

READY - Religious Education and Diversity

Sharing experiences of, and approaches to,
teacher education in the context of
"Education and Training 2020" (ET 2020)



READY
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY

After the dark

– A thought experiment –

The situation

The bunker has living quarters, one dormitory with ten beds and a small arsenal of weapons. Anyone who is left outside will die of radiation burns. The existence of the human race potentially lies in your hands...

Who do you choose?



Try out in a upper secondary course Protestant RE at the

Uhland-Gymnasium Tübingen – July 20th, 2016

(9 pupils, 1 exchange student from Nairobi / Kenia)

What did you learn about justice? (after “playing” the “game”)

1	<i>It is difficult to decide (who should have access to the bunker) because the decision will never be just. Humans are treated like things with specific skills or characteristics and not a humans as such with a large variety of personalities.</i>
2	<i>Altogether it's kind of scary to “decide about peoples’ lives”, even if it is a game. We have chosen people with certain skills that would help us after the year in the bunker, for example the organic farmer or the midwife. Therefore our arguments were the “usefulness” of each person, a criterion which cannot be justified by ethical arguments.</i>
3	<i>I believe is not a justified way to act because we were mostly only looking at the skills. Someone could be smart in school, but not smart “in the street”, because he is poor in communication and anti-social. One should include further “identity markers” and character traits in the list to make sure the group gets along with each other. This is the only way ...</i>
4	<i>This thought experiment is very interesting and a little bit scary, too. We have chosen people who specific skills which are needed to survive or to build up life afterwards: women, skills of mind, social skills ... In theory this seems to be easy because so believe to choose the person most useful. However, I think reality is far different.</i>
5	<i>It is a really interesting thought experiment. But the decision taken could never be justified because we reduce the candidates’ personality, look only at skills and not at the person. Even if in the “game” the decision seems to be possible, in daily life things will be quite different and more complicated.</i>
6	<i>It is interesting to talk about the different decisions taken. But it will not be possible to find a way which is just. And, the persons deciding, are they meant to be part of the group? Or what is their status, authority and perspective?</i>
7	<i>What is interesting about the test is that you select the people which you want to have in the bunker following certain criteria that are given by a very fundamental assumption. Our group, for example, believed to enter the bunker and leave it alive after one year. And we chose people who could probably satisfy the basic human needs first. And then the need of reproduction seemed important to us assuming the possibility to leave the bunker and to rebuild life.</i>
8	<i>I think in this situation there would be nothing you could call “justice” or “fairness”. In any case you would have to decide about life and death of humans beings, selecting the ones who may enter the bunker. It is like “playing God”. Like this you could call it a “game”, in reality, no matter what you will do, somebody will suffer harm.</i>
9	<i>No solution could be justified. One shouldn't judge human beings by their jobs, skills etc. Human dignity must have absolute priority.</i>
10	<i>Justice is something very personal. It depends on your opinion, your criteria and your perspective, your morals, your values. We just “decided” whether people would be useful for the future society or not. This has nothing to do with “justice”. Justice means that everybody has the same chance to survive whether he is “useful” or not.</i>

Teacher's comment	<p><i>This very motivating thought experiment seems to be an excellent approach for an initialization phase in the context of theories of justice, last not least to utilitarianism. The pupils worked in small teams and had heated and also entertaining debates about the "selection" of the bunker group.</i></p> <p><i>After the "thought" experiment the pupils were very surprised and somehow embarrassed about what they had done. This might raise the question if "thought experiments" like this are ethically acceptable (it probably depends very much on the context and the way of evaluating it).</i></p> <p><i>Actually there is a very recent public discussion about cars with automatic driving systems where similar problems come up: How to program the computer system for the case of a complex and precarious traffic situation in which persons of different ages, different states of health and with different qualifications are involved and difficult driving decisions would have to be taken?</i></p> <p><i>Several pupils mentioned the fallacy of reducing human beings to certain identity markers. This offers a link to the READY teaching proposal of "Identity Tartans".</i></p> <p><i>Interesting assumptions to be discussed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>- What is the role and the authority of the group deciding about the composition of the bunker crew?</i><i>- Are there alternatives to the priority given to reproduction?</i><i>- What would it realistically mean to prioritize reproduction in a group of ten persons?</i>
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