

Social Pedagogical Work with Different Age Groups in Germany

Olga Toporkova^a, Ekaterina A. Glebova^a, Inna V. Vysotskaia^a, Victoria V. Tikhaeva^a,

^aVolgograd State Technical University, RUSSIA

ABSTRACT

Background/Objectives: The main objective of the article is to study, analyze and organize the modern German experience in the sphere of social pedagogical and educational work with socially unprotected adults, including youth and the elderly. The retrospective analysis threw light on the background of work with socially unprotected adults in Germany and predetermined the research objective. **Methods:** The methods of induction and deduction, comparison and generalization of theoretical, practical and statistics data enabled to examine the main strategies of work with the risk-group youth; while the interpretational method and techniques of synthesis and analogy of the data obtained helped to bring to light the most important forms of work with the elderly. **Findings:** Scientific novelty of the article is represented in the following findings: the authors revealed and characterized meaningfully street social work and prevention programs for the risk-group youth to guarantee their socialization and adaptation in the modern society; they analyzed profoundly such forms and methods as intergenerational, biographical and interactive work to provide the elderly personal transition from pre-retirement to post professional period with due account for their interests and possibilities. The findings prove and stress the need of purposeful social pedagogical and educational work with socially unprotected adults in any society as one of the prerequisites both for the successful educational process and the further development of the society at large. **Conclusions:** Presently, different age groups and their problems are actively worked with and on in Germany. Social pedagogical and educational work serve various purposes but the most important goal is to socialize and adapt socially unprotected adults, youth and the elderly to ongoing social and economic changes in the society; guarantee a high standard of their life in the best interests of every person. Purposeful work with socially unprotected adults is very important. It is one of the prerequisites both for the successful educational process and the further development of the society at large.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Olga Toporkova ✉ toporkova.vstu@gmail.com

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Introduction

Germany is one of the leading countries in the world in the sphere of economy and education. It is the country where there is a profound theoretical ground of adult education with elaborately developed forms, methods and syllabus. Taking into consideration the fact that adult education includes different age groups, the main focus in the paper will be on social pedagogical and educational work with adults, youth and elderly people.

Intergenerational relations enable to satisfy needs in communication between generations, pushing aside all the obstacles, the modern society has already established between different age groups. In this context, not only questions of non-confrontational interaction between generations become currently important, but also issues of marginalization prevention of any age group are up-to-the-minute. Harmony in the society and generational dialogue cannot be achieved unless thorough work on the problems of socialization and adaptation of adults, youth and elderly people with regard to constantly changing social processes in the modern society is successfully done.

Research methods

This paper is a narrative review, which defines the application of the following research methods: method of theoretical analysis of psychological, pedagogical and methodological literature, standard and legal documents; comparative method; method of generalization of the experience in the field of study, and predictive methods. The methods of induction and deduction, comparison and generalization of theoretical, practical and statistics data enabled to examine the main strategies of work with the risk-group youth; while the interpretational method and techniques of synthesis and analogy of the data obtained helped to bring to light the most important forms of work with the elderly.

Work with socially unprotected adults in Germany

Background

German adult education differs from school or university education first of all by orientation towards a target group. In this paper by a target group we mean socially unprotected adults, including youth and the elderly.

Since 1970th in Germany there had been discussions about different possibilities of work with target groups. Work with a target group includes a didactic conception which takes into account a collective life situation and so-called “social character”.

Since 1970th the social critical-reformative adult education tried to eliminate social discrimination in the educational sphere. Work with target groups had been conducted in socially unprotected groups – “the bottom level” of population – to increase equality possibilities and to support the political implementation of collective interests. Such kind of work with target groups was mostly the part of the political education concerning life position. The connecting feature for group participants was their problem situation in the society and the chance to improve their position through educational work as well [1].

Work with target groups also concerns the effectiveness and the optimization of the educational process in respect of participants' number reduction. The effectiveness of educational activity was supposed to increase by means of addressing to groups with homogeneous study prerequisites and motives. Above all it referred to qualification courses.

In the 1980th Germany differentiated and financed work with target groups as social-political "crisis management". Thus, there had been founded some experimental educational centers for "groups on the verge" (the disabled, drug addicts, the unemployed) whose existence could mean the crisis recognition for the political system. From the didactic point of view that educational activity was connected with social-pedagogical and partially with therapeutic measures.

On the other hand in the context of "new social movements" work with target groups was running as self-regulating and self-initiating education activity. Consequently, there had been the mergence of work with target groups and self-help groups.

Educational institutions of churches, trade unions and peasant unions offered educational arrangements for different groups. Moreover topics of educational activity were agreed with groups themselves.

It is worth mentioning that group members belonging to a specific social milieu (the upper, the medium, the lower classes) are interested in different kinds of education and organization forms [2].

As a result of market society development the commercial adult education determined the orientation towards target groups as a market strategy. There had been created some market niches where there were defined and "invented" new target groups.

"Mixed groups" (e.g. the young and the elderly, different ethnic and cultural groups, people from different professional spheres) are more motivated for education than homogeneous groups under certain circumstances. In addition, many elderly people and the disabled are not interested in seminars dividing target groups.

A boundary sphere of adult education is social campaigns. According to J. Wittpoth [3], they pursue the aim to change people's attitude towards the following subjects:

1. health matters (smoking, alcohol, drugs, nutrition, cancer prevention, AIDS and etc.);
2. family planning (contraception);
3. safety (crime prevention, traffic code, inflammability infiltration of forest);
4. ecology (recycling, energy conservation);
5. human rights (violence, xenophobia, extremism, the equality of the sexes, integration of the disabled);
6. donation (donated blood, support to famine-stricken population);
7. education (literacy teaching).

These campaigns are directed at target groups which are divided in accordance with a) social features (e.g. sex); b) a way of behavior (e.g. smokers); c) mentality (e.g. right-wing extremists).

The primary aim of such campaigns is to change behavior which is mostly connected with views correction. First of all, these arrangements include different information through mass media, personal contacts and even financial incentive. These campaigns also cover a wide range of educational processes even if the matter concerns social strategies. Thus, the boundaries between social and educational processes are blurred.

“Social trainings” are wide-spread in the sphere of political education for adults and are directed against violence and xenophobia. Furthermore, educational advertisement itself is organized as “social marketing”.

By and large, a target group is a construct of those who define target groups. The target group definition classifies people by groups. Moreover it emphasizes “a distinctive feature” (Leitdifferenz) such as age and ignores other personality features. Such “reduction” can be didactically rational in the interests of target group participants. But it is necessary to avoid stigmatization [4]. For instance, when in educational process workers are addressed to not as individuals but as subjects of the working class from the very beginning, or when in the sphere of elderly people education participants are taken first of all as “the aged” and the only theme for learning is aging.

The theory of constructivism reminds us that we treat people as we perceive them. If we define as target groups women, the aged, the unemployed, the convicted, we pin a label on them, which shows that the andragogical idea of an adult is often not identical with the idea of this person about himself.

To sum up the discussions of work with target groups we can conclude that:

- a) if work with target groups pursues professional aims such as getting a qualification, it should be focused on life experience and position. Educational content must be “biographically synthesized” and facilitate a personality formation;
- b) reflexive, meta communicative phases are necessary for the productive work with target groups;
- c) question if members of a group should take themselves as a target group remains in abeyance. In any case participants should know the social milieu and mentality of a target group;
- d) the success of the work with a target group supposes participants’ readiness to discuss not only their life experience but also cognitive and emotional expectations;
- e) with a target group must suggest the idea of harmony and solidarity and express readiness for understanding and communication.

Work with risk-group youth: forms and methods

The problems of marginalized youth and creation of special ground for its non-confrontational life in the society are actively being studied and solved in Germany. We would like to describe two strategies of social pedagogical work with

youth broadly realized nowadays: mobile work or street social work and prevention programs.

Mobile work with youth is understood as a social pedagogical program, aiming to solve the social problems, modern young people face with: antisocial behavior, participation in extremist subcultures, alcohol and drugs abuse... The target is the youth rejecting general notions of rules and norms of behavior in the society. The main forms of the work include individual help; immediate work in mini and macro-groups in the street (stations, parks, subways...), or even in communities. Among the methods employed by this program are informative meetings with young people organized by social or “street” pedagogues or coaches.

As W. Specht claims, the concept of street coaches has been in action in Berlin since 1990. Street coaches do not only touch the problems of addictions and ways of dealing with them or give the information about specialized help services and their location, but also together with the police they are on duty in case of street riots. Their goal is to teach young people to deal with street conflicts in a peaceful way. The problem is that in many cases teenagers get involved in acts of vandalism or fights just because of the lack of knowledge how to solve a street conflict differently. The police usually only state the facts of disruptive behavior, but street coaches, collaborating with them, try to clarify and understand the reasons of such behavior, offer alternative ways of its prevention [5].

Within mobile youth work short-term and long-term professional consultations are available. Teenagers are provided with rooms for their leisure activities under social workers’ supervision. When the situation cries out for additional help, special authorities (health-care centers, community aid centers...) are asked to join the program. The main emphasis is to enhance the positive and weaken the negative in young peoples’ personalities, using this positive for benefit both individuals and the community as a whole [6]. The value of this work accounts for the following factors: young people are listened to and understood; they acquire knowledge of adequate communication and experience of careful attitude towards them; due to the lack of authoritarian style of interaction youth views on life and their behavior start gradually changing for the better.

We find it reasonable that within the program not only specialists work, but also young people who were in the risk group, can act as “immediate consultants” (The idea originated from the German pioneering project “Hallsschlag” in 1985). Their work proves to be helpful, as the experience of this youth shows that if social pedagogical work is organized in a proper way, the behavior of the risk group youth can be redirected into prosocial; these young people can find and have their affiliation in the society; they feel that they are needed and they are not marginalized [7].

The second strategy of social pedagogical work with youth is prevention programs, which are put into action in schools, youth clubs or centers. One of these programs is “Anti-Bullying-Program”.

The program aims at reducing the problems of school bullying and aggressive behavior among students and at “repairing” relations among peers. The working methods include different prevention activities at the level of the school, class or

individual help. School-wide prevention covers the following items: making of rules, forbidding bullying among peers; supervision system during lesson breaks; anonymous questionnaires to find out how many students experiencing these problems. Prevention measures in classes mean rules of behavior in classrooms and regular meetings with parents. Individual help is given for bullying victims and bullies themselves, their parents, teachers and school psychologists. The program is realized by a coordination board of teachers, school authorities, students and parents together with the coordinator [8]. The program results in evident weakening the problem of school bullying; improving school discipline and formation of positive attitude to school attendance [9]. Within this strategy other prevention activities are done. For example, so called “open club-based youth work” provides young people with places where they can spare their free time with peers (listen to music, do sports...) under social workers’ supervision, which is necessary for establishing discipline. As S.V. Kosaretskaya, S.G. Kosaretskiy & N.U. Sinyagina [10] state, open club-based youth work does not mean membership of teenagers in youth centers or organizations; it is done in the form of activities on a voluntary basis, so teenagers can choose whether to participate in the proposed activities or not. Pedagogues do not use a very strict hierarchy of relationship “educator – educatee”, they try to avoid excessive rulemaking of behavior; they give certain powers (creation of activities and putting them into practice...) to young people themselves, contributing in such a way to the formation of their abilities to self-organization, responsibility, initiative and creativity. Alongside with the principles of voluntary participation and self-organization, the main focus of this work is to make connections between young people with their needs and interests and the real world surrounding them.

In addition to the above, there are different systems of psychological and social pedagogical guidance at schools, serving educational purposes (giving current information); specializing in prevention addictions, alienations and deviant behavior; providing risk-group youth with timely expert consultation and care.

Work with the elderly (people of the third age)

In consideration of the foregoing premises it should be mentioned that educational work with elderly people aims at solving the problems of socialization and adaptation in the modern society. During the analysis of theoretical and practical research in Germany it was found out, that the most efficient educational methods of work with elderly people are intergenerational, interactive or conversational and biographical groups of methods.

Intergenerational technology is one of the most developing branches in social pedagogical work with people of the third age in Germany, that allows to supply needs of relationship between different generations, combine experience, knowledge and wisdom of elderly people with cheerfulness, energy and optimism of youth. Generally speaking, intergenerational educational work with elderly people in Germany could be divided into three big groups: 1) elderly people providing service to children and teenagers; 2) children and teenagers providing service to elderly people; 3) children, teenagers and elderly people providing service to other generation adults.



The work of the first group is usually used in kindergartens, schools, childhood health centers and colleges. Elderly people share their knowledge and experience with children providing valuable help for teachers, educators, parents and the society in general. An elderly person can be a tutor, a mentor, an educator, a nurse, an adult friend or a trainer. Nurses can work in hospitals, clinics, family centers, libraries and boarding schools. In all cases this person should be a positive model for a teenager or a child. A mentor gives support to children or teenagers, they can be their solicitors, motivators and, of course, friends. The mentor and his mentee often share mutual interests. A school or an agency facilitator usually selects, teaches and values elderly people who want to realize this function. Such programs' result is the improvement of success level, ego boost, getting life experience for children and teenagers. For elderly people these projects give the possibility to share their life and professional experience, to pass their skills to younger generation and also to design new useful social roles [11]. Practice, where elderly people are adult friends for teenagers, can include telephone reassurance service, work as a tutor or a helper in social family centers. Adult friends ensure support and friendly relations between children and their parents. They can read books, tell different stories and play games. Elderly people can play the role of a coach, if he or she had been a master of some arts or sports.

The work of the second group is usually intended for those elderly people, who need everyday help in housekeeping. Young people can fulfill some functions: a visitor, a companion or a helper, a tutor. They can visit elderly people individually or in a group. Children and teenagers can read for old people, set the music, exchange their impressions of different things, write letters and accompany them. Communicating with children, elderly people get interested and become grateful listeners. Also teenagers and youngsters can work as auxiliary nursing personnel in special sanatoriums, hostels for elderly people, community aid centers or hospitals. There is a facilitator for using such practice, who hires volunteers and teaches them all necessary skills. Nowadays it is popular to use different digital gadgets among young people. In Germany there are many projects where teenagers can teach elderly people using these modern gadgets, Internet or foreign language and realize the function of a teacher or a tutor [12].

The third group of work is connected with uniting different age groups in mutual job. Children, teenagers and old people can be united in an attempt to work together broadening the circle of their possibilities. Such work usually takes place in the open air: e.g. projects of urban greening, gardening and recycling, building children's playgrounds.

Interactive or conversational methods refer to solving the second important elderly people's demand for communication. Technical progress and development of digital technologies involve all people in lifelong learning. The most important goal for elderly people education is attraction of the third age group's interest to use the information technologies. For this purpose, in Germany many different projects are arranged, where professionals develop specific web-sites, forums, chats with special interface for people of the third age and other arrangements. Café "Mondial", virtual education University Hagen, European informational and communicational learning system (Internet-platform) "Learning in Later Life" (LiLL) allow old people to widen their communicative boundaries. Virtual cervices get more and more expansion. Such possibilities as "Telecare", "Smart Home", "Telelearning" and "Virtual Communication" are in order of the modern society and

play a great role for old people, as they give capability of keeping independence even for disabled people. If people have health problems, they can use compensating services in their education (text identifying systems, speaking computers) to keep self-dependence and to take part in the life of their community, which is the main goal of the German society [13]. There are many other forms of elderly people's engagement with information technologies in Germany. In the Internet there are so called "knowledge markets" or forums, where old and young people cooperate and exchange their knowledge and skills with each other. The Interesting project SIM, "Senior – Info – Mobil", was held in Germany with support of Ulm University Center for extended adult education. The project included three elements: double-deck information bus with six internet seats, a computer with visually version and video telephone. In some places they demonstrated new technical facilities for disabled people to keep independence [14].

Biographical methods are based on the life and professional experience. Pedagogical work with elderly people based on biographical technology allows people of the third age to overestimate their life experience according to changes in the modern society, to appreciate these social transformations and self developing [15]. The specialists, who work with the group of the third age people, should always remember that their students' experience can be much wider and richer than their own [16]. The contemporary places for reflection can be museums, workshops, monuments, spoken cafes and others. In all these places elderly people can reconstruct life situations that provide group communication. The development of biographical educational instruments is becoming obligate, which includes creative writing works, working with photo or pictures, records and documents. The educational process involves elderly people's life memories and experience as active means of studying.

Conclusion

Presently, different age groups and their problems are not ignored in Germany but actively worked with and on. Social pedagogical and educational work serve various purposes but the most important goal is to socialize and adapt socially unprotected adults, youth and the elderly to ongoing social and economic changes in the society; guarantee a high standard of their life in the best interests of every person. Purposeful work with socially unprotected adults is very important. It is one of the prerequisites both for the successful educational process and the further development of the society at large.

In modern Germany elderly people education is appreciated not as compensating educational area but as educational culture of society, which acknowledges the old people quality potential. It is raised in the status rate of general culture of society and its humanistic direction. The elderly people education promotes organizing of a new value system and culture of aging, corresponding demands of modern democratic society. The education of the third age group contributes to efficient activity of old people in the post professional period of their life, successful engagement with the society as voluntary facilitators and active participants of productive and social-political processes. Implementing youth programs aim at prevention a young person from marginalization as, whatever reasons of antisocial behavior are, the prior point is a failure of socialization. Efficiency of these measures are in their target to solve the problems of young people's socialization by close collaboration of psychologists, social workers and pedagogues who do not "struggle" with "difficult youth" but

provide all possible conditions for their successful person self-fulfillment in the life of modern society.

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