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Youth Organising Themselves

and Supporting Their Efforts through Local Youth Work

Dissertation University of Göttingen 2004

also pub. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen 2005:

http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/diss/2005/wendt/wendt.pdf

and: Verlag Dr. Kovac, Hamburg 2005

Content:

Summary:

In the framework of a qualitative study 62 educational specialists were interviewed about their experiences with respect to attempts to help youth organise themselves and with regard to how they proceeded in their supportive roles. All specialists did youth work for local government organisations.

The material collected was analysed according to a grounded theory model by using a special software program ("INCIDENT") especially developed for this study. Focus was placed on the question whether an approach common to all personnel could be determined with regard to their reactions to self-organisation processes of youth groups. The research results were interpreted in light of Kurt Lewin's field theory.

The most obvious result of this study is that, on the one hand, there is no definitive mode of approach in supporting self-organisation (a common pattern of action [to which one could say: "so that's the way it is"] is missing); on the other hand, it was possible to identify a general framework after characterising support of self-organisation as navigation in the field. It must be noted that the ability of an individual specialist to support self-organisational processes is dependent on his/her competence 1) to perceive and to assess the social environment with which he/she is confronted (that implies an analysis and subjective evaluation of a particular field including any sub-regions as well as the valences and energy originating from such sources); 2) to navigate between the youth and their immediate environment and at the same time to navigate

among the youth themselves with the aid of the strategies (ascertained form utterances made by personnel) which are applied depending on the assessment and evaluation of changes in the field resulting from the actions of oneself and of others.

In addition to the different behavioural actions (so called "procedures" and "interactions") the staff members displayed compressed forms of action with respect to the youth themselves and with regard to the local authorities or local political policies. The latter forms are, of course, a prerequisite of any action to support the self-organisational attempts of youth groups (if need be, to coordinate such attempts with respect to outside interests).

It becomes clear that concrete social actions within this general navigational framework continually assume varied forms and are apparently, to a large degree, based on experience rather than, as is generally assumed, on methodological conventions which are taught to personnel at colleges or universities. Indeed, certain processes do occur as the result of methodological approaches, but not as primary factors. Personnel involved in self-organisation support take actions which are obviously not, as a rule, based on such methodological principles but are part of a reflexive process. Social interaction can (should, must) not, as a rule, be the result of methodologically founded routines because any given situation is in itself unique and therefore demands flexible approaches of action.

The central findings of this study make it possible to draw conclusions with respect to the knowledge and types of abilities which youth work personnel must possess, as well as with regard to their orientation towards the community in which they are active. At the same time a detailed discussion is presented in which the inclusion of field experience in a course of study is considered. An answer is sought to the question of how important it might be to make such experience an integral part of college programs for youth educators/workers so that they can acquire professional competence through concrete situations. The question is also posed as to how closely education specialists need to work with local governments in order to support self-organisation processes. Finally, based on the results of the study, the suggestion is made that further research could be done. It could investigate to what degree the navigation mode implemented by youth within the framework of self-organisation process is applicable to other behavioural areas of social work and thereby lead to actually formulating a formal theory of navigation.