

# THINKING

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# Classroom

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- ▶ **Thinking aloud**
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A young girl with long black hair and bangs is smiling warmly at the camera. She is holding a globe of the United States, which is the central focus of the lower half of the cover. The globe shows the outlines of the states and is labeled with 'United States', 'Canada', 'Mexico', 'Gulf of Mexico', and 'Caribbean Sea'. The background is a classroom setting with colorful educational posters on the wall, including one of a bear and another with numbers.

# Cultural Awareness

## Democracy in a Globalized World: Children's Arts Exchange from a School/University Partnership

In 2001 and 2003 the whole world watched American foreign policy lead to the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Children were, and continue to be, bombarded daily with television news images of bombings and destruction and the inflammatory rhetoric of a "war on terror." Through such events, what is a teacher supposed to tell her students? How can such events be interpreted and explained so as to resist future repetition of the tragedy of war?

With these concerns in mind the LAWWW (Learning and the World We Want) peace conference of 2003 sought to find a way to connect with war-torn countries and to invite children from those countries to be a part of the conference. The authors of this paper developed the idea of an art exhibit based on the theme "The World We Want" with children's drawings from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Canada. The insight allowed the sincere, honest, and hopeful visions of children from these three countries to be connected and shared in one exhibit. The project attracted media attention, with articles in local newspapers and coverage on local TV stations. The artwork stimulated for teachers, university professors, and children questions about democracy, meaningful learning, and the role of education in society.

Educational spaces are critical for understanding, discussing, and developing a sense of democracy wherein children see themselves as active agents. It is the responsibility of schools to create those spaces, to involve children and their communities, to involve even young children in taking action, to transcend boundaries created by language and political difference.

We need to create spaces in schools through which children might learn to see differently, hear the voices of others, connect with the lives of others with different experiences, and collaboratively shape a new vision of the world. They/we cannot do this without knowledge of the other. Schools are locations where, with guidance and structural support provided by teachers, children can be enabled to connect with others throughout the world in a purposeful way. Through a range of communicative tools (mail, hand delivery, electronic media, telephone, video, travel) children can interact with each other in ways that break down barriers created by borders and by fear of difference in language, appearance, and belief systems. Schools are places for children to share, explore difference, support each others' learning, grow, and develop understandings in a community that reaches out to other children around the world.

### Education for global literacy

Democracy as understood by Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley and Goodlad (2004), demands a special kind of literacy that goes beyond merely comprehending words on a page or adding up columns of figures. It requires a literacy that includes such skills as critical inquiry; knowing how to ask questions and what kinds of questions need to be asked in a given circumstance; knowing how to evaluate the legitimacy and accuracy of an argument and the data that accompany it, to view issues from a variety of perspectives, and to evaluate the implications of a given text, read between the lines, and recognize and understand the unstated, the omitted, the subtext (pp. 8–9).

Goodlad and his colleagues suggest that it is critical to reassert the centrality of preparation for democratic citizenship as the foremost mission of public schooling, but also to engage others (politicians, journalists, parents, sociologists) in ongoing collaborative processes of study, evaluation, and discussion. If this process is to involve all learners, it must provide spaces and places for all voices to be heard, for connections to be made, and for learning to occur in spaces and places not previously imagined, not contained within classroom walls.

### **Theoretical perspectives and narrative**

This paper draws on three theoretical perspectives to frame the analysis: (1) social-movement learning; (2) democratic education for global citizenship; and (3) situated learning.

(1) Social movements are based on social action where new knowledge, including world views, ideologies, religions, and scientific theories, originates (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). Social-movement learning provides the tools to act on the world and in the world. Social movements have been reported as providing powerful learning for the participants, including learning as a democratic right (learning by all) and learning from the world (epistemological dimension). Social-movement learning is in contrast to the knowledge transmission model in which schooling is a tool of the system, offering one package for all, and education is about the world (Freire, 1982).

(2) Goodlad and his colleagues comment that “schooling as reading, writing, and a little arithmetic and science . . . [has] universal appeal: the same model would serve a democracy and dictatorship equally well” (Goodlad, et al., 2004, p. 55). However, they suggest that schools have a moral responsibility not just for what they teach but how they teach. They say that too much of schooling seems focused on creating “a nation of well prepared takers of standardized tests” (ibid.). The right of “liberty and justice for all” is not a given; democracy has to be continually worked at, refined, and fought for, even in modern states that have built their prosperity on the democratic ideal. Schools are the institutions of society that must equip children as citizens with

knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to sustain democratic societies.

(3) Situated learning is seen as “an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (ibid., p. 31). In schools, situated learning takes place within a social milieu where the community of practice understands knowledge based on “the power to renegotiate the meaning of the past and future in constructing the meaning of present circumstances” (ibid., p. 34). Within this research we have recognized the power of the situated social learning within authentic communities of practice where university-school partnership develops a sense of education that connects the local personal knowledge of themes such as the one we are going to expand upon, “The World We Want,” to collective expressions of children’s understandings (Hopper & Sandford, 2004). This local/global dimension to learning (Wenger, 1998) connects to Goodlad’s hope for a democratic education as an ongoing struggle to be understood, realized, and sustained.

The narrative structure, including details of lived experience, is a valuable tool in the search for self and also in discovering the self in the other and the other in the self. As Smith (2006) notes, “whenever I think of myself, I at the same time think of you, because you are part of me and vice versa” (p. 126). Narrative enables us to share the world of the other and connect with our own world. The narrative that follows, our narrative, suggests the possibility and potential for sharing worlds and in so doing creating empathy and transcending borders and language through exchanged artwork and vision.

### **A story of democratic education – children’s global artwork**

This narrative tells of a democratic project intended to engage students with each other around the world, to help them gain a greater depth and breadth of understanding of others who live in our world and the conditions in which they exist, to enable children to make connections in personal and caring ways. In February 2003, in the wake of the U.S.-led “war on terrorism,” Budd Hall (Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Victoria, Canada) invited colleagues to his home to talk, most seriously, about ways we could engage in projects to promote

peace and education in the world. These projects would then be featured at the Learning and the World We Want conference to be held in Victoria in November of 2003. We suggested connecting local schools to the conference with a curricular-based idea. Artwork was proposed as the medium through which children in local schools could connect with children in Iraq and Afghanistan, using the theme "The World We Want" as a starting point.

Four schools in the Victoria school district were approached in May 2003 to see if they were interested in developing an art exhibit in collaboration with schools in Iraq and Afghanistan. In September of that year, these four schools joined the artwork project and committed to enabling their students, with a range of ages, to create a variety of art pieces based on the theme "The World I (We) Want." Many teachers in each of the schools enthusiastically embraced the idea of using children's artwork to communicate with the international conference delegates, and their enthusiasm was apparent as they worked with their students. Each teacher chose to initiate the project with his or her students in different ways, but all began with discussions about the state of the world for children in different parts of the world and helped their students to recognize their good fortune. They located Iraq and Afghanistan on maps, shared experiences, and brought in guests to talk with their students. These discussions inspired the students to create their artwork using a variety of media in a variety of forms such as narrative illustrations, symbolic representations, and collages. All of the students' artwork was displayed in some way around their schools, but 10 pieces of art were selected from each school by the teachers themselves to represent a range of ideas and understandings. The students whose artwork was selected were invited to present their work at the conference, and many of them chose to attend the conference to show their work in person.

Through his extensive work in international education, Budd Hall was able to provide contacts in Suleimaniyah Province of Kurdistan-Iraq and in Kabul, Afghanistan, who agreed to help children from schools in these two areas express their ideas about the world they wanted to see.

The artwork that was received from Iraq came from a children's centre in the

**Figure 1:** Two examples of Canadian children's artwork



*Co-operation: Different cultures or countries need to cooperate in areas like eliminating war or racism.*

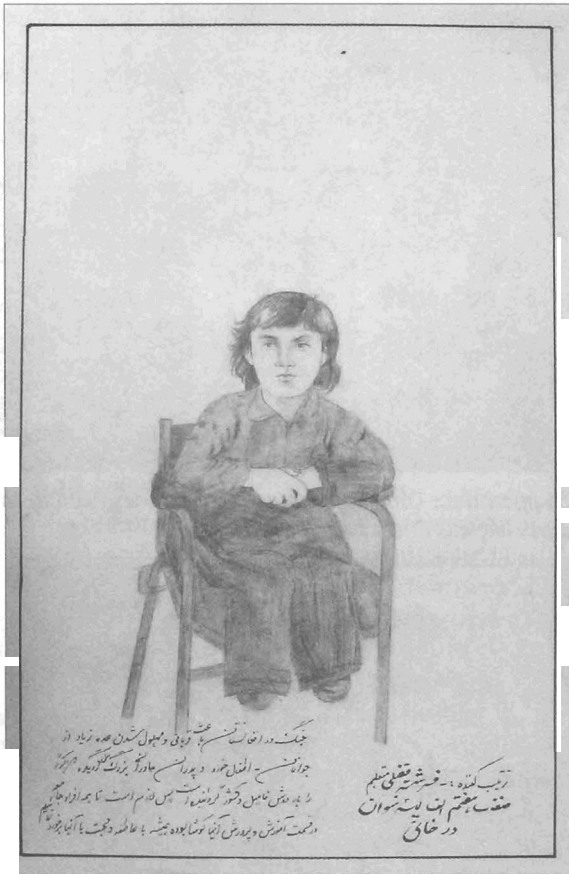


*Be a team if you want to work together. Be a team and be happy. That is my wish for peace.*

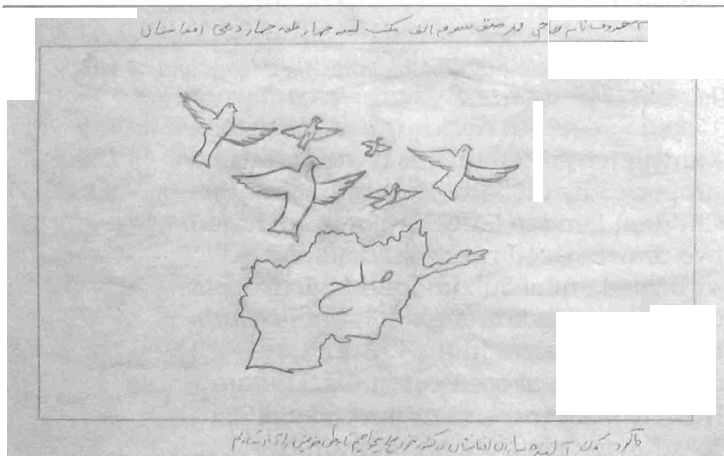
Kurdish territories, and its creation was supported by the local Kurdistan Save the Children Fund in Suleimaniyah. Forty-two drawings, 40 cm by 60 cm, were smuggled out of Suleimaniyah via Iran and transported through London because the postal services in the Kurdistan region of Iraq had been cut off by Saddam Hussein's government at the end of 1991. The only possibilities of communicating with the outside world for people in this region have been by fax, telephone, Internet, or through the assistance of people traveling. Without the assistance of many people willing to help local teachers to find art supplies, enable the children to create their artwork, and then find creative ways to move the art from Iraq to Canada, these connections would not have been possible.

Children and their teachers in Afghanistan faced different difficulties. The local

**Figure 2:** Two examples of Afghan children's artwork



*Landmines have caused death and dismemberment to many children.*



*Peace. We are future children of Afghanistan, we want peace in our country so we can fix up our country.*

schools in Kabul have almost no supplies and relied on others to provide them. As one of the volunteer coordinators commented,

*There are so many dire needs, such as no roof over the classroom (November is cold and rainy there too!), children coming to school hungry and leaving hungry. Parents, mostly mothers, begging in the streets. So, all these things are distractions from art. Of course, once we find our way into art, then the energy and strength that come from that experience are immense and help us overcome so many dire things. The challenge of this project might be just that: lifting teachers and pupils into art to uplift their hearts.*

A commander of Camp Julien, the Canadian Armed Forces command post in Kabul, scoured the base for materials to give to the children so that they might create artwork to send to Canada. He and his troops located pads of paper, pencils and pens that they delivered to the children<sup>1</sup>. Another of the volunteers for this project was an Afghan elementary teacher who left Afghanistan as a refugee in 1980 and had recently returned to Kabul from North America; he was the local coordinator and ongoing liaison for the project. Through these efforts and encouragement, the children were able to produce 40 pieces of art to send to Canada.

Transportation of the artwork from Kabul to Canada posed considerable problems for the Afghan teachers and children as well. Again with the assistance of the Canadian Armed Forces, an arrangement was made to send the work back to a military base, Trenton in Ontario, from where it was transported to Victoria. The artwork from Kabul, as well as the artwork from Suleimaniyah, arrived only days before the Learning and the World We Want Conference in November 2003, where it joined the artwork of the local Victoria students. All 120 pieces of art were professionally mounted and prominently displayed at the conference, thus interweaving the stories and visions of three international regions in a visual display. The display garnered overwhelming interest and support from the conference participants, as shown by the comments they wrote: "Dear Children

<sup>1</sup> The Canadian contribution to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is known as Operation ATHENA. With about 1,900 personnel deploying in each rotation, the Canadian contingent is the largest in ISAF. Canadian soldiers conduct regular patrol missions in the Canadian area of responsibility. In addition, they are involved in a number of projects, such as digging wells and repairing buildings, to help improve the quality of life of the people in their area. Of the 1,900 troops deployed on Operation ATHENA, about 1,700 are deployed in Kabul.

of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Canada: Your artwork is so beautiful. It made my heart beat stronger. We adults will do our best to teach peaceful, respectful ways of solving disagreements." Others wrote: "These images are poignant and powerful—you touch our hearts across cultural boundaries"; "I am touched and exhilarated by your wonderful work. It is strange that art is a universal language"; "Thank you for bringing these drawings here. They are an eye opener to the privileged children and adults of the North American World. And the unvarnished expression of hope—or sadness—is so moving."

Support was also expressed by the educational and academic communities. One teacher wrote: "This has been a very powerful experience. Being here with my students has encouraged us to continue to imagine and work towards a positive future." A community member was moved to write to the young artists:

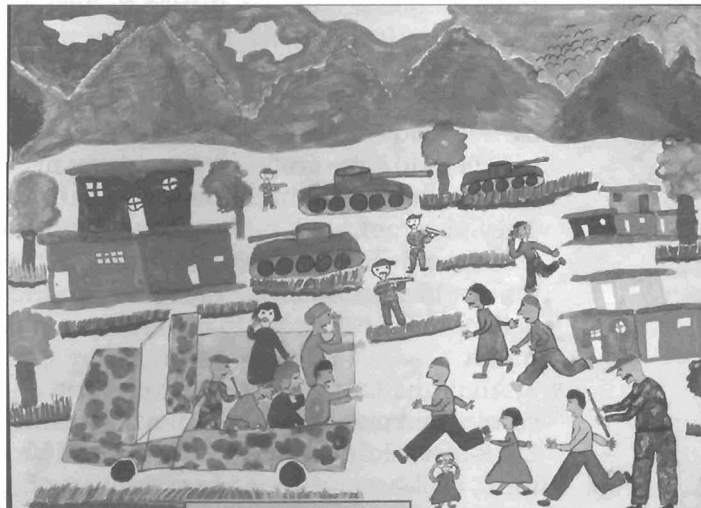
*Hi kids—I am writing this from a big fancy hall, marble, wood, glass. I am a security guard. In Canada security guards do not carry guns, clubs, we just use words. In Canada we have to argue with our kids to get them to eat, very hard for you to believe is it not? I was in the Canadian Navy, my own father died in World War II, but Canada has not seen a war in a very long time on her own shores. Afghanistan is about the size of one of our provinces and we have eleven of them now. Afghanistan could probably fit in Lake Superior. Such a small country for such big problems, maybe I hope the world will get Afghanistan back, better than ever. I believe education is the key and hands across and around the world in peace. Our soldiers are in Afghanistan to help with peace. We hope they come home soon.*

The artwork display caught the attention of local media and of the internationally renowned children's advocate and entertainer Raffi. The recognition of the importance of the children's work as a medium to speak to the world has inspired continued showings of the work in diverse community forums, financial support from Raffi's Troubadour Foundation, and further international development of the artwork project.

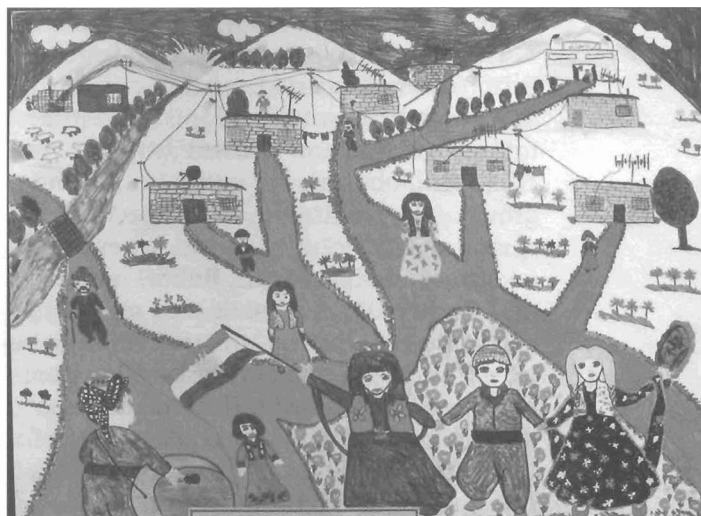
### Another chapter in the story

The initial story, narrated above, was powerful in the telling, for the artists, the viewers, the conference organizers, and participants. Canadian children embraced the project and became presenters

**Figure 3:** Two examples of Iraqi children's artwork



*The inhuman act of "The Anfal Campaign" done by the Baath Regime against the Kurds in my country.*



*Celebrating freedom in my country.*

at the conference, drawing in their families and friends, connecting with international delegates. The students, dressed formally, stood by their drawings explaining the ideas behind their art, sharing with delegates their commitment to peace and to care for the other.

The story did not end with the conference, however, and its ability to create so many sequels is perhaps the most powerful aspect of this story. The situated learning of the project strengthened already formed communities and spawned new communities. Within the local and global community of practice (Wenger, 1998) forming around the arts project, new relationships and practices evolved. One immediate sequel was that the funding provided by the Troubadour Foundation enabled a catalogue of the artwork

to be created, with the text translated into three languages, to be returned to the children of Iraq and Afghanistan as part of the ongoing dialogue of the story. The catalogue was sent back to Afghanistan by a local group of firefighters who were traveling to take firefighting equipment and knowledge to the Afghan people. They also took back more art supplies and created a documentary of their experience (to be aired on national TV), of which the delivery of the artwork to the children was a part.

All of the original artwork has been catalogued and stored by an art educator, Dr. Robert Dalton, at the University of Victoria, and is maintained as a significant art collection. The collection has recently been supplemented by 150 additional pieces of art returned by the firefighters from Afghanistan.

Through further funding, a website (<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/site/Lawwwart/lawwwart.htm>) was developed and maintained and has now become <http://www.childrenglobalarts.ca/> as the project has grown. Like a rhizome, the project has spread throughout the world, where connections in South Africa, Belize, India, and Chile are being made. Art supplies are being sent by any means available between ourselves and the destination communities, so that more children can use the medium of art to share their vision for the world they want to see. The artwork has given voice to many communities that previously were silent, because of location, language, financial situation, or ideology. We are recognizing that the arts, including visual art, music, drama, and creative movement, are powerful media that transcend boundaries of language. The arts are also powerful expressions of our beliefs, our hopes, and our visions. These art forms give voice to the passion and the pain that is felt, together and apart, and allows us to connect through the emotions expressed artistically.

The invitation for participation in this artwork project, which has been widely sent to communities around the world, has created recognition that Canadians are people who have interest in and compassion for the lives of others. The response has instilled a hope that there is a way to connect with even very remote communities, and to share a vision for a democracy that truly serves all the people

and enables them all to be heard and recognized. A DVD has been created to capture the story visually, enabling it to be shared widely. The intent is that the DVD will provide inspiration for teachers and community leaders to consider alternative ways to learn, to connect, to share ideas, and to address difference through understanding rather than conflict. The DVD offers alternative forms for addressing curriculum, both critiquing and changing current conceptions of "curriculum" that are static and entrenched, and reminds us all of the power of visual media and the arts for transcending language barriers. The DVD can be obtained from the project website <http://www.childrenglobalarts.ca/> as video clips or as a DVD that can be sent for minimal charge.

### **The story: Chapter three**

An institute was offered in the summer of 2005, enabling participants to spend a week with colleagues to engage in creative, purposeful classroom projects; address the urgency for educators to respond to our current world; develop a passion for social action; build international connections; sustain peaceful understandings; honor children's rights; and inspire democratic ideals in global learning. This professional development institute built on "The World We Want" project and conference that attracted children's artwork from Canada, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The World Peace Forum, (<http://www.peace.ca/worldpeaceforumvancouver.htm>), a worldwide peace movement "to help consolidate the capacity necessary for communication, coordination, and action on a global scale to stop war and end global militarism" to be held in Vancouver, B.C., in June 2006, will enable participants to continue developing and sharing their classroom initiatives for an ideal democracy.

### **Cultural identity**

The most important undertaking for schools, suggests Lanik (2002), is no longer to promote tolerance toward other cultures, but rather to help young people find their cultural identity while participating in education. Thus the highest priority of intercultural learning should be the acquisition of cultural maturity, the ability to understand the world of the *self* but also of the *other*. All students "should be able to find themselves in the faces of

other students” and in the faces of their teachers, as well as be reflected in the curriculum (Tatum, 2000, p. 22). School projects should assist students to make connections that recognize people’s similarities and to reduce prejudice caused by ignorance and fear. Instead of continuing to sort out cultural differences, adopting an approach which assumes that culture is relational and constantly created anew can open possibilities for a more connected and culture-based curriculum (Hermes, 1999, p. 391).

Multiculturalism should not be an isolated song and dance, as so often presented in many classrooms, but an individual and social quest into the diverse strands of a person’s life, today and yesterday; through thoughtful reflection on the meanings of our everyday lives we can better understand what it means to be human (Hansen, 2005). Understanding of the *other* cannot be reduced to sharing ethnic foods and dressing up in traditional costume; these types of activities only serve to trivialize and disguise the existence of myriad ways of being and believing in the world. Smith (2006) writes, “the paradigmatics of Western consciousness are completely self-enclosed, blind and deaf to all voices outside of their own logics and self-understandings” (p. 7). He points to a need for a different kind of partnership within a newly emerging global community, a greater attendance to the “underside of modernity” (p. 8). This attention demands that the “undiluted suffering of those making the freedom of Europe/America possible has to be brought into the centre of deliberations regarding human futures” (p. 8).

“Let us hear the real story,” demands Smith, “then let us decide if these [material] things are really what is needed to live decent human lives” (p. 8). He suggests that freedom is understood differently by those who possess it and those who do not; those of us who live in “freedom” are “conditioned to be deluded about its essential qualities.” He calls for a “new logic of freedom, not freedom whose very source is money,” not an illusion of freedom that is regulated by media. What is needed is for educators to seek sources for a “new kind of public knowledge that can genuinely provide insight... so that a new curricular narrative may be woven” (p. 9). We need to realize the gifts of the young,

to recognize their wisdom and listen to their voices. Through this Global Arts project, the real story has begun to be told by the children themselves; it has begun to be shared, transcending barriers of language and ideology. The voices and visuals created and collected are what transform the curriculum and transform our lives. As educators we must be committed to sharing stories and showing people’s lives, not reproducing traditional forms of Eurocentric history that serve to cover up and ignore the stories of the *other*.

Drawing on Wenger’s (1998) notions of situated learning, teachers participating in the Global Arts project have been encouraged to make a different, less prescriptive (reified) reading of the curriculum, enabling curriculum documents to be seen as guides that provide avenues for teachers to explore opportunities with their students. The British Columbia art curricula guide teachers in this way: “The fine arts are important to our understanding of society, culture, and history, and are essential to the development of individual potential, social responsibility, and cultural awareness. The fine arts are expressed in and influenced by personal contexts (e.g., gender, age, life experience, beliefs, values), social and cultural contexts (e.g., ethnicity, religion, socio-economics, evolving technologies), and historical and political contexts... An understanding of the fine arts fosters respect for and appreciation of the diverse cultural heritages and values within Canada and around the world” (BCED, 1998a). In situated learning terms, this project allowed the meaning of the artwork to emerge as Canadian children shared their visions with children from Iraq and Afghanistan. Students need to be helped to become Canadian citizens and citizens of the world, as recognized in social studies curricula where the overarching goal is to develop thoughtful, responsible, active citizens who are able to acquire the requisite information to consider multiple perspectives and to make reasoned judgments. Social studies curricula emphasize developing understanding, making connections, and applying knowledge from multiple perspectives (e.g., time, place, culture, values), practicing active citizenship, and using critical, reflective thinking (BCED, 1998b). The art exhibit has already been used by teachers to connect



Canadian children to the perspectives of children in war-torn countries, thus illustrating powerfully the basic human needs, including the need for child protection and human rights, as well as the effect of war on the environment.

This Global Arts project, and other projects with these goals, can help children connect in a shared vision of our future world most closely connected to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) priorities of basic human needs—health and education, the environment, gender equality, child protection and basic human rights. The children's art also reveals startling differences between and among us—horrors and injustices that will help all children understand the plight of others, enabling them to work towards a more equitable and peaceful world. The Children's Global Arts project provides a forum where children's voices can be heard and can make an impact on the future of the world. To quote the Earth Charter (Earth Charter, 2005),

*We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.*

In is our hope that this Global Arts project will enable children in Canadian schools to make meaningful connections to the ideals of the Earth Charter, and to connect as one human family to children and communities in other countries, where the *other* will then seem less strange and more connected in shared visions of peace, democracy, and freedom.

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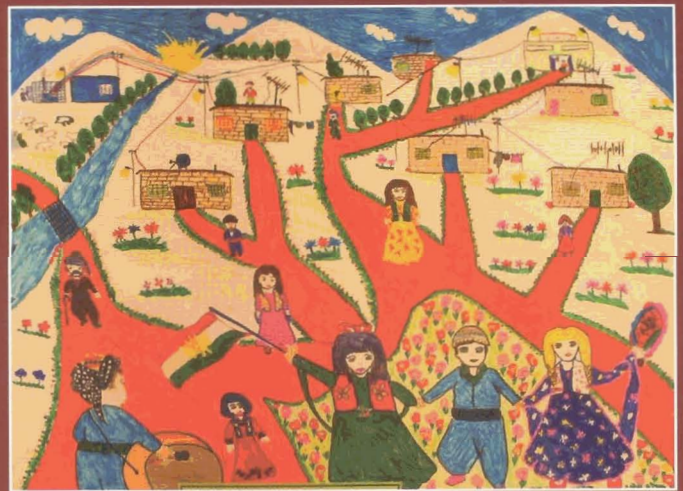
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Children's artwork from Iraq, Canada, and Afghanistan. See the article by Kathy Sandford and Tim Hopper at p. 3.