

Chapter 37

Making Identity Visible: The Case of the “Museum in a Suitcase”

Dalya Yafa Markovich
Beit Berl College, Israel

ABSTRACT

Museum in a Suitcase is a mobile museum dedicated to the voice and tradition of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel, whose culture and stories are barely heard. By using critical pedagogy, the “Museum” seeks to empower the pupils of the community and reexamine the social positions of underprivileged groups in the Israeli society. This innovative pedagogical practice was examined using ethnographic fieldwork in 4 workshops that took place in a 4th grade class in an underprivileged school in Israel that includes pupils of Ethiopian origin. The findings suggest that the educational process the pupils underwent brought on a positive change in the ways in which the Jewish Ethiopian culture was presented. However, its perception as peripheral and secondary to the hegemonic culture remained unchanged. It seems that it is precisely this process, and in particular the expression and place given to the Jewish Ethiopian culture in the class, that reflected and reproduced its peripheral status. These processes expose the existence of a gap between the assumptions of critical pedagogy and the results it yields, and therefore necessitate further research that will examine in depth both the complex ethno-class contexts in which this educational model seeks to operate, and its ideological-educational assumptions.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years “mobile” museums have set up in the classroom for limited periods of time aiming to reexamine the cultural narratives and traditions of underprivileged groups in the Israeli society.

These mobile museum spaces are based on critical pedagogical approaches that seek to empower the identity of underprivileged groups, by making their unique cultural voice heard as part of the school’s learning routine. A considerable amount of theoretical writing has been devoted

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2122-0.ch037

to the ways in which this procedure may expose the system of social power relations within which the underprivileged group is placed, deconstruct disparaging perceptions and images, and construct a new and empowered socio-cultural consciousness (Freire & Shor, 1987; 2005). This chapter wishes to examine these pedagogical assumptions through the unique case of *Museum in a Suitcase*. *Museum in a Suitcase* is a mobile museum which engages the aesthetic-expressive power offered by the artistic object and by artistic creation.

The museum is dedicated to the culture and tradition of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel, whose voice and stories are not heard in the official curriculum. The Ethiopian Jews immigrated to the state of Israel in the second half of the twentieth century, in two central waves of immigration that took place during the 1980s and 1990s. Upon arriving in Israel, the members of the community encountered many difficulties related to their cultural uniqueness and their interpretation of the Jewish religion. This difference disrupted their integration into Israeli society and caused them numerous difficulties, mainly in the areas of housing, employment and education. In light of this, the community suffers from socio-economic and educational deprivation, and its members have become the subject of stereotypical and even racist attitudes (Ben-Eliezer, 2004).

Museum in a Suitcase seeks to explore the richness and uniqueness of the Jewish Ethiopian culture and identity, thus deconstructing the sense of inferiority of pupils of that community, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of their classmates. This chapter traces the socio-educational dynamics created by the “museum’s” activity by following workshops that were held in one class at an underprivileged elementary school which includes a large community of pupils of Ethiopian origin.

I hope the findings will help to explore the advantages and limitations of this critical pedagogical model and the ways in which it can be improved and enhanced.

Findings like these will be of great importance to teachers, educators and policy makers in constructing pedagogical models for young students from underprivileged groups in multicultural societies.

The innovative pedagogical practices of *Museum in a Suitcase* were examined in 4 workshops, each an hour and a half long. The research was based on qualitative method using ethnographic tools. The workshops led by the “Museum’s” staff were audiotaped and transcribed. The analysis of the dynamics that took place in class was based on multiple readings of the data. Data was coded according to the core themes that emerged from class dynamics in order to understand the effect of this unique educational method on the participants.

The study took place in 2010 in a 4th grade class at a state elementary school (1st through 6th grade) situated in an underprivileged neighborhood in a small city in central Israel.¹ The neighborhood’s population is largely made up of Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia and Russia, as well as a small group of veteran Israelis, mostly second and third generation of Jewish immigrants from Islamic countries. The families of the majority of the pupils suffer from various social and economic problems, and require the aide of the welfare authorities. This reality is reflected in the composition of the pupil population: 35% of the school’s pupils are of Ethiopian origin, 32% of Russian origin, and the rest are veteran Israeli pupils. 67% of the school’s pupils do not speak the Hebrew language at home.

At the time of the study the 4th grade class consisted of 38 pupils, including: 16 pupils of Ethiopian origin, 14 Israeli-born pupils, and 8 pupils of Russian origin. The teacher who accompanied the activity is an immigrant from Russia who is in charge of art classes at the school.

The facilitator of the workshops’ was an artist named Alemu Eshetie, who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia during the 1990s and developed the project in view of the absence of Ethiopian culture from the state curriculum in Israel.

8 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/making-identity-visible/72088

Related Content

Rooted in Teaching: Does Environmental Socialization Impact Teachers' Interest in Science-Related Topics?

Lisa A. Gross, Joy Jamesand Eric Frauman (2013). *Approaches and Strategies in Next Generation Science Learning* (pp. 205-223).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/rooted-teaching-does-environmental-socialization/74098

The Plain Hard Work of Teaching Online: Strategies for Instructors

Dianne Conrad (2007). *Making the Transition to E-Learning: Strategies and Issues* (pp. 191-207).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/plain-hard-work-teaching-online/25621

A General Framework for Inclusive Lifelong Learning in Higher Education Institutions with Adaptive Web-Based Services that support Standards

Olga Santosand Jesus Boticario (2011). *E-Infrastructures and Technologies for Lifelong Learning: Next Generation Environments* (pp. 29-58).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/general-framework-inclusive-lifelong-learning/52916

The Use of Motion Tracking Technologies in Serious Games to Enhance Rehabilitation in Stroke Patients

Andrew M. Burton, Hao Liu, Steven Battersby, David Brown, Nasser Sherkat, Penny Standenand Marion Walker (2013). *Developments in Current Game-Based Learning Design and Deployment* (pp. 241-252).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/use-motion-tracking-technologies-serious/70200

Tutoring: Between Future Teachers Stakes and Perspective in a Potential Learning Process

Philippe Remy (2013). *Handbook of Research on Didactic Strategies and Technologies for Education: Incorporating Advancements* (pp. 646-653).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/tutoring-between-future-teachers-stakes/72106