

Karlsruhe, March 26th, 2015

Back to Northern Iraq: Emergency Pedagogy at refugee schools

At the end of March an emergency pedagogy team from the Friends of Waldorf Education visited recently traumatized children and youths in refugee camps in the province of Dohuk in northern Iraq. In four UNICEF schools 1,300 children could be supported in the processing of their terrible experiences and teachers were trained in dealing with traumatised children. The operation took place in cooperation with "Aktion Deutschland Hilft."

A lot has changed since the last emergency pedagogy operation from the Friends of Waldorf Education in northern Iraq in September 2014. The internally displaced persons, the majority of whom had to camp in unfinished buildings and open fields, have now found refuge in newly installed refugee camps. Since the middle of February, UNICEF has set up multiple school tents, so that refugee children can once again attend school.

In the refugee camps Berseve I and Berseve II an emergency pedagogy team supported four of these UNICEF schools from the 6th to the 20th of March. The schools work under difficult conditions: many school tents have neither tables nor chairs; the lessons take place on the floor. In some schools there are 1300 pupils for only 3 teachers and many of the pupils are severely traumatised. They have witnessed violence at the hands of the ISIS militia; have seen parents and siblings dying. The behavioural changes in the children caused by trauma could be seen everywhere; many exhibit aggressive behaviour during the day or isolate themselves.

In order to support these children and youth in processing their experiences, different pedagogical and therapeutic offerings were designed daily: experiential pedagogy and movement exercises give children trust in themselves and their environment back and dissolve their inner blockades. Art therapy offers a nonverbal possibility to express and process experiences. All together around 1,200 children ages 5 to 17 years old could be reached through different workshops and given a bit of joy back. The laugh of children, the colourful cloths, paints, and balls show a picture of hope in the grey surroundings of the refugee camps.

In order to establish lasting emergency pedagogical structures 39 teachers were trained in psych traumatology and the methods of emergency pedagogy in working with traumatised children. This training took place in parallel to the workshops for children in the context of a 3 day continuing education course. Most of the teachers are themselves refugees from the disputed Sinjar-mountain region and also traumatised. The continuing education can support them to better work with their own and the children's traumatization.

But not only children and teachers have been affected, also many adults are severely traumatised. They all have terrible experiences to report: family members and friends lost, experiences of violence and torture by the ISIS militias. Many just barely escaped the massacres in their hometown. After an escape full of hardship and deprivation, they are stranded without belongings in the camp around Zaxo.

Additional important building blocks of the work of the Friends of Waldorf Education in northern Iraq are therefore parental consultation and psych-social help; above all for women. In cooperation with a local NGO women's groups, which afford women the opportunity to talk about their ordeal and exchange their experiences, could be formed. Individual sessions with a trained psychotherapist were offered to those who were especially traumatised by their experiences during forced displacement and escape.

Emergency pedagogy: pedagogical first aid

Emergency pedagogy of the Friends of Waldorf education is based on Waldorf pedagogical methods and related forms of therapy. Through the activation of the affected persons' self-healing power the coping process is supported. Trust in one's self and one's fellow human beings are strengthened through experiential pedagogical exercises. Especially in the context of wars these measures are of immense meaning. In art and experiential pedagogical courses affected children have the opportunity to counter traumatic experiences with new aesthetic experiences. Movement and clapping games bring joy, dissolve inner torpor, and support physical coordination.

Emergency pedagogy of the Friends of Waldorf Education has been active in the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq since 2013. In the scope of countless operations worldwide many children have already been helped to process their traumatic experiences and so called trauma related disorders have been lessened.

During the course of the year the Friends of Waldorf Education plans further emergency pedagogical operations in the region.

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*The **Friends of Waldorf Education** are worldwide sponsors of a free education system. Since 1971 they advocate Waldorf education and the freedom of education systems. Since 1993 the office in Karlsruhe organizes and supervises international volunteer services, worldwide. Since summer 2011 it is possible to fulfill a 12-month civil service in anthroposophic institutions through the association. Since 2006 the Friends of Waldorf Education are 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*

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in Lebanon (2006), China (2008 and 2013); Gaza (2009-2013), Indonesia (2009), Haiti (2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Japan (2011), and Kenya (2012-2013).



Freunde der Erziehungskunst is a member of **Germany's Relief Coalition**, a union of German relief organisations that can provide rapid and effective aid in the case of large catastrophes and emergency situations abroad.