

Auni Kaipia, Kangasala / Finland

BIBLIODRAMA WITH ASYLM SEEKERS IN FINLAND

Auni Kaipia berichtet von Bibliodramaerfahrungen in einem Flüchtlingslager in Finnland. In einem Workshop wurden kulturelle Unterschiede durch die Arbeit mit bibliodramatischen Methoden besprochen. In einem anderen Workshop haben am Christentum interessierte Muslime die Auslegung biblischer Texte und die Kultur des selbständigen Denkens und Fragens kennengelernt.

Situation

September 2015 there came 30.000 asylum seekers to Finland. In Kangasala there was a center from September 2015 to the end of April 2016. It was established in an old hospital. It was situated 6 km from town on a beautiful place at a lake, but was somehow isolated. There lived 300-400 asylum seekers, mostly from Iraq and Afghanistan. They all were men. In my congregation I got as my job to work with them co-operating with the center. I had no experience of working with refugees or Muslims.

The Finnish Red Cross Organisation was running the center and tens of volunteers worked there. This was quite new for all of us. In Finland there is so little experience and good practices in working with asylum seekers. We were creating all the time our work.

I want to share two cases where I have used Bibliodrama-methods with asylum seekers with you. The first one is just using these methods and second one is real Bibliodrama.

BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE - WORKSHOP

In the winter a big amount of asylum seekers didn't do anything, they just slept. Nurseries, social workers and psychologist didn't manage to help them. The men were afraid to go and meet a psychologist. They were afraid that she'd tell them they are "lunatic". Workers said "they haven't time to do anything more". We volunteers also saw that workers at the camp had many problems to work with these men and it made more difficulties. One of the volunteers asked workers if we volunteers could do something. We were aloud. We were a multiprofessional group: a retired nursery, a psychological nursery, a person who has a degree in science of educational psychology and me.

Our aim was that asylum seekers take responsibility for their life, on their everyday life (timetable, food, sport, studies) and welfare of their own. They should decide if they want to stay in Finland or go back to their homeland. The third aim was to make them willing to take help if they need it. Workers at the camp chose us 20 men from Iraq in the age of 18 to 20 years, those who most needed help, in two groups that met three times.

Challenges

Culture: We decided that participants should be from one nationality, Iraq. They've stayed 6-7 months in Finland and didn't know much of our culture. We realized we don't know their culture: social roles and structure, education – no education (many reasons!). What can we talk about? We were all women... does it matter?

Religion: During Isis reign in Iraq there has not been any art or expressive subjects at school (art, music, sport). All that kind is strange to them. What is possible to do?

Trauma: In which condition are they mentally and physically? What are they able to do? Is this good for them?

New method:

- 1) in a group, where everyone is equal
- 2) safety and confidential (to whom I can trust?)
- 3) you work by yourself and speak of yourself as much as you feel good to do
- 4) all is right, there is space for all feelings
- 5) functional, bodywork; hole person
- 6) process, 3 meetings

Other leaders were not so used to work with groups and lead processes.

Piece of session

Iraq – Finland: In the room there were a table and different colored cloth in each corner. At the other side of the room there was a table for what is good in Iraq and another one for what is bad. Each one takes two or more symbols for that what is good and what is bad in his country. Each one puts symbols on tables and says what that is. And the same about Finland on the other side of the room.

Everyone worked eagerly and understood what to do. There was great help of good interpreters, who could explain unknown concepts. I was surprised that they still were so connected to their bodies and feelings and could express themselves so well. They were so eager to talk, to tell their stories, feelings and thoughts. It was a place where they were seen, heard and accepted as they were.



BIBLE STUDIES

Many Muslim asylum seekers want to study Christianity and convert to Christianity. I had taught many of them "in an traditional way" before I dared to do Bibliodrama with them. There are again some challenges. How do we understand the holy book? What does it mean that the Koran or the Bible are the word of Allah or God, which you must not change? The second one is that in Islam you must not ask any questions about god and the holy book because asking is disbelieving. In Christianity you may think, read and understand by yourself. All expressive work has been forbidden in their country. How can you encourage them to creativity and self-expression so that they understand that it is not against God`s will?

Trauma: Not work too deeply. If you work with your body does it remind you about your sufferings and violence you have experienced? I have to be aware where participants are. Working with Bibliodrama with asylum seekers makes it easier that some are literary and others non-literary. To read the Bible aloud together and to work with other methods helps those who can´t read.

First session

I started with a morning prayer at simple chapel on Jesus calls first disciplines (Mark 1:16-20). In front of altar I built seashore with clothes. Everyone was invited to take his place in this picture and be someone. I told the story and interviewed as a person in role some of them. Some found out at once the idea of working and loved "acting", being in the text. Those who were not so familiar to Christianity were allowed just to watch what´s going on.

After some months

The men got used to this kind of "Bible reading" and invited their friends to join us, too. When we worked with the text John 15:1-17 everyone was eagerly doing moving statue of how a tree gets its branches (picture). Also those who entered this Bible study group for the first time.

These Iraqi asylum seekers with whom I have worked have found out that this helps them to understand the Bible better. They also want to think, ask and question. They have also noticed that as persons who have converted to Christianity from Islam and being immigrants in our culture they have to find out their own way to live with all their roles and history in our nowadays church and society.



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