



**HANDS ACROSS THE CAMPUS
IN GERMANY**



In the fall of 2003, three Berlin schools took part in a three-year pilot project, adapting the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) successful democracy education program *Hands Across the Campus* for German high school students. How did a century-old American Jewish organization get involved in democracy-building in Germany?

Since its founding in 1906, the AJC determined that the best way to protect Jews in Russia and elsewhere would be to work towards a world in which all peoples are accorded respect and dignity. Since then, the American Jewish Committee has been devoted to advancing democracy, the rule of law, pluralism and mutual respect among diverse ethnic, religious and national groups. On the political level, AJC focuses on issues such as transatlantic relations, the Middle East, the monitoring of extremism, antisemitism and commemoration of the Holocaust.

One of AJC's successful domestic projects – *Hands Across the Campus*, a Core American Values Curriculum and a Youth Leadership Program under the aegis of the AJC's Belfer Center for American Pluralism – began as a response to so called race riots in Los Angeles in 1981. Since then, it has been used in more than 100 schools in the U.S.,



Hands-Trainer from the U.S. visiting Berlin, March 2004.

tapping the skills of AJC members in a variety of professions. Its program materials have been approved by the Teachers College of Columbia University and are provided free to educators. AJC also provides support and training to participating schools.

The goals of *Hands Across the Campus* in the U.S. are

- to reinforce the democratic values that bind Americans
- to reduce prejudice and build respect for differences among middle- and high-school students
- to develop skills among young leaders for resolving conflict and improving the environment of their school and community

HANDS ACROSS THE OCEAN

In 1998, the AJC became the first American Jewish organization to open an office in Berlin following German unification. Since then, the organization has worked to strengthen German-Jewish and German-American relations.

In 2000, following a wave of right-wing extremist violence in Germany, AJC in Berlin met with then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who encouraged AJC to bring the program to Germany.

After in-depth discussions with German educators, resulting in a co-operation with the Berlin Institute for Schools and Media (LISUM), *Hands* was introduced in 2003 to three Berlin schools: the Amelia Earhart High School in Treptow-Köpenick; the Kurt Tucholsky Comprehensive School in Pankow-Weissensee; and the Walther Rathenau High School in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf.



Students of Walther Rathenau High School during Hands-training, March 2004.

Other project partners are the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth and the Federal Agency for Civic Education. In addition to AJC's support for *Hands*, the project received financial support from the German government that funds the program through its entimon – Together Against Violence and Right-Wing-Extremism program and the Federal Agency for Civic Education. The Institute for Educational Science of the Humboldt University Berlin is completing an external evaluation.

The key to bringing *Hands* to Germany was the understanding that AJC is not trying to import an American outlook. Rather, the project aims to highlight the similarities – democratic core values – between the U.S. and Germany. AJC wants to encourage young people to reflect and define their own values, helping them learn about other cultures and thusly becoming more active participants in democracy.

The project consists of modules in the subjects of German studies, history, political science/social studies/community studies, and English. Controversial themes or statements are introduced and handled through debate and other group activities.

German lesson units include:

1. Identity and Society

- Identity and belonging
- Personal fundamental values: What is important to me?
- Fundamental values in comparison
- Values in everyday life
- Proverbs and sayings
- Culture, values, conflicts

2. Living Democracy

- Democracy in school
- Remembrance in motion
- A day in the life of a parliamentarian
- How to get active: From Greenpeace to me
- America in the Media

3. Democracy in Germany and the U.S.

- Fundamental values in democracy
- Immigration to the USA and Germany and "How to become a citizen"
- Staying or leaving? The political opposition in the GDR
- Revolution of Values: Forms of non-violent Resistance in the Civil-Rights-Movement in the U.S.: The U.S.-American Civil-Rights-Activist Martin Luther King, Little Rock and the African-German Singer Fasia Jansen
- The struggle for women's right to vote
- Dramatic Days in August 1961: The Construction of the Wall
- Heroes of the resistance

4. Human Rights

- Code of Hammurabi
- The Nuremberg Trials as a Contribution to the Development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Racism and Discrimination

- Fights against unjust regimes: Nelson Mandela and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa

5. Challenges for Democracy

- "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"
- Globalization
- Hate crimes / Right-wing extremism
- Sinti and Roma in Germany

Thanks to a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, the German adaptation of *Hands Across the Campus* is being implemented at other schools in Berlin and Germany. AJC hopes the Berlin pilot project will ultimately be adopted as a model for democracy education in Europe.

HOW HANDS WORKS IN BERLIN

At a press conference that launched the project Berlin education officials posited that *Hands Across the Campus*, as an American-style civic educational program, can have a major impact on action-oriented political and democratic education in Germany. Its aim is to instill core values that support civil society. Not only does *Hands*



Press conference, September 2003.

*Working with
american
teaching
methods.*



provide an opportunity to adapt American methods to German schools, it also supports transatlantic understanding and forms a basis for exchange with partner schools in the U.S.

The project has four core ideas:

- the educational approach is oriented around experience and action, both in and outside the classroom
- it reflects the idea of service learning – that is, a problem-solving orientation, in schools and communities
- it includes leadership, mediation and conflict-resolution training
- it offers the opportunity for pupils to experience democracy, a necessary component for a lasting education

The two main tracks of *Hands* are the **Core American Values Curriculum** (which seeks to instill such values as personal responsibility, respect for others, cooperation, civic participation and tolerance) and a **Youth Leadership Program**, an extra-curricular program that develops skills to resolve inter-group conflicts and other problems in school and in the community. It involves planning and implementing a project designed to improve the school or community.

THE HANDS ACROSS THE CAMPUS CURRICULUM: “CORE VALUES” LESSON SERIES

Core values are expressed on both the national and individual levels. Personal values, such as courage, morality, success, honesty, religion and family, help create bonds and a sense of overarching purpose in society. National values are shaped by a country's history, culture, and the framers of its founding documents.

In the U.S., shared core values and language create bonds that transcend ethnic, religious or cultural



differences, serving to ensure individual rights, freedoms, protections, and mutual obligations, and promoting social cohesion in a highly diverse nation.

Social cohesion depends to a large extent on these shared values, including respect for due process, the judicial system, individual freedoms and other citizens' rights, and faith and participation in the democratic system. Shared language facilitates participation in civic and economic life.

Two crucial democratic concepts – natural rights and the social contract – are expressed in our national documents, which advance a notion of

democracy as representing the participation of the people in the governance of the state, while emphasizing individual rights and capabilities to shape and direct their institutions.

In America, the contributions of immigrants are seen to have enriched life for all citizens. The earlier imperative to "assimilate" has long given way to the concept of "acculturation," in which the identities and cultures of immigrants are celebrated and taught, while core American values are instilled and civic participation encouraged.

HANDS IN BERLIN, IN PRACTICE

These same precepts can apply in Germany, as we see from the pilot project of *Hands in Berlin*. Here, teachers have used the Hands lesson series successfully in grades 8 through 12, in history, political studies, English, German, and philosophy.

Class evaluation was essential to the adaptation of *Hands* to Germany.

The results showed that students liked the core values concept, because it gave them an opportunity to get to know their fellow students better and to consider the relevance of various opinions to their

*AJC Berlin
director, Deidre
Berger, talking
to Hands-
students,
November
2003.*



own lives. The students also had access to a survey showing that personal core values barely differ around the world.

The cooperative learning strategy won kudos from students. The strategy involves small teams of students approaching a subject using a variety of educational methods.



Important component of Hands: Lively discussions.

Each participant must learn and help others. This helped create an atmosphere of collective effort, transcending individual abilities or social, cultural and ethnic differences. Students particularly enjoyed the lively discussions in small groups.

For example: in the "Think-Pair-Share" method, individuals think about a question posed by their teacher. Then students pair up and exchange ideas. In the third phase, the pairs share their responses with another pair or with the entire class.

In the "Jigsaw" method, students form teams with five or six members. Each group receives a working order, and each member has an assignment. The student then reports his results to other students with the same assignment. After the "experts" have reported on their results, the students reform the original teams and teach each other.

SCHOOL PARLIAMENT COACHING, CONFLICT MEDIATION AND SERVICE LEARNING

One goal of the Youth Leadership Program is to strengthen students' knowledge of their rights in Berlin schools. Another goal is to develop the ability to participate in politics, using essential tools for presenting proposals or moderating discussions.

School Parliament Coaching: From September 2004 through March 2005, a six-part training session for students was held at the Berlin Agency for Political Education. "Students Take Responsibility: What Options are Opened Up by the New School Law (of January 2004)?," a project of *Hands Across the Campus*, was supported by Berlin's State Institute for Schools and Media and the Berlin Agency for Civic Education.

The seminar was designed to help pupils and educators understand and use their new rights to participate at the school conference, the highest caucus of each school in Berlin. Material for the seminar was the brochure, "Reclaim the School – the School-Parliament Handbook." Topics included an introduction to the new law, presentation and moderation techniques, project management, and public speaking.

Conflict mediation involves a trained neutral third party (teacher, parent or student) assisting others

AJC-delegation meets students of Kurt Tucholsky Comprehensive School, April 2005.





Students of Walther Rathenau High School during Hands-training, March 2004.

to find mutually agreeable solutions. The method is based on Peer Mediation projects developed in the United States in the 1960s to help students resolve conflicts due to verbal or physical assaults.

The Amelia Earhart High School has one conflict mediator; the Kurt Tucholsky Comprehensive School has two; and the Walther Rathenau High School has six educated peer mediators. Some of the mediators were trained through the "Buddy Project" of the Vodafone Foundation (<http://www.buddy-projekt.de>).

Teachers passed along their training to students, in hopes they can learn to mediate conflicts on their own. But teachers are available to assist if need be.

At the Kurt Tucholsky Comprehensive School, two VSY-students (serving a Voluntary Social Year as an alternative to military service) received conflict mediation training and acted as multipliers in other project schools.

Service Learning, an educational concept that involves community-oriented social activities outside the school, plays an important part in "cooperative learning," and thus in *Hands*. The idea is to open the school to the surrounding community, overcoming the isolation of many German schools from their neighborhoods.

An important commemorative date at the beginning of the *Hands* project has given project leaders a first opportunity to test service learning. November 9, 2003 was the 65th anniversary of "Pogromnacht," a pogrom against Jews and their property across Germany and Austria. Many synagogues were destroyed and cemeteries vandalized.

On November 9, 2003, the three *Hands* schools and the Gutenberg High School sent some 80 students and a teacher to Europe's largest Jewish cemetery at Weissensee in former East Berlin. They took part in a service at the Holocaust memorial there. The chairman of the Berlin Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime, Fred Löwenberg, spoke to the students, along with a representative of the Berlin Jewish Community, the directorship of the *Hands* project, and the AJC.

The students, while helping rake and remove leaves in a section of the vast cemetery, also learned about Jewish burial and mourning rites; they spoke to eyewitnesses, asking about such things as the small stones placed on the gravestones. Survivors of Nazi persecution shared their memories of that barbaric period with the students. This project has become an annual event for pupils at the Berlin *Hands* schools.

*Service
Learning at
Jewish
cemetery,
November
2003.*



Following the tradition of post-WW II transatlantic exchange, AJC is pleased that the pilot project was launched in the city where President John F. Kennedy declared his commitment to freedom and democracy for Germans in 1963. Today, Germany and other European societies are becoming more pluralistic. Interethnic tensions sometimes arise in conditions of major political and social change. *Hands* helps explain why unresolved conflicts affect every individual's life and threaten democracy and human dignity.

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Project Homepage

<http://www.lisum.de/Inhalte/Data/Weiterbildung/gesellschaft/demokratieerziehung/>

- ▶ Projekt "Hands across the Campus"

"Hands Project Schools" in the Web

Walther Rathenau High School:

<http://www.wro.be.schule.de>

Kurt Tucholsky High School:

<http://www.kto.cidsnet.de>

Amelia Earhart High School:

<http://www.lakegrund.cidsnet.de>



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American Jewish Committee
A Century of Leadership



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Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung

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