

EQUIPE – SUB-GROUP 3

Case study:

**Systemic Counselling, System and Family Therapy -
a Postgraduate Study course at the Centre for Continuing Education
at the Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, Germany
by Barbara Kaup**

Introduction

The Centre for Continuing Education at the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg (ZWW - Zentrum für wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung) was established in 1975. It was first founded as a small project aiming to establish a co-operation regarding adult education courses between the University of Oldenburg and centres of adult education in Lower Saxony. Since then the centre has extended year-by-year and widened its field of activity. In addition to this co-operation and the realisation of courses in education, the ZWW nowadays co-ordinates the professional training for university employees, the university's guest auditor programme, the Z-Prüfung (a special university admission test), ethnic minority projects as well as short- and long-term postgraduate courses.

Among the long-term courses are the Psycho-Social programmes in Supervision, Mediation, Psychological Therapy, Systemic Counselling, System and Family Therapy. Head of these programmes is Dr. Joseph Rieforth, psychologist, who has conceived and developed the courses from the 1980s onwards.

History

Since 1984, ten courses in Systemic Counselling with about 200 students have graduated at the ZWW. The programme was set up in the 1980s to meet the needs of social workers for further education in the field of counselling of families and other systems.

Basic principles of the systemic approach are to look at the system as a whole, at the relationship between its members, the corresponding power structure and the family's or system's history. It assumes circular or reciprocal influence rather than linear influence and a circular causality. This means, that a conflict is always seen in the context of others, causing reciprocal grief.

The programme in Family Therapy was founded parallel to the one in Systemic Counselling and is also based on the systemic approach. Since its beginning about 100 students graduated.

The central feature of the postgraduate programmes is the focus on connecting scientific knowledge with the lecturers' practical knowledge and the everyday-life working experience of the postgraduate students.

As already mentioned, until 2002 the courses in Systemic Counselling and the in Family Therapy were running parallel. Since the beginning of 2003, a new model was developed, linking both courses in a modular curriculum. The first new class started in June 2003.

Programme overview

The new concept comprises three modules: a basic and an advanced course of Systemic Counselling and a 'master's' course in System and Family Therapy. The basic course takes two semesters and the advanced and the 'master's' course three terms each. The complete study programme runs up to four years.

Besides theoretical classes on systemic approaches, diagnostic, counselling, family and system therapy, etc. the programme also includes classes on self-awareness and supervision courses.

The classes on self-awareness are about the student's personality, family history and their current family situation as well as about forming their personality as a therapist. This is an important part of the study on the one hand in order to be able to develop empathy with clients and on the other hand to develop a self-awareness towards one's own personality.

The supervision classes aim to reflect the transition of the acquired knowledge into the students' working field and to offer the possibility of discussion and the clarification of questions.

As the emphasis is put on practical application, the students' work and the implementation in their everyday-life work are always part of the study. The students are supposed to implement the course contents directly in their working fields.

The theoretical classes take place in sixteen courses, every two months from Friday to Saturday. The five classes on self-awareness are held in external seminar houses for three to four days. Supervision takes place in the evenings about once a month in a group of about ten students. One course consist of about 20 students.

The students complete their studies with a university certificate. Furthermore, the studies are acknowledged by the German Association of System and Family Therapy (DGFSF-Deutsche Gesellschaft für Systemische Therapie und Familientherapie).

The term fees for the basic and the advance course amount to EUR 900, -. The fee for the 'master's' course is EUR 1.150,- by term. The total costs of the whole programme are EUR 7.950,-. The rates are payable each term.

The lecturers are members of the university's Social Work department as well as external lecturers, coming from practical counselling. This provides a good mixture of theoretical and practical aspects in the seminars.

The ZWW co-operates with the family research centre at the Oldenburg University Centre of Family Research (IFF – Interdisziplinäre Forschungsstelle für Familienwissenschaft), the Child and Family Department of the Tavistock Clinic in London, the German Association of System and Family Therapy (DGSF) and further institutions in the region.

Conclusion

Courses in Systemic Counselling, System and Family Therapy Studies have been running at the ZWW for nearly 20 years. The contents of the programmes have changed in order to meet the needs of the students and to include current developments. Throughout the years, the demand for qualifying postgraduate studies has increased. The combination of theory and practical education meets the requirements of the fields of work of qualified employees.

For the future it is planned to widen the modular character of the different Psycho-Social postgraduate programmes at the Centre for Continuing Education to allow students to combine those courses meeting their individual needs. There are also visions of further modular co-operation with other ZWW programmes and university faculties in order to open up new possibilities and achieve mutual benefits.

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