

ALARA Conference 2015
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**Dancing in Nazareth: a case for real
knowledge**

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Some key issues for learning and research

- To ask and answer 'sociological' questions
- To go beyond surface level understandings of ordinary life
- To understand our social lives in a new way
- To gather factual, not speculative evidence before coming to conclusions
- To ask developmental questions about change and social processes

Some key issues and themes

- Social dislocation and economic disruption is rife
- Poverty is still with us locally and globally
- Youth is often marginalised and alienated
- A digitalised world represents a danger as well as an opportunity
- Communities have been dispossessed
- Self-identity and personal viability is crucial

Dancing in Nazareth: a case study by Reem Shamshoum

- Action research at Mawwal Centre of the Arts, Nazareth
- 4 research questions:
 - how can dance transform the lives of young people?
 - what is it like to be a dancer if your culture demands a different identity?
 - how to resolve the conflict between personal desire and social conformism?
 - how do biographical experiences impact with gender, class, ethnicity and identity?

What happened in the Nazareth project?

- Contact with the 'other' to overcome social segregation and isolation
- Reciprocity and inclusion to contest lost unity
- Seeking the connections between Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Maronites, Copts, Anglicans, Baptists and Muslims-all of whom inhabit Nazareth
- Identity through the expressive arts of dance and drama
- Finding a voice

The process of research and learning to change at Mawwal, Nazareth

- Working with different groups and individuals
- Integration between different 'others'
- Socialisation and re-defining the self
- Combatting prejudice and stereotyping
- Creating belonging and group identity
- Creating a Mawwal identity around harmony and discipline
- Transformations: personal; collective; communal; social; generational and familial.

Lessons learned

- Learning can be creative through dance/drama-performance and is liberating
- Individual and group experiences can shape biographies
- Alternative identities are available through personal viability
- Thinking, feeling and personal creativity through participation is important
- Understanding of who we are and might yet be is possible

Lessons learned cont...

- Really useful knowledge can be re-invented in many contexts
- Personal and biographical encounters are critically important for learning
- Collaborative and practitioner learning helps us learn for a social purpose
- The critical 'self' as learner needs the challenge of engagement
- The active self and mind is the way to higher cognitive performance

Are there key issues not yet addressed?

- Digitalisation offers threats and opportunities as we face the intersecting of real and virtual worlds
- Modernisation depends upon scientific knowledge being made accountable and publicly understood
- Social dislocation following on from war and terrorism threatens social stability and cohesion
- Climate change threatens global stability with the onset of world scale mass migrations

In conclusion

- Conventional universities and schools have so far failed the test of finding solutions to the issues
- We need a “grassroots university of life” for sustainable learning for all
- We need a new curriculum which focusses on real learning needs and making a difference; we need to go where traditional teachers do not go
- Dancing in Nazareth is one project which worked for unity and progressive change through learning