

Andreas Böhle, Mark Schrödter

Institut Sozialwesen / Fachbereich Humanwissenschaften
Universität Kassel

andreas-boehle@uni-kassel.de

HOW TO BECOME A SIGNIFICANT OTHER FOR VIOLENT YOUTH

Social work interventions for intense violent youth frequently fail. This often leads to the exclusion of the young people from all pedagogical efforts, or – at last – in the exclusion from society through imprisoning.

The theoretical discussion about potential treatments for violent youth is mainly focuses on the psychological attitudes social workers pose against them. The protagonists of so called confrontative-pedagogic as well as proponents of repressive approaches portray the clients as people who conceive social work interventions based on being kind, offering support or giving respect in advance as weak, silly and dishonorable. Thus, the normative attitudes of the social workers and the clients seem to be incompatible, which repetitiously lead to a failure in building up a working-alliance between social workers and the youth.

This presentation discusses some of the results of the evaluation (funded by Hesse Ministry of Social Affairs, Germany) of the “Trainingcamp Lothar Kannenberg”, an institution for young delinquent male. It is shown, that this kind of treatment seems to be highly compatible to the described clients by using a variety of different aspects including confrontative communication.

Referring to theoretical concepts developed by Elijah Anderson’s *Code of The Street* (1999), we are able to show how status is negotiated within a special group of young people, who had to make the experience of being left on their own. Their biographies are characterized by disrespect in their socialization-instances family, school and peers and even by social work interventions. Their dominant experience in life is that they have to care for their own. They are not accepted as persons, while their (violent) behavior is overwhelming the educational staff trying to help them.

In the treatment concept of the Trainingcamp we have found several aspects of intervention, which seem to fit to this special group of clients: transparent and well structured guidelines of daily schedules and behavior expectations, in combination with a special type of communication which is particular based on the rules of the “street-life”. It is shown how the social workers are able to gain respect by the youth which enables them to become a significant other in the sense of George Herbert Mead and to function as a mediator within the pedagogical process to help the young people to distance themselves step by step from the violent logic of street life.