



CRT Grant Report 2013 - 2014

***נעמתי – בת-קול -- Narmati Voice Workshops**

This project was originally entitled MerMer. The project was retitled by the Palestinian facilitator as Narmati, the possessive of Narmeh (Arabic, sound), similar to Neima (Hebrew, melody) – "my (own) sound" or "my (own) melody".

The purpose of the project was to use Voice-in-Movement Integration, which releases women's natural musicality and frees up both expressivity and listening, to enhance connections, understanding, and teamwork among Palestinian and Jewish educators at the David Yellin Academic College in Jerusalem, while offering them a unique and pleasurable tool for individual empowerment.

Voice-in-Movement Integration is based on spinal bodily rhythms, transformative voice exercises and a wide spectrum of reciprocal voice practices between women and between every woman and the group. With collective sources such as chants and therapeutic singing, this work builds both inward and outward listening capacities.

A total of eight workshops were held.

In July, 2013 with private funding, an all-day introductory workshop was held at Neveh Shalom with eight participants who had a very deep experience and who have remained in contact with one another.

After a great deal of preparatory discussions with various staff members at the David Yellin College, we held five workshops there in all – two introductory workshops for staff members, and three learning workshops designed especially for two separate groups of young Palestinian teachers who were in their first or second year of teaching.

We also held one two-hour workshop for teachers at the Hand in Hand bi-lingual school in Jerusalem.

Details

The first session at David Yellin, a three-hour evening workshop on November 9, 2013 was an upbeat sound and improvised song workshop that also served to introduce our Palestinian facilitator Hanin Massarwi Natour to this particular process. Several participants voiced a strong wish to continue, but as we found ourselves very busy with the other workshops (below), we couldn't open a long-term group right away.

Our three sessions for young Palestinian teachers at David Yellin (one in late December and two in early January) were successful introductions to voice release as a technique for increasing calm, confidence and freedom of vocal expression, as well as support within the group. With one group, we focused directly on voice techniques for teachers, which the young women found tremendously helpful. We expect to be invited to run further such sessions next year. The supervisor of the group told me directly that while he feels that his community is in need of the kind of attentiveness and body-awareness that our work brings, he knows there is little interest in bi-national work on this front, and asked us if we would be willing to offer it to a uni-national group. We were very happy to fulfill this need, and at the same time put out the word about this process in the community, so that those still interested in bi-national work will begin hearing of it.

For the last session at David Yellin, a four-hour morning session on January 29, 2014 during the staff break, we offered our most developed program. The group was composed of both Palestinian and Jewish staff members who had voiced a serious interest in joint work, and included two hours of voice warm-ups, echoing and bodily release to increase comfort with oneself and each other, and two hours of work with individual words (and then word combinations) from a Mahmoud Darwish poem and an Israeli poem. The format, which took three months of an intensive research to develop, seems exceedingly rich, and was moving for all participants.

Our two-hour session for teachers at Jerusalem's Hand in Hand bi-lingual school on February 2, 2014 was joyful and light, and was meant to reach pleasant choral singing and increase trust and intimacy between teachers who already work together, rather than open up political or cultural questions. However, the teachers were not given a choice as to their participation, and several found the internal listening and quiet required in this process foreign.

All the workshops were women only. Hand in Hand administrators provided a separate activity for men on the staff; the Young Teachers' Supervision classes are all female anyway, and the introductory sessions invited only women participants

Accomplishments

We have accomplished a highly successful, wide-ranging introduction of our rich and radically unfamiliar program to a broad array of staff members, students, teacher trainees, administrators and influential figures at the David Yellin College where the process we bring is needed among staff members and students alike. Our introduction at the Hand in Hand School is not yet as broad, but the potential of our contribution is still growing through our on-going involvement with other activities at the school, and with many prominent members of the school's committee.

We have drawn a growing cadre of women throughout Jerusalem and beyond who have either experienced and enjoyed this work or who have heard of it and are eager to get a taste. This seeding of interest has lovely ripple effects which we are constantly experiencing. A core of committed women is actively requesting continued workshops and we are at work to create the conditions that would facilitate a strong, on-going, possibly unaffiliated group in Jerusalem this year.

We have developed and refined a set of approaches to launching voice work: general introductions of various lengths and intensities to voice integration in a Jewish-Palestinian context; specific introductions for staff members who are already familiar with one another and have on-going working relations; voice work sessions for teachers focusing on developing and solidifying classroom skills; and our treasured protocol, a remarkably touching and powerful process that involves thorough voice, body and interactive "warming" and which leads to deep work with separate words from the treasured poems, prayers and folk songs of Palestinian and Jewish cultures, followed by movement and sound work on these chosen words in pairs, foursomes and more.

We have nourished the connections and understanding between us – the core three facilitators and a number of advisors – and deepened our understanding of one another, of each other's cultures and sub-cultures and of the valuable potential of our work. Our awareness of the underlying effects of the politics of this country has also grown exponentially through our little microcosm and its internal dynamics as well as through its on-going encounters with a variety of groups and individual women in various contexts of this work.