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The group as context
The project Intercultural Reading of the Bible assumes and presupposes that culture determines the way we read. Aspects that contribute to how a Bible story is read is the country where one lives, and the people and social class to which one belongs. Bible reading is inevitably a contextual event. This book describes the way this happens and the effect the context has on the interpretation process from many different perspectives.

By using the adjective contextual, Biblical scholars and hermeneuts initially refer to the cultural influence on the reading and interpretation process. This mainly concerns the big cultural differences between continents and the influence of the difference in social position, prosperity, safety and perspective. In addition to the big cultural influences, the context of the smallness of the group itself also influences the reading process. This 'smallness context' and the group dynamics aspects and their effects are described and analysed in this article.

The hypothesis of this article is the conviction that in addition to culture, the dynamics in the group also play a role in the hermeneutic process. Every group as it is, consisting of these special people, women, men, or women and men, with their ages, in that number, meeting at that specific time in that specific place, creates the context of that one unique reading process.

Reading and communicating, the group collectively give a meaning to the story 'The Woman at the Well'. Their meanings come into existence in that specific group. Only these people, unique persons with their own backgrounds and irreplaceable experiences of life can put together these meanings in one unique process (Lanser – van der Velde 2000: 39)

The title of this article, Making things in common, was taken from John Dewey. This American educationalist has stated that learning and communication processes are always contextual and time-related events. People who read together and talk to each other about this, participate in a mutual practice for the duration of the situation. People were made to be together and in their inter-subjectivity they develop mutual relationships and collectively give new meanings to the texts (Boisvert, 1998: 135). People complement each other in the dynamics of conversation and the mutual search for meanings. All reading processes are context-related, which means that a reading process cannot be repeated, not even with the same people at another time. This shows that also the group and the communicative dynamics in the group influence the reading practice, and, therefore, are aspects in the hermeneutic process. Not only does the continent, the country and the culture affect the way meaning is attributed to Bible stories, but also the socio-psychological aspects and educational aspects of the group process are important as a dimension of hermeneutics. This article aims to provide an insight into the aspects that play a role and to indicate the way group dynamics influence the reading process.

Method of Analysis
The reading reports of the project Intercultural Reading of the Bible formed the research material for this article. Those who have been privileged to read all the reports, will agree with my observation that the material is incredibly diverse in form and content. Some reports were verbatim reflections of the entire meetings. Sometimes, a report was written by someone observing from the sideline, which also included some appreciation and critical comments. Sometimes the accounts were limited to short summaries of what had been said and done in a group. In addition, there was the phenomenon of the reading groups on the different continents receiving different reading methods and questions. The South-American groups used a different list of questions and points for attention than the Dutch groups and, apparently, the instructions given by the project co-ordinators in Asia were also different.

The great diversity in material is an expression of the richness of the project. That was the first and joyful conclusion. The second conclusion, directly related to the first, is that this richness made it very complex to analyse the reading reports. The big difference in form and content made it impossible to conduct a comparative analysis of the group dynamics factors. In one report a detailed account was given of the conversations among the group members and the thought processes of the participants, while in another report only a summary of the conclusions could be found. As the instruction material that the groups followed was very different, it was difficult to trace, with any certainty, where the groups followed their own path and where they adopted the project co-ordinator's recommendations. This great diversity made it difficult to properly assess the data and to compare the processes that took place in the groups.

A third remark is that, on the whole, less than half of the groups incorporated some information on the methods they used in the report. Approximately sixty per cent of the groups did not provide – useful – information on the method followed or the group dynamics process. The groups that did report on their methods and group processes, did so in very different ways and reported on very diverse topics with respect to the group dynamics and social interaction. This has resulted in a restriction that this article is based on only a portion of the reports and on a lot of non-uniform data. It is impossible to express a broadly valid opinion on the role of the group dynamics in the hermeneutic process based on the material provided.

Because of the richness and the limitations of the material, a qualitative approach and exploratory method was chosen for research (Wester, 1991). I read all the available material and I made a selection of the parts in which group dynamics information was provided. These texts were gathered, labelled, grouped and placed in a theoretical framework. The non-uniform reporting gave insufficient information to establish a complete theory. The material, however, induced us to further study certain aspects of the functioning of a group, for example its leadership and the way in which a facilitator organised and guided the meeting. The result of this was the establishment of the influence of a number of specific factors on the reading process.

In analysing the material I applied an inductive method (Heitink 1999: 228 ff.). For readability and clarity, I have presented the research results in reverse order. First, I will briefly outline a theoretical framework, following this with an elaboration on the two leadership types using information derived from the analysis. Both facilitation styles have a number of characteristics that have been illustrated by quotations from the research material. This shows the empirical data on which the conclusions have been made. By focusing on the
differences in facilitation styles and their characteristics, I have described the influence of the various working methods in the groups on the interpretation process.

**Task and relationships**

In group dynamics a distinction is made between task and relationships according to Watzlawick and co.'s (1968) communication theory. These two dimensions are actually closely connected. If things are clear and circumstances ideal, the relationships in a group will develop while working collectively on the task. By discussing, working and praying, the group members get to know each other better and start relating to each other more openly. Conversely, working on a task goes smoother and better when the relationships in a group are good, and when people trust and feel safe with one another. Both dimensions undeniably influence one another, although for the purpose of analysis a distinction can be made.

An important aspect in the functioning of a group is leadership. The way in which the leader takes up his task as group leader greatly determines the way the group functions. Leading a group can be differentiated into the same two dimensions: the task-oriented and the relationship-oriented aspect (Remmerswaal, 2003: 267). In the task-oriented part the leader works towards achieving the external group goal. The characteristics of this formal functioning are: the leader monitors the continuity of the group, makes sure that the goal is achieved, keeps the group focused on the task, takes care of the formalities of a meeting such as opening, closing and implementing the intended programme, monitors output and emphasizes production. In short, a group leader steers the group process that is focused on the group's task.

In the project, the members of the reading groups were invited to meet and read John 4 together. That made their task clear and univocal for all the groups: they read the story of the woman at the well. The groups reported on their reading processes. Each group was linked to a partner group from another culture. The partner groups studied each other's reading reports looking for differences and similarities, and reported back to each other and to us on this process. The result achieved by the group leaders in the project *Through the Eyes …* by working on their external group goal, could be established on the basis of the material, i.e. the reading reports on the website. The execution of the task-oriented function by the group leaders is shown in the large numbers of reports from groups throughout the world. It is difficult to make the relational skills of the group leader visible, but, nonetheless, these skills play a significant role in the whole process. The relationships are based on interactions, feelings and activities that arise from the internal functioning of the group. To guide this process, social-emotional and psychological leadership qualities are required, which are demonstrated in the ability to maintain a group as a group. The group leader performs this role by paying attention to the internal system of the group, i.e. to the interactions between the group members. A facilitator must have developed an interactional sensitivity and know what is important in relationships between people. A relationally skilled group leader is sensitive, focused on the members of the group in their unicity and subjectivity, supports people where possible and monitors the level of satisfaction of the group members. A good group leader has an antenna for the psychological and personal functions of the members and knows how the group can meet the needs of the members.

The task of a group leader was more extensive in the groups that were specifically formed for the reading project than in groups that already existed. If people already know each other and
if they have mutually developed a reading method in the course of time, their group is in a different, more stable phase of group development. The members of the group are then better able to work through the process together. They share responsibility for their task and relationships, and work more democratically. As a Korean students’ group said about itself:

“Our bible study was good in that we do not have to worry about what others think. We know each other quite well. Therefore we did not have to hide our present situation and were able to be honest in our expressing our ideas. We felt relieved in a way by doing so. It was very democratic because everybody could take part in the Bible study freely”.

People in groups that meet for the first time, first have to get to know each other. They are unsure about the way the group will work. They do not yet know what is expected of them, although they came to the meeting being more or less aware of their own expectations. In occasional groups, the group development is in a less stable phase. However, in such groups a safe atmosphere and a good exchange of information can also develop.

"While we were talking, there was a very pleasant atmosphere. We listened to what the others were saying, which often led to new ideas”.

In these groups the role, and therefore the responsibility, of the leader is more extensive. The group members will be more dependent on the group leader and the guidance of the process will demand better skills of the leader.

**Facilitator**

In the instructions to the reading groups, the group leader is referred to as the *facilitator*. The facilitator is the person who creates the conditions that enable the group members to read together and collectively search for the meaning of the scriptural passage. The task of the facilitator is described in the project handbook as:

"The primary role of the facilitator is to enable ‘group process’ to take place, to manage group dynamics, to promote turn taking, to keep time, to summarize and systematize the reading results, to find creative and empowering ways of reporting back to plenary the findings of the group, and to move on the group from reflection into action. Besides the more general group process concerns, the facilitator’s task in the contextual Bible study process is to stimulate the use of local reading resources and to introduce critical reading resources – in the specific sense that this term is used within biblical studies – into the reading process as they are requested and required (West 1999 in De Wit, 2001: 45)."

In brief, a facilitator needs quite some knowledge and skills to be able to guide the group process effectively. As indicated in the first sentence of the task description, the facilitator should know all aspects of group dynamics and be able to implement these if required. A facilitator should also motivate the group members to act: the group should move from reflection to action. The facilitator must be also able to apply more than one reading method: in addition to the reading method that the group is used to, the leader may introduce a critical reading in order to help the readers to better understand the story. Group leaders can only help others further by offering an alternative reading perspective if they have at least two perspectives at their disposal, and if they, according to the situation and the needs of the group members, can offer a 'new' critical perspective.
The project *Through the Eyes of Another* focuses on the ordinary reader, both in implementation and in scientific research. The organisers encourage the ordinary reader "to read as they usually do". Elsewhere, group members are called on to follow a process of spontaneous reading and they are appointed co-actors and co-owners of the project. The power lies within the group (De Wit, 2003: 188), although not all has been said with this statement. Facilitation is a function of the group and a skilled facilitator will use all knowledge and skills to serve the functioning of the group. In order to carry out this task of group guidance with a service attitude, facilitators should possess all the aforementioned skills and should be very much aware of the way their 'power' influences the group process. A facilitator has the 'power of leadership' and should also have – see West's description of the facilitator – the 'power of expertise'. Group leadership is not concerned with the presence or absence of power, but with the skills and the awareness of the responsibility to place everything *in the service of* the functioning of the group (Lanser-van der Velde, 2000: 318).

How facilitators dealt with this responsibility and whether or not they valued the group members as competent actors (Coenen, 1998:23), is demonstrated by the way they followed the project instructions or modified them with a view to their own group.

Speaking in very general terms, in the project *Through the Eyes* two styles of facilitation could be recognised. Some facilitators worked both task and relationship-oriented, and some led the groups with the main focus on implementing the task. As explained above, both dimensions, i.e. task and relationship, are present in each group. The distinction between these two styles was therefore a relative difference. There were facilitators who mainly attended to the task aspect and there were facilitators who clearly worked on the task and the mutual relationships. A number of characteristics of both styles could be recognised in the material, giving more meaning to the difference between the task and relationship-oriented styles.

**Task and relationship-oriented facilitation**

*Harmonisation between the group and the project*

In order to give the participants in the project a basis for their working method, instructions for possible procedures were incorporated in the project description. The handbook for the functioning of the group gave six group rules and a few clusters with reading questions. The material showed that different reading methods were applied on the different continents. It was crucial for the group dynamics and for research that the facilitators dealt with these instructions in very different ways.

Relationship and task-oriented facilitators took themselves with their own skills, and the instructions for the project and the group seriously. This type of facilitator incorporated the project instructions into a unique working method appropriate for the group. In a single report they meticulously gave account of the considerations on which their reconstruction was based:

"Question 4: Are there any questions/clarifications people wish to put forward about this text? Approach: This question was designed to allow participants to share their knowledge of the issues within and background to this passage. It was led in the full group. This question took about 15 minutes."

The group leader harmonised the different group dynamics aspects, giving appropriate attention to both the task and the relationship. The facilitators who applied such a working method made use of their freedom and bore their responsibility in relation to the framework offered. The questions provided were used insofar as these were relevant to the reading process of their own group.
A group of seven women in Colombia had been meeting for many years to study the Bible together. The women used to begin their meetings with prayer. From the questions provided they chose the question for identification. Of all persons in the story they could identify themselves most with the behaviour of the disciples. They identified themselves with them because they found they also tended to exclude other people. “Very few times we learn from the other one because we have a fixed idea of what you want. The dialogue goes around the woman. The knowledge takes us away from people, and the challenge is that it brings near them”.

Instead of following all questions provided, the women searched for the story that was not told in John 4 in order to broaden their knowledge. They filled in the ‘gaps in the text’ by telling each other what else happened. They put words to what went on in the woman's mind when speaking to Jesus. They spoke for Peter in order to know what he thought when he saw what was happening at the well. They told each other what happened that afternoon after the conversation at the well in the village of Sychar: What did the woman tell her fellow-villagers?

*Activating learning methods and creative arts*

Task and relationship-oriented facilitators translate their own educational preparations in activating learning methods and they prefer to use creative arts. Activating learning methods and creative arts encourage the group members to read, study and interpret topics by themselves. These methods create space, inspiring stimulating dynamics with creative actualisation. In the above example, the women chose for a simple narrative form, and adopted an unexpected approach. They broadened their knowledge of the story by searching for the ‘gaps in the text’. They may have adopted this approach from the feminist bible scholar E. Schussler Fiorenza. Choosing for creative arts such as drawing, drama and bibliodrama, music, storytelling and working with symbols in favour of methods in which conversation was dominant, is a remarkable characteristic of the groups that used a free working method.

"As a closing act at the end of the third meeting, the facilitator asked the participants to represent what had affected them most during the process. The group leader took along large sheets of paper, crayons and coloured pencils. While the group was drawing, they listened to classical music. The participants drew, for instance, a well, a stream and themselves with their feet in the water streaming from the well, or a meeting of two 'people with stamina' - Jesus and the woman - causing a fire in the course of their meeting."

This example shows that creative arts stimulate the design of unexpected new and in-depth interpretations and images. Also singing songs and making and pronouncing prayers show active imagination. There were groups where participants spontaneously expressed their perception of the text in a prayer or sang a song in between. The participants also used their imagination in these expressions and created space to associate with the text.

*Reflectiveness and exchange of perspective*

G. West states in his description of the facilitator that he or she should be capable of offering the group an alternative reading perspective if necessary. It would be an ideal situation if the group itself had reflected on the diversity of reading methods in the group. Looking 'through the eyes of another' does not only occur when views are exchanged with a group from another continent, but such an exchange of perspective may also occur in one's own group. In one's own group, the readings and interpretations are also determined by individual life experiences and the different members will use different perspectives. In some groups, the difference was
related to gender. In a South-American group a woman said that she wished to discuss the position of the woman in the story, but the men in the group considered that to be the woman's 'personal problem'. Naming this diversity can be an exercise in exchange of perspective and, thus, function as a preparation for the exchange of information with the partner group in the second phase.

The facilitator asked the participants a question regarding the aspects that played a role for each of them in their interpretation process. The participants talked to each other about this question. They mentioned "a need to search for a well in your life" and "you see the story through your own eyes, but learn from the interpretation of others which you have not read in the story yourself".

A facilitator may encourage the exchange of perspective in the reading process by asking the participants this kind of reflective question. Putting reflective questions to the group members, invites them to think just a little deeper and that is where the skill of the facilitator comes in. This process is explained in more detail in G. West's contribution in this publication.

*The world in the group*

The fourth characteristic of the task and relationship-oriented facilitation style is the presence of the world in the group. There are two moments in a group meeting when the social environment outside the group specifically comes up for discussion, i.e. at the beginning and at the closing of a meeting. Relationship-oriented group leaders tried to connect to the social environment of the participants. In groups that paid close attention to the mutual relationships, personal questions were asked, sometimes even very specific questions. An example from a Colombian group:

"What has been my personal story and who am I now? How am I as a person? What about my current condition, my ambitions, my qualities, my experiences? What is my relation with others like regarding paternal aspects (give life and guide others) fraternity (receive life and guide others) Nuptial relations (personal relations with others, administration of my body and my sexuality). Ways of participating in my community: my strengths and weaknesses regarding planning, execution and evaluation concerning personal and group actions."

Some also found creative forms to make a link to the outside social environment. This facilitator introduced the scriptural passage relating to daily life experiences of the participants in a very concrete and visual manner.

The pastor took along two bottles of water, one holding water from the river and one holding water from a well. The water from the river was highly polluted, but became clear through artificial purification. The water from the well was less clear but pure. The symbolic message was: "Not always the more transparent water is the water of life. After this activity the coordinator suggested that the members of the group spoke about the wells of their childhood, since many were born in the rural area."

The second specific moment when the world was present in the group, was at the end of the reading process. A few groups moved from reflecting to acting.

The women considered how they could move from their reading, thinking and discussing into acting. What could they do with what they had learnt from the
scriptural passage? They filled in this step very concretely and personally. They mentioned examples from their lives where and when they excluded others, for example the shoeshine boy in the street because he was from another culture and another people, and a family member leading a life that was not appreciated by the rest of the family. Finally, they expressed how they intended to change their attitudes and behaviour. “What should I make before excluding the other one?” and gave the following answers: “to ask and to speak”, “to come closer and to dialogue” and “not to take the things in a very personal way, this is selfish”.

During the reading process these women not only developed new meanings, but they linked concrete intentions to their development in order to fulfil the meaning of the story – Jesus does not exclude people as the disciples and they themselves did – in their own lives. This report showed that a free and creative approach to the text together using activating learning methods and creative arts enabled the group members to develop new meanings and new opportunities to act.

**Task-oriented facilitation**

*The discussion leader follows the scheme provided*

The following description of a group made by the group itself is characteristic of the task-oriented group:

"We conclude that we are not that much symbol people. We mark that the things we bring to a meeting are our agenda, a pen and a piece of paper. The marks are made on a laptop. We think we feel comfortable with objectivity and efficiency."

Task-oriented facilitators were indeed characterised by a certain degree of efficiency. They mainly focused on the external group goal: it was important to participate in the project and as a result a report must be made. Due to their efficient task-oriented approach they chose to follow the questions provided by the project without making many adjustments. In a number of cases, this efficiency had its price. In the cases where a facilitator kept too strictly to the role laid down by the project organisers, the project organisers became the authority. The questions were regarded as rules 'from above': it says here that we should do it like this, so we will do it this way. In those groups an external authority existed – the project organisers – that steered the reading process instead of the readers themselves supported by their facilitator.

There seems to be a relationship between the term indicating the group leader and the method followed by a group. In some reports the group leader had a first name and in others he was mentioned functionally: the pastor, the minister. In the report of the objective and efficient group mentioned above the leader was called 'chairman', in other reports the leader was called 'discussion leader'. These names say something about the way the leaders fulfilled their roles. A 'chairman' leads a business meeting, a discussion leader has to try to align different opinions. In any case, the role interpretation is more businesslike and task-oriented than the description of a facilitator given by G. West.

In task-oriented groups the leader had the central role, implying that the leader was the most active person during the group meetings. In this type of group that made a verbatim report, this was shown in the frequency of speaking and the duration of the speaking time of the discussion leader. A leader who strongly controlled the discussion may be very safe for the
participants, but this also led to less discussion among the participants. Sometimes sessions were held in which readers only reacted in turn to a text, after which the following question was dealt with.

On the other hand, there were group leaders who deliberately limited their own contributions to the group. These group leaders were possibly not very familiar with the role of facilitator. On a few occasions, I came across an explicit announcement that the facilitator would be saying little.

"Pastor: I said as little as possible, it is difficult to say little … I should have said even less………"

"the task of the chairman has to be reserved, everybody is responsible."

A leader that takes a too modest role is not always helpful.

"The second evening we end with only questions and no answers. Bernard, who was guide, did not put too much of his theological knowledge in the conversation of the participants. The idea was that they searched for their own solutions to their questions on the text. But, as they are not used to do so, they ended without the idea of understanding the meaning of this text."

This kind of facilitator aims to play a modest role, but forgets that their role is to facilitate the reading process of the participants. Group members do not just talk to each other, they need to be given a structure for this to take place. If a group leader does not deliberately opt for a suitable method, chances of learning from each other will be missed.

**Discussion method**
In groups with a task-oriented facilitator, the method used was, in fact, only discussion. The facilitators followed the questions provided and for leaders with little training in group dynamics, a discussion was a logical choice. For most of the groups this was the case. This is, of course, based on a wide theological tradition: one talks and thinks about texts, words ask for even more words. The choice to stick to talking will in most cases have been made subconsciously, or better said, the facilitators will not have considered an alternative possibility.

The advantage of discussion as a method is that the participants feel comfortable with it. They are used to talking about texts. The fact that this is a common form, however, is also a disadvantage. The participants told each other what they already knew and did not easily come to read the scriptural passage in an alternative way. Listening to each other, understanding each other and connecting with each other was not easy. Participants often followed their own flow of thought. A tendency to rationalise and problematize may go hand in hand with this approach. Human possibilities such as imagination and spontaneously following intuition were used less.

**Text-oriented**
The method of discussion is linked to text orientation. In the groups where most attention was paid to the task and where words dominated, it was striking that people had difficulty giving a meaning to the text. The task orientation became clear from a cognitive text-centred reading method, where groups to a certain extent tended to problematize the scriptural passage. They
particularly wondered what was meant by the passage and we read more than once that people found the Bible difficult to read. Occasionally, remarks were made like "we could not have known this, because we need a theologian or theological knowledge here".

"We conclude that we are not very much touched by this passage as believers. It is vague, it does not tell us what the will of God is or how you must worship God and what the living water is. It is abstract, no manual.
We concluded that our western way of looking at the bible – rational, explanatory – is hindering us. We believe with our heads and not with our hearts. We want to understand."

If the task-oriented facilitators follow the project’s handbook, they will put the question of which person from the story can one identify with. This question is intended to bring the story of the woman at the well closer to the readers of today. In a task-oriented group, the participants found such a personal question very difficult. Quite a number of groups, the Dutch groups in particular, were not able to deal with this question. There was one group where the participants answered the question about identifying with the personages by explaining what was difficult for them in this story.

Sometimes there was a link between the position of 'not understanding the text' and identifying with the disciples. This was a remarkable result, showing self-knowledge and a subtle understanding for the behaviour of the disciples. In the story in John 4 the disciples were not involved in the communication between Jesus and the woman. The disciples did not really understand what took place, just like the participants said that they did not understand the scriptural passage.

The world in the group
Task-oriented facilitators and groups brought in their social environment in a different way than those working in more relationship-oriented groups. In relationship-oriented groups, the text and faith were strongly linked to personal questions and circumstances. In the task-oriented groups, social and community problems were more frequently discussed. The tone of such discussions was somewhat distant. In many reports from all over the world tensions between population groups in their own countries were described. These tensions were compared to the problematic relationship that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. The relationships between Muslims and Christians, Catholics and Protestants, immigrants and indigenous peoples were mentioned, as well as caste and tribe differences and the difference between hardliners and softies in their own communities.

Because task-oriented facilitators usually followed the project's list of questions, they hardly ever moved on from reflecting to acting. When they were asked for the significance of the text for their own lives, they referred again to the tensions between groups. Sometimes, however, the world turned out to be present in the group as well and then it was less easy to talk about it.

"It was clearly difficult for the group to move away from this discussion, touching as it did a deep tension within most of them between their faith and culture. However, the discussion did move on when one of the group said that they also felt that the text was about how that in talking to the woman, "Jesus was trying to destroy the [racial] segregation". This shifted the discussion to racism, with the group wondering whether
it would ever end. Though there was not a lot of hope that it would, the group argued that the only way to destroy racism was to "really know a person".

**The effect of the facilitation styles on the hermeneutic process**

If grouped as above, each facilitation style identified has four characteristics. In order to be able to say something about the influence of the different styles on the hermeneutic process, it needs to be mentioned that all characteristics were only found in a few groups. More often the reports mentioned one, two or three characteristics of one style per facilitator. The conclusions on the relationship between the facilitation style and the hermeneutic process should be read with this in mind.

In the reports from the groups in which the facilitators displayed characteristics of both the task and relationship-oriented styles, relatively many remarks were found on the joy experienced by the participants in reading together. They explicitly stated that reading the bible together was an enriching experience. The participants in task-oriented groups also stated that they valued reading the bible together, but this appreciation was expressed less frequently and in a more reserved manner.

In a group which gave more attention to the mutual relationships, more space was created for the individual group members to put a meaning to the text. They did not tend to try to reach a consensus on the meanings within the group. The differences in interpretation were accepted and it was not necessary to reach any consensus between the participants. In those groups, differences in meanings and their diversity were experienced by the participants as enriching. The groups led by task-oriented facilitators more often came to a uniform conclusion on the meaning: the core of the story for us is ……. or, the message of this story is…..

In the groups that paid attention to the mutual relationships, the individual social environment was deemed to be important. In these groups the meanings given to the scriptural passage were more often explicitly linked to the members' own lives: my life is like this, and that is why the meaning of the text to me is … With this movement, the message of the story takes its place in a network of meanings. The meaning that is given to it in the hermeneutic process is included in and integrated into daily life. It seems that in these groups the members more often made the story their own. Only a limited number of groups moved on from reflecting to acting and it should be noted that the groups where this occurred were led by a task and relationship-oriented facilitator. In the groups where visual art forms were used, the most contemporary expressions for the meaning of the story were given. Apparently, creative art creates space to explain the text in one's own words.

On the whole, the analysis of the reports on the group dynamics aspects seems to lead to a very careful conclusion. Task-oriented leadership leads to the formulation of more uniform and objective meanings, while task and relationship-oriented leadership leads to more differentiation and more personal interpretations.

**Learning from the group process of the partner group**

Finalising the analysis of group-dynamics as part of the hermeneutic process, I compared the difference in facilitation styles with the exchange of information between the partner groups. Did the more task-oriented groups respond differently to the exchange with the partner group than the task and relationship-oriented groups?
In general, the groups responded very sympathetically and with much interest towards each other, but it turned out that it was not easy to look through the eyes of another. Based on the groups-dynamic analysis, an explanation for the reactions from the groups to the partner groups can be found in the way in which the groups have worked themselves. Groups with a task-oriented style tend to continue their more businesslike, rational and text-oriented approach in their comments to the reading of the partner group. The task-oriented groups read the partner group's report in the way they read the scriptural passage of John 4: with great interest but mainly text-oriented and analytical.

In contradistinction to our group they don’t discuss very much what they read in the bible, what the rational is, but they take the word as it is written. In relation to their way of believe we see many differences, i.e. because we are accustomed to ask for the meaning of a bible text and we discuss the meaning of saying a prayer. We have less or no open-mindedness in relation to matters of faith. We don’t know what is meant if somebody says ‘to calculate with God’. Our believe is more a matter of rational and deliberation than of emotions and feelings.

They described and paraphrased their partner group's report, they spoke of 'we' and 'they' and mainly established the differences. They stuck to their more rational text-orientation because of this approach, even now that the text was the report of their partner group. The tendency to problematise which goes with this approach, was often implied in the questions they put to their partner group. A genuine exchange of perspective – if we read the passage in their way, what would we get from it – came about with difficulty or only for small parts of the text.

In the description of the more task and relation-oriented facilitation style, the third characteristic of this style was that some facilitators of these groups demonstrated the ability to encourage their group participants to an exchange of perspective. In task and relation-oriented groups the facilitators did not take a difference in opinion, religious vision or interpretation as threatening or as an incident that needed to be solved. They just seized differences as an opportunity to learn together and from each other. Seizing this learning process is an appreciation of the enriching diversity of interpretations and of the subjectivity of the participants. This openness, that had already been practised in their own group, was continued in the contacts with the partner group.

You have a very different view than we have. You see matters, the bible stories much more practically. You take it more direct into your daily life. The story that is read is more spontaneously involved in your daily life. You work more practical, while we work more cognitively, and in other occasions more emotionally. All in all: we sympathise with your approach, and we acknowledge the need to copy this from you, which means that our attitude that determines the way in which we read the bible will have to change gradually.

It is striking that the writer formulates relationally. He does not say 'they' and 'we', but speaks to the partner group: you and we. This group paid attention to the relationships and this communication style was also continued in the contact with the partner group. The members of the task and relationship-oriented groups have already gained more experience in looking through the eyes of another. The facilitator of these groups showed them how to do that and the participants were given space for subjectivity and diversity. People are not naturally able to copy the reading perspective of someone else. An exchange of perspective can and must be learned. Relationship-oriented groups have already practise this
more than the task-oriented groups. Besides, in the above quotation it is rightly stated that
time change is a gradual process. Learning to look through the eyes of another will take time and a
careful guidance by a skilled facilitator.
For some groups, the way in which the partner group combined their attention to the task and
relationships was a revelation. They immediately saw what they could learn from their
partners. They were touched by the warmth and attention for the relationships in their partner
group.

The fact that our partner group shows more ‘warmth’ when they meet, could be the
result of the fact that they know each other well. If we understood it correctly, they
have been meeting each other for bible study over a couple of years.
Reading the interim report we realized that we actually never ask each other how
things are going personally. Because of this, we decided to do so in future.

This example shows that partner groups do not only learn from each other's differences in
interpretation, but also from the way in which the people in the group interrelate. This
Western 'businesslike' group realised that a combination of a task and relationship-oriented
approach will inspire the mutual bible reading process even more. The exchange with the
partner group showed them that the context of their own group, i.e. the attention that people
paid to each other and to them personally, made a difference. More importantly, they did not
only realise this, but indicated in one short sentence that they would move from reflection to
action: we decided to do so in future.
In the vastly enriching process of the project Through the Eyes of Another, this exchange of
perspective is something to be treasured. The many women en men who read, discussed, sang
and played together, shared their experiences with each other and with us. We found very
valuable treasures in what they shared with us.

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