

Biography Work

What is Biography Work?

Biography Work is a kind of memory work. It can help us to reflect on our life or specific aspects of our life and to explore how we became ourselves. In using Biography Work, we can see the injuries we experienced as well as the resources that helped us to survive, to empower ourselves and to grow. It helps us to better understand ourselves, to forgive, to explore continuities and frictions, to reinterpret past experiences, and to discover the whole picture beyond singular events. We can also uncover repetitive patterns of behaviour in relationships or unfair conditions and, subsequently, develop new approaches to transform them – if we want to.

What is the origin of Biography Work?

Biographical work is rooted in social science research and social therapeutic developments, for example, in the Script Analysis which is part of the Transactional Analysis, Gestalt Therapy, and Systemic Therapy. Further approaches can be found in anthroposophy which considers Biography Work to be an important medium.

Why is Biography Work important for political work?

Beyond the exploration of our individual history, biographical self-reflection allows us to recognise the social conditions that shaped us.¹ By listening to the biography of others, we can discover similar phenomena of society and power like discrimination, violence, and suppression which affect our private life and even our intimate life. If we start to reflect on the social and political conditions in which we live, we can better understand our deep embedment in social and cultural correlations. Here, Biography Work allows for an amazing depth, which mere socio-theoretical ideas can hardly provide. This apprehension of the social and cultural connections of our own life and, thus, the realisation of suffering from social conditions can set off motivation for changing political attitudes and for engaging with social and political issues.

Your task for the next CAT session

- Draw a picture (est. 20 x 30 cm) regarding the question: how do I experience myself and my environment during this situation or crisis? What connections do I find in my biography?

Perhaps a few questions make it easier to approach biographical work: what fears and needs do rise in the current crisis? What other feelings are there? What do you notice in your environment? What has changed in your way of feeling, thinking, and acting since the crisis emerged? Where and when did this also happen? Or what does that remind you of? Etc.

¹ “The private is political“, as student movements in the late 1960s across Europe and the second wave of feminism have postulated.

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Try to illustrate the different impressions, emotions, memories, and pictures. What matters, is that, in the first place, the reflection and drawing is for yourself. It is not about how – allegedly good or bad – you can draw. The drawing is just a means to capture something you can talk about with your group later. Also, at the next meeting, you can decide spontaneously which parts of your drawings you want to talk about and which ones rather not (this may help appease your inner censor). Once you finish the picture please take a photo or scan and upload it for the next CAT-meeting.

Literature (in German)

Gudjons, Wagner-Gudjons, Pieper. 2008. Auf meinen Spuren. Übungen zur Biographiearbeit.