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From **big words** to **action**

How do we change a paper from the Council of Europe with huge words like diversity, participation and human rights into a youth campaign for and by young people?

Do these words mean anything in your everyday life? For most of us they can seem empty after too many speeches from politicians who have few intentions of putting action behind them or creating a genuine discussion. This is why the campaign has to be about exactly that: action and discussion.

To get a discussion we need different points of view and the first challenge for All Different – All Equal in Norway was that everyone in the campaign committee had to agree on the three pillars of the campaign. This was neither controversial nor did it spark off a discussion. Not until we were able to put aside our political correctness and reach a common understanding of prejudices as the basis of discrimination, could we start our project.

Are you aware of your prejudices?

► **What does political correctness mean to you?**

This is one of the questions we asked over 500 young people last summer. Through 20 seminars at youth camps, we have faced young people with their prejudices. Hidden or secret theatre gave us the chance to put aside the political correctness and make room for reflection. Secret or hidden theatre is a participatory method where you as a trainer have a secret agenda. In a workshop you can either pretend that you are - or represent - someone different to who you really are. For instance have we developed a test where the participants can find out if they are disposed towards discriminatory behaviour or not. The test is presented as a very serious test. If the participants believe that the test is credible it will also make them try to get the best results – for who really wants to be seen as a person who is discriminating against others? The test is built up of many rounds of tests each designed to make the participants start to discriminate against each other. So the theatre is about not giving the participants the full infor-

mation about what they are taking part in, they are the actors. It is done to make them act naturally and to make them see how easy it is to forget all about our principles and allow our prejudices lead to discrimination. In the end of the test the participants get the full information and debriefing on what they have been through. The emotions of such a game can be very strong; when the debriefing is done in a proper way the participants will understand and feel how it is to discriminate and be discriminated against. Usually the feedback is that the people have learned a lot about themselves and also about mechanisms which lead to discrimination and prejudices.

To reach 13-26 year olds, not typically interested in the topics, we have to use a different language than the political correct policy language used by politicians. At the same time without making too simplistic a picture of why discrimination happens and how it is linked to human rights. For most young people in Norway, human rights are something associated with Abu Grahieb and Burma, not our everyday life. We wish to change this image by showing that the prejudices we all have, when put in to action, lead to discrimination and violations of others human rights.

What is the starting point of discrimination? Prejudices are something everyone has. It is all about making assumptions from single episodes; the picture the media gives of some groups and putting people in categories based on origin, sexual identity, religion, skin colour, social background and many more visible and invisible characteristics. Prejudices are based on feelings and emotions, which are further confirmed or rejected by the media and our close surroundings. The only thing we can do to protect ourselves from putting our own prejudices into practise, is to be aware of them. To raise this awareness we developed the “doublethink” symbol. By pausing the first thought and evaluating whether it is fair and justified before you form your own opinion. Does it match with reality or is it just in your mind? Pause – Hold – Play. The first thought is not always the right one.

► The need for equal rights and opportunities

Since 1995 and the last All Different – All Equal campaign, new forms of discrimination have taken form. Fear of terrorism has given rise to Islamophobia. Other forms of discrimination have gained more public awareness like gay and lesbians being harassed on the streets and young people with disabilities still not having the same opportunity to choose education and jobs.. These are just a few examples of the everyday discrimination which makes this campaign worth the effort. The campaign in 1995 was a success out of the political situation. The wall between east and west of Europe was torn down and the slogan All Different – All Equal brought us together. Even if there is no physical wall to remove today, there is a need for equal rights and possibilities whoever you are and wherever you live. Let us together tear these walls down!

► Participation creates ownership

The largest challenge is to make a European initiative truly ours and relevant to Norwegian youth. Youth participation is a buzz word and to me it really means that we have the possibility to take an initiative to change our everyday life. And maybe more important: the power to take part in making decisions. All Different – All Equal was re-launched thanks to an initiative from the Advisory Council on youth in the Council of Europe and by this it directly comes from young people and youth organisations. Young people have participated in the creation of the campaign on the European level and throughout the national campaign committees on a national level. Youth participation in all parts of the campaign creates ownership and ownership is needed to give the campaign a bottom up approach and make a change.

In Norway the campaign committee is composed of the three big umbrella bodies: youth clubs, disability organisations and the Norwegian children and youth council, as well as different organisations representing the broadness of the campaign when it comes to minorities. Ministries are invited as observers. The structure leaves both large umbrella organisations and smaller minority organisations to decide how the All Different – All Equal campaign will be executed.

The joint expertise on human rights education, participation and diversity in the Council of Europe, Governments and youth organisations, are the strengths of this campaign. The challenge is to give young people at national and local levels, opportunities to take part and shape the campaign to their reality. We do this through fifty young people from all over the country who are ambassadors, or “prejudice provocateurs” as we call them. Trained in methods based on active

participation such as hidden theatre, role play and the living library, they travel all over Norway to provoke youth and start discussions at youth clubs, schools and organisations. Funds for local and regional projects make it possible to start All Different – All Equal activities. These projects give young people a chance to make a change where they live and are the main component of the Norwegian campaign.

► The struggle must go on also after the campaign

Youth in Europe are the target group of many different messages and actors. To be able to stand out and make an impression on those who are not already involved in youth work is a major challenge - and with our means maybe not even achievable. That is why this eighteen month long campaign only can be the start. Through the campaign, networks are created and methods are shared that will be needed to continue to tear down the walls of discrimination. We see that the organisations in our campaign committee benefit from sharing experiences and making projects together. In the same way the European dimension gives young people in Norway the chance to know the reality of other young people in Europe and to see that we might not be that different after all. Not when it comes to the wish to live a life where it is not what you are or how you look that decides your possibilities.

All Different – All Equal should not be a campaign of political correctness, but of action. Use a language that everybody can understand instead of big words which have lost their content. Provoke to encourage reflection and discussions. Let us make this a campaign for and by youth where ownership is the result of active youth participation in all parts of the campaign. The European dimension of the campaign gives Norwegian young people insight into the human rights situation in other European countries. At the same time it aims to change our everyday lives by giving access to valuable tools of human rights education and other resources from the Council of Europe and youth organisations. I hope to see creative and effective ways to make people aware of their prejudices and fight discrimination all over Norway and Europe in the year to come. I am sure that we all have much to learn from each other and can develop new methods and projects which will remain long after the campaign is finished.

Start by double thinking about your own prejudices and go out and act. It is up to us!

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