

The Emerging Field of Art, Culture and conflict Transformation

ITAC THINK TANK: July 2019

Hosted by Carmen Oleachea (Argentina), Cynthia Cohen (USA), and Mary Ann Hunter (Australia)

This is the transcript of one of ITAC Collaborative's monthly Think Tank sessions. Each session focuses on a new theme and is hosted by someone from a different country.

In July of 2019, Carmen Oleachea moderated a discussion using the guiding themes and questions of ITAC3 and her professional case studies to explore alternative methods to further establish collective and all-inclusive processes of transformation. With the advancement of technological and institutional tools, the potential to develop new strategies seems possible for stopping the inertia of destruction and discovering sustainable ways to be on Earth.

This extraordinary, overwhelming but also exciting time is where we move along feelings: fear and hope; vulnerability and sense of power; shame towards other forms of life and pride for the exceptional abilities we have. The presence of conflicts is not only normal but unavoidable in times of transformation. So, from an optimistic perspective, we could say that the incredible amount of conflictive situations that we are living could also be taken as a source of hope and a sign of resilience and a map of what we need to address urgently.

This quest may contain many tools but, one of the most powerful is Art. Art is one of our more complex and complete sources of creation and communication. Art as a language, as a technical discipline, as a space of encounter with oneself and the other, as a manifestation of the zeitgeist, as a way to access the collective unconscious, as a way for the construction of new metaphors and narratives.

Carmen Oleachea 00:01

Okay, I'm Carmen Oleachan. I am in Argentina, and I'm here with three hearts. I belong to three organizations. The first one is Fundacion Cambio Democratico is an organization that is focused on conflict transformation. The second one is "... " is an organization that is focused on art and social transformation. And the third one is impact. And it's focused on art, culture and conflict transformation. And now I will pass the time to present herself to Cynthia to Marianne Hunter.

Mary Ann Hunter 00:42

Thanks, Cindy. Hi, Hello, everyone. My name is Marianne and I have I worked with Carmen and Cynthia on the impact project, which Cynthia, which will pass over to Cindy to talk about in a moment. And to begin a bit of a chat today. I'd like to firstly acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which I work, and live. And that's the morning of people here in Southern Tasmania. And I'd like to just convey my respect to all elders of indigenous communities, who we may work with elders past present, and also the future elders that many of us work with. For those of you who work in education contexts and in schooling context, it is indeed a privilege and responsibility to be working with elders and anxious colleges, in those spaces. So thank you very much. And Thanks Madalyn, this is a very wonderful opportunity to talk a little bit about some of the work that Tom, Carmen, Cindy and I have been engaged with with a wider collective of, of arts practitioners, educators, conflict workers in this space, and I'll pass over to Cindy To begin, and we're hoping for some lots of interaction and discussion with you all. So Cindy will talk a little bit about the structure for today.

Cynthia Cohen 02:03

Okay, good. Okay, great. I thought I unmuted Thanks Madalyn. So first I'd like to thank Madeline and ITAC for inviting Carmen and Mary Ann and me to create a short presentation in conversation, it gave us a chance to think together at a conceptual level that we often don't often have that much of a chance to do. So it's really been a pleasure to prepare for this. I work as the director of a program in peacebuilding in the arts at Brandeis University, where I'm based in an International Center for Ethics, justice and public life, not in an academic department. And in the center, we kind of face out to the world practitioners and professional art activists and artists. And before coming to Brandeis, I did a lot of work in a community based History Center. That was grew out of an Arts Council. So I've been working at this arts, culture, social change, conflict transformation for a few decades now. And, I guess, I would like to just introduce you briefly to IMPACCT this emerging structure and set of processes that the acronym stands for the Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture, and Conflict Transformation. And IMPACCT, has the idea for it has been growing for a decade or so when a number of us working in this area, and documenting practice realized that there is somewhat of a field, there's, it's not necessarily always bounded in the same way or named in the same way. But there are a lot of people working at the nexus of justice, peace, culture, and the arts. And that that field could really be nourished by field building, or there being some sort of infrastructure to support people working in that area. And that would include people who are working as teaching artists. Certainly plenty of conflict resolution work and justice building to do within schools, but also in communities in zones of violent conflict are in fact in anywhere in the world. So this imagining together platform for arts, culture and conflict transformation is an emerging organism. We don't know exactly what shape is going to take. But it's now a kind of a web of teams working on different different ways of strengthening the field, including virtual learning changes that Carmen and Mary Ann are spearheading, some of us are working for advocating for the field with Colombia. Others are working on ethical principles. Others are working on people who want to start regional organizations in their regions. What binds us together is a set of shared values, including reciprocity, respect, mutuality, creativity decolonizing approaches to working together and deep respect for different epistemologies as indigenous systems and ways of knowing to the knowing that emerges from the arts. But knowing that emerges from our discipline, and also a recognition of the complexity of ourselves and our communities we're facing in the 21st century, we, we believe that culture and the arts have crucial roles to play and that this field will be stronger when we're

connected, learning from each other, and having sustained conversations about questions of ethics and efficacy. And if you want to know more about IMPACCT, I think it would work if you just Google imagined IMPACCT in Brandeis, and you could find some stuff there. But that's a broad brush picture of impact. And now I'll turn it back to you, Carmen.

Carmen Oleachea 06:32

Thank you, Cindy. So, let me tell you how this is going to be, we have divided the time in four lock. First, we will briefly present some core concepts behind our work. And then we will have time for questions and comments. And after that, we will have another round of cases connected with our presentations, and then a last chance for questions and comments. And then I will start with my presentation. My Library I have a book that was published in 1969. And it was written by 14 North American specialists. The name is toll was the year 2018. Last year, and they were trying to predict life on Earth 50 years from then there are very few things in the book that became reality, they fade dramatically. For instance, there is a chapter called climax, it starts the following sentence, "man will control the rain, the fog, the storms, probably the weather" they were important specialists. But mostly they were a manifestation of the mainstream thinking of the time. So they were 100% confident on the power of science 100% blind for the inability of humans to understand the complexity of the planet, systemic functioning. And they were full of the sad arrogance that made us believe we were the most important species on Earth. And now, I would like to invite you to listen to the following words and feel the resonance these words have today. Ecosystem systemic, complex, multidimensional, interdependent, circular, global, Gaia.

Carmen Oleachea 08:41

Listen from the notions and perspectives of both the specific approaches that we need to understand and care and Gestalt that can inspire us in all our collective endeavors. Because this vocabulary expressed the emerging common sense of our time, as Thomas Kuhn put it, and they are part of the new narrative we are creating to guide our decisions. In 50 years, we have moved away from that mainstream thinking and we have started a collective, an all inclusive process of transformation that is still going on. I have no doubt that by now, we are all aware that something is going on in our bodies, our minds, our hearts, and our souls. We can even look back now and some milestones have such an extraordinary collective transformation. One that is not like others, because we now need to transform as fast as we can, in order to be able to stop the inertia of destruction we are performing all over, we really need to do it before it's too late for huge proportions of life. But it's different also, because never before, we've had so many technological and institutional tools to think and develop new strategies for remediating some of the damages, and for creating new and more sustainable ways to be on Earth. And this extraordinary, overwhelming, but also exciting time that we are living together, is so vital for us, that every day we are aware of it, and we move along opposite feelings of fear and hope, vulnerability and sense of power, shame, those other forms of life and pride for the exceptional abilities we have. Sometimes we feel we will not be able to change on time and others we feel that of course we will. It is a time with an urge for personal and collective commitment to this transformation. But how to commit?, and towards which horizon this question I cannot answer, definitely not today. But I can share my vision on how we go towards this horizon? First, we have to reckon that most of the time, these needs feelings and new understandings that we have, are entering in our consciousness in the form of a conflict. The presence of conflicts is not only normal, but unavoidable in times of transformation. This is

the way societies put light to those beliefs and actions that they are starting to question and reject. So from an optimistic perspective, we could say that the incredibly amount of conflictive situations that we are living could also be taken as a source of hope that we already understood some of us at least, as a sign of our resilience and also as a map of what we need to address urgently. And I have an optimistic perspective, in part because it's my nature, but also because I spent a lot of my time searching for the signs that show that we truly, truly going through this collective transformation. And I believe that although it won't be without pain, we are being successful. In the last 30 years, I have gone through moments of crazy hope, and of hopelessness. But most of all, I have learned to value the immense amount of effort and creativity that we can produce when we are in times of collective search. Millions of us doing our part. These parts sometimes are just little tiny pieces, and very focused. And other times they are transversal and huge. And all together, they draw the map of the 21 century quest in which we are all embark together. The conversation that we have today is organized by ITAC I will like to share their vision: "A world where every country has artists working in the heart of communities and learning. Where these artists are continually improving, internationally connected and well supported, and the potential of the practice and its transformative power is visible and valued." And I wanted to read it because I believe that for this quest there are many tools but, probably, one of the most powerful is Art. Art in all its dimensions because is one of our more complex and complete source of creation and communication. Art as a language, as a technical discipline, as a space of encounter with oneself and the other, as a manifestation of the zeitgeist, as a way to access the collective unconscious, as a way for the construction of new metaphors and narratives... In IMPACT we work to raise awareness on how Art and culture are one incredibly way to intentionally create conditions where our collective search and creativity can flourish and expand and can really help us transform our conflicts. Thank you. And I pass it to Mary Ann now,

Mary Ann Hunter 15:21

Thanks so much, Carmen. And I just want to bring up, I just want to, I guess, build on what Carmen has said there in a global sense and a wider conceptual sense, and bring it to the heart of the artist. So when we think about artistry, and I engage with one foot in the practices of artists who work in communities, and also educational contexts, and also one foot in education, where I work with pre service educators, who are working with the arts in both formal and informal settings. So I'm very interested in the way in which and I guess, practice in the ways in which artists engage in context, and that the artists role is a heart of transformation. And with that, the professional tools of trade, our presence, and curiosity, so I'm going to come back to this idea of these ideas of presence and curiosity. And what they bring to this endeavor of conflict transformation, as conflict transformation is integrated with learning and with the arts more broadly. But I want to touch on. And again, I'm coming from an educational perspective here, and I realized that many of you will be coming from very different perspectives. And when I say education, I mean, both school and beyond school. So some, you know, this is an education. For me this process of learning exchanges, with impact on educational process, I wake up in the morning, and I feel like it's an educational process, purpose in my day, to engage and relate with others. So I'm using education in a broader context here. And really value the ways in which artists enable a melding of life and professional practice together to really be learners, lifelong learners, and educationalists, and I'm really, I get really inspired by the work of "... b, i, e, s, t, a, some of you may have come across his work. He's an educational philosopher. And he talks very much in in a way that resonates so strongly with Carmen's words here. And he talks about the task of the educator as

being one who supports a learners shift from feeling like they're the center of the world, to being one within a wider world. He uses the term grownup-ness, in this context, and developmental sense of the term of grownup-ness, because he acknowledges that the translation into English is is not a good one for this word. But he talks about this idea of grown up notice, how do we support people around us to shift from a belief and a practice of being at the center of the world, to being part of the world. And this is where the intersection of arts conflict transformation really comes to fruition for me as a practitioner, as a teacher, and as a researcher, in that the arts can hold the paradoxes of us wanting to engage with the past injustices at the same time as trying to find a common ground to talk about future aspirations for peace. And it's a constant tension in the ways in which we encounter conflict both at a global level in terms of sustainability, and also on a local level in terms of a school, a school playground, or in terms of a community engagement, strategy of a community engagement process, where cultures are in conflict where beliefs are in conflict. Conflict, as said is part of our everyday existence and in for those of us living in countries which are and I'll put it in air commas are democratic or have a democratic at the center of its belief systems or political governance, conflict, we need to understand and know how to manage conflict in those processes, because conflict is the heart of democracy in some way. So how do we channel that? How do we work with that? So if we come back to these ideas of paradox, presence, and curiosity, in the educational context, we can think of the arts in three different ways and I acknowledge many researchers before me, and writers before me who have helped walked this path. This...the arts is a discipline. So what are the kind of disciplinary, deep knowledge is that we have about our art practices and their deep knowledge is around skill around traditional forms of practice, that are culturally inscribed, that have been developed over many years to become kind of virtuosic in whatever that context might be. And that might be from playing Beethoven, to sharing a cultural dance, in the sense in Central Australia, a dance that's been danced for generations upon generations. So this concept of disciplinarity there's also the context of the arts as play. So in what ways do we understand play learning as being the ultimate basis of what we do, as artists in terms of taking creativity, taking open ended exploration to our encounters with the arts as a mode of being? There's also the arts as inquiry, which is a very prevalent approach in the education, the formal education system. So how do we engage with the tools, the aesthetic tools of the arts, to inquire about what it means to be in relation with another person, what it means to be a citizen of a community or a nation? What does it mean to use the arts as inquiry in disciplinary as like maths or English if you're talking about the formal system, but art is also a way of knowing. And this is what we can bring as artists into the space of education and of conflict transformation. And when we think of the arts as a way of knowing it's not then just about the arts as a vehicle for learning about conflict or learning about peace, but art as the enactment of peace and the enactment of transformation in conflict settings. And this is where the experiential dimension of holding space of utilizing aesthetic forms, to engage with paradox intention in ways that are conducive to change, that offer people opportunities to sit well. And uncomfortable, at the same time, with the kinds of disturbing, distressing, challenging and uncomfortable learnings that we all experience when we encounter difference when we encounter ourselves and others in that process, that transformation from being the center of the world to being one of a wider, larger of the world.

Mary Ann Hunter 23:07

So he can leave that there as a contribution, and a provocation and a resonance, and I'll pass over to Cindy.

Cynthia Cohen 23:19

Okay, thanks, Mary Ann. And thank you, Carmen, too. So when we began to plan for this, I was reminded of conceptual work that I did a couple of decades ago when I was writing my dissertation. And it seems to be like very resonant here. And I'm going to try to share a couple of thoughts from that that are really for me, for the most part, kind of like a bedrock of what I'm doing. But I hope that lifting them up and thinking about them conceptually, maybe we'll be useful. It's been fun for me to do this. So, I've been thinking about trying to understand it, sort of the deep conceptual levels, what are the real links among education, conflict transformation and aesthetic engagement. And certainly, the ideas that Carmen and Mariana have expressed, or you'll hear them woven in here. And my work focused on one specific aspect of peacebuilding, mainly reconciliation. So as I studied these concepts, and thought about them in relation to each other, I discovered a possible common denominator among these three concepts, each of which is enormously complex in itself. And it's about the nature of the transformation that they involve, or at least that they can be crafted to involve not that they inevitably involve but and I'm going to try to explore this in relation to each of these three areas, but it's a kind of transformation that respects the integrity of the one who is being transformed, or more precisely, a transformation that respects the integrity of people who are transformed, and communities for that matter who are transforming themselves. So this requires a little bit of thinking about well, what do we really mean by integrity? Another complex concept with a lot of definitions, but for many people, integrity has this sense of an unchanging steadfast commitment to a set of values, and alignment of actions and beliefs. And if, in the 90's, I think there are several feminist philosophers who were committed to living lives of integrity and supporting that in their students, but also committed to radical transformation as the feminist project is. So how do we, how do we think about integrity when we're thinking also about transformation in this very serious way? So two particular feminist philosophers came up with Maria Laganus, who's Argentinian, by the way, Carmen and Victoria Davion, argue that it's possible to maintain a sense of integrity, while we're changing radically when we monitor our own processes of change. And we ensure that the various dimensions of ourselves or our various cells do not undermine each other. Another philosopher, feminist philosopher, Cheshire Calhoun adds that we that to live and being community with integrity, we, that human communities benefit when individuals are willing to take a stand, and to hold on to those standards, those positions even when they're unpopular, but also let go of them when we become convinced that another view is better. So these are, it's this kind of idea of integrity that I'm invoking here when I say that education and peacebuilding in the arts are all supporting transformation with integrity.

Cynthia Cohen 27:21

So, for me, I'm dealing with this basic idea that energy education isn't just about getting people to believe certain things, but to understand and assess the evidence that leads to their beliefs. And that's if we think about the difference between education and indoctrination, or the difference between education and socialization, we can see that it's that ability to monitor to have integrity with what we believe means to become metacognitively aware of what we think and why, and to be willing to ongoingly assess the evidence by which we come to our beliefs. And I'll mention two other sort of conceptions of education, one from Nel Noddings with her focus on caring that education requires that learners be instructed to use their knowledge in the service of caring, and I would say the cultivation of the necessary capacities to care such as empathy and compassion. And third view taken from the well known philosopher Martin Buber that as the importance of understanding that a learner is not just an

individual, a learner is embedded in a community, and a learner's ways of knowing and being our interest objective or linked to that group. So and this becomes especially important when we think about peacebuilding to understand that, while we are inter subjectively linked, so in thinking in ethical and epistemological terms were strongly linked in terms of what we know and what we value with our own communities. We're also linked in a different web of ethical and epistemological relationships with the other, which I kind of described as trans subjectivity. So we can't really understand the meaning of our own people's narratives, until we understand the ethical significance of our own group actions on the stories of the other. So anyway, I feel within this we can find some recognition of this idea that education supports us and supports a kind of transformation for people of all ages, but with integrity, with a sense of understanding what is the transformation we're going through and what its implications for ourselves. So switching gears to peacebuilding, maybe it would be helpful to think about this in relation to the difference between the kinds of changes that are wrought during war. And the kinds of changes that are cultivated and processes of peacebuilding. I mean, acts of violence change lives, and they destroy buildings and change the nature of communities. But with little regard for the well being, or the integrity of the other, they transform through destruction. Peaces also, peace also seeks transformations, changes in consciousness in relationships, and attitudes and behaviors. And, of course, there are many dimensions of building peace. But I believe that peace builders should pursue transformation, keeping in mind and aiming towards the strengthening of individuals and communities, and the strengthening of the capacities for integrity within individuals and communities, because in order to reconcile in order to build relationships across difference, people must be able to know what they believe, to be able to question what they believe, to speak empathically and sincerely, and especially when it comes to reconciliation, when they're working to rebuild trust. So I would say that in general peacebuilding, and also reconciliation in particular, require the kinds of transformation that education cultivates, namely metacognitive, awareness of one's own meaning making capacities for and commitments to empathy, presence and compassion, and the ability to negotiate the complexities of both valuing one's own community and the skills to compassionately interrogate its assumptions about itself. So I'm coming into the end here, I don't haven't gone over my time too much. But so why are the arts and aesthetic engagement well suited to the educational tasks and challenges of peace building and reconciliation? What makes the why do we believe the arts are, and especially aesthetic engagement, are so well suited to the challenges that we're facing? And there's probably hundreds of answers to this question. But when we think about the nature of aesthetic experience, itself, the kind of pleasure that we feel when there's a resonance between how we perceive and witness the formal qualities of a work and the formal qualities of the word, whether it's our perceptual capacities, and then what's built into the work of this resonance arises when there's a kind of reciprocity between the artwork and the viewer, slash creator, which maybe can be understood when we compare it with analysis, where the knower imposes preconceived ideas onto the work and propaganda, where the work imposes meanings that are embedded into it onto the knower or attempts to do that. But I think that art when it works, as art, issues an invitation to its witnesses, to consider new meanings, to experience new feelings, to imagine and interpret free from preconceived categories. And therefore to become meaning makers. I think art speaks to us and draws us out as people with integrity. And of course, when art is working as art, the processes issues an invitation to artists, to express themselves with originality with agency and complexity, and to create works that reach beneath the defenses of others, and in through their beauty, invite them to attend, to pay attention to be present. So, in these ways, I see education, the arts and peacebuilding as very strongly aligned at the deepest conceptual level,

ethically, and conceptually. And I think it's why artists, teaching artists have such an important role to play as peacebuilders because you're right there at the nexus of these 3 complex bodies of theory and practice. So I'll stop there.

Carmen Oleachea 34:45

Thank you, Cindy and Madeline now we'll pass it to you if people have questions. And you can organize that part of the conversation.

Madeline McGirk 34:57

Sure. So I think at this stage, the idea was to sort of have a little reflection, have an opportunity to ask questions or delve deeper into any of the things that have been said in this last section, before we then move on to the next section. So you can all take the opportunity to unmute microphones and say what you see and what you're thinking. You can also utilize that little messaging system. And so to begin with, I think what's usually helpful is just to propose the question. Are there any questions? And then if there aren't, what has sprung to mind what's particularly resonated with you about what you've heard? And you can either offer those up vocally or in the messaging system?

Woman 1 35:44

Or maybe people disagree?

Man 1 35:48

No, one disagrees. No one disagrees. Hi, everyone. I had a challenge. Can you hear me?

Madeline McGirk 36:04

Yes, I can hear you.

Man 1 36:07

I had an audio from the very onset. But as you can see, I'm using one of the phones of one of my ITAC, Catalina ITAC members here so that I can just hear me, so I got for me to hear the latter part of it. I'm very emotional about this topic, because when it has to do with the arts, and its impact in conflict resolution, that has to be my final year project when I was at university, and I can relate to this. I think it has to do with us, us doing all that we can to use the arts to make an impact in such an era, if anyone agrees with me. So here in Ghana have used the creative dance to try to work towards conflict resolution. And that has worked effectively. And that's one of the projects that I'm trying to expand since we are getting closer to an election again. Yeah, so that's briefly. That's my take.

Madeline McGirk 37:27

Thank you, Peter. Are there any other thoughts or linked issues that you want to share about your own practices or what's resonated with you about what's been said?

Man 2 37:37

I have a question for Cynthia. Cynthia, Could you expand more on this? Seems like you said something along the lines that peace builds power and integrity. Can you expand on some of that, or whether I got that correctly or not?

Cynthia Cohen 37:56

But I was saying is that, to build peace requires people to have integrity, and communities to have integrity in the sense that they have to have a capacity for, for being able to articulate what they believe, to question what they believe to, you know, and to expand their beliefs in relation to the other. And the challenging part is that, so I'm thinking now particularly of reconciliation, so in the aftermath of violence, when you're lucky, we can work towards reconciliation. This requires people to be able people and communities to be able to build trust, where we're trust, where there is no warrant for trust. How do we transform relationships from you know, the willingness to injure the other, to meet your needs to a trust and in the respect and well being and collaboration for a joint future. And this, these are the very capacities that are injured and eclipsed by violence. So I think one of the most important roles that the courts can play and educational processes of many kind, is helping people experience taking risks, even when they don't have a sense of trust, and start to build trust slowly over time, to become aware, to monitor their process of building trust. So that's maybe one one way in which I think peace building is peace. builders as educators, we have to, in most cases, in the aftermath of violence, we have to build people's capacity, to operate with integrity and to begin to cultivate, even to be able to discern when trust is warranted and when it isn't, so that you can open yourself to learning from the other. artists can play the role of listeners when people's capacity to listen has been impaired. Thank you. Thanks for the question.

Woman 2 40:34

I had a question for you, Cynthia, too. Can you hear me? I was just wondering if your study has centered around any specific communities that have gone through conflict, or as a case study or something like that, because I've been working for a long time with artists, artisans, artisans and communities. In the northernmost state of India, which comprises of three districts, and Kashmir is one of them. So, and they have traditionally, and still continue to do so.

Woman 2 41:29

Create tangible cultural artifacts that have been valued over centuries. So beginning with the cashmere shawl, which was then replicated in Scotland, and then moving on to hand knotted carpets, in fact, they have 34 registered craft practices. And each of those craft practices are exquisite. So notwithstanding the political turmoil and conflict that has been ongoing in the region, the communities continue to create. And I quite, I quite agree with you when you say that art and our practices enable, enable creation of peace, and more so because they work together, they don't work in isolation, right. So I mean, the whole idea of a community of artisans working together, primarily stems from the fact that each one executes a specific process. So the specific skill, and collectively they're able to create these wonderful commodities. So I was just wondering if I'm gonna make a lot of what you the three of you all have shared, resonates with what I've been working with and what I've been experiencing over the years. And I was just curious to know whether, like, so if I'm able to find able to situate my work in Kashmir, I was just wondering if I mean, just to sort of give a face or a geographical identity to a region that you may have been working with, just for me to understand how you all have been addressing any issues that may have come up and how best to sort of resolve them or to sort of answer questions that maybe boast primarily coming from there?

Cynthia Cohen 43:45

Well, I can answer this, we were going to spend some time discussing cases but I'll, when I'm done, maybe both Marianne and Carmen have something you want to say about particular cases my own, I develop these theoretical frames, because of a project that I was working on with Jewish and Palestinian women, living here in Austin area. And seeing if we could find create spaces for conversation by emphasizing folk arts embroidery and paper cutting and family photographs and recipe remedies that were some ways different, in some ways, similar, but and the project lasted for several years, and the Intifada in the late 80s grew up in the middle of it and and it was kind of shattering. But it propelled me into these questions like what makes me think that the arts and aesthetics work, you know, so that's one basic community that I've worked in. I've since worked with other people, especially young people from "... "Yeah.

Woman 2 44:58

So mostly mostly concentrated in the Boston area, right. So these were, these were people who had relocated from their original geographical settings. To me that

Cynthia Cohen 45:11

That was that particular project. Mariana and I were involved in a very large project called acting together on the world stage in which the performance artists, theater people and ritual leaders from 14 different regions of the world describe their practice. And one was a very, a kind of traditional I mean, play in the sense that it wasn't like playback theatre or theater of the oppressed, but a play a scripted play, in which Hindu actors presented the story of the Muslim minority in Gujarat, and, you know, the experience of that and of the the way in which that play, crossed some of those divisions and allowed this primarily Hindu audience to empathize with the suffering of , the Muslim community was very powerful and very beautiful. Yeah. And, and I would just say one other thing about this sort of description that you have of these registered crafts, I'm thinking about an initiative that was undertaken by people who are expatriates from Aleppo, in Syria. And thinking about how the rebuilding of that city maybe could have something about rebuilding trust among the different factions that have been forced to flee. And what they all had in common was music, food and craft, and then you know, the market. And so maybe in the planning process for the new city, those commonalities, those common interests to be built on to begin to rebuild some relationships of trust.

Madeline McGirk 47:06

So I also have one question in the comment section, and then I think we'll move on to the next section. But we have a question here in variable violence, emotional violence, or do we hold these in this conversation? I guess this is for any of our host?

Madeline McGirk 47:23

Hi. Oh, hi.

Woman 3 47:28

Now, I am trying to get used to this Zoom thing, which is new for me today. So I can wait. My turn for one comment....

Madeline McGirk 47:42

Go ahead, I think.

Woman 3 47:45

Okay. Well, first, I'm Inez Sanguinetti, from Korea while up in Argentina. And I want to thank you so much for the three beautiful women so smart. So moving everything you said. And I want I remained with something Mary Ann said that, I think it's it's the core thing of how to move on. And Mary Anne said art as an enactment of peace instead of helping peace. And I thought, what would happen as this as a special force to move forward with this concept of instead of helping peace, helping education, helping the prevention of violence, helping health, what would be our strength, if we could concentrate in the future as hard as enacting it? Well, because I was thinking, if the civil agenda in 2010 already said a thing where like 150 countries got together for arts education, and the conclusion was arts education can make a direct contribution to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing the world today. So it's already said, I think, in a global level, and I think that we are still trying to prove the point. But when Mary Ann said this, I said, wow. Now we're arts, in schools, in communities, but for helping something instead of perhaps concentrating in the reality art can put in the impressive life. Because when we do that the transformation is there. And the capacity to integrity and to do it is there. But I don't know why we continue to go in proving points and explaining ourselves.

Mary Ann Hunter 50:30

I'm very happy to hear that that resonated, I guess it's a good segue into some of the case studies. So we wanted to share a couple of examples of practice to just lead into the second half of the conversation here. So maybe I'll just touch base with that, with that comment, amplified a little bit more through an example here in Australia, and to also partly address the comment there from Errol around verbal violence and emotional violence. So I work in the Australian context where, in my particular context, working with deep structural violence, regarding the the fact that the invasion in Australia over 200 years ago, reconciliation processes have been have been thwarted, have not worked, are continuing to have that that conflict, that very violent conflict in the 1800s. In Australia, with English settlement in Australia, and interaction with local communities. It is resulting in deep structural violence in our country. I'm going to just bring up an example of a teaching artist Ruth Lankford, who, Victoria who's also found the Victoria, joining me from Tasmania. And Ruth Lankford, is an aborigines woman who partners with me in the teaching of a unit in arts education. So she partners in terms of comes in for a workshop, where in our Australian curriculum, there's a requirement for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander perspectives, to be engaged with curriculum. And it set an example for me of an approach which is thinking about peace, or integrating the arts as a teaching about peace. And many people have interpreted this about, okay, we would come an artist might come into a school, and say and teach about the darcy, or the didgeridoo teach about the instruments of Aboriginal expression, they might teach about cave paintings, or expressing cultural knowledge and respect around that, or engaging playtime, learning in terms of dance and embodied movement. All of those are great, all of those are important. And all of those are vital for the growing awareness of the cultural practices that are really at the heart and the center of the indigenous cultures that live on this land who lived on this land for many, many years. But they are only part of the part of the process in terms of that kind of learning about the culture and almost objectifying a culture through a structural organization, like the curriculum, what Ruth does with our students is walk with them. So she comes in and to just give you a

really grounded example, when she talks about ancestry, she might be talking about generations that are, you know, hundreds of generations. And she invites the students, both Aboriginal, non Aboriginal many different cultures in our classes, to think about who's on their shoulder, who's on the right hand shoulder, who are the women, who are the women, mothers and grandmothers. So whom they walk with, in their daily life, who are the male, the Father, the grandfather, the generation who they on their shoulders. And it translates this idea of learning about a culture into walking with a way of going and she brings in a rock or she brought in a rock this is the example of last year and and with respect to retirement told her that I was gonna check today, but it's just a great example though. So I'm hoping I'm speaking on a white woman experiencing this as a walking with a rock.

Mary Ann Hunter 54:39

as an example of a life form. When we think of a rock as being something very static, that has hard edges, that is hard and that you hold the session she had introduced the rocket just gave just let the rock kind of be in the space with us. So people would hold the rocket we did some other activities. Until we came to the end of the session to realize that the rock is still living in added many generations old, but we held the rock, and that the embodiment of the human and the material rock were actually shared. That was there was a boundary with the life force of the rock.

Mary Ann Hunter 55:22

And again, this was about an epistemology, a way of seeing life, as distinct from enter and an engagement to be with. And an invitation to walk with, which for us is a deep peacebuilding practice in Australia, rather than a teaching about peace, about the ways in which, you know, we need to raise awareness about, you know, aspects of our cultural understandings. So that's a very quick example, very happy to explain more of what we did in a more visual arts based way with that time. That's just a case in to, to potentially shift back now to Carmen or others. In Cindy, if there were other examples that we were thinking about sharing.

Carmen Oleachea 56:14

I would like to, I'm sorry.

Man 2 56:17

Go.

Carmen Oleachea 56:19

Yes, I would like to share a case also, that, and it's a group from "...". And it's a project that some years ago, that took five months, and it ended up with a play created and performed by 40 young artists from seven different countries. And all of them were members of NGOs that were focused on art and social transformation. And these artists have never been together before. So they had to meet each other, to understand each other and learn how to work together. And they started the work by using a virtual network, image, blocks. And for four months, they thought together about coexistence, and social and cultural diversity. And this topic was essential for them, because many were immigrants, or marginalized members of their own societies and communities. So among them, they spoke seven different languages, they didn't even have English as a common language. So for five months, everything had to be translated into four languages. And at the first stages, they were drawing, because

that was a very important way of communication. And after the literal connection, they spent a month together in Germany, where they created and play where they have been thinking and tearing and display was presented later in public theaters in Germany and Slovakia. And the name of the project was Respect. And the aim, the aim that they had applied critical thinking, and then to use a language, we send the personnel and their collective experiences on the topic of being excluded from society. And they started with the but with your policies that tolerance, a word that everybody uses were more than attitude of looking away, or of accepting differences, as long as they will not imposed on to us. And they wanted to talk about respect. That respect is a conscious look onto others with openness for dialogue and acknowledging the differences. A good whole project was designed as a joint exploration with open results. They didn't want to try to agree in on anything, or to explain to the audience anything, they wanted "... audiences with the stereotypes, related with differences and qualities. But I have to say that two of the adults that we're working with them out here with us today. But I just want to share because I think it's I think about what we were just realizing that when they finished the play, they decided to do something special. They stood in front of sat in front of the audience. And they then one artist said in a neutral voice, have you ever felt excluded for your personal opinion? If the answer is yes, please stand up. And some actors did at the beginning. Then she asked Have you ever been ridiculed for your physical appearance? And some actors and somebody from the audience stood up? And have you ever been hurt by comments about your beliefs? Have you been joked about your agenda, have anybody made fun of you because of the way you're speaking. And they they put one question after the other questions that they have been victims of. And people were standing and standing. And at the end, almost everybody in the theater were standing up. And there was a silence and there was a lot of people crying. And then the artist said, respect and light went off. And that was the end. I think that that took a lot of things together of what we were considering and question about how our place.

Man 2 1:00:38

Yeah, yeah.

Cynthia Cohen 1:00:43

Can I quickly add one more example? Yes, I want it. I feel that this question about verbal and emotional violence is really important. And I understand it in this way, that I think that violence is an act that impairs the agency of another person or another community. But whether that's done through murder, through injury through speech, that's always have impairing the other's capacity to act in the world to manifest their projects and to do. And so yeah, I think verbal and emotional violence are very brought up in here a minute. And I made me think about this project I was part of years ago, when we were working with young Haitian children in the Cambridge public schools. These are kids who, you know, were refugees here, and some of them had come from villages where they had never seen a clock, or a watch or toilet, got on a plane landed in the middle of an American city, Cambridge. And we're adapting to life here. And in their school, they were just the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy. I mean, they didn't speak English. Well, they smell they were said to be carrying AIDS. And in the course of having storytellers work with them, and having them draw images of their, the home that they remembered these images, and the stories that they told about them, became the bridge where first other teachers, and then even other students, like heard their stories and began to look at them in a new way. And just to go briefly, I mean, by the end of the project, they decided to take these images, and put them on to note cards, again, with the help of an artist, and sell them to raise money for an Eye Clinic in Haiti. So I,

you know, this is like a really like selling notecards, whatever. But what it was was the chance for them to manifest their own feelings and concerns and take care of their own community when it was being really it's so fragile. And I saw it as a beautiful example of young people gaining the capacity to take agency in relation to themselves and their community through an art making project. So that's an example to, and I'm sure that people here have many others. And time is short, but maybe we...I don't know. Madeline should be here. A couple of other examples.

Madeline McGirk 1:03:33

Yeah, so we have about five minutes until the end of the session. So if anyone wants to quickly contribute some stories about some of the work that they've done, and just share that so we can get a feel for what experience and what projects have happened from people on the call. And briefly, that would be very welcome. Victoria, you're up.

Victoria 1:03:56

Okay. Thank you, everybody. It's, it's just been fascinating. It felt like what I needed this morning to get my mind back into the right kind of gear. I'm very interested by the point that Cynthia made about how we reach beneath the defenses of others, particularly in the times we live in at the moment. And I suppose my work has always been about acknowledging the power of children, particularly young children, when you take them out of context that we're used to seeing them in. And so my work around publishing books that are by children, for children with children, and I've always found it fascinating that when children present their ideas on a topic that normally is dealt with by adults or in a way that's surprisingly presented will be in any art form, and how it can go under the defenses of the audience and allow adults to really understand things in a different way. And I think it's teaching artists, that's a very important part of our work is to bring those voices of children and young people out of the spaces where they're normally contained. I'll put up a link to kids publishing because I think there's some lovely examples in that canon of work. So for instance, under fives, and talking about gender violence from an under five perspective is just a really lovely, very different way of thinking about it. And, yes, they've been some lovely projects over the years, which I think resonate with today's discussion. Thank you.

Madeline McGirk 1:05:47

Before we start to wrap up, is there anyone else who would quickly like to share a project or a piece of work they've been involved in that relates to the theme. Okay. So in that case, I think we will start to wrap up. And before we do, I just want to say a big thank you to everyone for tuning in and participating. And do have a look at the comment section before you sign off. And some people have posted links throughout, which I didn't want to interrupt the conversation to point out, but they are there. And you can go and see some examples of conflict transformation projects that have happened, and that people don't want to necessarily voice but they're there. Also, as I was saying, before, thank you so much for logging on. I know some of you have come to us from various newsletters, and aren't necessarily tuned in to the ITAC collaborative. For those of you who don't know, very briefly, what ITAAC is, it's the International Teaching Artists Collaborative. And as Carmen said, that ITAC vision is a world where every country has artists working in the heart of communities and learning. These artists are continually improving, internationally connected and well supported, and the potential of the practice and its transformative power is visible and valued. At the moment, we have 500 people that we consider members that's on our mailing list from around 40 countries. And all of these people are

working in the participatory arts, and in arts for social justice and arts for social change. So it's the sort of first international collaborative network of people who do what we do in the participatory arts. So if you aren't signed up to that mailing list, do remember to sign up, do email me afterwards and ask you can do it on our website. And we publish regularly, information about Think Tanks, we have one a month hosted on a different topic by different people in different countries each time. And it's just a great way to connect with people who are doing similar kind of work in different countries, and we would never otherwise meet. So I'm really thankful that we're all here. We've fluctuated between around 30 and 40 people today, which is great. And so I would love to keep the conversation going. Normally what I do is starting email chain with everyone. And you can opt out. If that's not your thing, that's fair enough. But just email me afterwards if you're not into it, and I will not involve you. Similarly, I've recorded this session audio only. And I will post that as an archived conversation so that colleagues who couldn't be here today can listen back afterwards. If you have an issue, and you don't want your voice used anything like that, again, email me afterwards. Usually it's up within about 48 hours of the session ending. So with that being said, I just want to again, remind you to look at the comments. There are links coming up all the time. And thank you so much for coming. Thank you very much to our three hosts. I think you'll all agree that it's been fascinating listening, I've jotted down a few phrases, you probably saw me typing as you were talking that I'm going to go away and do some some looking into someone is sharing a screen with us. Is this, Alison? Do you want me?

Woman 3 1:09:26

No, no, I'm sorry about that. I just was adding it. I didn't mean to have to come up.

Madeline McGirk 1:09:30

Oh, no worries.

Woman 3 1:09:33

Sorry about that. Thank you so much.

Madeline McGirk 1:09:35

Thank you. So with that being said, I sort of hate to end this call because I'm really enjoying it. But I think we have to come to a close. So thank you very much to everyone. Thank you to our hosts. And I would encourage you all of you to sign up to our future Think Tanks and join us each month for developed practice and peer to peer learning. So thank you very much.

Cynthia Cohen 1:09:57

Thanks to all of you. It was one with you.

Carmen Oleachea 1:10:00

Bye, Thank you very much.