

DAY 3: MICHALINOS ZEMBYLAS: RECLAIMING HEALING IN EDUCATION

Emotion and Traumatic Conflict (2015). Oxford University Press

1. Emotions and Trauma

Michalinos Zembylas reminds us that traumatic events people live through, such as war, genocides, and terrorist attacks, result in powerful emotions, in particular: fear, grief, anger, shame, resentment, and hatred. He argues:

“Emotions, in this manner, become important components of historical consciousness and ethnohistorical practices in conflicted societies, and they strongly shape collective narratives, identities, and memories. ...It is often these powerful emotions, rather than material interests, that pose the most serious obstacles to peace-building, healing, and reconciliation efforts [the act of making one view compatible with another].” p. 3

When we focus on the role of emotions related to conflict, we see a clearer perspective of the interconnection between collective and individual experiences. We gain insight into ways our emotional experiences continue to live over time inside culture and history. Educational research has paid little attention to how schools encourage and present emotions, particularly in schools located in regions with ongoing conflict. Such attention matters because schools are places of belonging and identification for children. Zembylas explains his experience:

“As someone who has lived for most of his life in a conflicted and divided society that perpetuated animosity [hostility] toward the ‘other,’ I was troubled for years in my attempts to explore how education—which seemed to have an important role in cultivating negative emotions—might contribute to peace-building, healing, and reconciliation.” p. 4

Zembylas grew up in Cyprus during the aftermath of the “Turkish invasion” of 1974, resulting in many thousands of deaths, missing persons, the creation of thousands of refugees, the loss and destruction of property, and ongoing division of Cyprus. He remembers the campaign around the theme *Den Xehno* (meaning, “I don’t forget”) in his elementary school. That campaign (for Greek Cypriots), across schools and communities, had a goal: to “teach the young generation that the Turkish invasion should never be forgotten, and that Greek Cypriots should be ready, if necessary, to fight and liberate our occupied land” p. 4). The portrait of the Turkish communities (who occupied part of Cyprus after the invasion) appeared cruel and barbarian. In his world as a child, Zembylas recalls that the campaign’s daily message reminded him that “we were the victims who suffered tremendous trauma and loss: *they* were the ones who committed unspeakable atrocities” to his community. He says:

“The emotions associated with these representations have become important components of Greek Cypriot historical consciousness and educational practice, and over the years they have strongly shaped collective narratives, identities, and memories about ‘us’ (Greek Cypriots) and ‘them’ (Turkish Cypriots).” p. 4

In order to understand the “entanglement” of emotions, memories, and a future of peace education, Zembylas poses the following critical questions (p. 5):

- “Do the emotional responses of students and teachers to traumatic conflict constitute [be part of] insurmountable obstacles in peace education efforts?”
- How do these narratives shape the emotions of ethnic identity and collective memory?
- What can education do to transform the powerful influence of such narratives and emotions?
- Can peace education efforts that foreground (make prominent) emotions in critical ways become a productive pedagogical intervention in conflicted societies?

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes

As a teacher, what do you think of these questions Zembylas poses?

Can you comment on any of them from your own experience as Teacher?

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
MAKING CONNECTIONS
POSING QUESTIONS

2. Critical Emotional Praxis (practice and reflection)

Emtional Geographies

Zembylas argues that social and political institutions, such as schools, take up (appropriate) emotions of traumatic events to justify collective narratives about the victims (“us”) and the perpetrators (“them” – those who commit immoral action). Emotions, such as fear, become concrete and passed down to the students; an “evil other” exists. Fear, hatred and resentment establish a border between “us” and “them,” and between “similar” and “different.” Thus it becomes easier for us to “dehumanized them” (the evil) because they are constructed in our consciousness as a danger to existence. Zembylas argues:

“While the emotions of trauma are very real, and a very devastating feature of life in conflict and post conflict societies, I argue that educators can work toward peace-building, healing, and reconciliation through devising critical pedagogies that do not remain stuck in trauma or stay too firmly grounded in such pairings as oppressor/oppressed, master/slave, and power/freedom.” p. 6

He presents the idea of “critical emotional praxis,” a process of developing and sustaining pedagogies that focus on *critical* peace education in schools. Such an approach can build insights into teaching and for learning about traumatic conflict. Zembylas has studied the Cyprus conflict to gain such insights. He states that emotions need to be understood as multidimensional (thinking, feeling, acting) “complexes” that are both cultural and individual. These complexes (networks) of emotions arise in the interaction between people.

Emotional Geographies

In his argument, Zembylas draws upon the study of “Emotional Geographies,” which introduces different networks of emotions, arising from different realities: historical and political, physical, social

and cultural, as well as individual realities. For example, a physical place can ‘hold’ particular emotions and memories related to conflict for an individual or community. Or, historical events may be remembered with much emotion. Or, emotions can heighten responses to cultural practices. Considering Emotional Geographies helps us understand how emotions exist in all parts of life, and inside specific settings, such as schools, hospitals, workplaces. In schools, for instance, teacher and student discourses (talk, communication), based on negative emotions, can hurt and exclude other students.

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

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How might school leaders develop and sustain peace-building

pedagogies that focus on student and community emotions around traumatic events?

How are Emotional Geographies similar to Clyde Hertzman’s concept of Social Geographies? How might emotions related to trauma live inside Hertzman’s Social Environments? For example: the family? the community? the nation?

3. Education and Conflict

Healing and Reconciliation

The study of Education and Conflict (another area of study) explores the relationship between situations of conflict and education, how each impacts the other. “Through loss of lives and destruction of property, violent conflict directly influences the access of children to safe schools and creates economic and social situations that deprive children of educational opportunities” (p. 25). Education can influence conflict situations “either by contributing to the violence or working against it.” A negative influence, for example, may be displaying resentment toward others or by promoting social conditions that perpetuate violence and conflict. But, education can also become a stimulus for peace, healing and reconciliation when it teaches “tolerance, respect, compassion, and nonviolence” (p. 25). Here, curriculum can promote peace, healing, resilience, and global citizenship in the face of conflict in the surrounding environments.

Of course, education cannot solve a conflict on its own. Zembylas argues, however, what teachers can do:

I argue...that teachers and students need to develop a critical understanding of emotion and trauma in conflict situations. Such an understanding will provide a compelling basis for a critical pedagogical exploration of traumatic conflict and its implications—an understanding that pays attention to emotions and is critical enough to develop pedagogical theories and practices that contribute to healing, and reconciliation. Such critical understandings of reactions to conflict must also take into consideration the emotional scars and dilemmas of those experiencing traumatic conflict, either as primary or secondary witnesses. p. 26

Zembylas defines trauma as: “the effects of unthinkable catastrophic events that, when witnessed, evoke painful feelings and disrupt one’s understanding of how the world works.” Such experience ruptures normal habits. The emotions around trauma are difficult to talk about. He argues it is critical for teachers and students to talk about emotions that both individuals and large groups carry (school or community), and to dialogue around personal grief and the collective trauma. Here it is important to analyze the consequences of creating “us-and-them” situations where hate and resentment take over.

Healing and Reconciliation

Healing is related to recovery from an overwhelming traumatic experience. Reconciliation is a political process related to peace, post-traumatic reconstruction, and the end of hostility. Healing and reconciliation are connected; neglecting the healing of trauma may put reconciliation at risk. Social healings are important to the immediacy of recovery, whereas reconciliation may come later, perhaps years later as a political process. Zembylas argues that in either case, the line between individual and social (political) healing is blurry. He argues that it is important to consider how victims feel and recover alongside social and political reconstruction.

Healing can be a long process that happens in stages. First, Zembylas writes, there needs to be a safe environment. “Security includes basic healthcare needs, food, a safe refuge, and a network that can provide emotional and practical support.” Second, there needs to be remembrance and mourning: “to tell stories, confront and uncover difficult questions and recreate some meaningful explanations for the traumatic event.” Third, there needs to be reconnection with ordinary life. Education plays a key role here by “helping younger generations re-humanize broken relations, work against violence, rebuild trust, and restore hope” (p. 30-31).

****Re reading & Taking Notes***

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.

Zembylas writes about emotion and traumatic conflict. How might some of his ideas contribute to situations such as the trauma of sudden drought or persistent poverty?

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
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4. Critical Peace Education

“The goals of Critical Peace Education relate to issues around structural inequalities. It aims to promote and develop a sense of “transformative agency” (action or intervention) that leads to peace-building. The goal of critical peace education is to empower young people to engage in practice and activism that increase societal equity and justice, which in turn, foster greater peace. ... Hence, the transformation of unjust societal structures addresses conflict, just as the reduction of destructive forms of conflict fostered through critical peace education contributes to dismantling unjust structures and eliminating inequities.” p. 43

Zembylas argues, however, that it is important to question assumptions we take for granted about peace and peace education. He insists that part of the inquiry into these assumptions means questioning

“structures of feelings” that prevent peace building. As well, he recommends that the inquiry dig into the “entanglement between emotion and traumatic conflicts” (p. 43). What he is saying here is that critical attention to emotions should intersect with peace education so that emotions are considered (at the forefront) at individual and social levels.

Such critical attention to emotions (in reflection and practice) offers spaces for healing in schools, and for “the flow of alternative ideas.” Students and teachers can consider similarities they have with those who they have called the enemy. Critical peace education and critical pedagogy bring in multiple perspectives and stories. We learn about the experiences of others to form bonds of “common humanity and common suffering.”

“The aim is not only to understand what emotions of trauma *do* in everyday school life but also to invent new interpretive approaches and practices of relating with others—critical pedagogies that do not fossilize emotional injury but *move forward*. The richness and complexity of emotional aspects of critical peace education and critical pedagogy call for more refined and more varied theories, methodologies, and practices.” p. 46.

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.

We have studied critical pedagogy through reading the work of Paulo Freire. What do you think that Michalino

Zembylas adds to Freire’s work by bringing attention to emotions, “structures of feelings?” What would critical peace education mean to leadership in education? How might it become part of curriculum?

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