

Storyline Course at the Police Academy in Oslo

Marit Storhaug & Knut Age Teigen

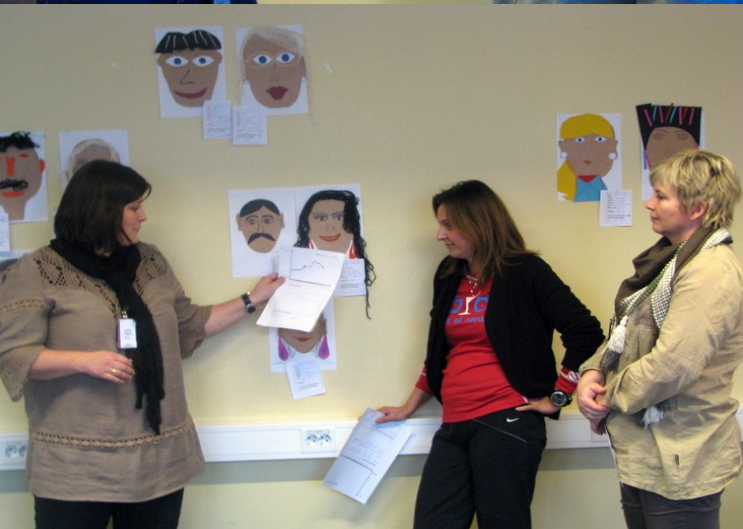
On February 10th March 2011 the Police Academy in Oslo was the scene of a mini-storyline about "Conflict tackling in a multicultural society". The storyline was part of an inservice course for police officers from different parts in Norway and the course holders were Marit Storhaug from the Teachers College in Oslo (HiO) and Knut Åge Teigen. The main questions were: Should hijab be allowed in the police forces? And what is a good way of performing ID-controls?

Last year Marit Storhaug was asked to write a storyline about conflicts in a multicultural society that would be relevant for the police officers that attended an inservice course about conflict tackling. The course was successful and this year Storhaug was asked to come again. On this occasion she brought along Knut Age Teigen, a former teacher from Ringstabekk skole.

The storyline started with the police officers creating families that lived in an apartment building downtown with a diversity of ethnic origins and religious beliefs. The participants wrote short biographies for their family members including a life curve and hopes for the future.

The first incident was linked to the café on the ground floor. An article in the local newspaper said that a young girl working there was fired because she insisted on using a hijab. The owner of the café was quite irritated and the article ended with her question: "What comes next - female police officers wearing the hijab?".

Of course this fired a debate among the families and all of them wrote a letter to the newspaper. After reading the letters aloud and a following discussion the first surprise of the day literally showed up. A young Norwegian-Egyptian teacher wearing a hijab was introduced to the police officers. What questions would they like to ask her about wearing the hijab? After many questions and thorough answers everyone was a bit wiser, but the question whether hijab should be allowed in the Norwegian Police Forces or not remained an open and hot issue.





The second incident was triggered by a role play with the course holders as police officers and a young man as himself. All the families were asked to imagine they were enjoying a quiet afternoon at the local café. Suddenly they witness two police men checking the ID-papers of a young man. The ID-control ends with a quarrel between the young man and the police officers. How could this quarrel have been avoided? What is a good way of doing such an ID-check? Is it racism when a coloured man is stopped by the police repeatedly and asked if he has ID-papers?

The course administrator, Jai Ganapathy, had invited two young men to participate in the role play and the discussion afterwards. The two men had experienced being ID-checked several times. After the initial role play some of the police officers were asked to show how they would do such an ID-check. What considerations did they have to make when they did an ID-check, on what grounds could an ID-check be performed and what is good communication in such a situation? The discussion afterwards was fruitful and nuanced and as with all good discussions you would like to continue the debate when the course holders say time is up.