

Philippines 2013

In the wake of typhoon 'Hayan' horror, misery and mourning take over

Emergency pedagogy in the Southeast Asian archipelagic state



Bitoy is two and a half years old. The little boy is crying and he clings on to his brother Roger (9). They are huddled between uprooted trees and the severely damaged shack of their aunt in the village of Burauen on the island of Leyte. Neighbors saved the boys and their two brothers, aged four and ten, from the torrential floods of the typhoon. Trying to save his children their father died right in front of their eyes. Their mother and sister Princes (6) died in their hut when the typhoon destroyed the family's lodgings. Ever since the catastrophe no one gets through to Bitoy. He is locked up in his inner world and suffers from eating and sleeping disorders. Worst of all, he can't stop crying and only one of his brothers can offer him a short relief from his sorrows. His aunt won't be able to feed the four siblings because she has children of her own; besides, the psychological strain is just as overwhelming for her as for the children. She has resolved to give the siblings up for adoption.

Despair in Tacloban



On November 8th 2013 the most devastating typhoon of all times raged in the Philippines. From November 23rd until December 7th the Friends of Waldorf Education sent a team of 11 emergency pedagogues into the crisis area. The team was supported by the German Relief Coalition and the union of Philippine Waldorf-kindergartens and –schools. This local connection made it possible to help even the youngest children. In most cases they lacked necessary coping mechanisms and could not process the disaster. Also, many lost their families in the typhoon. Many children are traumatized and roam the streets in search of something to eat or a little water to drink. Children holding signs that read “we need help” line up along the street. Two weeks after the disaster the city of Tacloban is still in a state of shock. More than 2,5 million people still wait for basic care: “It is such a painful situation to look at parts of the city that were reduced to nothing.(...) That was horrible. Witnessing something like this is painful (...).” [2]

Traumatic events change lives- emergency pedagogy offers relief

The emergency pedagogic team helped Roger and his brothers to process the devastating events and to integrate them into their biography. [3] [4] Rhythmic games based on bodily movement and other experiential pedagogic elements helped counter the paralyzing listlessness and established a rhythm in the children's lives. Eurhythmic exercises further helped express psychological trauma. Many of the children and adolescents which the emergency pedagogic team assisted had characteristic traumatic dysfunctions: They relived their dreadful memories and the accompanying mortal fear over and over again. They could not forget what happened. Others banned the unbearable experiences to their subconscious and could not remember a thing that happened. Roger and many other children were not able to talk about their experiences, thus creative techniques such as drawing and painting allowed them to nonverbally express their experiences. Situations that evoked helplessness, such as being buried under debris and rubble, were particularly traumatizing experiences. These situations left the children with a deeply rooted feeling of powerlessness and a sense that they lacked the ability to shape their own lives. A trauma's backward orientation through a fixation on the past and bygone events leads to a missing perspective for the future. Jointly planning and executing smaller projects helped the adolescents to regain their confidence in their strengths. Naturally, all the above mentioned impairments interfere with daily life. Traumatizing events change lives.

The help needs to continue



Besides working with the traumatized children the emergency pedagogic team organized seminars for doctors, therapists, teacher, and educators in Manila, San Dionysio and Tacloban. They also organized counseling sessions for parents in the latter two cities, where they gave advice on how to best handle the children's traumatic reactions. In view of the current situation the continuing work of anthroposophist doctors, therapists, teachers and educators on site is especially pressing. Bitoy and other children need continuing support until they regain their vital forces and they gain a perspective in all the mayhem. In order to grant this, the team of emergency pedagogues are planning to build a child care center in Tacloban and to execute further emergency pedagogic interventions in the Philippine crisis area. [6]

Bernd Ruf

[1] The Team consisted of: Nancy Aries Baquero (eurhythmy), Anna Holz (experiential pedagogy), Monika Görtzel-Straube (waldorf teacher), Elisabeth Mall (assistance), Lukas Mall (coordinator), Reinaldo Nascimento (experiential pedagogy), Ulrike Preisser (physicist), Sabine Romero (waldorf educator), Bernd Ruf (head of the team), Warja Saake (psycho-therapist), Nina Taplick (art-therapist)

[2] <http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/interview-hetkaemper100.html>

[3] Harald Karutz, Frank Lasogga (2008): Kinder in Notfällen. Psychische Erste Hilfe und Nachsorge. Edewecht

[4] Jo Eckardt (2005): Kinder und Trauma ,Göttingen

[5] Clemens Hausmann (2006): Einführung in die Psychotraumatologie. Wien

[6] Donations account: GLS Bank; IBAN DE47 4306 0967 0013 0420 10; BIC/SWIFT
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