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The Lesley University Israel Extension Program: Teaching in a Troubled Land

Mitchell Kossak and Vivien Marcow-Speiser

Introduction

Lesley University has existed in one form or other, in Israel, for nearly 30 of the country's 60 years. Vivien Marcow-Speiser, Director of International and Collaborative Programs in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences at Lesley, began the program in Israel in 1980 as the Arts Institute Project in Israel (AIPi), in collaboration with Shaun McNiff, then the Dean of the Institute for Arts and Human Development at Lesley College. Mitchell Kossak is the Division Director of Expressive Therapies and has been the academic coordinator for the Expressive Therapies program in Israel since 1999. The impetus for this edition of the *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice* comes from our working with students and faculty who learn and teach in the Israel Extension Program and from the conversations about teaching and learning that have evolved from this experience. The writers in this edition will share their understanding and experiences of teaching in a land that is awe inspiring as well as deeply divided and deeply troubled. This paper will examine some of these strands.

Teaching in Israel is never easy. The tensions that exist there are complex, deep and often times contradictory. These tensions are mirrored by the students and by the society in which they live and an understanding of what it means to teach and learn in Israel requires historical, social and emotional contextualization. As administrators and instructors from the United States working in Israel, often external stressors (such as during both wars in Lebanon, the Gulf War, the first and second intifadahs), has required deep soul searching and painful internal confrontation to be able to look at Israel's relationship to the Palestinians, while at the same time understanding and empathizing with the historical, political and social forces that have brought us all to the current moment. All who have traveled to Israel over these years have flinched at encountering the pain that the creation and the maintenance of the Jewish state has imposed upon its citizens. As editors of this journal and as Jews ourselves this is not only the history of our students- it is also our own history.

Teaching in Israel

This is a deeply divided and troubled land. The conflicts that manifest themselves here are long standing, and constantly in flux. Sometimes it has taken thousands of years for these conflicts to begin to resolve themselves. Many remain unresolved. This country was created out of the ashes of the Holocaust. There are Biblical antecedents for anti-Semitism, and it has taken almost two thousand years for Christianity to begin to correct for the part they have played in perpetuating this phenomenon. Pope John

It is quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, on April 14th, 1998, as having stated, during the Via Crucis procession on Good Friday, that the Jewish people have “been crucified by us for too long.” He continues that it is not the Jews, “not they, but we, each and every one of us”, who are responsible for Christ’s crucifixion, “because we are all murderers of love.” This has “sowed the seeds of anti-Judaism” and “indirectly favored the Shoah” (p. 2). The argument continues, is this doing too little, and has it come too late? As always, everybody has an opinion on this and every issue. As always there is a variety of opinion, feeling and response.

The articles in this issue are all written by Lesley faculty and administrators who have worked in the program in Israel. These articles recount instances where they were moved by the students, touched by the intensity of the teaching experience, and influenced by how powerfully this teaching has impacted upon them personally and professionally.

Vivien Marcow-Speiser writes about some of the complexity of factors that have contributed to the establishment of the State of Israel in *Towards an Understanding of the Israeli Context for Teaching and Learning*. Through assessing some of the historical trends that have influenced the 60 year development of the small country, this article lays out the socio-political and cultural aspects of Israeli society that have affected pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. Through the lens of the intrapersonal domain, the interpersonal domain, the socio-cultural domain, the political-institutional domain, and the spiritual domain this paper examines the impact upon teaching and learning in the Israeli context.

Christine Boyko-Head explores some of her assumptions about teaching and illustrates the aesthetic outcome in *Piecing/Peacing It Together: An Experiment in Teaching and Learning in Israel*. Through a feminist perspective, and as a Canadian traveling to teach in Israel, Boyko-Head explores how various art modalities can be used as powerful communication strategies for social issues and concerns, giving voice to the neglected, the marginalized, and the disempowered. As a journalistic writer she applies her inquisitiveness and quest for meaning through a personal and socio-political perspective, elaborating on her own sense of risk taking and through specific engagement in a quilting project that would address correcting the misconceptions of the outside world and bridging the cultural divide.

Irle M. Goldman describes the dynamics of his teaching experience in *Stories from Teaching in Israel: Making Connections in Times of Danger*. Through narrative vignettes from teaching over the past seven years, this article attempts to present and explain the Israeli experience, especially why the Israeli classroom experience is such a blend of confrontation and deep meaningful connection. The article explores the interesting dynamic of connection and competition that often occurs in teaching in Israel and

sees its resolution in the altruism shown by the students' dedication and work in the classroom and in the final papers.

Mitchell Kossak recalls the complications of teaching during the 2006 war with Lebanon, while at the same time experiencing the personal terminal illness of his father in *Notes from the Field*. Through personal journal reflections and a broader theoretical base, this article juxtaposes personal, professional and socio-cultural contexts, which are always embedded in the teaching and training of expressive arts therapists. Working with theoretical dimensions of attachment and acute stress, the article outlines one week of teaching during an acutely stressful situation in order to illustrate some of the unique situations faculty often face while teaching in Israel.

Keren Barzilay Schechter and Yousef Al Ajarma elucidate the process of co-teaching a group of Israeli students from the perspective of an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man in *The Group Twice Promised: Reflections about Co-Teaching in Israel*. The unique potential for growth, understanding and hope between two cultures are explored through the teaching of one class "Principles and Practices of Expressive Therapy" that the authors co-taught in Israel in 2006. The course was taught in an intensive mode to a group of expressive therapy students. Through experiential and theoretical materials the philosophical foundations of the intermodal work were presented and its various potential uses within the therapeutic process were demonstrated. The article discusses the development of the group as well as different elements of co-teaching in general and binational co-teaching in particular.

Eleanor Roffman explores the conflicts and challenges she encounters in teaching women students in *A Collision Course: Teaching the Psychology of Women in Wartime Israel*. Utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach to teaching and drawing from sociology, political theory, and the historiography of psychology, literature and other art forms, this article reflects on issues relevant to the concerns of women in Israel today. The lived experience of students, the siege mentality many of the students have developed by living in a perpetual war zone, and the timing of the course are all highlighted.

Elinor Gadon reflects upon the spirit of Israeli women studies students in *The Secular Israeli Woman: A Transgressive and Heretical Spirit*. This article elaborates concerns of the impact of three thousand years of suppression of the female body, sexuality and spirit that is inherent in monotheistic religion and male dominated societies through an exploration of the ancient goddess as a symbol for the sacred female and her reemergence in the cultural mythology of the Western world in our time. This article is an outgrowth of teaching "Women and Spirituality" in the Graduate Women's Studies Program at the Lesley University Extension in Israel, and includes personal reflections of students and documented by comments taken from student's reflective papers.

Joel Ziff examines his teaching experience in Al Quds University as part of a partnership between the Lesley University Extension in Israel and Al Quds University in the West Bank. His seminar was entitled *The Body as a Bridge to Peace: A Stress Management Seminar at Al Quds University*. In this article, the author describes his experiences teaching a stress management seminar at Al Quds University in the summer of 2006, on the second day of the war between Israel and Lebanon. Participants, Palestinian health practitioners and students, learned an awareness-based, body-centered approach to stress management to heighten awareness of moment-to-moment, kinesthetic awareness as a foundation for interrupting that pattern and regaining physical, emotional, and mental balance.

Mitchell Kossak is the Director of Lesley's Expressive Therapies program, Mitchell Kossak has taught on campus and at the Lesley Israel Extension since 1995. A licensed clinical counselor, Kossak combines expressive arts therapies with body-centered approaches that address a range issues including chronic pain, trauma recovery, depression, and anxiety.

In the final article *Cross-Cultural Observations Emerging from Lesley's Partnership with Israel's Ethiopian Immigrant Community*, Sam Schwartz observes his impressions of working with the Ethiopian community in Israel as part of Lesley University's outreach efforts partnering with the town of Nes Ziona. This article analyzes US-trained professionals operating in an Israeli context with immigrants from Ethiopia documenting numerous insights, discoveries and faux-pas that took place along linguistic, national/religious, and musical axes.