What about the bibliodrama “rules” and leading in different bibliodrama families?

My personal experiences in the psychodrama bibliodrama in the EBN Conference in Cluj (2016) and the Advanced Course in Kismaros (March 2018) together with my experiences in the workshop that was introduced as “basic bibliodrama” at the conference of Batschuns (2018) inspired me to write this reflection.

As a bibliodrama leader and trainer I hardly have the opportunity of playing bibliodrama myself. I seldom have the occasion of enjoying the power of the medium in my own life as a way of struggling and building in my own processes of a searching and conscious person. The EBN conferences and advanced courses offer me the possibility to work with my questions of life and in the same time I am encouraged to sharpen my own skills as a bibliodrama leader and trainer. It is challenging and fun at the same time. I love it.

In these bibliodrama workshops by going into this personal process and in the struggle with the themes of my life, being submerged in the participants role, I bumped into some important issues I would like to share.

The first item is about **the necessity of clear agreements** in the beginning of each bibliodrama process. Usually we start with explaining the rules. But how obvious are these rules? How to check if everyone understands the “rules” the same way as you do? Do people coming from different bibliodrama families have the same idea about the rules? And what about the leading style of the leader(s)? Is it possible that this style can cause misunderstandings? That is can damage the feeling of security?

The second question is kind of related to the first. What is **the position, the involvement and behavior of the leader when people seem to be deeply affected by what happens in the bibliodrama process?** Where stops the responsibility of the leader and starts the self-responsibility of participant? Is it the personality of the leader which makes the difference? Or is it the method or the bibliodrama school with a different view?

Talking about **“basic bibliodrama”.** What is meant by that? Does it concern some specific actions, protocol and working methods? Or is it a way of saying that you only use methods preparing the real thing? And what is that then? Is it again something related to the leader(s) or is it particular for a bibliodrama family?

What about the **interreligious and intercultural dynamics** in the bibliodrama process. There are so many differences in understanding and experiencing the meaning of Bible texts. How does this effect the bibliodrama process?

After my 5 years of exploring European bibliodrama, I wonder….

**The bibliodrama rules and the position of the leader**

As a bibliodrama leader working with a group most of the time you don’t know the people or the context of the persons in your group. You have to be aware of that considering that bibliodrama can touch people in their hart and can challenge or confront them to handle their personal issues. That makes it necessary and obvious to have a clear and open conversation about the rules. That way a safe space is created.

Some of the important rules seem to be clear and obvious. But is this true for every participant? Does everyone understand the same?

- Everything that happens stays in this room.

- Bibliodrama is not therapy

- Everyone is responsible for him/herself

It is obvious not to talk about personal things people share during the bibliodrama after the workshop is over. It has to be safe to go into the process, to experience your own issues, to feel confrontation and challenge, to even let you go on a wave of emotions, without being afraid that you will be in the middle of a public forum afterwards . It is not permitted that people start talking about personal things of other participants.

But what people bump into a personal issue that effects them and they are not given the opportunity to talk about it BEFORE leaving the room. If in a case, for instance because of timing problems, the workshop stops and the participant was not able to speak out, he or she is left in an unsafe position. Then it is very possible that the process goes on outside the room, that the confrontation is not left behind, that emotions are still turning the person upside down… Is it necessary that the leader(s) takes care that everything that has been done or said or experience CAN stay in the room? Should the leader check if the person needs something to go on? Or can one relie on the “self-responsibility of the participant? Is it the participant who has to ask for help , for the possibility to share his feelings, problems, his still “sitting in the situation”? Is it a sign of psychological instability if a participant is not able to do so? Or has the leader a task to do?

Bibliodrama is not therapy. But what about the intense processes that can be trigger by its methods? Especially when psychodrama is involved, I ask myself if it is ok for the leader to touch very deep personal items without taking proper care for the persons to make sure they can go on. What should he do?

Is it the own style of the leader or is it connected with the bibliodrama school? Since I did not attend the Basic Education in the European Training Program I have no idea about what is taught there about this issue. In the textbook of the Flemish Bibliodrama we have a chapter concerning the attitude and skills of a bibliodrama leader. ( see attached)

My idea is that it is perhaps necassary especially in an intercultural and interbibliodramatical situation to explicate the rules properly and to check if all understand it the same way as the leader does. Is self- responsibility just keeping your own( physical and emotional) limits? And how to express? By saying, by leaving the activity, by stepping back? And what if it happens that you are hit by a personal theme that affects you? What to expect from the leaders? It not needs much time to clear this out in advance. But it can prevent misunderstandings and creates a safe environment.

**A basic bibliodrama**

What is that? In our school basic bibliodrama means a rather strict structure of:

- arriving in the room, introduction of leaders, participants and method

- warming up: bodywork, pleasure and thematicly

- reading of the text and questioning

- Bibliodrama: big play or short activities of getting in the role , interview, interaction

- out of the role

- exchange of experiences

- read the text ( of part of it) again

- saying goodbye

But what does it mean in the European Basics?

**Intercultural and interreligious**

How to make the bibliodrama in this context to be an enrichment and exchange between different ways of interpretation of the Bible? How can the fighting struggling, searching people be challenged by those who have an obvious and integrated way believing and vice versa? How can bibliodrama exceed the individual level? And what about those who don’t really identify themselves anymore with a religious group?

**Conclusion**

For the good understanding: I don’t want to say that the leading in the vision of other bibliodrama schools is wrong. I only noticed in my European experiences that it is different. Therefore the explication of the position of the leader and of the rules in the beginning of a bibliodrama is an necessary and interesting topic. The participants have to know what the position of the leader is. What to expect or not.

Meanwhile I keep asking myself: How do I want to do this myself? How do I create safety and clarity for the participants and for myself? How do I take care that the personal process of the participant started by bibliodrama can go on in a safe atmosphere with the biggest respect possible for the person?

How should beginning leaders be instructed to deal with this?

How dealing with it in the multicultural and multi bibliodrama family context?

*Next page: The skills and attitudes of a bibliodrama leader in Flemish Bibliodrama School*

# The skills and attitudes of a bibliodrama leader in Flemish Bibliodrama School

Since 2004 bibliodrama is an important part of my life. I started my bibliodrama education in Belgium in the only institute that offered bibliodrama courses at that moment. Jean Agten was the inspirator of the training. He was formed in Holland in the center of Jan Lap. (more psychodrama bibliodrama) When I had my training a “Flemish bibliodrama school” was already going its own way. They developed their own creative, group, person and text centered method. And a group of trainers were in the middle of composing their bibliodrama textbook. After a lot of articles their expertise was concentrated in a systematical manual.

<https://www.bol.com/nl/p/bibliodrama-begeleiden/1001004005552489/?country=BE>

Content:

- background of bibliodrama: What? How? Relation Bible- life, effect and places/situations to use…

- Protocol to organize a workshop and the necessities

- Structured description of a variety of bibliodrama formats

This book became the textbook of the Flemish education in which I was a trainer since 2006. The textbook is very helpful, especially for starters. It provides them with step for step instructions that help to prepare and lead in a save way. It is a real “basic” protocol book.

One of the chapters in the book focusses on the required attitudes for a bibliodrama leader. In our education program we try to practice as trainers what we preach. We think it is very important that the participants, learning to become leaders, experience the skills we expect from a good bibliodrama leader. I made a rough translation of this chapter below.

**Chapter 5: Leader Posture in Bibliodrama.**

Bibliodrama is a ' serious thing '. Throughout the method players can touch deep human and personal questions. They deserve to be leaded in a safe way. Therefore a good leading style is indispensable. We explain what we mean by this.

**1. Appreciation for each participant**

*Respect*

People who play Bibliodrama do this as the person they are. Through the Bibliodrama, the individuality of the player is expressed. Aspects of the whole, integral person can be seen in their playing. This implies that the leader is attentive to the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of the person he accompanies. He creates a safe space so that the player can express what lives in him. The leader tries to accept every player as the person he is and to deal with it with care.

*Attention*

Each participant in the Bibliodramaspel may expect attentive attention from the leader. The leader is open for the individuality of the person by listening and looking carefully. This is essential because the leader can respond to the signals that the participant sends out consciously or unconsciously and so to achieve the objectives of the Bibliodrama.

*Acceptance*

The leader accepts the participants as they are. He is open to the role and the way of each player playing the role. The leader agrees to what the player wants to explore through the play. Every participant has the right to go into those themes that are important in his life at that moment. The leader does not judge the participants or their way of playing the role. He ensures that the participants also accept each other's way of playing. Finally, he prevents them from giving up their personal intentions in function of the group. Sometimes the danger excists that players release their own interpretation of role because they think they have to change it to conform another player who chose the same role.

**2. Growth-oriented**

*Perspective*

It is the task of the leader to seek openings to allow the player to look further and to offer perspective. It should be the intention to give the player insight into aspects of the story, itself, values, meaning... The leader tries to deepen and provide perspective so that the player may take a step further after the play, or may get a glimps of something new. By offering perspective, the leader acts conform the Biblical thinking. It has to do with “handling with care”. We do not leave a player in a grave, in a pit or as a dead one... unless it has a perspective or can continue in one way or another.

*Confidence in the process*

The leader has the task of guiding a bibliodramaspel as good as possible. But at the same time, he has to be confident that through the story and the play processes are started and the people themselves are able to go on deepening their issues or reaching to a breakthrough. This is not something the leader has in his hand, and in that sense he is not allowed to force anything. The process continues anyway. The leader also gives a kind of peace and understanding that he does not have everything in hand. After all, people learn at their own pace. They go their own process. This way the leader is placed for a number of choices: What questions does he ask or leave? To what extent does he zoom deeper into something that still seems unspoken? He has to seek a balance between challenging the player to the next small step that he chooses and the respect for the rhythm of the player's growth process. The leader is also always attentive to the fact that he unwittingly does not begin to follow his own track, but always focuses on the player he accompanies.

**3. Distance and proximity**

In the play, the leader must be sufficiently close to the player. Thus, the player feels himself supported in his role and brought to himself.

However, there is a danger that the leader becomes too heavily involved in a particular role or player and that he loses the overview at stake. By being too close to one player, you can easily lose attention to the other participants. The leader experiences the emotions of that role too strongly and goes on as a leader himself in the experiences of the player who is supervised. The leader can avoid this by keeping enough distance. First of all, in a physical way. He takes a step backwards, goes to the other side of the playing field,... Thus, he automatically creates distance from that role, he gets an overview on the whole and takes his role as leader of all players back on.

Keeping mental distance is also important because it keeps you from ' being in the back '. Players always deserve to be approached as self-employed persons who have sufficient strength to make their own choices. A leader does support, makes sure that the circumstances are good, invites the player to take the next step, but he leaves each one free to take the step he wants. The leader will not be tempted to make choices for a player.

**4. Properly**

*Attentive to the setting*

The leader has the task of tackling the Bibliodrama so that it fits the target group. Style, words, choice story,instructions , method... should be adapted to the group that wants to play Bibliodrama. It is not the opposite that the group has to deal with what the leader is offering. The Leader tunes his guide to the group and looks for the ways he has to go to get this group to play with this story in this situation.

*Caring*

In a play or at the exchange round there are sometimes very personal matters people are talking about. The leader makes sure that no one goes too far, that they show no more of themselves than they really want. That is why the leader will sometimes have to slow down too broadly. In this way, it is to avoid that the person afterwards regrets that he has said too much under the influence of the atmosphere. The leader is therefore looking for the right balance between depth in which people do show a lot of themselves and protecting the person who makes themselves vulnerable.

*Discreet*

The leader handles discreetly what is said and showed . He does not just tell you what role someone played and how he did it, or what was told in the exchange. The leader also askes this as an attitude for the other participants. In principle, what was said in the group remains in the group.

**5. With the necessary aftercare**

A bibliodramaspel can be a very intense experience that remains sometimes resonating for a long time. It is certainly not exceptional for people to come to important life decisions through a new understanding by the bibliodrama . Very often, participants need some feedback afterwards. The leader does not have to cope with all of this, but it is necessary to raise this and to provide some outweighing at the end of the Bibliodrama. The participants have had a shared experience and the leader can remind them that they can ask someone from the group to keep in touch for a talk if needed. In a series of sessions Bibliodrama the leader is approachable, or he can even speak to someone he has noticed that has played very intensely. The care goes beyond the guiding of the Bibliodrama. We are reminded of the good understanding that Bibliodrama is not a therapy and therefore does not provide therapeutic care. That is outside the domain of aftercare in Bibliodrama.

**6. With attention for group and individual**

The leader pays attention to each person, but should never lose sight of the group. In this sense, attention must be shared. While guiding a player, he must simultaneously monitor the whole group and its reactions, so that they can move back to other players ' feelings and thoughts.

If an intense process occurs in one person, this often affects the other people in the group. The leader tries to see this and will initially accompany that one person well. He will have to re-engage the other players and check with them to what extent that intense event has an effect on the role they play. Certainly in the exchange, attention will be paid to what this intense moment possibly evokes as experiences, feelings and thoughts among the participants.

You can also play in the group of mutual processes: roles that collided, but also people who fight through the play an (existing) conflict. The leader does not always knows it, but as soon as he notices it and feels he has to be aware of unusually violent reactions, he tries to keep the players as well as possible in their role and can provide elements of the story to guide the conflict to the storiy instead of the persons. Thus the players come to themselves and they can go through the questions of the leader in a quieter way to dwell on what goes through them. In such a situation too, the exchange is very important.

**7. Awareness of own possibilities and boundaries**

*View on your own life and history of faith*

A bibliodrama touches the personal life and evokes everything, including the life of the leader.

The leader needs to be well aware of this and has to know which themes in life and on the faith level concern him at the moment.

Guiding a Bibliodrama with a story that greatly affects your own life is better avoided, unless the leader is sufficiently aware and sufficiently strong to record his position as a leader. After all, it is not the intention of the leader to submerge through the actions of participants his own personal process or theme. If a particular theme is very sensitive to the leader and he knows from himself that in his current life phase he is easily touched emotionally when that theme comes to the order or has become completely unbeatable, then he should avoid that theme in his guidance. The leader must be sufficiently free from the story or theme so that he can take his role of leader and accompany the process of others.

*View on your own possibilities*

Guiding Bibliodrama is a complex event. Players, story, processes,... it all goes its own way and the leader must manage it. In this sense, it is important to know your boundaries: what can you do well? What is more exciting? What is still not so good?

When choosing a working form, the leader will take into account his own possibilities and limits. The Bibliodrama will probably have the most chance of success if he chooses a sufficiently familiar form of work in which he feels good.

*Accompany in duo*

We recommend to accompany as much as possible with two. That has many advantages. After all, the leader cannot see everything and a second leader who takes on the role of ' double ' (see Bibliodrama method: Double ') can be a serious support. A double can bring someone who is silent in the play. He can help to take care when someone is emotional or does not find the right words for what he thinks or feels in his role. A co-leader can signal the leader to involve someone, or may ask attention for a player.

When alternating, each player may get the attention he deserves. Also, a leader sometimes clashes with sympathy and an inroadion for players, or he does not knows well how to respond to one player who wants to go his own way. With two such things can be better taken care.

Afterwards, co-leaders can also give feedback. This allows them to learn to each other.

**8. With respect for the chosen story (-excerpt)**

Stories have their own strength and dynamism. They are often centuries old and have played an influential role in the lives of many people. The meaning comes slowly and is sometimes not so easy to grasp. We assume that a story has many levels and meanings. Multiple meanings can light up through a bibliodrama. Respectfully dealing with those treasures requires the leader to open up to the deep wealth that is hidden behind and in the story. Gaining knowledge about the story and about the background by reading different translations and comments is a first step. Which protects the leader from sticking to his own interpretation or unconscious serving one particular interpretation to the participants. In a second preparatory step, the leader can examine the substantive traces in the story itself: What is the storyline, what themes are in it, what dynamics,... They determine what he can do with a concrete story and what is not, what type of work is suitable, what content can be explored,... During the Bibliodrama, the leader can bring that story into the footlights to stimulate the players in their voyage of discovering the story.

Finally, a timid approach to each story is appropriate because its effects on humans are sometimes so deep that you cannot imagine before.