

TextRaum 60-2025

The EBN Charter – From a Training Regulation (2003) to an Ethics of Bibliodrama (2025)

Soon it will be 25 years since a structured process began that has allowed Bibliodrama to grow into a network spreading, connecting, and enriching itself across many countries, cultures, and now even religious boundaries in Europe. In 2001, the consultation process “Long-term Bibliodrama Training in Europe” started within the framework of the Socrates Program of the European Union “Grundtvig 2 Learning Partnerships.” Above all, Wolfgang Wesenberg from GfB advocated that, over the course of three years and seven consultation meetings from 2001 to 2004, Bibliodrama facilitators from Germany, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, and Denmark exchanged their training experiences.

In September 2001, the project began under the coordination of Wolfgang Roos-Pfeifer with an international Bibliodrama workshop in Bad Segeberg (Germany). Three goals were defined:

- The founding of a European Bibliodrama Network
- Content and structural coordination of training opportunities
- A European framework for long-term Bibliodrama training

After two more consultations in Gelnhausen (Germany) and Graz (Austria), the text of the first EBN Charter was finally adopted in June 2003 in Dobogókö (Hungary) and published in TextRaum. This marked the official founding of the European Bibliodrama Network. Wolfgang Wesenberg wrote in an atmospheric report on that meeting:

“Relief that the preamble and framework have been adopted. I don’t want to think about who had to give up their favorite phrases. We are now a network (without a name). I am learning that it’s not only about networking, but that we are already in a programmatic field.”

This quote shows that this birth came with its fair share of labor pains and difficulties, but also that the time was ripe.

Quality Management through Training Regulation

The core of the text is Section 7, “Joint Concept for Training Bibliodrama Facilitators.” This defines prerequisites for participation, course objectives, and the structures of Bibliodrama training as a minimum consensus. The underlying concept is didactic: competence development as personal, social, and factual growth.

Why was the foundation of a training concept placed at the heart of an organizational charter? The main motivation for the consultation process was, on one hand, to

promote networking across borders, and on the other, a desire for quality assurance in Bibliodrama. The records contain many anecdotes about uncontrolled growth in the Bibliodrama landscape. The wild pioneer days since the 1970s also brought some abuse of the term “Bibliodrama.”

For a long time, there was debate about creating a European quality label. But who should oversee it? The grassroots-democratic structure of Bibliodrama processes fundamentally contradicts such an authority monitoring quality. So, as a guarantee of quality, it was agreed: “We want to further develop our Bibliodrama work through collegial consultation and professional exchange beyond national borders.”

A European Network is Founded

The so-called preamble of the charter defined for whom it was written (Bibliodrama practitioners from various countries, churches, and training backgrounds), what contribution the network could make for Europe (unity in diversity), what goals it pursues (spreading Bibliodrama with awareness of quality), and which basic principles of Bibliodrama it commits itself to. The definition of what Bibliodrama is was placed at the very top. Finding consensus on this wording was one of the greatest challenges for the project group. Interestingly, this experience was repeated over 20 years later in the revision of the charter in much the same way. Perhaps this is because every Bibliodrama facilitator develops and defends their own concept and understanding of this process work? The ability to cultivate unity in diversity is in high demand here.

The process, originally planned to last two years, was extended by a year and three more consultation meetings (Bad Segeberg, Lidingö, and Gelnhausen). Representatives from Finland and Sweden joined the previous five countries. In Gelnhausen, the child was given the name “European Bibliodrama Network.” The charter was also supplemented by a section on the methods and structure of the network and the secretariat—a topic that also caused heated debate. Some wanted clear and strict structures, while others favored minimal regulation. In the end, a minimum consensus prevailed, essentially limiting the structure to an annual international congress, a website (Lars-Gunnar Skogar was the father of the first version), and a three-person secretariat.

This consensus was also viewed ambivalently. Two quotes testify to this: Lotta Geisler said at the end of the meeting, “I’m happy that everyone is still alive.” Peter Pius Varga said, “We are growing into a family.” Maybe both are part of normal family life.

Forward-Looking Nuances at the Network’s Birth

Looking at the revision of the charter more than twenty years later, two topics from the network's founding period stand out to me.

Even then, the question was raised whether Bibliodrama ethics should be formulated in the charter—and was dismissed. Andrea Brandhorst, following a study conference in Bielefeld that same year, published an important article in TextRaum entitled: “Theses on Responsible Bibliodrama Facilitation.” And at the start of the consultation process, Wolfgang Roos-Pfeifer had defined as one of the goals: “We will agree on standards for Bibliodrama activities and training programs within the framework of an ethics paper.” A paper that was never adopted.

The topic of interreligious Bibliodrama was already mentioned back then. After the founding of the EBN, the next edition of TextRaum was entirely dedicated to the European Bibliodrama Network. Maria Elisabeth Aigner wrote an article titled, “On the Necessity of Intercultural and Interreligious Differences and Their Perception in a European Bibliodrama Network.” Interreligious Bibliodrama was rare then. Now, it is experimented with in many countries and online with great ease.

The Network Comes of Age

Since 2005, the EBN has held a European Bibliodrama Congress in a different country each year. Well-established traditions quickly developed (usually in summer, lasting four days, including an EBN meeting, and internationally composed workshop leaders, among others). More countries joined the network with individuals and Bibliodrama associations and hosted congresses: Great Britain (2011), Czech Republic (2013), Lithuania (2015), Romania (2016), Belgium (2017), Poland (2024), the Netherlands (2026).

The Corona pandemic brought major upheaval. For two years, international congresses were no longer possible. Yet, the network proved resilient. We quickly learned to use new technical tools for video meetings. What started as a necessity due to “social distancing” developed into enjoyable and creative new event formats. Many new forms of international exchange emerged: online coffee meetings, European Bibliodrama Online (now in its sixth edition), interreligious workshops across national borders via Zoom, or working groups meeting regularly online from all over Europe.

The EBN secretariat also started meeting via Zoom. To cope with the crisis, the need to meet more frequently grew. Where previously members met only once a year in person at the annual congress, they now meet every two months online. New areas of responsibility were added, and the secretariat expanded to six or seven people. A new website was built with a newsletter. From 2022, congresses were possible again and renamed “EBW – annual European Bibliodrama Workshop” to continue receiving Erasmus funding. All these restructurings eventually called for a charter renewal.

Two-Year Revision Process

At the end of 2023, the secretariat defined process steps for revising the charter and tasked Beate Chrudzimska and me with drafting a first version. In early summer, the secretariat discussed and revised this draft, presenting it to representatives from 12 countries at the EBW premeeting in Krzywowa (Poland). The secretariat had planned discussions on six detailed topics:

- Definition of Bibliodrama: Do we see it only as work with biblical and other sacred texts, or also with other literary texts?
- How much should interreligious Bibliodrama be emphasized?
- Should the secretariat be elected annually at EBW?
- Understanding of leadership in Bibliodrama facilitation: non-directive according to the English term “facilitator”?
- Spirituality: Bibliodrama as “spiritual accompaniment” or also as “spiritual guidance”?
- How detailed should the framework for Bibliodrama training be defined?

The premeeting participants only wished to discuss the identity of EBN as a network and the understanding of Bibliodrama facilitators in Europe. These responses were incorporated by Helene Isborn and me into a second draft, which was sent to the national Bibliodrama associations for comment. Six responses were included by the secretariat in a third draft. This was presented at the EBW pre-meeting in Höör (S) in August 2025. The diverse history and reality of the European Bibliodrama Network was visualised in the image of a tree, with different roots growing into a common trunk, from which different branches and further developments spring. The charter is also intended to represent this open history. With minor editorial revisions, it will be published as the 4th draft on the EBN website and sent to subscribers of the newsletter. The charter will be presented for adoption at the EBN General Assembly in 2026 in Huissen (NL).

Ethics of Bibliodrama

What are the key content points of the new charter? First, it is notable that the 2003 charter was written in German, while the new one is in English. The geographical balance in the European Bibliodrama scene has shifted considerably over the past 20 years; German-speaking countries are no longer dominant.

The core section is now no longer a training framework but nine ethical “principles and guidelines” for Bibliodrama facilitation:

- Respect
- Equal rights (especially in interpreting texts)
- Understanding of leadership (“more facilitator than leader”)
- Confidentiality (“safe space”)

- Consideration of the “globe”
- Process orientation
- Holistic approach
- Spirituality (“spiritual accompaniment, not guidance”)
- Reflection through (peer) supervision

Bibliodrama 4.0

Meanwhile, Bibliodrama training is offered in 11 European countries, and the range of expectations has widened. The detail level of 2003 no longer does justice to this diversity. On the other hand, the call to define an ethics for Bibliodrama facilitation has grown louder.

I allow myself to offer a certainly simplified history of Bibliodrama’s development in four generations:

- Pioneer phase: From the 1960s, our Bibliodrama mothers and fathers experimented with combining biblical group work with approaches such as drama pedagogy, psychodrama, gestalt work, body awareness, expressive dance... “At the beginning, play was 'wild.'”
- 2.0 First training courses: In the 1980s, the pioneers created courses to pass on their individual methodologies.
- 3.0 Formalization of training (Charter 2003): Trainers who had already completed their own training developed new curricula and exchanged ideas across Europe.
- 4.0 Continuous integration of new methodological approaches into the basic concept of Bibliodrama (Charter 2025): Today, there seems to be consensus on what Bibliodrama fundamentally is, making it possible to integrate new techniques continually. The best example is the many digitalization experiments during the pandemic years.

For this generation, defining ethical leadership principles is helpful. The slight expansion of the secretariat's responsibilities also enables even better European networking. Thanks to the expanded structures, the network can now respond more adequately and quickly to new developments. Still, the self-concept of the network remains “non-hierarchical” and based on “self-commitment.”

There is great hope that, with this renewed charter, the network will continue to thrive and grow for many more years.

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