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The Grundtvig Project "Domestic Violence Met by Educated Women"

Results by ZKE

The study "Domestic Violence Met by Educated Women" (DVMEW) was conducted from 2013 to 2015. It was initiated in 2012, following the Istanbul Convention, which had been worked out in the year before. The DVMEW study was a project of the European Commission in the scope of the Grundtvig learning partnerships. Under Finnish coordination, women's organisations from Germany, Finland, Romania and Slovenia participated. In addition, Kyrklunds' Consulting International from Sweden and the Centre for Constructive Educational Science at Kiel University (ZKE) collaborated. The organisations had agreed to focus on two central problems. Firstly, it was to be clarified, how "domestic violence against women" was understood in EU countries. Secondly, a recommendation on the avoidance, reduction or ending of domestic violence was to be formulated. The conclusions derived from the work of the ZKE are presented in the following.

The team from Kiel was involved in the study by making the following five contributions. Firstly, they presented their own definition of violence, which fulfils the requirements of being explicit and unambiguous. The background of the definition is the scientific position represented by the ZKE, which is a methodological constructivist approach. The definition of violence was the basis for the work by the Kiel group on the two central problems to be dealt with in the Grundtvig project.

Secondly, the ZKE proposed its own tested intervention program for the avoidance, reduction or ending of domestic violence. The program emphasizes the role of language, and the principles of "general dialogicity" and the "universal dialogue competence" for the development and success of a practice of non-violent actions.

Thirdly, an own objective, reliable and valid questionnaire was developed and surveyed. With the help of the questionnaire eight areas of domestic violence against women were identified. The questionnaire is a prerequisite for the application of the intervention program.

Fourthly, the research group developed an offer for storytelling, which – following models in belletristic literature (like Fontane's Effie Briest and Tolstoy's Anna Karenina) – would provide women with a special language enabling them to communicate with others about their individual exposure to and experiences of violence.

Finally (fifth), the ZKE presented its own contributions to the participants in the Grundtvig project and offered them to adopt these. The research team collected and answered questions and objections from the organisations. The discussions held with the Grundtvig participants about the ZKE contributions have been documented in a weblog.

The ZKE team has formulated reservations on the handling of its contributions, results and recommendations in two respects. Firstly, the study contains detailed explanations on the scope of its general descriptive statements, wherein the term 'contingent' refers to statements on empirical findings under infinite and future aspects. The analogous refers to prescriptive sentences. Secondly, the empirical results of the study relate to interviewed subjects whose experiences of violence are at the lower end in the hierarchy of violence and who are willing and able to provide information on their domestic situation. Neglecting the defined limits affects the validity of results and conclusions.

The examinations of the ZKE indicate that

1. the definitions regarding domestic violence against women formulated by WHO, UN, and the Istanbul Convention are not explicit and unambiguous, but descriptions in rather colloquial language,
2. the definitions of the WHO, UN and the Istanbul Convention are not suited to provide a comprehensible resolution of the question of what domestic violence against women is understood to mean in EU countries,
3. empirical studies on domestic violence against women, which use the definitions of the WHO, UN and the Istanbul Convention, contribute to relative speechlessness through neglecting the intensional aspect of the definition of violence,



4. in general, education can contribute to the reduction of violence,
5. in particular, the intervention program of the ZKE can contribute to the reduction of violence on a communicative basis,
6. of all domestic areas the communicative area was most frequently affected by violent acts,
7. the violent acts committed by the domestic partner of the surveyed women were associated with a preference of the male individual at an above-average frequency,
8. female Grundtvig participants associated the efforts to limit domestic violence with preferences of the female individual and situational expressions in speech.

At the beginning of the study, the question was asked, how among opponents it can be recognised in which way domestic violence can be warded off effectively. The answer was, in summary, described – against the methodological constructive background – as a culture of discussion, which is referred to as "dialogue" and which has been developed in a pragmatic way in order to avoid, reduce or end violence. According to the findings of the study on tendencies of relative speechlessness and solipsism, an all-decisive start will to draft a roadmap: the partners develop a common language and shared rules for their way towards resolving conflicts non-violently. The chances of succeeding can be increased with the support of the intervention program offered by the research team.

What is meant by the plea for the development of a common language? Everyday language serves to ensure communication in familiar surroundings. However we often talk at cross-purposes when colloquial expressions depart from the private area of the individual, and we understand each other less, the more we are strangers to each other. By answering a woman's question as to why he forced her to have sex with "because I'm a man", the man opens up a communicative divide between himself and his partner. A woman is equally misunderstood by her partner when she responds – also using colloquial language – with a feminist position. The scientific language presents an opportunity to avoid misunderstandings. In defining "violence", the ZKE team availed of the unambiguousness of a terminological agreement. The price for this clarity, however, was a loss in the richness of meaning. Belletristic literature can provide a further possibility for common language use. Based on representations of forms of



violence against women in classical European literature, the ZKE team poses the question as to how storytelling can help to overcome communication barriers.

What is the second demand about, the demand for common rules? In a controversy, claims are made as to how something is (“You hurt me”), and demands are made as to how something should be (“You must obey me!”). In order to end the controversy non-violently, the conflicting parties agree to secure the validity of their claims by means of a process in which their roles are fixed. Whoever makes claims and demands is obliged to explain or justify them. The opponent can react by agreeing. If he does not agree, then he in turn is obliged to explain and justify this position, and so on alternately. The rights and obligations may not be replaced by any privileges, such as those based on belonging to a particular gender.

Commonality of language and rules are necessary, albeit by no means sufficient conditions for a non-violent conflict.

This text is the conclusion of the following publication:

Peter Kroppe, Johannes Peter Petersen (eds.): *Wege aus der Gewalt? Eine Untersuchung zur dialogischen Methode in Europäischem Rahmen* [Ways out of Violence? An examination of the dialogue method in the European setting]. Waxmann. Münster etc. 2015 (to be published in autumn 2015).

