

Critical visual analysis of multicultural sketches

RAWIA HAYIK

Indiana University

*ABSTRACT: In a teaching context fraught with conflicts on religious and ethnic backgrounds, I decide as a teacher researcher to address these issues with Israeli-Arab middle school students in my EFL classroom. Picture books on religious diversity and minority issues are used as a springboard for providing spaces for students to discuss these issues orally, in writing and through arts. I attempt to explore what happens when reading aloud and discussing multicultural children's literature with Israeli Arab EFL teenagers and inviting them to respond. To what extent, if any, will the enacted critical literacy curriculum inform how they begin to address social justice issues in their responses? How, and in what ways? This article presents a visual analysis of two of my students' sketches symbolising how the story *Feathers and Fools* (Fox, 1989) relates to their reality. The findings reveal that my critical literacy curriculum afforded profound responses and critique of social injustice.*

KEYWORDS: Critical literacy, religious diversity, minority issues, visual texts, visual analysis, critique, children's literature.

INTRODUCTION

Art is a system of meanings that offers interesting insights into students' understandings of texts and themselves. Through reflecting the ideas, beliefs and values of its maker, artwork may make the ideological contexts in which it is created visible. It is hence essential that educators recognise that visually-conveyed messages are as important as those communicated through written and oral language (Albers, 2009) and analyse texts to uncover such messages.

Acknowledging that ideological positioning is abundant in children's artworks (Albers & Murphy, 2000), I read aloud the picture book *Feathers and Fools* (Fox, 1989) that portrays a fatal conflict to my diverse students and invited them to create a sketch symbolising what the story meant to them. This article includes the visual analysis of two of my students' sketches, based on a combination of various visual analysis approaches.

BACKGROUND

My research site is located in a middle school in a small village in the Galilee area of Israel. My students are either from Christian or Muslim faiths and all are part of the Arab minority in Israel. The religious background is the most salient cause for conflicts in the school and village in general. Several recent fights between Christian and Muslim groups in the village reflected underlying tensions between the two religious groups that exist but do not always peacefully coexist (Louër, 2007). Fights at school between Christian and Muslim students are familiar scenes. During my

observations of the students of my school during recess in the past few years, I have noticed that students mostly gather in same-religion groups.

In addition, the dual identity of being simultaneously an Israeli and an Arab poses a conflicting scenario and occasionally incurs strong feelings of marginalisation. My students are continually exposed to the media that keep reminding them of their status as minority in their country. They may be cognisant of the upsetting challenges of being unequal members in society (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Nathan, 2006; Muzaffar, 2008) but are not encouraged to discuss them at school. The curriculum does not acknowledge or address these difficult issues. They are simply absent from the textbooks, including the English textbooks.

These problems constitute a considerable challenge for me as an English teacher and educator, and necessitate an urgent need for designing a curriculum that addresses such issues. The Israeli textbooks contain very few materials on tolerance of different others. “What is” is considerably different from “what might be”. Therefore, “the urgency to create new meanings and practices on a day-to-day, face-to-face basis cannot await outside policy prescriptions” (Campano, 2007, p. 6). Out of the belief that “good teaching is ultimately a moral act” (Gee, 2008, p. 114), I find myself morally committed to educating my students to social justice issues in addition to the responsibility of teaching them the English language. My purpose, therefore, becomes to incorporate materials on religious diversity and minority issues in the curriculum and provide space for students to respond. My complex reality necessitates a need to extend learning beyond basals and classroom resources to include real materials, connecting texts to my students’ lives and community. Providing opportunities for students to engage in real-life topics and reflect on their own experiences becomes a must in such reality. I decide, therefore, to make justice my project (Edelsky, 1999) and explore: What happens when reading aloud and discussing multicultural children’s literature with Israeli Arab EFL teenagers and providing spaces for them to respond? To what extent, if any, will the enacted critical literacy curriculum inform how they begin to address social justice issues in their responses? How, and in what ways? In a teaching context fraught with various challenges of meeting the demands of prescribed curriculum, I decide to take the challenge of diverging from the mainstream textbook and introducing different texts, ones that revolve around religious diversity, identity and minority issues.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My research is grounded in critical literacy theory. Luke and Freebody (2000) define literacy education broadly as not just a matter of “skill acquisition or knowledge transmission” (p. 49). Rather, determining how to teach literacy should “involve a moral, political, and cultural decision about the kind of literate practices needed to enhance both peoples’ agency over their life trajectories and communities’ intellectual, cultural, and semiotic resources in multimediated economies” (p. 48). I view my role as an English teacher as not merely to teach English language skills but also to advance students’ lives through, among other practices, raising their awareness to social justice issues and urging them to take action for a better society.

Pennycook (1999) argues that a critical approach to TESOL is one that hopes to transform, to “change things”, and constantly works to “question common

assumptions”, “not merely to describe social formations such as class and gender but also to critique the ways in which such social formations are linked to questions of power and inequality (p. 331). Inclusion of diverse representations in TESOL does not necessarily lead to a critical classroom. Rather, Pennycook urges turning these representations into “‘issues’ by overtly addressing them in discussions” (p. 339). Teaching the language of critique and asking critical questions around social texts are required for students to become critical.

Bringing students’ experiences into the classroom is an essential component of critical literacy theory. Taking a critical literacy stance involves addressing social justice issues that are relevant to students’ lives, asking critical questions, and conducting critical discussions of stories to encourage students to critique the characters’ and their own social practices and question stereotypical behaviours. Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) emphasise that enacting critical literacy involves providing “resources that make difference visible ... so that voices that might traditionally be marginalised are heard” (p. 33). However, merely integrating materials with social justice issues into the curriculum does not make it critical. An in-depth interrogation of real-life issues is required for more a critical classroom. Lewison et al. (2008) explain, though, the necessity of moving from the personal to the social to raise students’ awareness of historical practices, power relationships and cultural systems of meaning. They encourage teachers to “use literacy as a way to open up spaces in their classrooms for important conversations about critical issues” (p. xxiii), to enable students to “linger in text by providing multiple opportunities for extended discussion, writing, and art” (p. 69). Introducing “risky texts” and critically discussing them create the tension necessary to raise students’ awareness of social complexities and urge them to critique their beliefs and social practices.

As a critical literacy researcher, I view my role as to help my students question their realities and participate in different conversations. I follow the four dimensions framework of critical literacy (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002; Lewison et al., 2008) that includes the following dimensions:

- *Disrupting the commonplace*: It involves making the unconscious conscious through introspectively examining one’s beliefs and assumptions, challenging the taken-for-granted practices, developing and using language of critique (Shannon, 1995) to disrupt what is considered normal through asking different questions and interrogating the status quo, viewing the world through new lenses, problematising reality and visualising a different reality, and examining the social norms that popular culture communicates and how these messages position individuals/groups and shape their identities.
- *Considering multiple viewpoints*: This dimension involves becoming cognisant of the voices of the silenced or marginalised, trying to understand experience and text from others’ viewpoints in addition to ones’ own perspective concurrently, reflecting on and making sense of multiple perspectives of a problem, juxtaposing multiple and contradictory aspects of the text/event and asking whose voices are heard and whose are missing? (Luke & Freebody, 1997), searching for these silenced/marginalised voices, making difference visible, and scrutinising competing narratives or writing counter-narratives to the dominant discourses.

- *Focusing on the socio-political*: What characterises this domain is moving beyond the personal to examine the socio-political systems in society. It involves raising awareness to historical practices and cultural systems of meaning, questioning the legitimacy of unequal power relations, investigating oppression, privilege, and status, and using literacy as a means to participate in the politics of daily life (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993).
- *Taking action to promote social justice*: The ultimate goal of critical literacy is transforming the world into a more socially just one. Such transformation is achieved when students reflect and act upon the world to transform it into a better one (Freire, 1972), “use literacy to compose their own narratives, counternarratives, letters, essays, reports, poems, commercials, posters, plays, and webpages to promote social change, ... use the arts to express critical understandings and to get messages of justice and democracy out into the world, ... rewrite their identities as social activists who challenge the status quo and demand change, develop powerful voices and ... speak out collectively against injustice” (Lewison et al, 2008, p. 12).

Taking a critical literacy stance, I address social justice issues relevant to my participants’ lives, ask critical questions and conduct critical discussions of stories to urge students’ to critique the characters’ and their own social practices and question stereotypical behaviours. Hopefully, that will result eventually in raising students’ awareness of social justice issues. I feel obliged as a teacher to provide opportunities for students to question, to critique, to further explore social issues and approach them from different perspectives.

For enacting my critical literacy curriculum, I use multicultural literature (the kinds of texts described in the next section) and encourage students’ responses to the texts. Their responses varied between written (for example, writing their opinions on post-it notes or in their diaries, composing letters to the author or president, and writing short stories), oral (for example, brainstorming, participating in discussions and debates, and orally sharing how the story related to their realities), and artistic (for example, drawing sketches and making collages). Carter et al. (2007) “envision initial ‘difficult dialogues’ as potential antecedent for enhanced multicultural communication, understanding and respect” (p. 159). One possible way to arouse such “difficult dialogues” is through using relevant children’s literature. Books on issues of race, politics, religion and culture create opportunities for students to deal with issues of diversity, privilege and social justice. Using and discussing children’s literature on these issues can serve as a catalyst to critique the characters’ practices, to “disrupt the common place, interrogate multiple perspectives, focus on socio-political issues, and hopefully take a stand toward social justice” (Lewison et al., 2002). Multicultural children’s literature has the potential of providing a lens through which my students can question their reality and dive deep into problematic areas. It may help students not only understand and challenge the social and ideological networks, but also act in the world (Maher & Tetreault, 1997). The books I use portray the included and excluded, the privileged and disadvantaged, the dominant and subordinate. In a teaching context fraught with various challenges, such children’s books serve as a springboard for discussing and critiquing issues of empowering certain individuals/groups at the expense of others.

METHODOLOGY

As a teacher researcher (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 2009), I used practitioner inquiry research in the middle school in my village in the Galilee area of Israel. To address religious conflicts and minority issues, I read aloud picture books that promoted tolerance and understanding of different religions – *God’s Dream* (Tutu & Abrams, 2008) and *Many Ways: How Families Practice their Beliefs and Religions* (Rotner & Kelly, 2006) – as well as ones on minority and identity – *I am Rosa Parks* (Parks & Haskins, 1997), *Rosa* (Giovanni, 2008) and *Sitti’s Secret* (Nye, 1994) – and incorporated critical literacy engagements and discussions in my lessons.

Students’ responses to the book, *Feathers and Fools* (Fox, 1989), is the focus of this paper. The story describes a conflict that started between the swans and peacocks because of their fear of their differences and leads to a fierce war in which all of the birds from both groups are killed. After reading the book aloud, I invited students to “sketch to stretch” (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988, p. 353), to create a sketch symbolising what the story meant to them. After sketching, each student held up her/his own sketch and others were invited to hypothesise what that “artist” tried to express through the sketch. After everyone had stated their hypotheses, the “artist” shared the thoughts behind her/his sketch (a strategy described as “save the last word for the artist” by Harste et al., 1988). Sketches were later displayed around the room in a walk-in gallery. The visual texts I analyse in this article are the sketches of two of the students on that story.



Figure 1. Students in the process of sketching

Through “Sketch to Stretch”, I invited students to “release their imagination” (Greene, 1995). They had greater agency than they traditionally experienced in their language classroom to choose how to represent and what to include in their images. When asked to make a visual representation of what the story meant to them, they seemed perplexed and shared that they did not understand what I wanted them to do. They expressed that they were never asked to express their connections to a text through art. However, after a few seconds of bewilderment, they started sketching with apparent concentration and pleasure (see the participants in the process of sketching in Figure 1). When announcing to them that they still had about five minutes, they all

stated that they needed more time, which was given. Although Albers (2000) referred to the fact that adolescent male students often associate art with femininity and refrain from engaging in artistic activities, Walaa, the only male student in the group that day, produced his sketch with apparent pleasure, concentration and depth.

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse students' sketches, I use a combination of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design, Albers' (2009) visual discourse analysis, and Reissman's (2007) narrative visual analysis. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the way characters and/or objects are placed in an image and whether they are connected or not convey certain meanings. They can tell a narrative (if they portray interacting characters or certain actions) or display a concept/s (if they depict a static, stable picture, with no diagonal lines of interaction between the characters). In addition, an analyst should note who is active in the image and who is passive, who acts and who reacts. Characters and/objects can have symbolic attributes also through their salience in the visual texts, for example by their size, colour and position. The angle from which a character or object is depicted, whether it is from above, below or eye-level, and from the front, side or back can also symbolise certain meanings. The way an image gazes at the viewer is also significant and reveals a certain point of view. On a horizontal level, a frontal depiction of the character/s and/or objects represents full engagement in the visual text, whereas if they are portrayed from the side, the viewer is more detached. There is a wide range of varying degrees of vertical and horizontal angles in between that convey certain levels of involvement or detachment.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) also propose that the whole image can have either a horizontal or vertical orientation. Images usually fall into four quadrants with an effective centre of attention. An image with a vertical orientation will convey information, usually from top to bottom, in the upper and lower two quadrants. The upper half often conveys the ideal while the lower half portrays the real. Images with horizontal orientation are read from left to right, with the left side representing what is known or given, and the right conveying new orientation. The top-to-bottom reading would apply to Arabic, my participants' first language, since similarly to the English language, Arabic is read from top to bottom. However, the left-to-right directionality of the English language and other western languages does not align with the right-to-left directionality of Arabic (or also Hebrew, my participants' second language). In an attempt to find out whether visual production and the grammar of visual design are affected by the producer's first language, I located a study of visual analysis of Japanese isotypes (universal signs) and advertisements. When investigating whether Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) method applied to Japanese images, Oyama (1998) found that a right-to-left directionality was prevalent in Japanese signs and advertisements, aligning with the directionality of the traditional Japanese language. In addition, the given was located on the right side of those images while the new on the left, the opposite from their location in British images. Oyama concluded that "each directionality correlates with the scriptorial directionality of its language, the traditional way of writing Japanese and that of English" (p. 12). If composing the images according to the conventions of their own language, Arab students would be visually expressing themselves from right to left. As a result, I will use Kress and van

Leeuwen's (2006) left-to-right theory in reverse in my analysis, to suit the directionality of my students' first language.

Albers (2009) suggests analysing "visual texts" systematically and thoughtfully with an "informed and critical eye" (p. 7). To delve into profound interpretations of visual texts and the values that underlie within them, Albers (2009) and Albers et al. (2009) suggest using visual discourse analysis (VDA), which is informed by Gee's (2005) discourse analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design. Similarly to oral and written discourses, art is a "significant language through which visual messages are expressed" and a VDA enables educators to identify and study the beliefs and perceptions embedded within (Albers et al., 2009, p. 235). Albers' VDA involves analysing the graphic, syntactic, and semantic and pragmatic elements that lie within and around visual texts. To complement such critical reading of visual texts, Albers (2009) uses Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of the visual text.

However, both approaches have some limitations. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) stress that the suggested meanings the elements of the image may reveal are potential and possible ones but not certain or precise. They offer a descriptive framework that "does not, on its own, offer all that is needed for the sociological interpretation of images" (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 154). In their implications for future research, Albers et al. (2009) suggest interviewing children about their drawings, "both to hear children's readings of their own texts, but also to listen and look for elements that arise within their drawings but not yet in their talk, or vice versa" (p. 257). They do not do so, however, in their study. Students' interpretations of their creations are absent from the process of these researchers' approaches to visual analysis. Reissman (2007) suggests a more comprehensive version of visual analysis. "Just as oral and written narratives cannot speak for themselves, neither can images...Multiple readings are always possible" (p. 179). According to Reissman's narrative approach, images can tell a story. They "become 'texts' to be read interpretively" (p. 142). He reviews studies that use both found (for example, archival photographs and museum paintings) and made (for example, collages and video diaries that research participants produce with the researcher) images and argues that "visual representations of experience ... can enable others to see as a participant sees, and to feel" (p. 142). His approach to visual narrative analysis includes not only interrogating the image itself, asking about the story it may suggest, what it includes, how component parts are arranged, and use of colour and technologies relevant to the genre, but also the story of producing the image – interrogating "how and when the image was made, social identities of image-maker and recipient, and other relevant aspects of the image making process" – as well as how the image is interpreted by different audiences – such as "responses of the initial viewers, subsequent responses, stories viewers may bring to an image ... where the spectator is positioned, and other issues related to reception" (p. 144). Reissman's approach focuses on all three phases of making the images: the conditions of production, the image itself and its "audiencing".

Since the approach Reissman (2007) suggests focuses not solely on the image itself but also on the before and after, it offers a wider narrative than Albers' and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) approaches. Although the latter approaches include more details on how the image can be interpreted, our interpretation/s may or may not align with the image-maker's intentions. Consequently, allowing the producers to express what they intended to express would allow further scrutinising of the meanings that

underlie the image. In addition, inviting the audience to interpret the visual text would provide additional depth to the story. As one of the art teachers in Albers and Murphy's (2000) book, Ms Woolf, stated, "the artwork itself visually identifies the belief systems that the artist holds, while at the same time, the readers of the artwork interpret the artwork through their own belief system" (p. 95).

In my visual analysis of my students' sketches, I use a combination of these approaches. Through Reissman's (2007) approach, I present the whole story, including what happened before sketching, the identity of the producers, and how the other students as well as the producers themselves interpreted the images afterwards. For a thorough and systematic analysis of the actual images, I use Albers' and Kress and Van Leeuwen's approaches since they offer more detailed and meticulous guidelines into analysing the actual visual texts. I adapt the latter, though, to suit the directionality of my students' first language through reversing the reading from left-to-right to right-to-left.

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' SKETCHES.

The following part includes my visual analysis of both students' images. I present the analysis of Walaa's image (Figure 2) first, followed by Nasma's (Figure 4) since Walaa was the first to volunteer to talk about his sketch during that session. Nasma is a fourteen-year-old, Muslim Israeli-Arab female, while Walaa is a fourteen-year-old Christian, Israeli-Arab male. They are both highly-achieving students from middle-class families, graduating from middle school and going to high school. They live in the same Arab village and are part of the Arab minority in their country.

Walaa's sketch.

Walaa divided his sketch (shown in Figure 2) into two halves. The two distinct parts are separated by a thick, red line. In the right side, the sun, with its frowned eyebrows and yellow rays are partially covered by bold dark clouds. The remaining images in this part are somehow vague, with the ground seemingly burning and obscured by high yellow and red flames. The space between the "angry" sky and the burning ground is covered with blue and black short lines that look like rain drops, with a lightning bolt added to the stormy day. In that space, two shapes that resemble coffins, with a cross on each, are positioned in the foreground. They are boldly delineated with a thick black marker. Next to one of the coffins, Walaa depicted two bold red circles that resemble "no" signs, with a green dot in the first and a blue in the other, seemingly forbidding colours that represent vibrant nature and life, like blue skies and green pasture and trees. The black colour, one that represents grief, mourning, and suffering in the Arabic culture, is prevalent in this side of the sketch. In addition, the presence of the red colour that represents danger and blood is also apparent. The whole right side conveys a pessimistic reality.

The left side of Walaa's sketch, on the other hand, portrays a more optimistic picture of the world. The different images on this side are unambiguous. The sky is blue and cloud-free, the ground is covered with fresh green pasture, with a blue stream gushing on the side, and the sun is putting on sunglasses as if enjoying the bright beautiful day with a wide smile on its face. In the centre of this half, two persons stand facing the spectator. The character to the left is a male with the letter "T" on his shirt and his

hands tucked behind his back, and the second is apparently a female with a dark skirt, a long braid, high-heeled boots, and her hands wide open to the sides. Both characters seem to have the upper part of their heads open with glasses, on which the word “hate” appears, coming out of their heads. Instead of these “hate” glasses, they have other glasses that apparently make them see the world more brightly and more beautiful. They both seem happy, with smiles on their faces, although not as wide as the sun’s smile. The female figure, together with her glasses and the word “hate” on them, is slightly larger than the other figure, a slightly surprising element knowing that Walaa is a male who lives in a male-dominated society. All the characters (the male, female and sun) in this side are putting on glasses. The black colour is absent from this side, and red is apparently used to represent love rather than danger.



Figure 2. Walaa’s sketch

On both sides of this image, nature represents a strong theme. A gloomy and murky natural scene at time of struggle is starkly opposed to a bright and vividly coloured scene at peaceful times. The number two is also a recurring theme. There are two clouds, two coffins, two no-entry signs, two characters and two “hate” glasses. The presence or absence of people is another significant element in this visual text. Pleased people and a satisfied personified sun are at the foreground of the left side, symbolising the joy of peaceful life. Living people, on the other hand, are absent from the right side, conveying a possible powerful message as “hatred results in death”, with two foregrounded black coffins in this side. The coffins are the only elements on this whole sketch that are portrayed in a thick black marker. The intensity of the colour and the choice of the ominous black colour both stress the negative consequences of hatred.

A frontal depiction in Walaa's sketch invites the viewer's maximum engagement in the visual text. All the characters and objects face the front rather than each other. The female's hands are facing the front instead of being directed towards the male, and the disconnection between the characters is even more stressed in the male's hands being hidden behind him. Vectors or actions connecting the characters or objects on both sides are absent. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) call such a picture a "demand" picture. Rather than merely offering information, frontally depicted pictures demand the viewers' attention through inviting them into the picture and involving them in the message. Walaa's choice to have the elements on both sides – sun, coffins and no-entry signs on the right, and sun, "hate" glasses and two characters on the left – face the viewer rather than face and interact with each other may reveal his intention of communicating a certain message. The characters and objects in each side are located on the sides of the focal centre of each side. Such divergence from the centre may affirm their disconnectedness. Despite the separation of the two parts, they are still connected through constituting one visual text and conveying one message. Analysing the sketch the way I did, I read such message as: "Look how beautiful and joyful life can be when hatred is out of the picture!"

Walaa's sketch has a horizontal orientation, with the right side conveying what is known or given with the left portraying the new, the opposite of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) assumptions (as shown in figure 3). I have reversed reading the visual text from left to right, as when analysing Walaa's image. His right side reflects the dark reality while the left side includes the aspired to, brighter reality.

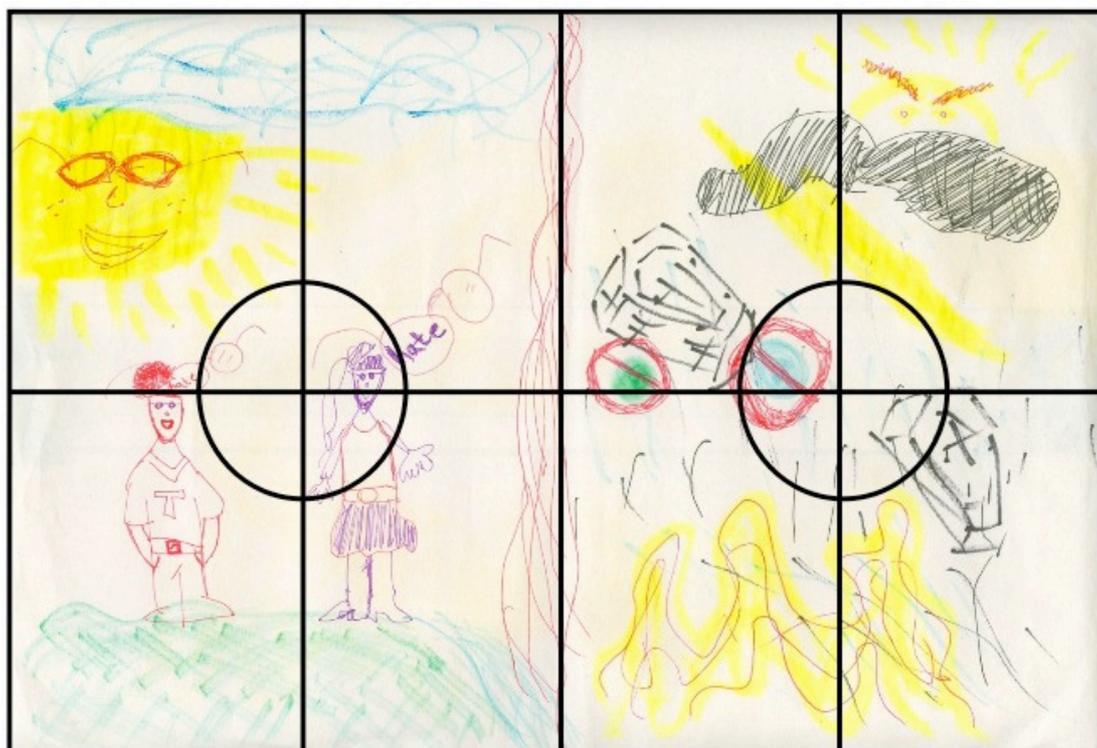


Figure 3. Walaa's divided sketch

While Walaa's sketch apparently included a message opposing conflict and boldly revealing its devastating effects, he refrained from directly addressing religious conflicts that were the focus of our preceding discussions, although he drew crosses

on the coffins. His choice to exclude such specificities from his sketch might indicate his intentions to make it more inclusive. His sketch potentially conveys a more universal message, that conflicts on various grounds would be equally destructive.

Nasma's sketch.

What is noticeable from the first glance when viewing Nasma's sketch (shown in Figure 3) as opposed to Walaa's is the scarcity of colours. The whole sketch is depicted with a bold black marker, apart from the sun and sky and the two small flags, thus conveying bold meanings. The sun and sky are surprisingly coloured with red, a colour representing danger and blood in the Arabic culture. Such choice of colours may transport the viewer into a pessimistic, heavy reality. However, a bold peace symbol appears in the picture, although inside the "bleeding" sun.

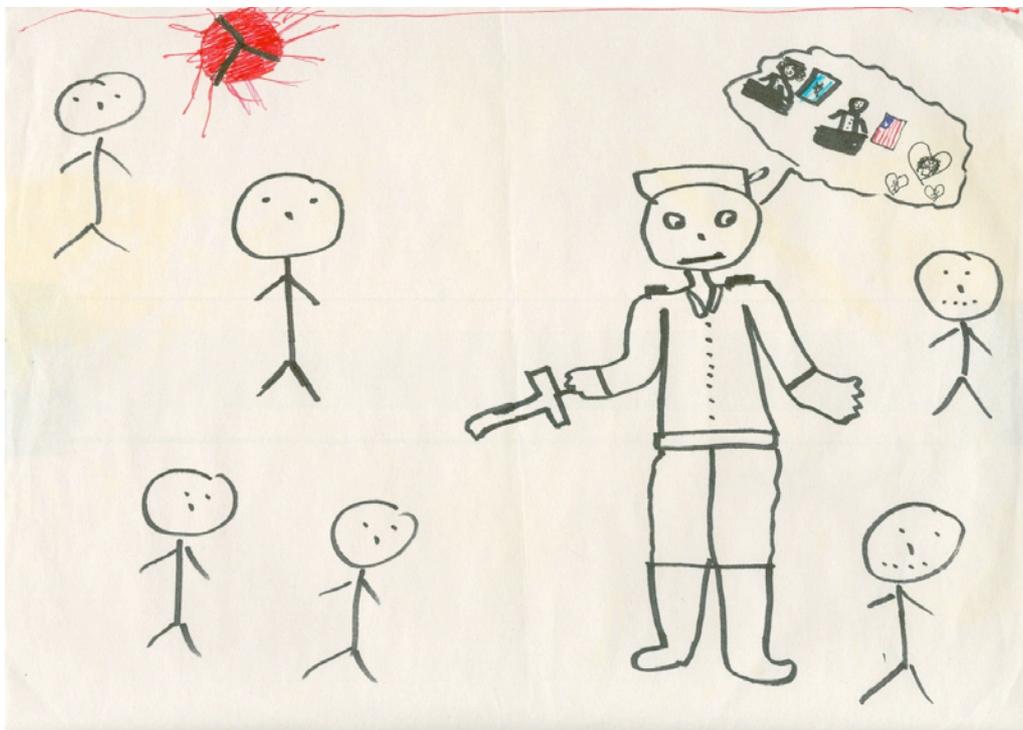


Figure 4. Nasma's Sketch

The character that is at the foreground of the picture seems to be a soldier or a policeman. He is wearing a uniform and has badges on his shoulders. He holds a weapon that looks like a sword or a machine gun in his right hand and points it towards the people on the left. Through sketching a thought bubble next to his head, Nasma reveals what he is thinking of. Inside the bubble, there are two people, probably presidents or other official figures, sitting each behind his desk, with the flag of his country (Israel and USA) hanging behind him. Next to them, there are three heart shapes, one larger than the other two, with a girl's picture in the biggest and one person in each of the other two. His thoughts may assert the strong relationships between the United States and Israel. Because USA "loves" Israel (symbolised by the hearts), as known among Arabs, the authority figure knows that whatever he does as a soldier or a policeman, he will be supported by that strong country. Although feeling

powerful, he is still not happy. Instead of smiling with content, he seems bewildered, with his mouth drawn as a straight line slightly turned upward on the sides.

Nasma uses size to symbolise powerfulness. The authoritative, influential character occupies a much larger space in her sketch than the powerless people. The other characters in the sketch are significantly smaller. They are interestingly divided into two groups, two on the right side of the sketch and four on the left. The ones on the right side have dotted mouths while the ones on the left have no mouths at all. Since the mouth is the organ used for speech, among other functions, the absence of mouths among the second group in this context may symbolise incapability of expressing themselves. They are powerfully silenced, with the weapon directed towards them. The first group is probably in the authority figure's side but refrain from speaking and criticising his suppressive actions, either because they affirm them or simply being supportive to him since he is "one of them". They do not seem satisfied, though. Even the soldier's mouth is tightly closed, possibly communicating that he obeys and follows orders non-arguably. Since what is excluded from an image can be as or more powerful than the included elements, the exclusion of mouths, as well as joyful colours, from Nasma's portrayal has profound significance.

There is also a difference in the body shapes between the soldier and the other characters in Nasma's sketch. The soldier's body parts are realistically depicted while all the others are drawn in a cartoonistic way. Their size might slightly differ, but they all have similar shapes, except for the mouths. The soldier is dressed while they are naked. They have no hair and no apparent sex. Such rendering of the soldier as a distinctive individual while the others as part of a non-distinguishable, collective group conveys his significance over them. He has a dominant place in his country, whereas they are pushed to the margins and figuratively marginalised.

Drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) theory, Nasma's image has both vertical and horizontal elements. On a vertical level, the characters are all posing towards the viewers with their bodies rather than each other, thus inviting the viewers into the sketch and interacting a powerful message with them. The eyes of the most dominant figure, however, are turned away from the people on the left side of the sketch and pointed down toward the two figures on the right, thus revealing a relational action, though unidirectional and silent. Such a horizontal point of view indicates his symbolic power over them. The pointed weapon conveys additional action. Although most characters are static and isolated, such symbolic action offers a narrative, a story of power and oppression.

The soldier is pointing both his gaze and weapon downwards towards the lower right and left quadrants, respectively, which represents reality in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory. His attention is focused on what his reality as a soldier requires him to do, namely to fight. A horizontal scrutiny of the image provides further meanings. When reversing Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory according to the Arabic directionality, the right side would represent the known/given while the left a new orientation. The soldier's gaze to the right side may either emphasise his focus on the known or given rather than aspiring for a new, ideal reality, or indicate his apprehension of the unknown, what new reality the future is hiding from him and his country.

Dividing Nasma's sketch into four quadrants and circling the centre according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory reveals interesting details in her sketch (see Figure 5). Through such division, the weapon appears in the centre of her sketch. Violence is unfortunately the focal point of her reality. In addition, scrutinising the sketch reveals that it mostly lacks the ideal, aspired to, bright reality and is limited to the existing dark world as she sees it at present. The only positive elements in the whole sketch are the peace symbol and the heart shapes, which are relatively small. They are placed in the upper half of the drawing, which according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), symbolises the promised or ideal. Although the largest part of Nasma's sketch portrays the dark reality, she still includes positive values that she aspires to, specifically peace and love.

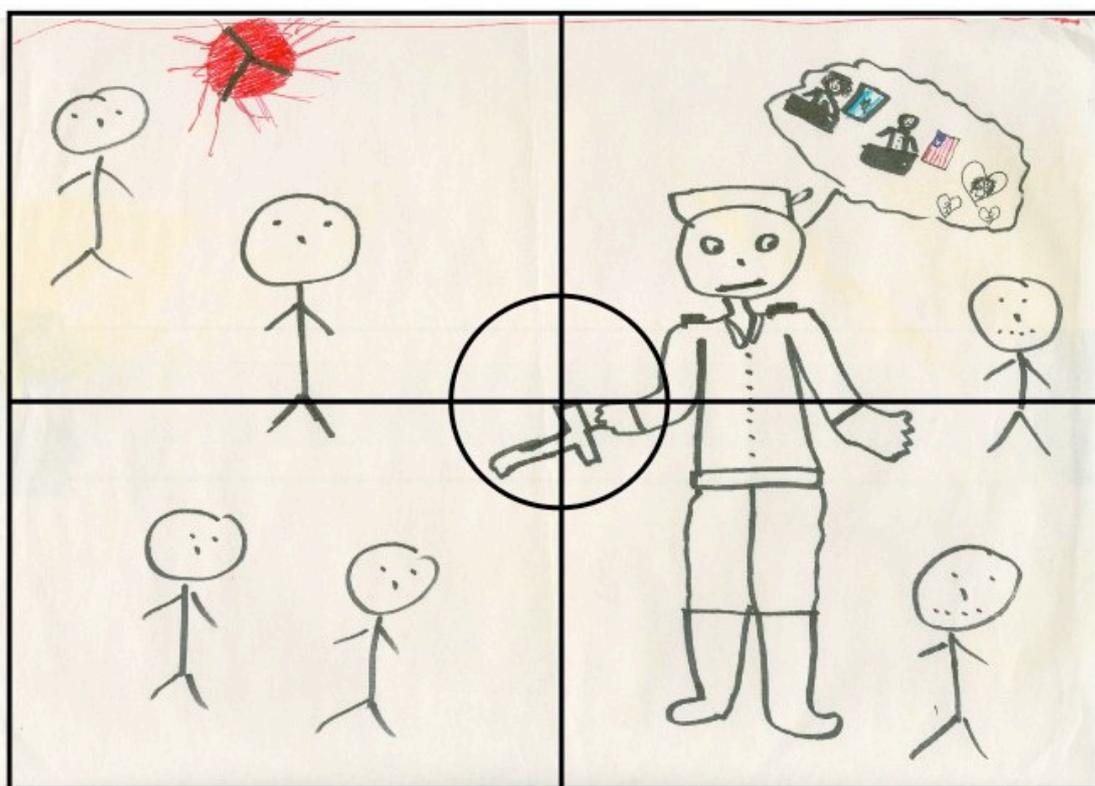


Figure 5. Nasma's divided sketch

Situated in the broader political context in Israel, I would interpret Nasma's sketch as addressing the political silencing that the Arab minority in Israel has experienced. They are not allowed to freely express their objection to the occupation of the West Bank and the unjust oppression of the Palestinian people. I would interpret the people on the left side of the sketch as the Palestinians and the ones on the right as the Arab and peace-seeking Jewish citizens inside Israel. The size of the citizen, the absence of mouths, the use of force (represented by the weapon), the unconditional American support, the prevalence of the gloomy black colour, and the "bleeding" sun and sky all convey the painful reality that she sees. Her choices subtly represent her perspectives about the society she lives in, and as Albers (2000) finds in her study, socio-political perspectives "permeate the ways in which [such] students construct and represent their identities and those of others" (p. 114).

THE “AFTER” STAGE

Since the same image can be interpreted differently by different audiences (Reissman, 2007, p. 144), I find it essential to invite other viewers as well as the artist her/himself to share the meanings they see embedded in each image. The verbal part is needed to affirm my analysis, challenge it, or reveal aspects that the other students and I might have overlooked. In addition, and since different modes enable people to “say” different things, it was necessary to recognise which components and meanings the artists embedded in their sketches but did not address in their verbal sharing. Afterwards, I will try to locate meanings that the artists included in their artistic creations but consciously or unconsciously chose not to describe in their talk.

Sharing the sketches with the other members of the group was the next stage in the lesson, with each student holding his creation for others to see. After other students tried to speculate what each sketch represented, the artist explained his/her intentions, choices and message.

The sharing time was video-taped. The students talked about the sketches in Arabic. Since students’ English competence was still developing, using their first language during the sharing time was necessary to enable them to focus on the ideas they opted to express rather than struggling with finding the right English words. The meanings they made while interacting with an English book and connecting the text to their lives might be beyond their English competence. I transcribed the Arabic videotaped sharing time into an English Word text.

Walaa’s sketch

When asked to share with Walaa how they understood his sketch, Nasma started by the statement that “Your sketch is very deep”. Their reflections then followed. Nasma said that “the left side conveyed that the sun is very happy in America”. Walaa asked “Why America?” in a surprised tone, as if implying that that was not his intention at all. Nasma replied: “Because there is English on the boy’s shirt and on the glasses. And because there is a separating line, as if it’s the borders.” Nasma then stopped when she realised that her initial interpretation did not match what Walaa intended to say. Luna noticed that there was the word “hate” and asked if the girl was an Arab. Walaa replied negatively by saying: “I’m not necessarily talking about Israel here.” Luna then laughed and asked in a desperate tone of voice: “So who is she? What are you trying to say?” Rawan then joined by saying, “It tells me how things were before and how they are after, destruction as opposed to joy.”

The way the other students interpreted Walaa’s sketch was interesting. They recognised the depth of his sketch and tried to interpret it according to their belief systems and perceptions of the world. Nasma connected the English language with America (a word used in Arabic to mean USA) rather than other English-speaking countries. She also viewed the separating line between the two parts as borders between countries. Luna interestingly wondered whether the girl with the “hate” glasses was an Arab. By asking whether the girl was an Arab, Luna probably wanted to connect the sketch to the “here and now”, whereas Walaa’s intentions were more symbolic and universal. Rawan saw a dichotomy of the before and after, the destruction and joy, “how things were before and how they are after, destruction as opposed to joy”.

After a period of silence, the students wanted to hear Walaa's interpretation. He started communicating his representations by affirming Rawan's assumption that his sketch consisted of two chronologically different periods of time. One part preceded the other and it was actually the one on the left. He explained what he tried to express through the left side:

There are two people. Their heads are open, not because someone hit him or something, but to show that he's thinking "hate". The red thing on the left person's head is his exposed brain. They are looking at each other and they're covering their hatred with their glasses. Beautiful nature surrounds them, with green grass, a flowing river, and clear, blue sky. It's a beautiful day, but they don't appreciate the beauty of nature. The sun is smiling because it has her sunglasses on and doesn't see what they're thinking about.

(With regard to the right side) The no-entry signs on the right side show that green and blue are forbidden. Green and blue symbolise beautiful things. The sun is hiding behind the clouds. There's fire and coffins. That happened because one cannot keep his hatred concealed, suppressed. At some point, it will explode and destroy everything.

Walaa's sketch was chronologically arranged that one part, the left, preceded the other, the right. Hatred that prevails for a long time cannot be concealed forever. At some point it will inevitably explode and cause the massive destruction shown on the right side. In his sketch, the known or given lies on the left while the new, imagined scenario is located on the right. That surprisingly aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Western directionality. However, when reviewing the whole videotaped lesson, I interestingly noticed that during the sketch-making process, Walaa started sketching the left side first (see Figure 6 that shows him sketching the right side while the left is already completed), probably because my course was an English course. In addition, and while I started analysing Walaa's sketch from the right to the left following the directionality of Arabic, he described the left side first.



Figure 6. Walaa in the process of creation

Walaa's explanation of his intentions behind the elements in his image also revealed that I interpreted the element of sunglasses in the image differently. For him, they were a way to conceal, to prevent people from viewing reality as it is. The sunglasses

prevented the sun from seeing the hatred that prevailed underneath and prevented the two human characters from enjoying the beautiful nature. For me, on the other hand, the sunglasses are associated with enjoying the sun-kissed nature and outdoor life. Such different interpretations of the same object may be caused by the different connotations different people bring to the same object. A probably significant element that appeared in the sketch but was not addressed in Walaa's talk was the cross signs on the coffins. That might imply that he saw Christians as victims, but chose not to state his thoughts. Alternatively, it might be the only way he knew to represent coffins since he was Christian himself. He might have never seen a coffin of a Muslim person.

Walaa's elaborate explanation of his sketch was an essential complement to my visual analysis. It corroborated a considerable portion of my interpretations, such as the universal no-entry signs, the connotations we both (as sharing the same culture) brought to the green and blue colours as representing the beauty of nature, while the black symbolised death and destruction, and the meanings coffins, fire and nature conveyed. However, his subtle use of glasses as concealing hatred was overlooked in my analysis, as well as the chronological order of his pieces. Therefore, I would conclude that in order to get a complete picture of the visual text, the creator of that text must be a part of the process, if possible. In my analysis, analysing the visual text alone was not sufficient to comprehensively and accurately reveal the artist's real intentions behind each element. Hearing how other students "read" the sketch was also eye-opening for me and made me realise the significance of teaching them the grammar of visual design (2006) to help them read visual texts more profoundly and critically.

Nasma's sketch

When the students started sharing with Nasma what they noticed in her sketch, Rawan noted that "your drawing shows Israel and America as allies. Two strong countries are allied against a weak country." Luna added that, "What draws my attention is that the sun is red, and there's the peace symbol inside it, as if to symbolise peace. And I also notice the hearts, but I can't see what's inside them." Walaa then interrupted by saying passionately, as if discovering an extremely interesting and surprising fact: "Oh, the four people (referring to the ones on the left) have no mouths. As if they can't talk." Luna joined with an excited "a-ha!" adding: "He's as if protecting his people, the silent people" (said while stressing and drawing quotation marks with her hands when saying "the silent people").

The students subtly noted some embedded elements in the sketch and connected them to their own views. Rawan noticed the American support of Israel, while what caught Luna's attention was the peace symbol inside the red sun as well as the heart shapes. These small details caught their attention. Walaa excitedly detected the absence of mouths and realised that such a fact symbolised inability to speak. Luna joined the excitement by asserting that the soldier must be protecting "his people, the silent people". In her view, a soldier's duty is to protect his/her people.

After they had stopped talking, Nasma started explaining her visual text and the choices she made as an artist to convey her message. While pointing at the foregrounded authority figure she stated:

He's a soldier. I didn't put an Israeli symbol on his uniform because he doesn't have to be Israeli. He can be American or anything else. He's fighting the weak people who can't talk. He's shooting at them (referring to the four characters to the left of the soldier). I didn't draw his body like theirs because he's living while they aren't. He's not looking at them because he doesn't want to see the suffering and destruction he's causing. These other two men (referring to the ones to the right of the soldier) are from his own nation, people who live in his own country. They have mouths and they talk, but they don't have any points of view. No one notices them, like us. We speak and critique, but we can't change anything. No one listens to us. While he's shooting (pointing at the soldier), he's thinking of the Israeli prime minister, the American president, and of his wife and two sons (referring to the figures in the thought bubble). It's all bloody, the sky and sun. The sun is not golden anymore. It is looking from above at the situation and thinking that at the end there should be peace. The connection between my sketch and the story is that in the story, stereotypes and preconceived ideas caused hatred and wars, and people here also have stereotypes of each other and so hate each other and fight.

Nasma's interpretation of her sketch confirmed my visual analysis interpretation to a certain extent. The only detail I completely misinterpreted was the heart shapes. While I saw them as a symbol of the loving bond between of the United States and Israel, Nasma used them to represent the soldier's loving family. I also narrowed my interpretation to include an Israeli soldier, the occupied Palestinians, and the silenced war-opposing Israeli citizens. Nasma's intentions, on the other hand, included an Israeli, American, or any other soldier violently oppressing any group of people, with silent objection from part of his people. She noted, though, that the silenced people are "like us", referring to herself as part of the Israeli Arab minority in Israel. She interestingly refrained from addressing the conflicts inside her own village between Christian and Muslim groups and went beyond the local to describe the wider circle of the whole political and military reality in the area.

Inability to effect any change in reality was prevalent both in Nasma's sketch and talk. In avoiding the local (the Christian/Muslim conflict in the village), and diverting attention to the global (Israel, the Occupied Territories, and the U.S.), she felt helpless: "We speak and critique, but we can't change anything. No one listens to us." Her ability to take action seemed limited, since she focused on "big P politics rather than little p politics" (Janks, 2010). However, her purpose in avoiding the portrayal of the conflict amongst Arabs might be to represent a unified picture of the Israeli Arab minority. They might have more power to effect change when united. My speculations, though, remain unverified.

A considerable part of what the students narrated about their own sketches truly matched what I observed through my visual analysis. Other students could also interpret some of the elements in those sketches accurately. However, hearing the artists' "stories" revealed that we perceived certain images differently from what the artists intended. Our own values, belief systems, and socio-political views had apparently influenced the way we saw the images. As Greene (1978) states, our ideological perspectives are significant since they all underlie "our present perspectives and affects the way we look at things and talk about things and structure our realities" (p. 2). People with different backgrounds, values and belief systems may

view the same image from different perspectives. They can focus on certain parts of it while overlooking others, or conclude completely different meanings. As a result, it is essential to hear the artist's "story". This substantiates Reissman's (2007) approach to visual analysis, that it should include what precedes the creation of the image, who creates it, the process of creation, as well as how it is interpreted by different audiences.

In my visual analysis, listening to the artist's intentions and point-of-view turned out to be necessary for exposing the complete and accurate picture that the artist intended to communicate. It helped corroborate some of my findings, challenge certain parts, and add extra layers to others. My visual analysis made student's perceptions and representations of reality visible, including both what they considered constitute existing reality and the new reality they prophesied or aspired to. A combination of various approaches to visual analysis, I conclude, is necessary to uncover the whole story of and behind students' depiction of their reality.

FINDINGS DISCUSSED IN RELATION TO LEWISON'S DIMENSIONS OF CRITICAL LITERACY

Through my curriculum, I provided opportunities for my students to respond to English multicultural texts in the EFL classroom through allowing and encouraging them to express their thoughts through sign systems other than the English language that they had not yet fully mastered. Art enabled my Arab students to convey profound ideas in connection to the English text that they would not have been able to express through English words. Such an approach to teaching English literacy is unique in my Israeli-Arab context, a context in which peace between Jews and Arabs as well as between Christians and Muslims is very fragile. Offering spaces for students to address such issues is essential. When I read aloud multicultural literature to my students and invited them to respond to these texts, they started addressing these issues not only in personal but also critical ways. Reviewing my findings reveals that the dimensions of critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002) emerged in my student's responses. A synthesis of the critical elements that surfaced in students' responses is described below.

Disrupting the commonplace

Although the weather is lovely and bright, the nature is vibrant, and the people are seemingly happy, Walaa problematizes such beautiful reality by uncovering the hatred hidden inside the characters' heads. Beneath the surface, reality is not as perfect as it appears. It is problematic and vulnerable. Walaa challenges the taken-for-granted, seemingly peaceful life through visualising a different, extremely menacing reality that awaits the world if hatred is not rejected.

Nasma's portrayal of reality also disrupts the commonplace through highlighting the shocking truth as she sees it, not as portrayed by the media that the army of her country is legally protecting the country from its fierce enemies. Placing the armed soldier with his considerably large size and real-like body in the foreground of her sketch while allocating a smaller size and cartoon-like body shape to his mouthless "enemies" and voiceless citizens all problematize the existing reality. She stresses that "I didn't draw his body like theirs because he's living while they aren't." Such

portrayal disrupts the status quo showing that the reality is different from the publicly communicated one, and her country is not as democratic as claimed, emphasised, among other implications, by drawing quotation marks with her hands when saying “democratic.” According to her, a strong army is actually oppressing weak, disarmed people in a country that silences the citizens who oppose such action. The “bleeding” sun and sky add extra depth to the dramatic scene. “It’s all bloody, the sky and sun.”

In her description of her sketch, Nasma uses language to critique what is considered normal. Although soldiers are expected to fight, Nasma critiques their right to kill weaker people. “He’s fighting the weak people who can’t talk. He’s shooting at them.” She also questions the freedom of expression in her own country and interrogates silencing certain groups of people, “people who live in his own country. They have mouths and they talk, but they don’t have any points of view. No one notices them, like us.” Her critique continues with describing how such a problematic reality in her own country positions certain individuals/groups: “We speak and critique, but we can’t change anything. No one listens to us.” Through powerful words and images, Nasma expresses feelings of marginalisation.

Considering multiple viewpoints

Standing in the shoes of his characters, Walaa can imagine and read their thoughts. They are “thinking ‘hate’”. Walaa also considers the situation from multiple perspectives. From their own perspectives, the characters’ thoughts revolve around hatred. They might or might not be cognisant of each other’s hatred. From the sun’s perspective, reality is different. “The sun is smiling because it has her sunglasses on and doesn’t see what they’re thinking about.” On the right side of his sketch, Walaa depicts a counter-narrative to the dominant reality, an alarming picture of a hypothetical scenario that he predicts as possible if the status quo is not disrupted and corrected.

Nasma puts herself in the shoes of the soldier as well as the other characters. She concurrently tries to understand experience from his viewpoint in addition to hers, through speculating what he is thinking of while being on duty. “While he’s shooting, he’s thinking of the Israeli prime minister, the American president, and of his wife and two sons.” Although she opposes his merciless actions, she still views him as a human being who has feelings. He thinks about his own world, duties and his family. He is not just a cruel, ruthless member of the army who kills people unrelentingly; he is a family guy who has feelings (“He’s not looking at them because he doesn’t want to see the suffering and destruction he’s causing”).

Considering multiple viewpoints also appears in Nasma’s attempt to view the situation from the sun’s perspective. She speculates that the sun “is looking from above at the situation and thinking that at the end there should be peace.” In addition, Nasma’s sketch noticeably includes voices of the silenced or marginalised. She includes those whose voices are heard (the soldiers and government officials) and those whose voices are missing (the people on both sides). She makes silencing visible basically through absence of mouths for people on the left and dotted mouths for people on the right and stresses such difference in her interpretation of her sketch. She also makes difference visible through the differences in the characters’ body shapes: “I didn’t draw his body like theirs because he’s living while they aren’t.”

Even the sun is given a voice through “looking from above at the situation and thinking that at the end there should be peace”, but her voice is also marginalised and not being considered by the dominant figures at present.

FOCUSING ON THE SOCIO-POLITICAL

When sharing with Walaa how they see his sketch, both Nasma and Luna move beyond the personal, trying to connect the picture to America or the Arab world. Walaa’s reply that he was “not necessarily talking about Israel here but in general”, takes his sketch from the local to the universal level. He also addresses the social when talking about hatred in society and its destructive power (“one cannot keep his hatred concealed, suppressed. At some point, it will explode and destroy everything”). When sharing with Nasma how they see her sketch, Rawan focuses on the political through noticing that it “shows Israel and America as allies. Two strong countries are allied against a weak country”; Walaa notes the mouthless people and realises that it might symbolise political silencing, that “they can’t talk”; and Luna accepts his interpretation and calls those people “the silent people”.

Nasma’s sketch is especially political. In the beginning, and in an attempt to communicate a universal message, she explains that the soldier can represent any soldier in the world who violently oppresses any group of people: “I didn’t put an Israeli symbol on his uniform because he doesn’t have to be Israeli. He can be American or anything else.” However, when she later describes the silenced people with dotted mouths, she says: “just like us”, narrowing the context from the universal to the local. Be it universal or local, her portrayal does largely address the socio-political. The soldier is “fighting the weak people who can’t talk. He’s shooting at them.” In the Israeli reality, those people might symbolise the Palestinians whose weapons are not as developed as the Israeli advanced weapons, hence the lack of weapons on their side. Smaller and mouthless, they do not have the right to speak up or to make their own decisions.

Political silencing of Israeli Arab citizens, a group to which Nasma belongs, is also apparent in her interpretation, represented by the two characters to the right of the soldier. They “are from his own nation, people who live in his own country. They have mouths and they talk, but they don’t have any points of view. No one notices them, like us. We speak and critique, but we can’t change anything. No one listens to us.” Nasma feels that as part of a minority group, her voice is unheard, silenced.

Uneven power relationships are also visible in Nasma’s portrayal of reality. The size allocated to her characters, the difference in their body shapes, the absence and different shapes of mouths, as well as being armed or disarmed all symbolise the powerful and the powerless. Through all these elements, Nasma challenges the “unquestioned legitimacy of unequal power relationships” (Anderson & Ervine, 1993, cited in Lewison et al, 2002, p. 383).

Worth noting here is the fact that although the conflict portrayed in *Feathers and Fools* is general and the story does not specify a particular conflict, the children chose which conflicts to portray. Not addressing the Christian-Muslim conflict that was discussed prior to the story might be of special significance. Their avoidance of dealing with the differences amongst them, but rather remaining on safe ground by talking about others, can either indicate their unwillingness to open up and reveal their

views on the sensitive issue of religious conflicts, or alternatively convey a strategic move of deliberately disregarding their local conflict to convey a message of an undivided, unified minority in the face of a common enemy.

Taking action to promote social justice

Both students used art to express their critical understanding of the world. Through their artistic creations, they rewrote their identities as social activists who challenged the status quo and demanded change. In his sketch, Walaa dramatically portrayed the potential destruction of untreated hatred to convey his poignant message to the spectators: “Look what happens when you keep hating each other.” His views reveal an identity of a human being who is encumbered with the future of humanity and demands change in people’s attitudes towards each other. Nasma also uses the language of art to represent her critical perception of the world. Her portrayal reveals her identity as a person who rejects oppression, violence, unequal power and silencing certain groups of people. However, she silences the conflict between the religious groups in the village during the process. She communicates a message that “preconceived ideas and stereotypes can cause hatred and wars, and people here ... have stereotypes of each other and so hate each other and fight.”

In addition, both students developed powerful voices and spoke out against injustice. After finishing this unit, all the students’ responses were displayed around a large room at their school together with the corresponding picture books. The school principal, English teachers from the village, the mayor and local council members, and the students’ parents were invited to the “walk-in exhibit”. Many visitors came to witness what the students produced. Students walked them around the room and explained the stories behind the creation of each piece. During that day, students got their messages of justice and democracy out into the surrounding world, to their community.

To conclude, all four dimensions of critical literacy emerged in students’ representation of reality. In respect of disrupting the commonplace, both students equally problematised existing reality. However, the language of critique was more prevalent in Nasma’s sketch and words. She eloquently used language and other sign symbols to critique reality, whereas Walaa expressed his critique basically through the sign system in his sketch.

Considering multiple viewpoints also appeared in both representations. Walaa and Nasma dived into the characters’ heads in an attempt to reveal what revolved in their minds. Considering multiple viewpoints, though, was more apparent in Nasma’s portrayal of reality. She juxtaposed multiple and contradictory aspects of reality through including the perspectives of the soldier, weak people, silenced people, and the sun. An especially interesting critical dimension was the fact that she considered the soldier’s viewpoint that apparently contradicted her own views.

Focusing on the socio-political was also more pervasive within Nasma’s literary engagement. Both Walaa and Nasma went beyond the personal. They started with a universal message and then addressed the problematic socio-political situation, but Nasma expanded more on these dimensions. She conveyed a universal message that addressed a problematic socio-political situation and encompassed several details of

the problematic political situation, including unjust war, uneven power relations, soldiers' loyalty to own county, and silencing certain groups of people.

Taking action to promote social justice emerged equally in both cases. Both students represented their critical understanding of the world through arts and communicated an important message that aimed to promote social justice. Through sharing their views with the visitors during the "walk-in exhibit", they developed a powerful voice to "speak out collectively against injustice" and "get messages of justice and democracy out into the world". They rewrote their identities as "social activists who challenge the status quo and demand change" (Lewison et al., 2008, p. 12).

Reviewing the data alongside the four dimensions framework (Lewison et al., 2008) reveals that my critical literacy syllabus encouraged critical responses from students. It actually highlighted that students began incorporating the different critical literacy dimensions into their responses, although to varying degrees among the different participants and across the different dimensions. Using such a framework in combination with my combined approach to visual analysis helped illuminate students' beliefs, embedded messages, aspirations and critique. Scrutiny of students' discussions and responses over the text revealed their quest for social justice. Whether they maintain and develop such pursuit for a more socially just society and take it to a more active and influential level in the future, though, remains uncertain.

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