

Karlsruhe 19 April 2016

When the unthinkable happens

Days after the attacks in Brussels, shock over the events was still in the limbs of the people on the ground. On Wednesday, the 19th of April, a four-person team travelled to Brussels for a short mission. The mission was mainly directed at teachers and other interested persons.

Many pedagogues work with children suffering from so-called secondary traumatisation in their schools. This means, that also children and adolescents who were not directly affected by the attacks, could be traumatised from reports in the media, stories told at school and similar situations.

In the ABC-House (Art Basics for Children), a public cultural centre in northern Brussels, we were greeted. Our emergency pedagogy seminar was met with great interest: Waldorf teachers from the entire region travelled, some for over two hours, in order to be able to participate.

The inner city of Brussels is as before cordoned off, there are police everywhere. Again and again we must find a new route from the ABC-House to the hotel because the streets are closed.

The start of the seminar consisted of an opening circle followed by a lecture from Bernd Ruf, which was also translated into Flemish. Afterwards the attendees split into two work groups in order to experience what they had just heard in practice. In one workshop, modelling beeswax was artistically and creatively sculpted. During this activity, an intensive discussion resulted about experiences, aspects of trauma psychology, and what happens to us emotionally when we experience something traumatic. The other workshop was more oriented on experiential pedagogy with trust and sensory exercises.

What united everyone after this short but intensive seminar, was the realisation that one can do and accomplish so much with so little when one has the appropriate awareness in order to help the affected children.

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The Friends of Waldorf Education are worldwide sponsors of a free education system. Since 1971 they have advocated for Waldorf education and the freedom of education systems. Since 1993 the office in Karlsruhe has organized and supervised international volunteer services worldwide and has to date made it possible for over 7,000 people to complete a social service in over 350 projects in more than 60 countries. Now around 600 young people annually take part in the programme. Since the summer of 2011 it has also been possible to complete a 12-month civil service in anthroposophic institutions in Germany through the association.

Since 2006 the Friends of Waldorf Education have been active in the area of emergency pedagogy. Following the outbreak of a war or a natural disaster, they worked with psychologically traumatized children and adolescents in Lebanon (2006), China (2008 and 2013); Gaza (2009-2013), Indonesia (2009), Haiti (2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Japan (2011), and Kenya (2012-2013), the Philippines (2013-2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), Nepal (2015), Greece (2015), Slovenia (2015), Kurdistan-Iraq (2013-2016), Germany (2014-2016), Paris (2016), Brussels (2016), and Ecuador (2016).

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