Revealing a child's understanding of war through his drawing
Daphna Dinerman
The Academic Arab College for Education in Israel- Haifa.

In this presentation I will present to you some drawings of a Muslim 5 year old boy residing in a village near Nazareth. The young child drew the drawings during the time of the operation Cast Lead in the Gaza strip. I accidentally stumbled across the child’s drawings while training students learning early childhood education in The Arab College for Education in Israel Haifa. As a pedagogical instructor at that college, I visit many preschools throughout the year. In one visit, I was stricken by the incredible ability of that child to express himself. I was impressed by the abundance of details that the child expressed, ones that reflected the war atmosphere in a very unique manner.
The drawings represent the child’s mental pictures and perceptions of the war. Along with drawings of real events, children draw fantasies. But, for young children, the line between fantasy and reality is flexible. That flexibility may enable children to use drawing for emotional release, but it may also influence their perception of their surrounding (The ECD Emergency Task Force Programme Division, 2005)

Looking at additional drawings done by the same young child evoked the following questions:

- How do children define the concepts of war, peace, and conflict?
- How do children express their knowledge and understanding using multiple languages such as drawings, story- telling, conversations, play, and others?
- How do we, the adults, interpret what children express?
- What is our role as educators in supporting the children as they come to terms with giving meaning to the terms of war, peace, and conflict?

In an attempt to understand what is behind the drawings, the child’s teacher, mother, and the child himself were interviewed (in Arabic). In the conversations, the child, shed light on his understanding and interpretation regarding the meaning of war. It was interesting to learn of his cognitive understanding, as he did not experience war first hand, but received information via secondary sources. Meeting with the child’s mother and his teacher added additional upon information and interpretation of their perspectives, it can be shown that they were not always aware of the experience, knowledge, and understanding of the child.

Overall, the data from the child’s drawings and the conversations I conducted depicted a picture that anchors the relationships between the environment, and the child’s culture regarding the child’s understanding of what the term ‘war’ means. Moreover, the data reflects the adults’ (parents and educators) neglect of paying attention to aspect of the child’s cognitive understanding, mainly focusing solely on the emotional aspect.

References:

ns_ddph@bezeqint.net