Second World War, when there was a need to re-teach political education in Germany so that there would not be traces of Nazism, with which a generation had been indoctrinated. So very clear rules for political education were laid down, and I know that in Germany itself there have been debates for a long time that the Beutelsbacher Konsensus is outdated, but for us in the Czech Republic and Slovakia [it would be beneficial]. We should not be afraid to talk about politics. To label controversial opinions as controversial. Feel free to talk about Kotleba, but let's describe what's wrong with it. Not to be afraid of controversial topics in general.

And there is a lot of literature that can help in that sense. Even everyday experience can help. Someone says, „Common share, don't be a Jew.“ Just say, look, it's not okay to say that. I know you don't mean this in a bad way, but...



Just show the pyramid of hate. And maybe pointing out the boundaries in a situation like this is more effective than a long debate.

But if I could take something from Germany, and you can Google it, it's the Beutelsbach Consensus, which simply gives clear boundaries so that the political education of youth is not indoctrinated and there is a clear labelling: Let's talk about something controversial, but let's call it controversial.

#### **Sascha Lehnartz**

Maybe one thing I can think of in terms of what can teachers do on a daily basis. I mean in my experience, I am teaching journalism classes occasionally, and one thing I always do with my students, and they are already students who want to study journalism, so they have a certain interest for the journalistic or media sphere, I always ask them to sort of collect their sources for about a week or so. Just to trace where their information they are actually use, they are interested in, comes from. And it is something which delivers quite surprising results, because most people they do not really pay attention to it. Do not really know it.

I came to this kind of exercise, because I am socialised in a time when people were still reading newspapers and basically accordingly to your ideological orientation the same newspaper every day. So you knew where stuff was coming from, that you would consider your political information.

When I started teaching students, and in the beginning, I was telling them to come up with a story that was interesting for you last week or that angered you or that you have been passionate about.

First, I asked to bring a story and then I asked where they got it from. And in a lot of cases, they did not know. I thought that is the younger generation, they do not read newspapers anymore, they have an app, and they can trace it back there or something. But that was not the case. In a lot of cases, it was some sort of stream that came somewhere in their social media. Something came up. It got them really angry or emotional. It was something they were coping with. But a lot of times people who had a profound interest in media and in becoming a journalist had trouble tracing back their sources. And I think that is a crucial competence that you need in this world. Because everybody, I was speaking about social bubbles, just think about trolls from Russia or from anywhere else. People are trying to influence our stream of information all the time. It is not only Putin, it is a lot of people and they are becoming better and better.

I think what we are seeing now is ... I did not grow up in Eastern Europe, so my exposure to propaganda in those years was different, but I think the generation that experienced it, it was always my perception, those people knew how to deal with it. They had a certain critical distance towards it. I think the interesting development is that this critical distance somehow seems to have disappeared.

I do not know why it is the case. Maybe the dictators have become more professional and efficient in using media, but it is striking to me to see that nowadays you have people really capable of using media, of influencing a lot of people with a whole bunch of crap. That is what our media world is sort of built upon. And that is kind of a striking thing. And I think the only way to tackle it is really to start with an early age to get some sort of digital literacy and media literacy, in order to be capable of coping with that.

#### **Flavio Bollag**

Can I make a comment to respond to the question of what can we do in schools. And I wanted to pick up Zuzana's point as well, but we should be talking about these things.

I think we also have to remember a lot of the structures that we have in our daily work or in schools, the way we talk to people and how we talk, they do not necessarily lend themselves to have difficult conversations like this. And so before we decide, we want to talk about the process. How are we going to have this conversation? And so one of the things we do on every project is that we invite the group to work together and create their own rules before they start the difficult conversations. How are we going to decide who gets to speak and for how long? How are we going to express agreement or disagreement? Are we going to vote, snap our fingers, are we going to use words? When and where are we going to have this conversation? Am I used to having a teacher or an authority figure who has the right answers and now we are talking about something that has really difficult answers?

Making time to think through how we are going to have the conversation is as important as having the conversation.

#### **Emil Voráč**

I was talking here about our organization, which I think is one of the smallest in the Czech Republic but tends to have the highest attendance at our events. Over time, I have managed to train lecturers from among the Romani people who teach Romani history, the Holocaust and similar topics. Therefore I also cherish the idea of passing on this information to as many young people as possible, so that they know and fight against the fact that the history of the Holocaust,

for example, will never be repeated again.

#### **Participant**

I have been an educator for quite a long time now and I disagree a little bit with what has been said. We are told not to generalise and lump people together, but I have a feeling that that's exactly what has been done in some of the responses, labelling everyone as Russian trolls and antivaxxers, as soon as they express a critical view on those topics. It strikes me as a sort of mainstream propaganda telling us what we're supposed to think. Who even determines what is right or wrong? I feel that you do not even get the chance to express your thoughts if they are not aligned with the mainstream or with what has been said here. We are talking about dialogue in polarised societies, but we are not giving space to those alternative voices.

#### **Participant**

Thank you very much for raising that issue. Because that was actually what I wanted to talk about and know about. How do you, because you said journalists are in their echo chambers, so how do you relate to other people, if you have the same people in the newsroom, agreeing on what they agree upon. And there is no pluriform within the newsroom, and people distrust the choices that are made by people, who have set ideas, values etc. and already have decided what is good or wrong. It is really touching along those lines, so thank you for raising that.

#### **Sascha Lehnartz**

Thank you very much. I think the questions are very good and hit a point. I am sorry if what I have said, I sort of roughly summarized. I did not intend to make the distinctions you mentioned. We have certain overlaps, we have people who jump from one group to the next and you have to see that not everybody at a certain point in a

public debate may fit into the group, is already a problem or a conspiracy theorist. That's what I was trying to say.

And that is what I was trying to get at, that is our job. Even if we have strong convictions and do believe in certain things, which is what I believe is not a journalist's job. A journalist in the first place, theoretically you have a strict separation between fact finding and reporting and opinion, and those forms are separated, used to be separated on paper and clearly on the internet it becomes more difficult to keep up this distinction. But I think you are, that is precisely the political problem, the societal problem, the quick judgement. Because I think everybody is entitled to have doubts about all the issues we have raised here. These are not topics where it is easy to find conclusions very quickly. They are complex, all those issues have their history, be it the history of vaccination, be it the history of complex relationship between Russia and Ukraine and the complex relationship between NATO and Russia. All those issues go way back and they do not deserve a 30 second talking point and that was it. And if you disagree on that you are out of the debate. I think that is not something that can possibly be the solution.

And yeah, I think you are totally right. I mean that is the issue, the problem of journalism. I do not have an answer to it. I can tell you something from my personal experience where I thought it is not going into the right direction, it is a bit of an absurd anecdote.

I was on a press trip five or six years ago to Tanzania. A very nice press trip – sort of organized by the World Wildlife Fonds, about a huge natural protected area. And there were seven German journalists, all from Berlin, all from different media outlets – left, right, centre. When we

came back from this very nice trip - it was sort of friendship finding experience for all of us - we got to the airport, jumped into the cabs. Guess where we lived! We all lived within one square mile in the centre of Berlin. Our bubble, not only social media bubble, but the shops we go to, the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, it is entirely the same and our salary more or less and our education as well. We come from the same background more or less, some people with a different social background.

That is a major problem and that is what people feel outside. That we are all coming from the same cultural bubble. They have different experience; they live in different places, and they have different histories. And I think the big task for journalism is to fight that and I do not have a solution to that.

#### **Zuzana Schreiberová**

I'd like to go back to the previous question. I actually think there is a very simple rule for this, and that is the Italian sociologist Nadia Urbinati, who said that everyone has the right to be heard, but must not at the same time take away the right to be heard from someone else.

I stand by the fact that at least the group of people with whom I have personal experience, the development is really visible there. It was these people who went to attack politicians, who went to attack journalists and so on. For me the moment when I stop listening is the moment when you're not enough of a democrat and you're liquidating others, threatening, attacking, being aggressive towards people who don't agree with your opinion, that is their opinion. That is where I draw the line.

But at the same time I have to say, and thanks for this question, even though it was not easy, that yes, we have blinders on. My colleague in academia was very much against compulsory vaccination, very much against Covid measures. He's a philosopher, he was arguing it on democratic principles, philosophy. Honestly, I had to make an effort not to label him myself. It's not easy, and I think the first step is just our own reflection.

But at the same time, unfortunately, stereotypes and prejudices are part of our thinking and, generally speaking, there is nothing wrong with them. If we can't generalize from experience, we will burn our hands on a hot stove over and over again because we can't learn.

But the issue is when we don't reflect on that experience, "oh that could be prejudice". And the second issue is when we enter into some discriminatory action against others. And that was a red line for me, for example, when tyres were punctured for health workers, ministers were threatened and so on.

#### **Emil Voráč**

I work with hundreds of people and I refused to discuss anything regarding Covid because I felt that if I would, that everything I had been creating for twenty years could instantly crumble. I simply stopped expressing myself on Covid, and it really made sense, because I think eighty percent of the Roma were influenced by the anti-Covid people.

#### **Tomáš Kraus**

Thank you. So I think that was the zenith of our discussion today. I don't think we were trying to push opinions on anyone, but it's certainly important that it has been said here.

The answer to that is also, of course, to have a dialogue. The key is critical thinking, putting together facts, sources. Of course, it's quite a difficult thing to make sense of the clutter of the internet today, but that's why we need to stand up for those values here. Because I think we have to stand up for our truths.

It's very complicated, I don't think there's a single answer, but I'm glad we were able to talk about it so openly today.

I would like to thank very much our panelists today, Zuzka Schreiberová, Sascha Lehnartz, Emil Voráč and last but not least Flavio Bollag. And also thank all of you in the audience.

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