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About Teaching

Before explaining the exercises practiced within the framework of the Munich Model, this section will deal with approaches to teaching. First, I'll shed light on my previous teaching experience with unemployed youth, as this had a lasting effect on my further teaching activities.

First teaching experience

In November 1996, I took up a three-day lecturing job at a vocational preparation course – which apart from my training in college – was my first experience teaching adolescents. The group consisted of 15 unemployed youths, some with a high school diploma, some without. Some of them had already been “kicked out” of school several times, and for these students, the vocational training program offered a last chance.

The program served to orient participants to the job market and was intended to support them in finding work internships and potentially being hired by one of the participating companies. It was one of many approaches undertaken by the federal government to get youth unemployment under control.

Over the next three days, I had planned to teach these students the function of their own perception (day 1), their own thinking (day 2) and, linked to this, their behavior (day 3). On day 3, I would spend the afternoon covering the topic of “job interviews” and I actually believed that by the end of my teaching assignment, I would be able to present “model-ready” applicants! As a compass, I had planned the concept down to the last minute.

However, it all turned out quite differently! My concept proved to be useless and within a very short time, I had to throw it all out. On the first day it was necessary to end the lessons early. Several times I'd had to dismiss a number of students due to their unruly behavior, and gradually, the group became very small. To my surprise, they were more interested in provoking me or doing their own things than in accepting my well-meant “offer of help”.

It was only upon returning home in the evening that I realized I had to do things completely differently; that I really didn't know anything about these students; and that I'd only been focused on my own ideas about how the lessons should go.

I also realized that it was possible to interpret the provocations differently, rather than as attacks on my personality. It was very likely that these students had already had numerous negative experiences with teachers. Apparently they wanted to test me and decide for themselves whether they would eventually accept me as a teacher.

The next day I came to class, without any plans – so to speak, and asked only what they wanted to do. Some thought we should make a film. “But no shots to practice job interviews or anything, something about gangsters, that would be cool!” The others in the group agreed. I was so grateful that they wanted to participate at all, so almost anything would have been fine with me. We started right away and began first writing a script. At some point we had a storyline and assigned roles. We got the necessary video camera from the educational institute. I knew little about camera technology, but two

participants were experts. We managed to get some shots the same day! The rest we shot on day 3. It was the perfect chaos and it caused me a great deal of stress! Being completely inexperienced in both teaching and dealing with young people, I had to not only “carry” the film project itself, but also keep an eye on these students.

At the end of three days of teaching, instead of having applicants suited to the job market to present, I only had a video cassette with several film sequences on it. If one were charitable, among these could be found the thread of a “gangster story”.

“Hey Andy, when are you coming back?” is a question I’ll never forget. My thought at that moment was: “My God, never again!”, and I suddenly realized that nothing of my original plan had been realized. This would certainly mean the program’s supervisor would never again ask me to teach.

But once again, things turned out differently! To my complete surprise, the supervisor immediately asked when I would be returning. Had she mistaken me for someone else? I finally agreed to come back, but only on the condition that I could arrange my lessons completely on my own terms. Topics could be specified, but I wanted to be able to decide for myself how I’d work on them with the respective group of participants. She had no objections and agreed.

Over time, I received numerous other assignments from other sponsors and educational institutions in Munich and the surrounding area. Word had got around that there was a “Dutchman” who could handle difficult young people. The three days of lecturing became nearly ten years, from the end of 1996 to mid-2006 (with a 7-month break in 1998).

These years greatly influenced me, and I learned a lot about how people of different backgrounds with different educational levels can work together in a sincere and respectful way. And above all, working with adolescents has made it clear that no matter how difficult and behaviorally challenged they are, they all have potential that can be developed. This is a task that falls to educators in particular. They can create the space that is necessary for the development of these students. Being able to discover and unfold their own potential has a positive effect on the self-esteem and self-efficacy of adolescents, and is also crucial in terms of whether they will feel accepted by society.

I then made working with adolescents the subject of my doctorate in ethnology at LMU Munich. It had become clear that my pedagogical work with young people had many parallels to the so-called Fox project – out of this project a new approach to ethnology ultimately emerged in the 1960s, called action anthropology.¹

In my dissertation *Jugendliche – ein fremder Stamm? (Adolescents – a foreign tribe?)*, I presented in detail the experiences I gained from my years of teaching unemployed youth, and compared these experiences with the results of the Fox project.² Here I wish to briefly mention the requirements and principles of action anthropology, which postulates a so-called *System of Values* – a canon of values, which, in my work with youth at that time played an important role, and still continues to, in my professorship at the Munich University of Applied Sciences.

Action Anthropology – System of Values

In action anthropology there are no rigid guidelines, no fixed methods of how to act in the “field of research”. Instead, there are certain values, such as UNDERSTANDING, INTERACTION, RESPONSIBILITY and COMPLEMENTARY VIRTUES, which serve as guidelines for action.³ In my opinion, these can also be very valuable and helpful for teachers in teaching situations and can enormously enrich the way in which teaching content is imparted. Transferred to the teaching situation in educational institutions, the action-anthropology canon of values could be interpreted as follows.

For teachers, UNDERSTANDING is about perceiving the thinking and behavior of the participants from an “inner perspective”. This so-called *emic understanding* is also about revealing and becoming aware of one’s own subjective perception filters and conditioning. Only when I am aware of these can I succeed in opening myself to the views of my participants.

INTERACTION involves creating a framework for teachers in which all participants are respected and valued and can contribute to the lessons using their own abilities.

RESPONSIBILITY for teachers implies that participants are supported in achieving more self-determination and self-efficacy. This includes teaching participants knowledge and skills and strengthening their self-confidence.

Among the COMPLEMENTARY VIRTUES are PATIENCE, HUMILITY and LEARNING AND REFLECTING. These virtues give teachers the opportunity to engage more in an *eye-level dialogue* with the participants. By signaling that learning and designing lessons are reciprocal and that they, as teachers, can also learn from the participants, an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect is created, which motivates participants to become involved in the discourses.

Last but not least, HUMOR and AUTHENTICITY also play a significant role in action anthropology. Teaching must not lack “humor” as it contributes to a relaxed atmosphere. As a teacher it is also important to be authentic. In the context of the Munich Model, being authentic for me also means showing that you are as engaged with the exercises as the participants are, and that you’re also gaining new experiences. Every now and then, in class, I tell short anecdotes to illustrate certain topics related to the practice of mindfulness and meditation in the context of real life. These not only bring a liveliness to the lessons, but they’ve been shown to help students better integrate the practices into their own lives.

SOURCE

de Bruin, Andreas (2004). *Jugendliche – ein fremder Stamm? Jugendarbeitslosigkeit aus aktionsethnologischer Sicht. Zur kritischen Reflexion von Lehrkräften und Unterrichtskonzepten im deutschen Schul- und Ausbildungssystem*. Münster: LIT Verlag.

¹ The action anthropology approach was developed by the American anthropologist Sol Tax (1907-1995) together with a team of students at the University of Chicago. They had originally tried to help the Mesquakie, a group of Native Americans in Iowa, to integrate into the "American Way of Life". However, the aid programs developed by the students completely failed, as they had entirely overlooked the fact that the Mesquakie consciously accepted their social problems such as poverty, unemployment and social declassification because they didn't want to abandon their own culture for integration into American society. In the development of the programs, the students had not included the Mesquakie's concerns at all, only considering their own viewpoint in the project. Under the direction of Sol Tax, a thorough error analysis of the approach by the students, as well as initial attempts to initiate a genuine dialogue with the Mesquakie, ultimately led to this new approach to understanding in anthropology. (Cf. de Bruin 2004, p. 21 f.)

² See de Bruin 2004.

³ Cf. de Bruin 2004, p. 22.



"Sweeping away"
thoughts is like cleaning
out an apartment.