(Civic-) education in times of extremism – Lifeworld-narrative group-work and the "culture" factor: Two model projects and accompanying qualitative EU research

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Last autumn, the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* ran a story about a young prisoner without school-leaving qualifications – and about his teacher, who had worked for some time in a grammar school and for many years in vocational training colleges, and who was now teaching German – i.e. culture and language – in a youth prison. According to the teacher, he had now ended up in "education's core business", leading the article to pose the fundamental question: "Can education improve people?" Moreover, under what conditions can it do so in the case of young persons who are increasingly brutalized, out of control, multiple offenders? Reasonably enough, the *Zeit* dossier of 8th July 2010 asked "whether probation is a curse" – since what actually needs to be done is to conduct extensive social-therapeutic work in prisons themselves.

What we want to do, however, is to try to turn the question of whether education can improve on its head, and ask: Can *education* be improved? What can "normal" education as conducted in various forms in schools learn from innovative approaches in prison and criminal prevention? What can 'civic education' – this uniquely German approach from the post-war period – can learn (cf. Weilnböck 2012a)? What can those first-line practitioners of innovative social work in highly problem-laden focus areas teach us about (civic) education in any of the more moderate zones of society? Can it suggest how working ability in today's classrooms and lecture halls might be developed in the long term? How might the cultural and social sciences in particular be able to profit?

We wish to follow up this question on the basis of two federal model projects in youth social work that focus on preventing violence and radicalisation, and on the re-integration of violent offenders. Both of these projects employ innovative social-therapeutic methods that follow a similar educational principle: *Cultures Interactive e.V.* works in schools and communities with youths prone either to rightwing extremism or (religious) fundamentalism. It involves youth cultural workshops and uses methods of post-classical civic education. For some time it has also been using modules of group self-awareness. The "culture" factor plays a particular role here. *Violence Prevention Network e.V.* works in prisons with young offenders whose crimes display an extremist or fundamentalist background, and that fulfil the criteria of *hate crimes*. The method

developed to work with these people – Responsibility Education® – aims to stimulate in the young offenders a long-term process of reflection of own biographical history and of their subjective experience of their crimes. Accompanying post-socialisation work aimed at providing the young offenders with key soft-skills prepares them for reintegration once leaving prison. A further important impact factor alongside elements of civil-societal and civic education is processual-dynamic group-work and its cultural context, and is thus similar in essential respects to the *Cultures Interactive* approach

A range of evaluations and impact measurements conclusively prove that both training providers are exceptionally successful. However this is not to say that it has been explained precisely why these approaches work so well, or what can be learned from them in order to "improve" education as a whole, and to develop methods of social and youth work.

It is all the more appropriate, then, that both projects are accompanied by EU initiatives in so-called Best Practice research, whose goal it is to analyse effective intervention methods for their precise impact factors and conditions, so that the methods can be developed with a view to optimising their effectiveness and applicability in various – EU – contexts.[1] Already in the provisional evaluation stage, this accompanying research has arrived at conclusions that suggest that educational methods commonly used in schools/universities and in social work and civic education do indeed partly need to be modified and extended. Concepts of "emotional intelligence", "psycho-social competence", "lifeworld-narrative group-work" and the analysis of "fictional narratives of the cultural environment" will play a central role here. More broadly, resources of clinical psychology and psychotherapy will also enter the picture – to an extent that social work and civic education, not to mention the cultural sciences, tend not to like.

Cultures Interactive – Youth cultures in the group

The target group of Cultures Interactive lives in structurally-weak regions and districts characterised by high youth unemployment and struggling schools and families. These regions display either widespread hegemony of nationalist, rightwing extremist and/or xenophobic youth milieus (e.g. in rural regions in east Germany) or migration-related

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[1] Towards Preventing Violent Radicalisation' (TPVR, EU-Directorate ‚Justice'); 'Literary and Media Interaction as Means of Understanding and Preventing Adolescent Violence and Extremism" (LIPAV, Marie-Curie-Research, Weilnböck 2009-2012) cf. Pizani Williams/ Pollock & Weilnböck 2011a, b.

tensions (e.g. in disadvantaged inner-city boroughs). In both socially problematic areas, young persons run the risk of developing radicalised affect and thought compulsions, and of becoming violent and committing corresponding offences. It is almost impossible to reach them through classical civic education or schooling, if only because of high truancy rates. For this reason, the *Cultures* team is often warned by teachers in these areas that, "you won't be able to work with this lot for long, they aren't interested in anything, they can't concentrate on anything, they're gone after the first break, and a few of them are well known to the police." Experience shows, however, that these young people (who are indeed not easy to handle) are often still enthusiastically attending the workshops even after the lunch break. Here the questions need to be raised: Why is this? And what precisely happens there?

The *Cultures Interactive Approach* is based on a concept of social work (Baer, Wiechmann & Weilnböck 2010 a,b, 2011a,b,c Weilnböck 2012b) that uses youth cultural practices – e.g. dance (in breakdance), acrobatics (in skateboarding), song and spoken word (in rap and slam poetry), digital music production (in DJ-ing), graphic design (in comics and graffiti) – to conduct democracy education and develop civil-societal skills among socially vulnerable youths who are otherwise difficult to access. Nevertheless, the method needs to be distinguished from straightforward experiential-educational work. It is based on the following methodological tools and underlying assumptions:

(1) The principles of *peer-learning* and *informal learning* mean that participants work a lot together, under the supervision of youth-cultural practitioners who in many cases are not much older than the participants themselves. These rappers, skateboarders and DJs/DJanes are themselves proven and self-declared members of the respective youth culture and can thus authentically convey its cultural techniques and attitudes. However they do this in a way that is critically and methodically thought out – and in close cooperation with modules of civic education. One aspect of this is the facilitators' reference to the civil rights and social backgrounds from which these youth cultures emerged. For example, many of the young persons and adults in these regions and boroughs do not know that HipHop comes from the experience of violence and criminality of American "inner-city ghettos", where unemployment, drugs, racism and sexism dominate, and it is precisely this that informs HipHop's rejection of violence and drugs as well as the key term of mutual "respect". On the other hand, the workshop facilitators focus on tendencies towards homophobia, sexism and the glorification of violence that today are part of the marketing of much youth culture. They encourage discussion about

the misogynist or homophobic aspects of many song texts or images, at the same time practicing breakdance, digital music production, slam poetry composition and graphic design. The colleagues from the modules of civic education and open group work build on this and then extend and intensify the issue which came up.

(2) The principle of *goal and project orientation* implies that concrete mid-term goals are always borne in mind during all youth cultural activities, these being pursued in joint, team-based work. In *Cultures Interactive* these project orientations currently have two dimensions: (2a) In the "Cultural regions 2010" project, work is carried out on the community from a social-regions perspective, using young persons' cultural practices to involve them in the communities in which they live. Work begins with the schools in the region. In addition to the youth culture workshops come "open space" events, where community-interest projects arise: the building of a skate park; measures against the formation of aggressive cliques of same-aged youths and regional "fear zones"; dance training opportunities; repainting the school building. Self-conducted social-region analyses underpin these projects and generate short films, image collages or rap songs. "Future workshops" are held exploring areas where concrete changes could be made that bring on board adults and people with roles in the community. In a mid-term process, the Cultures team accompanies and supports the young adults with practical and bureaucratic challenges, the latter at the same time gaining essential experience of political participation and self-empowerment in the context of youth cultures.

(2b) In the "Fair Skills" project, the overarching project goal is the personal and vocational qualification of the individual. It brings together course teams where young persons from socially disadvantaged areas train to become "youth cultural facilitators" and thereby develop skills relevant to the job market. The participants qualify to be able to give people of the same age basic courses in youth cultural practices and subjects – and thus also to pass on civil-societal attitudes, e.g. tolerance or "respect". In order to be successful in this, participants learn basic techniques for communication and self-awareness in dealing with (peer) groups and for leading training and educational exercises. After receiving a certificate, participants are accompanied as a group by "Fair Skills" in preparing to give their first courses to other young persons in their community.

(3) The principle of the *lifeworld-narrative procedure* ensures that the personal-biographical experiences of the individual are prioritised and actively sought out by the facilitators of all modules, and if necessary given preference over the teaching plan and the workshop programme. "Lifeworld narratives" here basically means nothing other than

what the young people *have to say* and what stories they have to tell – if one asks them seriously and if one is prepared to listen to them carefully. These narratives concern experiences in the young persons' personal and community surroundings; at first they can be discussed and then put to creative use, for example in a graffiti, a rap, a comic or a breakdance routine. Unlike straightforward discussion and argument about civil-societal topics or subject matters connected to democratic training, in lifeworld narration it is always possible to observe individual histories, personal experiences and emotionally charged topics for each individual. Nowhere else is a person and their social environment more present as when they are telling a story from their own world. Nowhere else can a person be accessed better; nowhere else are they more open for changes of attitude and behaviour as when they have just talked about themselves and their experiences.

The most recent interdisciplinary narrative research (from the disciplines of social and cultural science, psychology and psychotherapy research) strongly supports the prioritisation of narration as an educational tool (as opposed to information, discussion and debate) (Herman, Angus/ McLeod, Tschuschke, Weilnböck 2006, 2008). Also indisputable, though not sufficiently recognized, is that the narrative-lifeworld approach is all the more appropriate the less there exists in a person's background access to education, and the more impulsive and more prone to violence this background is. It is precisely here that the informative, rational-argumentative methods of classical civic education are least effective. The *Cultures* approach increasingly attempts to account for this in its second main area: civil-societal democracy education. Here, the workshops attempt to connect issues of history and citizenship as far as possible to the lifeworld narratives of the young persons. This module contains important and narrowly defined learning goals that do indeed need to be part of any work on preventing extremism and violence; the methodological repertoires of civic education and/or anti-bias work are excellently suited to this. Nevertheless, all the necessary provision of information, objective explanation and precise argumentation on issues of human rights, migrant policy or minority protection notwithstanding, post-classical civic education continues to place particular emphasis on what the individual has actually experienced, for example in connection with "foreigners", members of a minority, or human-rights relevant scenes – and what individuals have to tell about these experiences.

(4) Because the deepening of personal experiences frequently involves – and should involve – some degree of emotional intensity, and because this requires that these activities have their own framework and setting, which ideally should be a group setting,

Cultures follows the principle of *group-dynamic based learning*. For some time, it has used an additional module of an thematically open conversation round, which is essentially run as a *self-awareness group*. In this "We-Amongst-Ourselves-Group" (Weilnböck 2012c), the young participants get together to exchange, via personal narratives, accounts of events that have occurred either in their biographies and/or their social environments. The topics are derived from all areas of experience and are directly introduced by the workshop participants, sometimes prompted by the civic education modules, sometimes prompted by – open, non-directive – enquiries from the facilitator, which are phrased in as broad terms as possible. The narration in the group then impacts back on the youth-cultural workshops and the civic education, deepening it in the process.

The evaluation of this work suggests that anyone who might have thought that young persons with little education and ability to articulate themselves are incapable of taking part in such a self-awareness group needs to fundamentally rethink. As if they were simply waiting for an opportunity to do so, the young persons recount stories about friends, conflicts, scenes of violence, loyalty and betrayal, where they got help and support (or discuss where they could have gotten this support) and also what made them happy in their lives thus far. This narration might begin in the thematic area of the peer group, for example: what is so fascinating about particular leisure and youth cultural styles; the fact that you used to be rightwing and in certain respects still are; and above all, how it all came to happen, what concrete persons, scenes and experiences played a role. Or else: what it means to be a Muslim and to have "honour", and in what directly experienced situations this came to be an issue for you; more generally, who or what you love or hate and where you think that comes from; and also what films and songs you watch and listen to and what you like about them, what films you'd like to watch with the group, so you could talk about them afterwards; what exactly goes on in the politics of the clique and how you experience that; how and where emotions arise, etc. All this already contains a great deal that is political-civil-societal. Any civic education that builds on this will have an even longer-lasting impact.

As a rule the talk in the group quickly turns to the family and above all its conflicts and problem areas. Participants tell stories about collapsing parental homes, periods in children's homes, youth psychiatrists and close, overburdened friendships, experiences of violence, of being abandoned and struggling to deal with things – and how all this is dealt with. After a while, participants learn to take more of an interest in what the others do, to understand differences and points of similarity, to listen better, to enquire more openly

about things that previously they would have avoided because of the uncertainty they caused. Participants get to know one another in a way that is not possible in the clique. And they intuitively know how to appreciate that.

Given this fact, one finding of the accompanying evaluation was all the more remarkable: namely, that during the conception phase of the project, the intention to use a self-awareness group met with a great deal of scepticism and resistance from colleagues in social work (Weilnböck 2012a). The argument was that recourse was being taken to a method that belonged more to psychotherapy or clinical work and that this is not appropriate for social work. It seems that in the fields of civic education and social work, "psychological" approaches or elements are sometimes difficult to communicate – a comment that can also be made about the academic social and cultural sciences. It is easier, however, to agree about working in a "lifeworld-narrative" mode. And there is no controversy at all about the observation that, particularly with vulnerable young people, it is necessary to involve the "relationship" level, and more generally about the importance of "clarifying" as precisely as possible "the relationship [between course facilitator and the young people]" and if necessary "of changing it" (Spangenberg; Steger).

This is because on numerous occasions practitioners of civic education have experienced that vulnerable youths and/or "young 'rightwingers' have very sensitive [relationship] antennae: 'What's he/she like?' 'How does he/she talk to me?' 'How does he/she seem to treat me?' and decidedly less frequently, 'Is the argument sound?'" (ibid.) Moreover, the experience is universal that the "power of objective argument" should on no account be "overestimated" in youth work. After all, it is almost impossible to "counter feelings or emotions rationally, with facts and figures" (ibid.). Instead, the only way is to enquire about experiences and the stories that underlie them. This is even more the case for relationships and emotions in a group, where there can be countless instances of narration, clarification of actual situations and stories of having made a personal change. For that reason, it is not surprising that the quality of the pedagogical process in *Cultures Interactive* interventions has significantly increased wherever it has been possible to introduce an accompanying "We-Amongst-Ourselves-Group".

(5) The final principle that can supplement and deepen the proceeding ones is that of *cultural and media based learning*, which strongly involves the "culture factor". This aspect is based on the general experience that young people – like us – absorb a great many fictional stories and media products, consuming them as "entertainment". What goes unnoticed, however, is that these films, song texts, comics books often contain close

references to personal experiences and life topics and provide us with an opportunity, through our mental media interaction, to deal with *personal developmental challenges* (Kansteiner et al., Weilnböck 2008, 2011). The exchange about such film, lyrics etc. in a "We-Amongst-Ourselves-Group" can therefore further stimulate the personal learning process in the workshops and thereby deepen it.

Violence prevention network – work with young violent offenders

For the VPN course in prisons, group-work was an integral part of the approach from the outset. Here we are talking about young persons who – mostly in connection with a group – have been sentenced for violent crimes and who harbour extremist or fundamentalist impulses, and thus represent a manifest danger both to others and themselves. These young people now need to be enabled to respect the rights and the dignity of all persons and to resolve conflicts non-violently and take responsibility for their own lives. In other words, deep-rooted mechanisms of social exclusion and anger-reaction need to be worked on, and central personality competencies retrospectively developed: affect control, emotional intelligence, empathy, personal reflection and the ability to build trust and form relationships.

As the findings of the best practice research suggest, this challenge, which the VPN undertakes using its *Responsibility Education*® approach, is very difficult to bear without group-work. For that reason, VPN brings together up to 8 participants and two facilitators, who together complete approx. 20 day-long group sessions over the course of 4 to 5 months. Additional one-to-one conversations are also conducted, as is individual coaching for those who want it in the first year after release from prison.

The group sessions themselves are in principle open, both in terms of their process and the topics discussed in them. They begin with a flashlight round, where immediate concerns to do with everyday life can be aired. Placed within this basic process-openness are nevertheless the following methodological-thematic components: (1) The personal motivation statement of each individual; (2) the development of a climate of trust and confidentiality in the group; (3) discussion and analysis of biographical topics (in particular of experiences of violence, denigration or neglect), as well as (4) topics to do with "friends/ mates/ the clique"; (5) centrally, more intensive work on the offence scenes of each participant; (6) topics of civic education, running throughout the course (human rights, civil liberties, group based enmity [W. Heitmeyer, Endrikat,K. et al.] like sexism/

homophobia/ racism, extremist positions ad their consequences); (7) family days; (8) educational exercises and role-plays, sometimes sporting activities and informal group meetings, which always also is supplementary material for group self-awareness.

In detail this involves the following: (1) that each offender who has registered or is being considered for a VPN group completes a biographical interview with the two facilitators. This intensive conversation is used to observe the personal motivations of the young man and to ensure that his decision to participate in the group is voluntary. The goals of the group work are explained and the need for as much mutual honesty as possible emphasised, as is the need for the participant's basic willingness to talk about himself and his offence(es).

The facilitators guarantee to the participants that what is said in the group will remain confidential. The participant expresses his reservations, worries or personal interests. In other words, a working relationship is established with the facilitators in the course of this two- or three-way conversation, which the individual can return to at any point during the group process. Lastly, facilitators and participant agree on the participant's individual learning goals, which are identified by looking at his biography and offence.

The further and more detailed discussion and analysis of the participant's biography happens later in the group session. Empirical violence research has made abundantly clear the extent to which a connecting thread runs through experiences of violence, humiliation and powerlessness in the biographies of this type of offender, whether it was because the father was absent or violent, because of the frequency with which parents either moved house or exchanged partners, or of parents' illness, drug addiction or inability to manage their own lives. It is also well known how closely these histories are related to the violence later carried out by the child.

However the young persons themselves do not know this, and even less can they gauge the far-reaching effects their personal backgrounds. The VPN therefore sees it as the task of the first phase of group work to understand as a group the biographical circumstances of individual participants, and to a certain extent to experience and feel them as if one's own. Here it should be underlined that the facilitators emphasise insight and the assumption of responsibility, and not the creation of a false sense of relief by creating a biography of "victimhood". It should be said, however, that in VPN's practical work with the young persons this problem rarely ever occurs (and might rather be perceived as such in the public perception of any such social therapy). In the VPN groups,

the experience is far more frequent that the young men are for the first time in their lives placed in a situation where they are able to express the important facts and episodes from their own lives. According to the course curriculum, the responsibility education approach used by the VPN is expressly aimed at talking as "honestly" and "authentically" as possible, and that "the structural principles of narration" therefore start to take effect. From the outset, the VPN has recognized the importance of narration (as opposed to discussion, argumentation or description) and, as above in connection with the interdisciplinary narration research, that it is especially significant in work with persons with little access to education who are prone to violence. Here, the VPN consciously employs methods for generating narrative used in biographical therapy, for example the life-historical partner interview, the generation of a genogram, or the drawing and illustration of a personal lifeline, which can facilitate access to one's own biography.

Another area alongside the family background to which the VPN method attributes a great deal of importance is the consideration and narration within the group about friends, cliques and mates – i.e. significant relationships. What was crucial for one's life before the offence with people of one's own age in or outside the clique? What happened with people who did not belong and were seen as enemies? What attitudes and resentments ruled? Were there leaders? Were they fair or were they violent and conspiratorial? Were there pressures – either behavioural pressures or ideologically informed pressures? How did one feel there? When did one feel good and when was one ambivalent? Like when discussing the family, experience shows that these short sequences rapidly lead to the broaching of thematic areas of "violence", "extremism" and "fundamentalism" / xenophobic affects, which can then be addressed and worked on in the group.

From the outset, the responsibility education of VPN sees the task of the facilitators to create a climate of reciprocal trust and reliability within the group. This is introduced at a didactic level insofar as forms of democratic equality are practiced within the group. Agreements are reached on how to behave towards one another – what is desirable in the group and what is not acceptable. For example, should one be allowed to talk about one's own feelings (something that generally does not happen in male youth groups prone to violence and radical attitudes)? What standards should apply when talking about others? The aim of this preliminary discussion is to operate, within the group milieu, a maximum degree of mutual acceptance, support and trust. The very difficult and demanding phases that follow can then build upon this basis. The fundamental attitude of the facilitators themselves often appears to play a role in this process, although the VPN facilitators often

seem so be unaware of the factors behind their considerable success in creating trust (see below on accompanying research).

The main focus of the course are the so-called "violence sessions", which aim to stimulate the young offenders' personal appraisal of their own violent acts. These sessions present the biggest challenge for all participants – and the facilitators alike. Research shows that in the violent act everything comes together in a highly-charged mix[2]: (i) one's own, often repressed history of being at the receiving end of violence; (ii) the unconscious attempt to reverse this through one's own violence; (iii) the act itself, which is often experienced as a moment of ecstasy which later on can hardly be remembered in any precision; (iv) the inhumane brutality, which is often completely ignored but which then – in the "violence sessions" – is talked about as openly and as non-judgemental as possible. There no detail is spared, no matter how irrelevant it might seem: (a) one's feelings before, during and after the violence are examined and recounted, (b) one's specific intentions to do physical harm to another person, one's "enemy" images and one's hate fantasies, that in turn have a lot to do with one's own life history; (c) a "staging" or "constellation" of the scene in detail or a step-by-step recollection of the sequence of events; (d) thereby the patterns of justification and pat excuses dissipate and are abandoned which are usually used to dismiss everything ("nothing much happened", "it's been his own fault" etc.); (e) the victim of the crime becomes visible increasingly clearly, so that the suffering caused by the act of violence and hatred, both in the short and long term, become ever clearer to all participants in the group. All this generates a high degree of emotion, often pushing participants to the borders of what they can tolerate and deal with so that a special post-session debriefing has to be available at any time.

The method used by VPN works on the assumption that the retrospective development of abilities to empathise, understand one's own feelings, control one's affects and understand things rationally takes place most intensively in the biographically-informed violence session – not merely among the involved participants, but also among all others that take part, assist and follow the process. Here, a particular potential of group-work appears to consist in the fact that the other participants of a VPN-group, themselves "specialists in violence" are all too knowledgeable about all aspects of violent behaviour, are able to help the person currently at the centre of attention through asking him questions

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[2] Dudeck, Manuela; Spitzer, Carsten; Gillner, Michael; Freyberger, Harald J. (2007): Dissoziative Erfahrungen während der Straftat bei forensisch-psychiatrischen Patienten - Eine Pilotstudie erschienen in „Trauma und Gewalt", Heft 2; 1. Jahrgang, S. 34 - 41.

and vigorously encouraging him, sometimes confronting him, and finally pay their due peer-respect to him for his efforts. Characteristic for this approach to working through the crime scene seems to be that, when these "violence sessions" are prepared and coached in this way, afterwards the participants are always emotionally moved, exhausted and sometimes deeply shaken up, however that no one feels degraded, humiliated or broken. In view of the findings of psychological violence research, this all appears reasonable and to contain a great deal of potential, given the knowledge of how easily experiences of humiliation and degradation – and sometimes morally-based judgement – can in certain circumstances lead to a spiral of violent behaviour deepening rather than being ended (cf. Sutterlüty).

More broadly, the VPN approach emphasis the value of rationally understanding the high degree of personal emotionality generated during the "violence session", in order to find out each individual participant's specific pattern of violence and factors that trigger it, as well as the physical signals that warn of an imminent loss of control. At the same time, the individual "hate culture" of each participant is precisely analysed, and discussion takes place about what happens when one remains in such a hate culture and constantly feels threatened by a hostile environment. The group can also develop and rehearse possible ways to begin to free oneself from the compulsions that go with this hate culture. Building on this, the facilitators draw up a personal "safety plan" for each individual. It is explained how safe behaviour can be distinguished from unsafe behaviour, what situations can be rehearsed and where points can be identified at which the dynamic of violence can be exited, how one distances oneself from group pressure, and how one takes the edge off aggressive provocation.

The VPN approach treats the work with the attitudes, prejudices, resentments and ideological and religious thought patterns of the participants, usually closely related to the patterns of justification for their crimes, as a crossover task – of civic education – running throughout all methodological components. Regardless whether the respective background is politically extremist or religious fundamentalist, the experience of the VPN is that violent offenders claim that people don't have the same value, and that violence is necessary in order to protect that which is worth more. The course modules of civic education concentrate systematically on such thought patterns, and what constitutional rights, civil freedoms and the rule of law can do to counter this. However, like *Cultures Interactive*, *VPN* also emphasises the value of integrating topics of civic education as directly as possible into the lifeworld experiences of the participants. The aim is to avoid

an argumentative battle between entrenched political fronts, in other words not to "counter feelings or emotionality [...] rationally with facts and figures" (see Spangenberg, above), and instead to awaken participants' attention to what is experienced and narrated, and for the subtleties, contradictions and biographical influences that the worldview of each and every person displays. In the process, topics of xenophobia, anti-democratic national community and the evaluation of the Nazi period are repeatedly introduced into the discussion, thus becoming a constant theme.

Provisional finding from two EU projects of Best-Practice Research (TPVR and LIPAV)

What is it exactly that makes these two approaches – the one in prisons, the other in local community prevention work – so effective? While both techniques clearly demonstrate Best Practice in working with vulnerable youths in the field of Hate Crime, the precise factors and conditions behind their effectiveness have, as has already been mentioned, yet to be explained. The question whether "education" can "improve" people and/or what one might be able to learn from these Best Practices both in this country and in other EU member-states, is one that requires the necessary accompanying research and evaluation. In both projects, a qualitative-empirical design was therefore used that makes use of open, non-thematic methods, in other words biographical-narrative and focused-narrative interviews with participants and facilitators, as well as participative observation (Weilnböck 2007, 2008, 2011).

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Data pertaining to the second research question – how the target group draws on and makes use of cultural/fictional narratives from film, TV, song lyrics, etc. – was collected using a specific media-experience interview (and in part via a group-analytical media interview) (ibid.). This sub-field of the research investigates the question how and to what degree of success the person, in his or her mental treatment of a fictional narrative selected by him or herself, consistently attempts to confront a particular personal "developmental challenge" that possibly or probably also has to do with his or her delinquency or vulnerability to delinquency. The material was evaluated using a sequence-analytical, abductive hypothesis-forming technique, which in addition to the usual analytical steps also draws on the resources of clinical psychology and psychotherapeutic research.

One of the most significant factors in the impact of both social-therapeutic group-work techniques has proved to be that it was possible to generate an interactive atmosphere in which a trusting and resilient relationship was established both towards the facilitators as well as within the group itself. This "trust" proved to be essential, as an all-or-nothing condition, without which the pedagogic techniques and methodical exercises would only have been of limited impact and barely capable of prompting a lasting change in the individual's attitude and behaviour. Why this should have been the case was not immediately obvious. Nevertheless, it was already known from empirical violence research that people tending towards violent and extreme behaviour live according to a marked system of distrust that can sometimes assume paranoid features.[3] The question, however, as to how, in psychodynamic terms, this mistrust is conditioned and obtained, and above all how both techniques still managed to generate trust and resilience, remained for large parts of the research unanswered. Initially it was possible to isolate a few formal factors:

(a) it seemed to be of utmost importance that both teams *come from outside* and not from within the environment of the institution itself. Obviously, the prison is particularly susceptible to distrust. It is very difficult for a prison psychologist to succeed in credibly guaranteeing the confidentiality of the conversation when he or she has a direct institutional involvement in decisions that are life-altering for the prisoner. However for *Cultures Interactive* and their schooling and youth-work contexts, it also proved necessary that the team be independent from the everyday contexts of the young people. Above all the components of the self-awareness-group required a protected space that internal staff and facilitators would have been unable to provide.

(b) That is by no means to say, however, that the institutional environment should remain uninvolved, or that it should not accept and absorb the external impulse, and support and extend it using the means available to it. On the contrary – and this is the second formal factor: the effectiveness of both projects was closely connected to the

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[3] On the "paranoid style of attribution" in "violent imprisoned men" as well as the tendency towards "preventative attack", cf. Tedeschi, J.T. (2002): Die Sozialpsychologie von Aggression und Gewalt. In Heitmeyer/ Hagan: Internationales Handbuch der Gewaltforschung, Westdeutscher Verlag. p. 585.

necessity of involving in the intervention's sphere of impact not only the young people themselves, but also and in principle the *institutions and local environments* to which they belong. It is therefore propitious and helpful when these institutions expressly signal their "respect" for these "outsiders", for example by simultaneously commissioning training for staff members and by seeking institutional consultancy. *Violence Prevention* therefore also often works with prison employees and takes on consultancy roles in higher-level administrative-technical and political structures, while *Cultures* is also active in further training as well as in consultancy for schools and local communities. In both projects this consultancy activity gave rise to networking effects that in turn had a positive effect on the work with the young people themselves.

(c) The third formal factor contributing significantly to the generation of trust and resilience, and thus to the lasting impulses for change that arose, is the fact that in both projects work was done *in the group and with the group*. The interviews clearly indicate that the basic trust of the participants, and thus the degree of impact that the behaviour-altering effects have upon them, are crucially dependent upon a *group-dynamic* approach being taken. In other words, it is essential that attention is paid to the *processes* and the *developments* of the participants in the group and their *relationships* towards each another, and that these processes and relations are conceived of as the primary object of the group work. It is clear that what is said and experienced by attentive and active participants in a professionally-led group goes much deeper and has a doubly lasting impact.

This observation seems to be particularly pertinent with the groups of people at issue here, because almost all violent hate-crimes are generated by clique behaviour – and thus are the product of uncontrolled processes of a so-called escalating *anti-group dynamic*.[4] It is therefore all the more true to say that in both projects an essential social-therapeutic goal of the work is the ability to enter into, maintain and make use

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[4] On the other hand, it should be said that the psychopathic individual offender fundamentally requires forensic psychiatry and is out of place in normal prison and its capacity for intervention. It is particularly important to point this out given the misleading question occasionally expressed as to whether it does not constitute a limitation of a technique such as VPN that it only applies to a selected sub-group of violent offenders. Rather it became evident that the technique – as soon as the necessary framework conditions are provided – can in principle be applied to all types and all degrees of crime. (And even in forensics, excellent work is done with – psychotherapeutic – groups.)

of triangular (at the minimum), multi-pronged and complex group relationships. Both approaches therefore intuitively placed emphasis on demanding from their participants the difficult social craft of talking trustworthily and personally within the group, and of being confidential and discreet outside the group – without at the same time insisting that they be utterly silent and act as though they were members of a secret society.

Moreover, the ability to successfully practice trust, confidentiality and "respect" across the range of loyalties and group- and relationship-contexts in one's life and school/work environment can be seen as the highest goal of *civic education*, in the post-classical sense of anti-bias work. After all, societies in which the opposite of freedom, liberality and non-violence predominate can be recognized simply enough by the absence in them of trust and confidentiality, and instead the presence of indiscretion/denunciation, intrigue, surveillance, fear/exercise of power, and selfish segregation – a misanthropic and anti-social situation that can exist in smaller or larger groups and for which terms such as "anti-democratic" or "extremist" are far too vague. It seems all the more appropriate, then, to aim for what can only be achieved through dynamic and open group-work, namely to provide participants with the ability to find their way in a world consisting of occasionally conflicting and competing groups, and to provide them with the necessary abilities of self-integration and self-delineation.

More broadly, the findings also point to the fact that *the one-to-one supervisor,* no matter how talented, is unable to through his or her work to achieve this demanding pedagogic goal, and that the expectations and self-images of practitioners often equate to a systematic (self-)over-exertion that negatively affect the work. This is especially true for the target group in question here, since violent offenders, or those vulnerable to such behaviour, often grew up fatherless (because the latter were absent either de facto or emotionally). They were thus socialized in a dyadic and *tendentially symbiotic two-way relationship*, which was mostly cramped, insufficiently delineated and chronically over-exerted. For this reason, all social- or psychotherapeutic interventions carried out between two persons are subordinated to additional structural limits that, in the interest of quality assurance, should be cause for concern. Having said that, the two- or three-way conversation has an important *supplementary function*

in the VPN approach and is above all useful when individual results need to be consolidated or when individuals have to be stabilized because the group process becomes too intense for them – a permanent risk with precariously situated groups such as this. Accordingly, the results also indicated that a further formal factor influencing trust-building lies in the precise *dosage of group intensity*, which is regulated through flexible setting changes from the whole group to small groups and to two-way conversations, or through the change to pedagogic exercises and role plays. Nevertheless, it appears to be crucial to the success of the work that *the group* always remains the main point of reference, against which the various individual measures are placed in perspective.

Above and beyond the formal factors, the interview material also raised connected questions as to how the *personal habitus and group-interaction style* of the facilitator contributed to producing the aforementioned prerequisites for generating a climate of "trust and resilience", and how the facilitator succeeded in moderating the interaction within the group in such a way as to be effective in terms of trust and hence of changing behaviour. There are many indications to suggest that the personal attitude of the facilitator represented a *direct influencing factor* – although this runs the risk of being mystified as a personal talent, whereas in fact it is of a thoroughly technical nature and as such can be communicated and acquired.

Violence Prevention Network revealed a central aspect of this personal guidance attitude to be a kind of conversational and group leadership, which, like in *Cultures Interactive*, can be called the "*lifeworld*" mode or briefly: the *narrative* mode of interaction. As mentioned above, this denotes that the centre of the group's attention is occupied by each participant and his or her self and personal experiences, and that the primary interest is the individual, lifeworld experiences of that particular person, to which the other group members relate at an equally personal level. Compared to this, all other components – teaching and training plans, exercises and definite pedagogic content – are assigned a secondary valence, because in order to be lastingly effective they depend on the existence of a relational basis that always offers the possibility for participants to confidently return to narrating their experiences.

In work with violent offenders, then, all morality and all judgements are initially dispensed with. Similarly, in local prevention work, where the primary concern is civil-societal issues of tolerance and diversity, or political educational issues of prejudices and group-directed misanthropy, then any argumentation, information and ethical or value-based considerations are initially put to one side. In both cases, the working approach is primarily concerned with the release of the individual, lifeworld narratives of the participants; with their *subjective experiential perspectives* and *biographical early histories* – and with the exchange of these perspectives with the other members of the group. In this respect, both projects intuitively followed the *pedagogical primacy of narration*, and both discovered and took to heart the fact that people, especially when it comes to making lasting changes to their attitude and behaviour, open up when they are able to *develop their personal narration in a trusting relationship,* to do so in a way that reveals areas of their individual experience, and when they can share these perspectives with other people in a process of group exchange. Aspects of ethics, morality and judgement then seem to return of their own accord, not from the facilitators, but rather from personal motivation.

Of course, the experienced practitioner will hardly be surprised by this. It is well known that morality, judgement, arguments and information have always demonstrated limited effects; people have been quite right to warn against "overestimating" the "power of factual arguments" as opposed to the level of "feelings and emotions"[5]). This is truest of all for vulnerable youths, who automatically react with cynical contempt or inner retreat wherever moral or pedagogic value pressure is generated. Yet regardless of how well known this fact is, it often seems difficult to abandon the moral-judgemental impetus and to acquire and to put into practice a *facilitator style of lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based access*. This, at any rate, represented a particular challenge for both projects when it came to training new co-workers and introducing them to the work and the *facilitation style* of the approach – which one has after all developed oneself (cf. Weilnböck 2012).[6]

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[5] See Spangenberg, R.: http://www.politische-bildung-brandenburg.de/extrem/praevention.html
[6] However it became all the more clear how necessary it is to continue, by means of systematic accompanying research, objectifying, documenting and didacticising Best Practice techniques, in order to provide orientation for further methodological developments in this and other areas of social work and "education".

In concrete terms, the difficulty for methodological approaches like this consists primarily in motivating participants to even begin with *trusting narration* – given that as a rule they are often somewhat disinclined to talk about themselves and about emotional subjects. The ability to narrate in this sense of the term is a quite difficult skill that requires the person first recognizes their own subjective narrative perspective as such, and that he or she is sufficiently familiar with its content in order then to be able to present narrative episodes as detailed and accessible stories and to exchange these stories with others. However the greatest objective difficulty is above all the fact that the personal experiences recalled by this group of participants, for example in the area familial background, often involve exceedingly negative experiences that can only with considerable difficulty (or not at all) be narrated spontaneously – and as such, block other more immediate narrative content.

The skill of narrating is also difficult insofar as the narration – and this is especially the case with less negative subject matter – can take a form that is always more or less *detailed and conducive to personal development*. As is well-known, one can "lie to oneself", "kid" oneself and others, remember essential details "only dimly" and jointly cultivate anti-narrational defence mechanisms. On the other hand, together with the group, one can take risks in narrational self-discovery – which in principle produces social-therapeutic effects. From a narratological perspective, it should be recalled that psychotherapy as such is defined allegorically as the "continual re-telling of one and the same story", only that this one story "is re-told ever better" (Roy Schafer). This can be taken to mean that, through narrative representation, the decisive episodes of a person's biography and life-world can 1) be increasingly elaborated and completed, so that 2) they can gain increasing intensity in emotional expression and in the affective engagement of the narrator. Thereby the emotionality of the narration increasingly comes to approximate what was thought and felt during the experience itself. This *process of narrative-forming* often extends to the listeners and co-narrators in the group, and/or is to a great extent prompted and supported by them.[7] The "better" – in a narratological sense – the story is told, the greater the probability of releasing long-

[7] The biography researcher Gabriele Rosenthal has in this connection spoken of narrated and experienced life stories. In: (1995). Erzählte und erlebte Lebensgeschichte. Gestalt und Struktur biographischer Selbstbeschreibungen. Frankfurt a.M. (Campus). Rosenthal, G. (2004). Biographical Research. In: Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium, J.F. & Silverman, D. (Eds.). Qualitative Research Practice. London: Sage, 48-64..

lasting impulses for personal change and development. From a scientific perspective, too, there is a great deal to be said for trying to elicit development-conducive forms of narrative in the group, and for that reason for the facilitator to adopt the attitude of *lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based access* as the benchmark for the group-culture being aimed for in the intervention.

How, then, did the facilitators in both projects proceed in order to initiate a *narrative process quality* of this sort?

Throughout it was possible to observe that the group and workshop facilitatorsin their own ways signalled *their personal readiness to enter a relationship*. In doing so, they made use in particular of the basic fact that the more one demonstrates a credible personal interest and a "*reliable attentiveness*", the more open others are, both towards themselves and in the way they speak about themselves. However this attentiveness has to be entirely credible and to stand up to all kinds of testing – especially with young people, who relentlessly and minutely scrutinise their counterparts before they trust them.

As concerns the central question as to which further conditions need to be fulfilled so that this trustworthiness and attentiveness at the level of the personal relationship can be reliably applied, the evaluation resulted above all in two findings. Helpful, though as a rule overestimated, is the ability and the readiness of the facilitator to involve *themselves as a person* and sometimes also to reveal personal information about themselves, in order to appear to others as authentic and inspire trust. However this factor is in fact demanded by young people lesser than is generally thought – and sometimes feared. In most cases, the questioning from the adolescents is a matter of fairly uncomplicated and easily manageable initiatives in order to carry out a first contact probe, something that basically is very welcome. (Notably, in almost all cases the facilitators tended to respond to the questions directly and in a measured fashion, without insisting too soon on professional abstinence and neutrality, which comes into play at a later stage during more critical moments. The facilitators, with their process- and relation-oriented approach, go on the basis that a principled abstinence would – logically enough – be understood by the young people to mean that there is something else, something external, that is more important to the facilitator than the working

relationship at hand, and that therefore that the young person him- or herself is of merely secondary importance).

On the other hand, what is generally underestimated, despite it being of central importance, is that the openness and the attentiveness of the facilitator, though thematically unrestricted, is by no means entirely unconditional. Successful praxis in both projects was characterized by the fact that the facilitator demonstrates an attitude that can be called an *attitude of critical attentiveness*. Essential for this is that the facilitator, alongside his or her credible guarantee of confidentiality and trustworthiness, also unreservedly expresses any (un)reasonable doubts, conjectures or enquiries concerning the statements, representations and stories of the participants, and that an atmosphere is thereby created in which everyone can show their true colours and thus, by daring to express themselves, enter into negotiations over their relationships. This is standard in dynamically-open group work, however by and large something that the young people barely have experience of.

Critical attentiveness, in other words, deals with precisely this conflict-prone contact and the frictional points of reference, without of course acting in a way that is aggressive or deprecatory, or even overbearing or suggestive. It is far more the case that in both projects the facilitators pursued the goal of practicing an exemplary mode of *respectful scepticism*, which does not jeopardise the dignity of the person, but which, on the contrary, for the first time gives the person's dignity its due. (While "human dignity" is only very formally guaranteed by an undifferentiated and contact-abstinent notion of tolerance or acceptance, in a successful negotiation of difference it can be properly given credit.) The *critical attentiveness* practiced by both projects observes the basic difference between person and criminal offence, and thus corresponds to a fundamental attitude that is *as accepting as it is confrontational* (cf. Köttig, Steger, Köttig, Harris et al., Harris/ Bush, Harris/Riddey). One might have thought that this combination would be impossible (at least if one bases one's assumptions on the discourse of classical political education or youth work), however it has proved essential as a technique of intervention.

Moreover, this combination contains a specific pedagogical value. The *attitude of critical attentiveness* involves the practice of a skill that this target group can be seen

to be sorely lacking, yet one they urgently need to learn: the ability to get along with people who are very "different", to overcome large subjective perceptions of difference, and to act acceptingly-attentively as well as, in critical moments, critically-confrontationally. They must also learn to maintain this ability in emotionally dynamised group situations – and not to react, as they had previously, with avoidance, uncompromising schism or violent escalation.

Particularly as concerns the "lifeworld-narrative" technique, the *"culture factor"* opens up a highly original spectrum of methodological possibilities. The trusting narration of personal experience can be particularly effectively prompted and intensified using cultural and fictional narrative and/or individual creativity. Particularly with youths from problem areas, a group it is hard to reach, *Cultures Interactive* employs activities and practices taken from urban youth cultures that offer the young adults readily accessible methods for personal self-expression, and which can thereby help to attain a significant deepening of the pedagogic process. Even drawing on films or song texts that the participants indicate to be personally important or interesting opens up numerous possibilities for working on biographical or lifeworld experiences, which can then be taken up in the group discussion. In a person's mental handling of a fictional narrative of his or her own choice, particular personal themes or "developmental challenges" are consistently brought to the fore that can be used for the shared process. Of course the prerequisite for this is that a *lifeworld-narrative and relationship-based access* approach is used and that the facilitator practices an *attentive-critical attitude*.

In comparison with the fundamentally different, what could be called behaviouristic approaches, it can be said that, when taken out of context, individual elements out of a complex technique like the VPN approach have proven barely to function and sometimes even to be unadvisable – in other words, to remove particular exercises, role plays, methods of arrangement or didacticised modules of civil education from the concept as a whole, and to practice them outside the trusting, process-based and relational context of the directed group, will barely be successful. Even maintaining the process-based context requires that care must be taken not to carry out the modules, exercises and role-plays etc. too early, before the framework of trust necessary for life-world narrative work has been reliably generated. This is because

there is a danger that the exercises are only performed by the participants for the sake of politeness, or that they descend into more or less open boredom, and that the biographical investigations remain superficial and clichéd.

The even greater risk of a technique that tries to employ selected exercises while dispensing with the context of relations, process and group, is that in acutely emotional situations particularly vulnerable individuals will enter states of fear and rage, since they are unable to rely on the security of a relational framework of trust, one that because of their psychologically labile condition they absolutely require. Methods such as the "hot seat", where the violent offender is provoked with insults and physical assault, so that he learns not to lose control and resort to violence, need to be cautioned against. People that have learned both approaches were able to provide particularly useful assessments here. Various external assessments have since reached the conclusion that methodically isolated provocation exercises of this sort are disadvantageous (cf. Schneider; Pingel & Rieker). They run the danger of exacerbating precisely what these young people can do all too well (and what is not good for them): bottling things up and hanging in there, until in real life the affect breaks out – at the expense of others. A *critical-attentive* attitude and systematic relational and narrative work in the trust-framework of the group is therefore an essential prerequisite if individual exercises and modules are to have a lasting and low-risk impact. It is all the more important to emphasise this, since in the last decade anti-aggression work has been strongly characterised by such approaches.[8]

The results of the Best Practice research on VPN are thus clear: 1) that the facilitators of the respective pedagogic intervention come from *outside the institution* and are able to act independently; 2) that the *institution and/or the local environment* are, however, *involved* – for example in staff training or workshops given by these facilitators, etc.; 3) above all, that the work takes place *in the group and with the group,* and thus that attention is paid to the processes and developments in and of the participants and their *group-dynamic* relationships with one another; 4) that a

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[8] It is possible to learn a this lesson through a similar methodological trend in psychotherapy: the family arrangement of Bernd Hellinger. Here, the long-established and highly effective methodological element of "family constellation" has been removed from the therapeutic (trust) framework and been used as an isolated -- and sensational -- technique. The bitter consequence has been psychiatric internments and suicides, as well as occasionally highly questionable ideological implications.

favourable dosage of group intensity (combined with supplementary-supportive two-way conversations and exercises) is borne in mind; 5) that the personal habitus and facilitator style of the interventionists generate a *trusting and resilient* relationship, both in the group and in the one-on-one sessions, and that this relationship is nurtured constantly; 6) that on the basis of this relationship a mode of *lifeworld-narrative* and *relationship-based* access to the young people is created that enables the occurrence of a trusting and *development-conducive* narrative about personal experience; 7) that a facilitator style of *critical attentiveness* is adopted that also seeks out points of conflict, at the same time observing the basic distinction between the person and the offence, so that an attentive-enquiring exchange can proceed both *acceptingly and confrontationally*; and 8) that the *culture factor* is incorporated in order to add depth.

These conditions seem propitious for setting in motion mental processes that in turn can lead to the development of essential personality competencies and emotional intelligence and to the alteration of certain attitudes and forms of behaviour. Hence, it is possible to state that in the future an innovative, interdisciplinary and application-oriented technique is called for, and that in the development of interventional methods for use in social work there are good reasons to look for possible ways in which the clinical-therapeutic field might be of assistance – and thus to ease the not always easy relationship between social and clinical work, and between clinical and cultural/social scientific research. Then intervention methods with hate crime offenders will yield sustainable success – and the point will indeed be reached at which "education can improve people".

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