

# **Monographien zur konstruktiven Erziehungs- wissenschaft**

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Monographien  
zur konstruktiven Erziehungswissenschaft  
Heft 9

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**Elementary Storytelling – Notes on “domestic violence“, and prevention**

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## **1 First ZKE-questionnaire results**

Enquiring the test results of the ZKE-questionnaire in Germany, Finland, Romania, Sveden and Slovenia, our attention is mainly attracted by the table depicting conflict and violence frequency in connection to education:

<b>Education</b>	<b>Conflict situations</b>	<b>Violence situations</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Hauptschule<sup>1</sup></b>	4,33	4,00	12
<b>Mittlere Reife<sup>2</sup></b>	1,22	0,81	32
<b>Abitur/ Fachabitur<sup>3</sup></b>	1,22	0,67	45
<b>University</b>	1,09	0,75	128
<b>Other degree</b>	1,75	0,75	4
<b>No data</b>	0,33	0,17	12

**Table:** Conflict situations, violence situations, and education. Results of the ZKE-questionnaire (Peter Krope, Johannes Peter Petersen (eds.): *Wege aus der Gewalt? Eine Studie im europäischen Rahmen über häusliche Gewalt gegen Frauen*. Münster/New York 2015, p. 75).

Noticeable is that women with a degree from the Hauptschule mention on average 4,33 conflict situations in their partnership whereas university graduates only mention 1,09. The difference in stated violence frequency is similar. The average is 4,00 for the graduates of the Hauptschule in contrast to 0,75 for university graduates.

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<sup>1</sup> Degree after 9 years of school.

<sup>2</sup> Degree after 10 year of school.

<sup>3</sup> Degree after 12 or 13 years of school, allows the holder to enter university.

The comforting effect of this statement should not be underestimated, as the obviously well-founded expectation that education could have an effect on domestic violence limitation is produced.

However, what exactly is the basis for this statement? What we call education, results on closer inspection through at least a triad of social factors - situation, context, institution – determining our behaviour. The individual factor value can be subject to other socio-scientific studies. A dominance of one parameter is generally not expected, we assume rather an interdependency between the mentioned parameters.

Nevertheless, it is this confusing parameter plurality which forces us to try to examine larger scale socio-cultural movement dynamics, which build the basis for observable individual processes and which show that domestic violence problems need long time frames to be actually recognised as problems. An abundant optimism regarding a fast improvement of the situation seems to be misplaced in this situation.

But how to approach that level, which determines human actions for centuries without conveying any notion to his consciousness? (Gilbert Ryle/ Clifford Geertz: Thick description)

Evidence suggests that during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the women's movement already on the horizon, an unprecedented subject concentration occurs in European literature: the failure of a woman's life in middle-class society. We talk about Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina and Effi Briest, novel characters by Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoi and Theodor Fontane. The reader learns, on the basis of true incidents, about arranged marriages, which first turn into non-love stories then adultery stories with a deathly ending, through broken hearts or suicide.

We owe these French, Russian and German authors the knowledge of a topic, which obviously concerns all of Europe but is probably rather purposefully kept silent. To prove that the topic did actually exist under the surface we can look at a quote by French renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592), who noted in his essays (1580) with the heading "On friendship":

"Marriage is a contract, only the first beginning is free, the continuity is enforced by constraint and violence, thus it is not due to our volition, the purpose of the contract is usually not love; moreover, marriage carries many unexpected problems, which have to

be solved and which are often enough to trouble a lively affection or to destroy it; this is different for friendship; for this non-characteristic commercial aspects or aspects concerning family do not play any role.” (Michel de Montaigne, p. 111 German edition)

We notice: Montaigne – a sceptic towards the circumstances of his time, who hates violence, a critic of the strict regimen in grammar schools, an advocate for free classroom discussions, an unconventional thinker, who believed in mistrusting eternal certainties and whose essays were put on the Index in 1676 – marriage for him is separate from any wishes for change, it is according to Montaigne per definitionem not a non-violent zone. Thus, he probably describes marriages in their factuality of the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, how the European literary siblings Emma, Anna and Effi might have experienced them until the women’s movement was heard and the romantically charged illusory world of gender roles faded also in the great European novelists’ literature.

There is no shortage of proof that the response, especially to Flaubert and Tolstoi, was enormous. Their novels were translated into all languages of the world. Their subjects did not only reach a reading audience, but also the wide spectrum of cinema audiences: Emma Bovary has up until this day been put on screen 13 times, Anna Karenina 14 times and Effi Briest five times. And we should not forget to mention that in 2010 Flaubert’s novel was published under the name “Madame Bovary” as a literary comic book (text by Daniel Bardet, illustrations Michel Janvier), also as a German version in 2012.

The positive public reception should not make us forget that Flaubert was prosecuted in 1856 *due to glorification of adultery*. In the following trial an acquittal was reached for Flaubert. It cannot be made any clearer, that the middle-class world at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had taken refuge in a world to whose questioning through realism in literature, which gave the unmentionable, the unconquerable a name, it could only react offended. Therefore, we can interpret Flaubert’s prosecution as a late confirmation on Montaigne’s marriage definition, and his acquittal as a sign for a new definition. Is everything well now? The numbers tell a different story. Flaubert’s country reports that every fourth day a woman is killed by her partner or her ex-partner, in Russia the number of violent acts is estimated to be even higher and the number of domestic violence cases, with uncertain data and an estimated high number of unreported cases, to be still above the European average. Therefore, there is still cause for us not to overestimate the impact of world literature.

## 2 Telling stories: strength and crisis

The strength of telling stories, of the narrative, has been described before. The philosopher Walter Benjamin led with his dictum *language- the actual sphere for non-violence* (W.B.: Der Erzähler, 1936) the discussion about the spoken word for years, and 60 years later the author Amos Oz continues this thought by stating about the main secret of telling stories: “Starting a story almost always means building a contractual bonding between author and reader” and “The difference between an artistic and a scientific text is in the invitation to the reader, to accept what is written.” (A.O.: So fangen Geschichten an, 1997).

In these two quotes mentioned above, *telling stories* encounters us through a double meaning – as the spoken word (orality) and as the written word (literality). Orality (telling and listening to stories, accompanied by facial and gestical means of expression) is in this respect the oldest, most elementary form for experience exchange.

At the same time, Walter Benjamin was in the 30s already one of those, who, with the beginning media change in mind, believed to be able to state: “The art of telling stories is at its end, because the epical side of truth, wisdom, is dying out” and that this dying happened in a historical situation, in which “stories are indispensable, when being concerned with producing the human abilities for cooperation.” (W.B.: D.E., p. 108).

Above all, Benjamin wants to distinguish the process of telling stories from the progress of providing information: “Information produces the claim of possible instant verification. The first half of telling a story is however, to keep the story free from explanations. The information gained its profit at the moment it was new. Telling a story is different; it does not spend itself. Thus, a trace of the story teller stays with the story (like the fingerprint when making pottery)” (W.B.: D.E., p.109 – 110).

Despite Walter Benjamin’s predicted crisis for telling stories, we have to state that apparently his thoughts about the value of telling stories for life experience mediation unfold their meaning especially in Religious Education lessons during the 70s and 80s. The text “Elementar erzählen. Zwischen Überlieferung und Erfahrung” („*Elementary storytelling. Between tradition and experience*“) published in 1985 (by Hans Bernhard Kaufmann, Helga Ludwig-Steup and Hans-Theo Wrege, Comenius Institute Münster) can be used as proof for this thesis. The term “elementary” in this text can be traced

back to an essential term in Wolfgang Klafki's theory of curriculum. The "didactic analysis", the basis for lesson planning, the teaching person should work out the general theme with which the students are confronted in one specific cultural content. These kinds of considerations are to make sure that the abundance of possible lesson content does not lead to insignificance, but concentrates on the essential, the fundamental, the exemplary, the elementary. Klafki calls the result of this process "categorical education". Through the mentioned text from the Comenius Institute, the reader gains another interesting extension to the functional description "producing the human abilities for cooperation" as mentioned by W. Benjamin. Hans-Theo Wrege calls this extension "the confessional element in telling stories" (p.21), which can already be established in an early description of the Passover celebration in the Old Testament.

It is known that "Israel – according to its self- conception – is coined by the experience of the Exodus from slavery to Egypt, the conquering of the promised land and last but not least Moses' law. All three cases are occurrences in a far removed past. Nevertheless, all three have claims to determine the present. They can only reach this aim through different strategies. The law wants to be interpreted and followed. The liberation story cannot be present in the same fashion. It wants to be told – in a way that every new generation recognises itself anew in the old storyline" (p.21). According to the biblical tradition in Exodus (2<sup>nd</sup> book of Moses) 13, 14 ff. this basic experience is activated by the son's question to his father concerning the Passover celebration and its practices. "And if your son asks you tomorrow: Why are we doing this? , you should answer him: Jahwe brought us from the slave house Egypt with a mighty hand" – and the telling of the rescue story starts, presuming that oppression "stays a looming threat through all times" and that "rescue always has to be re-experienced, reclaimed and re-suffered" (p. 21). Even if the story does not provide rescue to the oppressed, it at least provides them with a voice. One could still question, whether the confessional element, obviously or implicitly, could also be part of lower level stories.

### **3 Storytelling**

Despite of W. Benjamin's predicted crises of telling stories, we state that storytelling, probably brought about by the "Learning- Histories- Approach", developed at the MIT in the USA, gains new and unexpected attention as a method for business management

during the 90s. Exemplary for this can be: Doug Stevenson “Story Theatre Method. Strategic Storytelling in Business” (Offenbach 2008). This method is about lifting secret but implicitly existing knowledge in organisations through stories, thus “practicing communication management”. It is not easy to deny the impression that, through a detour to the new term “communication management”, old knowledge about the interdependency between human knowledge and telling stories is rediscovered.

#### **4 Telling stories – an example from present time school experience**

We will now leave the level of great tales and the narrative, which binds societies to their past and accompanies them to their future, and turn towards the institution of school. We will attempt to gain insight into its impact mechanism by describing and analysing story telling situations.

The example which is provided here, is from the year 2015. I owe this transcript to an experienced teacher, to whom I am very well acquainted. (To be exact: My daughter Kathrin, who on a visit at the end of last year noticed my note-covered desk and asked me, what I was working on. I answered: “Storytelling” and illustrated a few of the main ideas. She said: “Oh, I could tell you something about that”, and then she told me the story of “Kyra and the cheese”. I had the impression that this story might fit well into the concept which I was working on, and asked her to write the story down for me. A few days later, I had a handwritten version on my desk, which can now be presented to the reader in print.)

This example is not about “domestic violence”, however rather about the interdependence between a social norm and the individual adaptability...

#### **5 Kyra and the cheese**

The preparation for our class trip to Hörnum/ Sylt for me also included a talk about a few rules of behaviour concerning eating. Thus I emphasised to my mixed class of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils that I would not tolerate anyone making noises of disgust about the food. I also spoke about possibilities of what to do when just not liking a type of food.

Thus we approached the topic “liking and not-liking of food”.

I reported on my own experience with liver sausage which I did not like as a child. After short amounts of time I had always tried it – and after some time I actually liked “rough liver sausage with pieces”.

Encouraged through my description, multiple pupils told such little events, of tomatoes which they did not like before but now liked, of lettuce which at first tasted like “nothing” and was now “tasty”, of cauliflower, which smelled “weird” but was now with a “special sauce” promoted to a favourite dish...

It was known in our class, that Kyra did not like cheese.

On class celebrations, which included a self- created buffet, she stressed her dislike again and again – always accompanied by my mentions that she could maybe try it again, maybe she might like it by now.

On the class trip I was able to observe how Kyra’s friends kept offering her cheese.

One day a boy of the next table came to me beaming with joy and reported: “Kyra tried to eat cheese!”

I asked Kyra herself: “Well?” Kyra answered: “No, it didn’t taste good.”

Well, it was a start.

## **6 Comments on the described story telling situation**

As far as identifiable, the topic “Liking and not-liking of food” or “table manners” does not result from the guidelines of an educational curriculum, but rather from a necessity of out-of-school living, thus the preparation for good interaction on a class trip. The teacher has obviously enough experience to know that such interactions can be disturbed through un- coordinated utterances of distaste at the occasion of shared meals. Here, the adult acts as a representative of the cultivated society and its demands to the younger generation, through apparently not being willing to accept individual ideas of taste.

Such a constellation could, as we know, lead to a refusal of the addressee and to a silent protest against adult dominance. The teacher is apparently aware of the danger of a break in communication. She chooses a path, which is able to assure her pupil’s central response: She reveals that she is familiar with the problem from her own childhood. The

thus displayed vulnerability makes the intimidating dominance disappear. At the same time, the teacher is smart enough and realistic enough to indicate that aversion to food can change with time. According to her report, not just one pupil but numerous of them express themselves through the given pattern “from not-liking to liking”, thereby lifting the pressure, for themselves and others, which burdens those who have difficulties to answer to adult world expectations.

Up until this point, the story is obviously a success. Encouraged by the little stories of change in taste, a few pupils develop something of a missionary eagerness toward one of the pupils, whose distaste of cheese was discovered. It was obviously not easy for them to tolerate her deviation from the majority and to grant differences. This resembles new cognitive science results. **Not like me = bad: Infants prefer those who harm dissimilar others**, this formula is the main research result by Hamlin, Kahajan, Liberman & Wynn (Psychological Science, 24, 589-594, 2013), which allows the conclusion that our current moral sensibilities react preferably to sensually tangible processes. However, if they are accompanied by cognitive actions, for example the decelerating telling of a story, we are able to produce over time more stable results.

Should the last thought “Well, it was a start” actually only refer to Kyra?

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