



Promoting tolerance and non-Discrimination – Guidelines for the media educational work of jugend- schutz.net against hate speech on the Internet

Speech by Stefan Glaser, Project director of jugendschutz.net

Before giving a short introduction to the guidelines of the media educational work jugendschutz.net developed to promote tolerance and non-discrimination, please allow some preliminary remarks about my organization's work against right-wing extremism on the Internet. jugendschutz.net was founded in 1997 by the German Youth Ministeries, in times when the Internet in Germany was still in its infancy. The mission was to control the "new medium" Internet for illegal and harmful content and, if possible, counteract such content aiming at its removal. Since 1999 jugendschutz.net has been running a special project on right-wing extremism, because we realized, that racism, antisemitism and Holocaust denial on the Net became more and more relevant with regard to kids using the Internet.

From the very beginning our work was driven by the conviction that all relevant protagonists of the Internet – people using websites, social networks, chats and communities and all other services, legislation, jurisdiction and state authorities combating hate by legal means and last but not least providers, gaining a financial profit from people using their services – that all of them shall take their responsibility for getting rid of hate mongers on the Internet.

And also from the start, our work facing online hate has been characterized by a multidimensional approach which is carried out on several levels: jugendschutz.net does a permanent Internet monitoring, esp. with the focus on how right-wing extremists target youngsters, how they try to interest and recruit them for their ideas and organizations. This "observation" and analysis is imperative for counteracting and for our educational work as well. We take effective measures to get illegal content removed, and here the co-operation with our partner organizations within the INACH network and especially the joint activities against transnational cases are very important. Finally we invest a lot of our resources in educational work with teachers, students and out-of-school educationists, especially we believe, that education is a very important 'missile', to use a militaristic term, in order to promote tolerance and non-discrimination. We are convinced that these three action lines belong together and that they are essential columns on which sustainable work against hate on the Net has to be built upon.

At this point I would like to introduce this last column. I don't want to describe concrete methods – the choice of methods always depends on concrete situations and the individuals or groups you are working with – but I want to give a short insight into our understanding of learning and into the didactical assumptions the educational work of jugendschutz.net is based on.

The educational part of our work is – in my regard – the most challenging, because it aims at educating children and youngsters. Those, who have children or who have ever worked with children and teenagers in an educational context will know that education is not really predictable. You can only assume or hope where your activities may lead to, but you will never know at the beginning what or who will finally come out. Education is not like baking or cooking – look at a traditional recipe telling you how it works: take a child, two or three yummy ingredients shake twice and there you have: the tolerant and democratic oriented young man or woman. This is not the way education functions. The development of a kid is a much more complex and complicated process, it depends on lots of factors and variables and, this I am really convinced of: teachers and educationists can only influence certain parts of children's lives. They can for example offer their knowledge, their own experiences, thoughts and skills and if they are good and professional they do it with regard and respect to the special talents, needs and interests of those youngsters they are working with.

The first question I and my colleagues always have to answer when we introduce our educational work for example to teachers in schools, is: Why should we deal with online hate? Don't we just make youngsters curious or make these ideas attractive for them if we make them subjects of discussions and analysis in schools? What we answer then is: we should make it subject of discussions and analysis because of several reasons and here I want to name some of them:

Nowadays children and teenagers increasingly use the Net for entertainment and information purposes. It is somehow their medium. However, they often don't assess and analyze information they read or obtain from the web in a critical manner. Again and again teachers reported to us that their students wrote seminar papers or made presentations on the Holocaust/National Socialism using material from revisionists' websites. And – this is what we experienced in many workshops – revisionists' arguments seem to appear plausible and are often accepted as credible statements. In addition, everyday racism presented on the web feeds prejudices and those 'harmless' subliminal racist and anti-Semitic arguments are very often accepted without criticism (not only by young people).

Another experience is that children know right wing extremist bands and have their music on CD or as downloaded files from the Internet on their computers. Music is an important element of young lifestyle and identity and also an important tool for right-wing extremists to lure teenagers. In Germany, for example, the dissemination of so-called Schoolyard-CDs with music from neo-Nazi-Bands, have become an integral part of their agitation. Especially right-wing extremist parties like the NPD (the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, a right-wing extremist party here in Germany) distributed thousands of CDs in school surroundings within the last years.

And, we should also recognize that discrimination unfortunately is an everyday reality in schools and that anti-Semitic, xenophobic, homophobic, islamophobic expressions are part of children's and teenager's lives. Dealing with racism on the Net is nothing else than dealing with racism, we are just starting at its modern, multimedia-expression!

Last but not least right-wing extremists target youngsters on websites and in popular Internet services. In the past jugendschutz.net and other partners from the INACH network have investigated a number of cases in which neo-Nazis placed their propaganda on open communication platforms or in social networks to spread hate speech, to advertise and recruit for regional groups and to infect kids with their inhuman ideas. And: Right-wing extremists offer certain values that might be regarded as

attractive especially by youngsters not really socially integrated. They offer "comradeship", "home" or events/action like concerts etc.

All these are very good reasons why educationists in and out of school should deal with hate speech online – kids get in touch with it sooner or later or they already know it anyway and to close our eyes and ignore this fact, in my opinion is not really helpful.

What are we aiming at with our educational work? First of all our aim is to foster the media literacy of children and teenagers. For us this means to carefully introduce them to how to assess information critically and to support them to become competent users of the Internet. "Go into deep!", never just believe what people publish on the Net without a critical view asking why and how something is said or written. And: "refer to reliable sources" to proof the verity of what it is published. In our workshops kids have the possibility to train themselves in analyzing and decrypting texts/messages and to learn something about the rhetorical strategies that racists and right-wing propagandists use.

Furthermore we want to encourage youngsters to stand up for human rights and against neo-Nazi statements and activities. The Internet is what users make of it and an Internet with less hate and discrimination can only be achieved if we strengthen young people in counteracting online hate with their possibilities and by means of the Net.

And finally we regard it as our mission to raise awareness about hate speech amongst teachers and out-of-school educationists. Though racism is an everyday reality in schools, teachers are often not aware of this fact or they don't see the need to make it subject of discussions. Our job here is to sensitize them for the problem and to show that hate mongers use modern media to recruit (their) kids.

Let me just in short stress some guidelines for our work: We are convinced that teaching the dangers of hate speech on the Internet in the oldfashioned sense of lecturing is not really what didactical concepts nowadays should rely on – what comes to my mind here is the warning index finger ('mahnende Zeigefinger') trying to save children from making mistakes. Modern educational approaches take into consideration expectations and experiences of young people. They are no longer regarded as 'deficient' but as young people with their own competences and interests. And education has to pay tribute to this recognition and has to make use of appropriate ways of working.

When analyzing hate content on websites we think that it is necessary to rotate between self-contained web research in the sense of learning by discovering and discussions in plenary. Kids will finally have to ask their own questions and they have to try to find their answers independently – without a teacher wiping away unwanted opinions by saying what is right or wrong. This does not mean that educationists have to stay neutral – quite the contrary. They should offer themselves as a counterpart for discussions by providing background information, asking critical questions themselves and showing their own, authentic point of view. But they should always do that by taking boys and girls seriously. And youngsters should get the possibility to reflect their experiences, ideas and last but not least their own prejudices critically with others.

One of the last steps in our workshops leads us to a very practical approach, including activities against cyber hate by means of the Internet. Young people enjoy this and it provides the positive experience of being able to tackle hate mongers out of

their own. We encourage them to counteract hate speech and they have the chance to try out and train as well as reflect on several possibilities, for example to argue against hate propaganda in discussion panels and community platforms, to send letters to providers and complain about hate content or to create and upload anti-racist websites or profiles and videos in social networks. This is the moment when talents and creative potentials of teenagers can be incorporated, and it is fun for most of the kids.

Our experiences show, that an educational project realized this way may end in a kind of self-reflection that finally leads to new cognitions and expands the horizons of knowledge and understanding. This is the way how learning can become an action-related process and will not stay something theoretical.

What do we offer? During the last years jugendschutz.net developed concepts for the work with teenagers, teachers and educationists and we organized more than 250 workshops in and out of schools. We conducted seminars at universities and academies in order to teach persons who will be working with children and youngsters.

Due to the fact that we have limited resources – we are not able to go to every school and teach every teacher – we developed and published tools and handouts which multipliers may use for their work on the subject of cyber hate. Here we target different groups: The CD-ROM on right-wing extremism and the book 'Erlebniswelt Rechtsextremismus' both include background information on the phenomenon and concrete material for the educational work with children and youngsters. And the booklet 'Vernetzter Hass im Web' has been compiled for older teenagers in order to sensitize them for right-wing extremist propaganda.

To come to an end: our work made clear that education has to face the problems of hate on the Internet and we do state an enormous need for information and education on this subject by youngsters and adults. The work with kids requires a high degree of expertise, didactical and methodical skills. This is why we are currently concentrating on working with the upcoming generation of educationists in universities – to provide didactical skills for the practical work with children and teenagers.

Education can face cyber hate and what we see is that young people can learn the critical use of the Internet and a critical view on racists, anti-Semitic and all kinds of discriminatory thoughts. Especially an action-oriented approach helps to motivate kids to stand up for democracy and human rights and to act against hate mongers by means of the Internet.

We hope, and I think I share this vision with many of my colleagues, that through this the Internet more and more becomes an instrument to promote tolerance and non-discrimination rather than a tool to spread hate. And – with this I will end – I would like to encourage other organizations dealing with online hate also to implement educational activities.