Art Teachers’ Positions and Practices in Addressing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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T-shirts printed by soldiers' initiative and distributed to their comrades in their very exclusive Israeli army units (2009).
Because the art teachers are situated in an education system which promotes a nationalistic agenda, they actively participate in the mechanisms of perpetuating the culture of conflict; constructing the national identity and pride, building collective memories of past traumas and celebrating Israeli heroism.
Art Curriculum Strategies
Addressing Deep-Rooted and Ongoing Conflicts*

A. Arts creation as an act of therapy; Voicing feelings, fear and thoughts.

B. Promoting peace and tolerance toward the ‘Other’ through broadening the gaze beyond the conflict.

C. Critical analysis of art works and imagery which represent the conflict.

D. Creating alternative situations and imagery as a pedagogy of possibilities.

*Based on two studies conducted by Cohen Evron 1996-2003; 2007-2010
A. Art Creation as an Act of Therapy; Voicing Feelings, Fear and Thoughts.

Children and adults affected by violence and tragedy turn to arts creation to express and understand these events.

Their coping strategies include restructuring of painful experiences, finding imaginary alternative solutions, and “traveling” into imaginary worlds.
Drawings of Israeli kids while they stayed in shelters during the Lebanon war, summer 2006.
A sculpture done by a 17 year old girl as part of her final art project in high school.
The line between art-making and expression as a therapeutic activity can be questioned. This line is blurred when art is a means not only to express spontaneous feelings in response to traumatic events, but as a way of expressing political consciousness through thoughtful acts of representation and the creation of images.

“Happy Childhood” (2012). A digital image created by a 9th grade Israeli student, who lives near Gaza strip's border, witnessing constant rockets falling.
B. Broadening the gaze on the "Other" beyond the stereotypical image aiming at promoting tolerance.

This approach of promoting tolerance and peace suggests teaching students to respect one another regardless of differences such as race, sexual preferences, ethnicity or nationality, and to correct cultural ignorance.
Within this multicultural approach of tolerance toward the “Other,” of “I’m ok, you’re ok,” one can identify two practices which arts educators used in Israel:

A. Inclusion of the Other’s arts as part of the curriculum:

Studying “their” culture and life as a means for developing a more differentiated view of the “enemy.”

B. Initiating arts projects based on cooperative creations:

It provides opportunities to meet the students who are labeled as “Other,” emphasizes the similarities between the participants, and creates positive experiences through the joint projects.
Studying about the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, build between 687 and 691 by the 9th Caliph, Abed al-Malik, and recreating its façade.
The “dinner party”, a combined creative art work of Jewish and Palestinian students at The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
C. Critical analysis of art works and imagery which represent the conflict

Examining certain truths and biases which construct the culture of conflict through deconstruction and reconstruction.

Visual images, as fragments which depict the life, do not mirror the reality but represent it, using a code system which is always constructed within a specific culture and specific values.
These visual images are a departure point for questions raised by Rolan Barthes (1957) such as:

• What and who is represented and what is ignored?
• Whose view is represented and whose is ignored?
• What are we looking at?
• How do we look at this image?
• What can we understand about it?

Israel, Pilot, 1940’s. Unknown photographer.
• What and who is represented and what is ignored?
• Whose view is represented and whose is ignored?
• What are we looking at?
• How do we look at this image?
• What can we understand about it?

West Bank, Bypass road, 1996.
Miki Kratsman

A Palestinian Baby, 2002. Miki Kratsman
• What and who is represented and what is ignored?
• Whose view is represented and whose is ignored?
• What are we looking at?
• How do we look at this image?
• What can we understand about it?

Eeden Abargil’s Face-book, August 2010
Deconstruction and Reconstruction of war photography

A unit taught to 11th grade students

Staged photographs of heroes and victims
The students expressed their views regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by creating collages. They used the photographs they created, and added images, words and colors.
D. Creating alternative situations and imagery as a pedagogy of possibilities.

Roger Simon (1992) regards pedagogy of possibilities as displacing “desire onto images and activities that refuse the closure of possibilities provided by existing forms of authority and relations of power” (p.8).

Implementing this pedagogy in arts classes is possible through the use of art activity as a way of thinking the unthinkable, of departure from the conflicting situation while designing an imaginative solution.

The imagination in this pedagogy is an act of reaction through resisting the understanding of reality in the culture of the conflict’s language.
This pedagogy uses the ability of imagination in the way Maxine Greene describes it:

“…imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” over the years… of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities.”

(Greene, Releasing the Imagination, 1995, p.3)
Thank you

