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The Transformative Drama: The Case of Violence

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Abstract

The purpose is to discuss the project titles Work and dignity life for women victims of violence and especially drama written during the project. The main aim of the text is to present and define the new kind of drama - transformative drama and the way of use it in working with women-prisoners - the victim of violence. The text promotes the new, unknown method of therapy and the result of it - raising the women's consciousness and their self-reliance. It is also worth to underline the transformative drama is a new category of literature – it is an applied literature. The drama and the method of use it can be successfully and effective used in working with marginalized people.

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1. Work and dignity life for women victims of violence

The project titled “Work and dignity life for women victims of violence” was realized from 2005 to 2008 in cooperation with Foundation Centre of Women Rights and Community Initiative EQUAL. Beneficiaries of the project were women experiencing domestic violence: unemployed, in danger of unemployment, sentenced for crime of homicide on their abusive partners. The project involved 140 women who represented different age groups and different levels of education and work experience. The project was based on the assumption that women experiencing domestic violence suffer double discrimination: because of gender and family situation. Women who served prison term were stigmatized by this fact and as a result they face additional difficulties. In order to reach those objectives authors of the project created integrated system of assistance to women victims of violence, which comprised activities related to employment as well as psychological, legal and social counseling necessary to leave violent relationship. This comprehensive approach needed cooperation of employers, employment and training agencies with those providing legal, psychological and social assistance to women victims of violence.

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Innovative in the project was: 1. selection of the target group; 2. showing interdependence of domestic violence and women's functioning in the labor market; 3. identification of specific barriers and needs of women victims of domestic violence in the labor market and necessity to take it into consideration in all activities related to employment; 4. coordination of work of institutions providing assistance related to employment and of those helping women victims of domestic violence; 5. creation of integrated system addressing gender based discrimination in the labor market and violence against women; 6. use of creative and innovative methods (theater and other artistic activities as well as e-learning) in working with women victims of domestic violence aimed at improving their situation in the labor market. I am interested in the last innovative. Women who took part in the project described their experience on the theatre stage. They got the possibility to talk, in the form of art, about their stories. The method of therapy through theatre is—as its authors claim—treatment by working with autobiography, which includes past, future, and contemporary times of a person. It relies on ordering pieces of information about herself and expressing emotions linked with her own life. The inspiration for this innovative method was the work done with women-prisoners from the Penal Institute in Lubliniec - the BUS method used in work with marginalized persons, relying on exchanging memories and telling the audience the story of a colleague. The first stage of working with prisoners (the work with a group of women) lasts for three months and the aim of this stage there is building interpersonal relations, arousing sensibility, trust and positive emotions, as well as stimulating the way of thinking that leads to overcoming stereotypes. The second stage of work (three months) is therapeutic work with an autobiography. The prisoner gives her consent to make the history of her life public. A director and a psychologist are included in work at this stage. The work relies on writing biographies and analyzing internal and social experiences of members of the group. During this stage, prisoners write dramas and are provoked to discussion. The person who tells her story is the most important, special and unusual one. The third stage (three months) relies on drama writing and performances. Women are able to share their experiences and work on the drama's character and role. The study covers the group of 24 women convicted of murder. One group consisted of 12 women participating in the therapeutic theater. The second group of 12 women was the control group. Research showed that an improvement of mental and emotional condition of the women in the therapeutic group, and an increase in their willingness and ability to make positive changes in their life situation. Theatre helps to create a positive experience in social interaction and opportunities for getting rid of helplessness and improving one's self-esteem, while building a sense of dignity and self-confidence. Participation in the drama-theatre therapy develops positive emotions and weakens negative emotions, allows participants to gain interpersonal experience, to be mindful of the needs of others, and allows them to construct an adequate self-esteem. The performance in front of an audience breaks stereotypes and emotional barriers, makes participants appreciate each other, overcomes feelings of alienation, teaches self-reliance and gives a deeper insight into their "selves". Prisoners, playing out their past, are able to free themselves from the constraints. Performing on the stage and creating drama allows for a reevaluation of past experience and gives the participants confidence in new challenges and possibilities of changing their lives. One of the participants says: "In the theater group it is very important that this process is fast and intensive, and actually changes its appearance. It is not about sitting and meditating on 'what I experienced,' but these are actions that actually change the way of thinking and methods of acting. This is actually a very effective form of therapy."* Another one writes: "Thanks to this therapy, the project, I recognize that everything lies in the fact that I have to want to do something with myself. In fact I have to decide, no one else." And the last statement from a participant: "The drama, the spectacle, is a clear message. This is the best. It is a simple matter: you can read ten thick volumes and you will really know nothing. After such a drama or performance you just understand and feel, and everything is clear. The reader or viewer has no doubt what this is, how it should look". Within the frame of the project, sex dramas were written. The first one, *Zapach dzikiej róży* (The smell of a wild rose, 2005) was written by a professional playwright, Adam Szymura. The drama tells two parallel stories, the first one about the nascent love of a woman towards a man. This love cannot be explained, it is an invisible, terrible power, which the woman gives up to. The second story begins with the end of the first one. It tells the events after a tragedy, and tries to find an way out of the nightmare of the past. Szymura writes dramas based on the stories of prisoners, using the common elements of their stories—alcohol, loneliness, physical problems, lack of understanding of the environment, family, the indifference of neighbors. In the background scrolls regret for lost love. As the author notices, dramatization is a great tool for teaching and

* <https://www.google.pl/#q=zasady+bezwarunkowe+poparcia+dla+ofiar> (Access: 16.04.2013) — the project's materials.

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