

Benedikt Sturzenhecker, Thomas Glaw, Moritz Schwerthelm

Gesellschaftliches Engagement von Benachteiligten fördern – Band 3

Kooperativ in der Kommune: Demokratisches Engagement
von Kindern und Jugendlichen fördern (KoKoDe)

Abstract

This publication provides evidence of the impact of the GEBe method – a method developed in Germany that aims to facilitate the social and democratic engagement of disadvantaged children and youth in informal, voluntary child and youth work – and develops the model further. Our objective here is twofold: For one, we aim to show how the conditions for democratic participation within child and youth welfare institutions can be established. The publication also shows how the method helps children and young people develop the skills to publicly present their interests and concerns within the community, engage in debate with others and, ultimately, to participate both in the process of democratic decision-making and efforts to implement such decisions. The piloted concept is titled: “Enabling the democratic engagement of children and youth in the community through cooperation” (in German: KoKoDe). The project demonstrates how the various institutions responsible for child and youth welfare can work together with a community’s policymakers and civil society actors in facilitating the democratic participation of children and young people. However, instead of taking an institutionally centric approach, this particular project was designed to focus on the interests and activities or behavior of young people in their daily lives. As a result, the project cultivates a bottom-up educational context.

The book targets professionals active in all areas of child and youth welfare as well as those who are involved with the sponsoring of such organizations. It therefore addresses a broad spectrum of areas, including nursery and daycare, informal child and youth work, all-day childcare, school social work, youth cultural work, family education and neighborhood-centered work.

The book is divided into two parts:

- The first part outlines the rationale, methodological concept and process experience derived from the pilot project “Cooperatively enabling the democratic

engagement of children and youth in the community” (KoKoDe).

- The second part examines more closely the GEBE method, which forms the basis of the pilot project.

The book’s first section shows professionals and sponsors how they can identify the day-to-day issues relevant to children and youth in various institutions, while clarifying and addressing these issues in dialogue with children and youth together. The KoKoDe pilot project meets the long-standing demands of participatory models, neighborhood-centered approaches and educational networks to work with children and young people as citizens and agents of change in ways that allow them to democratically co-determine and participate in the affairs of an institution, society and their place of employment.

Benedikt Sturzenhecker introduces the conceptual rationale and methodological approach underlying the KoKoDe project. Thomas Glaw then describes the goals, methodological steps taken, and the specific experiences, successes and difficulties associated with the practical implementation of the KoKoDe project within the context of the Nachbarschaftsheim Schöneberg e.V. in Berlin, a Berlin-based neighborhood association targeting youth employment issues. As part of the KoKoDe pilot project, a project was conducted that brought together various child and youth welfare institutions in Berlin’s Schöneberg district to test the extent to which a daycare center, informal youth work facilities, youth culture work efforts, all-day childcare and school social work actors can identify and take up the issues relevant to children and young people in consensus with them. Nina Vormelchert reports on her experiences with the process. The participating youth welfare institutions not only discovered issues affecting the children and youth they target, but also cooperated with other organizations within the district in taking action to address these issues.

Benedikt Sturzenhecker then provides a summary of the various methodological approaches taken by the projects. Drawing on this summary, he presents operational steps and courses of action to be taken in a cooperative manner that foster the democratic engagement of children and youth in a community.

Professionals from institutions participating in the Nachbarschaftsheim Schöneberg e.V. project were trained in the GEBE method prior to the project’s launch and were provided support throughout the implementation of the KoKoDe project. Moritz Schwerthelm, who co-trained participants and coached the projects, pre-

sents the methods and approaches applied in training the professionals involved.

Another section reflects on the challenges and successes associated with the implementation of the GEBe method among professionals aiming to build a consensus in promoting democratic engagement within the community. As part of three evaluations, Benedikt Sturzenhecker interviewed the professionals involved to discuss the details of implementation. The evaluation points to positive outcomes as well as some ongoing challenges.

At the end of the book's first section, educational networks expert Stefan Maykus provides a conceptual framework for the democratic design of such networks. Drawing on the Nachbarschaftsheim Schöneberg e.V. pilot project and the Bertelsmann Stiftung's work, he offers concrete suggestions for developing democratically informed educational networks. This once again provides a theoretical justification for cooperation efforts that focus on children and youth, their issues and interests, and their capacity to act in the community.

The book's latter half features contributions that show the validity and advantages of applying such a method to all other areas of child and youth welfare and their target groups. Werner Lindner details in his contribution how those engaged in child and youth work must – and can – influence local youth policy. Marco Althaus then explains the principles of political consultancy for the municipal youth lobby. He outlines what professionals in the field need to know and do in order to be able to advise and influence local politics on youth policy issues. Herbert Schubert, a proven expert on network design, provides insight on and methodological recommendations for identifying and designing networks within a municipality.

Earlier work on the GEBe method gave only marginal attention to the question of children's and youth participation in the welfare institutions targeting them: How can difference and diversity be reconciled with the goal of equality in democratic participation? This issue is relevant because children and young people differ from each other in different ways – which has consequences for how they might become involved in democratic and participatory processes of co-decision-making. Melanie Plößer and Benedikt Sturzenhecker describe in their contribution how difference and inequality are connected and the discriminatory effects they can have on different people. They show that a democracy targeting equality must demonstrate a reflective acknowledgment of inequality and incorporate this awareness into its socio-pedagogical efforts to promote democracy education.

The contributions that follow discuss experiences with the GEBe method and efforts to strengthen it. Jenka Bühler and Anka Henatsch, two professionals from the Nachbarschaftsheim Schöneberg e.V., discuss their efforts to link their method of non-violent communication with the GEBe method. Drawing on the models used in experience-driven learning theories in psychology, Alicia Picker sheds light on the learning processes of professionals that work with the GEBe method. Finally, Annalena Uhlenbrock offers a report of her research internship in which she interviewed two youth workers from the Gütersloh area on their experiences with the GEBe method. Her report demonstrates how a regional youth affairs office can advise professionals at youth facilities on how to implement the GEBe method while strengthening their methodological awareness of the actions they take as well as their reflective processes regarding their field over the long term.