

Visual Ethnography in Three Preschools in Kuwait (Middle East)

by

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## ABSTRACT

To understand the visual culture and art education practices within three ideologically distinct kindergartens, I employed an interdisciplinary approach, utilizing tools from the fields of art, education, anthropology, literary theory, visual studies and critical social theory. Each of the three schools was considered to be the “best” of its kind for the community in which it resided; TBS was the original bilingual school, and the most *Westernized*. It was set in the heart of a major city. The second school, OBS, operated from an *Islamic* framework located in an under-developed small transitioning suburb; and the last school, NBS, was situated in Al-Jahra, an “outlying area” populated by those labeled as *bedouins* (Longva, 2006).

The participants’ attitudes towards art education unfolded as I analyzed my visual observations of the participants’ daily practices. I have produced a counter-hegemonic visual narrative by negotiating my many subjectivities and methods to gain new knowledge and insights. This approach has provided a holistic understanding of the environment in each site, in which attitudes and practices relating to art education have been acquired by the community.

Operating from three different educational paradigms, each school applied a different approach to art education. The more *Westernized* school viewed art as an individual act which promoted creativity and expression. In the *Islamic* school art was viewed as an activity that required patterning (Stokrocki, 1986), and that the child needed to be guided and exposed to the appropriate images to follow. In the *bedouin* school, drawing activities were viewed as an opportunity for representing one’s individual story as well as a skill for emergent literacy.



## DEDICATION

To the three most important men in my life:

This work is dedicated to the man, who showed me the path of knowledge,

my beloved Grandfather.

And to the one who cultivated passion within me,

my Father.

And finally, to the man who walked with me through both paths,

my Husband.

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## Chapter 1. Situating the Journey

In this first chapter there are three main parts, in the first section I will inform the reader about the bigger picture in which the research has taken place. This will be a walk through the development that Kuwait went through from its beginning until today. The next section will be on the development of art education in schools, and a brief description of Islamic Aesthetics. The final part will be an auto-ethnographic *collage*, a synthesis of the problem that has emerged in Kuwait.

### The Site



*Figure 1.* Kuwait City before the oil.

Retrieved from

<http://www.macalester.edu/courses/geog261/kuwait%20city%20changes/Culture.html>

I would like to situate the research location and culture in which this research takes place- 21<sup>st</sup> century Kuwait. Having this background will allow



readers to better understand how a small fishing village was transformed within fifty years into a globalized oil producing rich country.



*Figure 2.* This is an image from ([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/b7/Arabian\\_Peninsula\\_dust\\_SeaWiFS.jpg/657px-Arabian\\_Peninsula\\_dust\\_SeaWiFS.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/b7/Arabian_Peninsula_dust_SeaWiFS.jpg/657px-Arabian_Peninsula_dust_SeaWiFS.jpg))

Prior to the eighteenth century, within the larger context of the northern portion of the Arabian Peninsula, multiple nomadic tribes survived through a pastoral lifestyle. The arid desert, with its limited water sources, required a lifestyle of constant travel and created hardship for its people. Land for them was not “strictly bounded and exclusively occupied territory” (al-Mughni, 2001, p. 21); rather it was the wells and oases that belonged to a specific tribe. As a result society was stratified into economic groups; and those who considered themselves “noble” tribes were the more powerful, and this “power was wielded by the

camel-herding tribes” (p. 22), while tribes with less defined lineage usually relied on sheep, goats and the craft of blacksmithing. Tribes with camels were able to physically cover larger areas in contrast to those who only had goats or sheep to herd, leading to increased wealth and power. For the more powerful tribes practicing endogamy - marrying within the tribe - was necessary to maintain their superiority.

There were many tribal settlements along the coast of the northern part of the Arabian Gulf, which then became trading centers (al-Mughni, 2001). The Bani Utub, a group of families that belonged to a powerful noble tribe, were amongst those settlers. They migrated in the late seventeenth century out of the heart of the Arabian Desert (Najd) due to a severe drought. They settled in the Qatar peninsula for around fifty years, (Alghanim, 1998) where they had established a relationship with their new source of livelihood, the Arabian Gulf. While the harsh arid desert climate had produced a society which thrived despite the myriad of challenges faced by the unpredictable environmental conditions, those former desert dwellers shifted their loyalties from the harsh arid desert to the mysterious unpredictable ocean (Alghanim, 1998). In the early 1700’s they moved north, settled briefly in Bahrain followed by the southern part of Basra, and in 1716 finally, they settled within the Bani Khalid’s territory (Alghanim, 1998).

The Bani Khalid were considered one of the most powerful tribes of north of Arabia, and had been in control of that area since 1688 (Alghanim, 1998). By 1752 however, their power declined. By then, Bani Utub took charge of Kuwait with Sabah bin Jaber as the first elected sheikh of Kuwait (Alghanim, 1998).

According to al-Mughni (2001):

Thereafter, succession became hereditary, ultimately confined to the Al Sabah lineage. The sheikh’s authority was relatively diffuse. He was a

leader but not a true ruler. He practices the system of *shura* and the town had a *majlis* in which the *ulama* ) religious scholars and the merchants played influential roles (al-Mughni, 2001, p. 23).

Kuwait's strategic location at the northern most part of the Arabian Gulf, as well as Bani Utub's free trade policies, helped in its development as an important trading port. The emerging merchants of Kuwait funded and developed a boat-building industry with the nomadic tribes providing the labor. Later, ship builders came from neighboring Bahrain. By the end of the eighteenth century, the shipbuilding industry thrived, and people from neighboring countries as well as tribal groups from Central Arabia were attracted to settle within Kuwait, bringing in slaves from Africa.

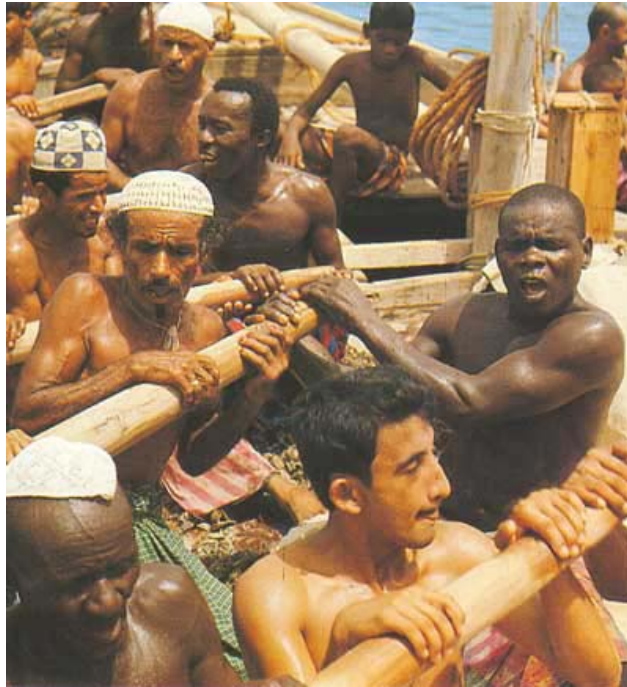
With this new wealth, the merchants started to finance maritime industry (pearl diving, fishing). A new group, the *tawawish*, (pearl merchants who financed the ships), recruited a *nukhoda* as the captain of the ship. The *nukhoda* was usually from a "well established Sunni family" (al-Mughni, 2001, p. 24). Socio-economic stratification was retained, and the power of the merchants reinforced, through a debt-bondage system, excessive interests, taxes paid to the ruler, and the strict endogamy practiced by the merchant families (al-Mughni, 2001). Physically, the mud town was divided into three sections: in the east pearl merchants, captains and the divers lived; in the western section, the wholesale merchants lived, while and the ruling family (Al-Sabah) occupied the central region (al-Mughni, 2001).

In its beginnings, Kuwait depended on the Ottoman Empire's rule, which helped protect Kuwait from the volatile relationship with the Wahabi forces<sup>1</sup> and other stronger neighboring countries. The people of Kuwait learned to depend on

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<sup>1</sup> The Wahhabis are those who follow the legacy of Muhammed bin Abdul al-Wahhab's legacy (1703-1792) Wahhabism is a religious revivalist movement that aspires to the return to the fundamental Islamic sources Qur'an, Hadith, and scholarly consensus (<http://historyofislam.com/contents/resistance-and-reform/shaykh-ibn-abdul-wahhab-of-najd/>).

the ocean as its source of livelihood. Yet the unpredictability of this lifestyle has helped in shaping the people's strength of character, and traditions.



*Figure 3.* This is a photograph of the people on-board of a pearl diving ship in the Gulf region retrieved from (<http://forums.deeperblue.com/travel-places-dive/71376-mapping-dive-sites-arabian-gulf.html>)

The three main social groups at that time were the 1) ruling family who's responsibility was to protect the people from outsiders, 2) merchant group who paid taxes to the ruling class, and 3) laborers including the divers and seamen (Ghabra, 1997). The merchants were "the basis of civil society in Kuwait prior to the discovery of oil. They traveled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to India, Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Yemen...established networks of relations beyond Kuwait, and observed other systems of government, which led then to seek change in their own society" (Ghabra, 1997, p. 362). Some of those changes were; opening of al-Mubarikiya, which was the first school that commenced in 1911, followed by another one in 1920. Those families had a dominant role in society even after the

discovery of oil, the wealth only “enhanced the role of the established merchant families, perpetuating their dominant role in society” (Ghabra, 1997, p. 362).

### **Oil in Kuwait**

Kuwait is an oil-rich small country, and is approximately the size New Jersey with a \$40,700 per capital income (retrieved from The World Factbook of the CIA for 2011), which is considered high in comparison to the rest of the world, and it is due to the country’s oil revenues.

In 1938 oil was discovered in Kuwait, and by 1953 Kuwait was the largest oil producer amongst the gulf countries (<http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-7572.html>). Hence this increased the county’s budget for education, and brought in foreign educators and educational specialists. A flood of workers from all over the world caused a dramatic shift in the identity and the outlook of the country. The explosive nature of the media (TV, videos, newspapers, magazines etc.) and the accessibility to foreign travel contributed to the abrupt advancement of the society (Alenezi, 1999).

The economic developments in Kuwait brought about changes in attitudes about education and art. Kuwait’s physical location in relation to the Arabian (Persian) Gulf provided its settlers with a great opportunity for sea faring and trade to and from Iraq and northern Arabia. This brought about the development of the specialized craft of boat building. The merchants exported pearls, dates, date molasses, camels, horses and donkeys. They imported food, spices, coffee, textiles, and metals. Creating and fabricating goods locally was a necessity before the emergence of wealth in Kuwait. The bedouins wove tents, furnishings and clothing, and the town settlers built mud houses and walls, wooden ships for seafaring. As the economy developed, ships were built to facilitate trade.

## **Class Dynamics**

Nationality rights were granted to those who were able to trace their ancestors before 1920 in Kuwait. Many bedouin<sup>2</sup> immigrants fled to Kuwait after the discovery of oil, yet due to the nomadic lifestyle of a bedouin, it was difficult to establish within which border a bedouin belonged. But with rapid economic development of Kuwait in the 1950's, desert tribes migrated into the urban centers, and as the cities expanded and the desert became more urbanized, more bedouins became citizens (Longva,2006).

Leading up to the 1980's, many bedouins became naturalized citizens. The government believed that "traditional bedouins would be more loyal" than other workers who were present in large numbers (Ghabra, 1997, p. 364). However, this was also a way for the government to:

get rid of the merchant traditionalists who felt themselves entitled to a strong voice in public affairs, and to replace them with 'new men' and tribal representatives who, because they would owe their social prominence and their private benefits to the regime, would know their places and act accordingly" (Tetreault, 2000, p. 202).

The bedouin traditions of polygamy and high birth rates has made the bedouins the the majority of Kuwaiti, they are over 65% of the local population (Ghabra, 1997). Bedouins became:

the backbone of the army, police and security forces ... Although they have become the numerical majority, the former urban majority- in particular , the leading merchant families-have remained the dominant political and economic group, retaining control of the private sector (Ghabra, 1997, p. 365-366).

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<sup>2</sup> Bedouin is the English translation of 'bedu'. "The term is used to differentiate between those populations whose livelihood is based on the raising of livestock by mainly natural graze" (Chatty & Young, 1996).



Marx's theory of class structure identified two distinct social classes: the proletariat and the bourgeois. The bourgeois are those who are capitalists -- people who own capital. The proletariat are the working class -- people who have labor power. They performed physical work using their bodies, hands and minds (Tucker, 1978). Tetreault (2000) identified the Kuwaiti merchant class as the bourgeoisie. "In Marxian terms, it is the merchant class and not the middle class that is the analogue to the bourgeoisie. Unlike the merchant class, Kuwait's middle class is an economic group defined by income level," and are employed by the government (Tetreault, 2000, p. 129). The proletariats of Kuwait, therefore, are represented by the foreign workers who are politically and socially invisible with no rights for citizenship.

### **Art Education in Kuwait**

According to Alenezi (1999) economic, social, political and cultural factors affected how art was taught from 1912 to 1997 in Kuwait, beginning from a teacher-lead authoritarian environment, to more progressive and experimental venue in less than a century.

Today, education for Kuwaitis is compulsory for children who are 6 years old, and is offered free of charge from the age of 4. According to previous research conducted in kindergartens in Kuwait, art activities in the curriculum were given least priority and were inferior to the societal, religious and academic priorities (Al-Gharaballi, 1995; Nashif, 1985).

As the shipping trade increased, there was a need for clerks that read, write and do simple math on-board those ships encouraged the opening of the first school in 1911. Prior to the discovery of oil (1938), children in traditional schools produced abstract geometric imagery based on Arabic calligraphy, since human and animal imagery were prohibited in Islam (Alenezi, 1999). Based on Egyptian

curricula, students in the beginning were expected to copy geometric patterns were drawn on the chalkboard by the teacher. Students were also taught Arabic calligraphy and tracing geographic maps up until 1936. The instructor dominated the direction of art education, where he/she “chose the patterns and the idea” of students work (Alenezi,1999, p. 121). While Egypt only followed this approach until 1923, Kuwait continued teaching in this way until 1936.

Since Kuwait was not an industrialized country at this time, not much importance was given to art education; hence, craft acquisition was not a necessity for the future workforce. During the next phase of Kuwait’s modernization, however, trained art teachers arrived from Palestine and Egypt in the mid-1930’s, and they helped to establish a more sophisticated view about art in society (Alenezi, 1999). They introduced imagery of humans and animals, which caused a “social stir” (p. 122), since at that time it was considered prohibited by Islam. Alenezi (1999), stated that in Islamic schools practiced only Arabic calligraphy, and abstract geometric designs. In contrast, the British system of education taught students to draw humans and animal images. In an effort to resolve this duality, Palestinian and Egyptian teachers focused on plants, Arabic calligraphy and still life.

Since the country had more access to technology and mass media as well as a huge influx of foreign educators, there was a demanded for a re-assessment of Kuwait’s educational direction (Alenezi, 1999). Accessibility to foreign travel also contributed to the abrupt advancement of the society. Kuwaitis were suddenly exposed to information that would have taken them decades to acquire if it was not for the oil wealth.

By the late 1970’s, many Kuwaitis returned after study abroad in Egypt, USA and France. They had acquired knowledge and qualifications in art



education, which aided the development of local intellectual human resources. Visiting professors from the Arab world, Europe and USA came to give lectures. In 1979, the Ministry of Education stressed that the children of Kuwait were to be socialized with an Islamic foundation and an “Arabic culture in the aspect of spiritual, moral, conceptual, social and physical development” (Alenezi, 1999, pp. 124-125).

In the 1980’s, concepts from John Dewey, and Rudolf Arnheim were experimented with and explored stressing that “education depends on perception, and that the education process means discovery of the environment and subjectivity” (p. 125). Later, the American Psychologist Guilford’s (1957) ideas on creativity and art education were stressed to be an opportunity for children through art activities and handicrafts to “practice behavioral objectives such as cooperation and responsibility” (p. 126).

### **Art in Pre-schools of Kuwait**

Huda Nashif (1985) conducted fieldwork where she identified the aims of Kindergartens according to the teacher’s perceptions in Kuwait and the U.K. In comparison to responses of teachers from the U.K., aesthetic education was ranked very low. The most important category identified by teachers of Kuwaiti kindergartens was the social development of the child, and then came the foundation skills that were thought to prepare the child for elementary school (e.g. letters, numbers, and science). Third was the religious and moral education of the child, followed by cultivating his/her good citizenship, maintaining of health and hygiene, then to the school’s routine, followed by an all round development, aesthetic education came eighth on the list (Nashif, 1985, p. 173).

In Al-Gharaballi’s (1995) evaluation of kindergartens in Kuwait, she declared that the Arab countries focus on academic issues “with priority emphasis

on spiritual and religious development and language competence” (p. 61) rather than following the norm that is followed by many developed countries where the curriculum is interested in the developing a well rounded child. She assessed kindergarten’s art education as inferior when compared to societal, religious and academic expectations in the Arab world:

In Islamic countries, interest in developing the child’s religious beliefs, his or her social and moral attitudes and his or her physical and intellectual abilities, are seen as part of the process of enculturation of the child into the socially accepted patterns of behavior (p. 48).

Her criticism was that there was not enough emphasis on play in the kindergartens of Kuwait. This is similar to comments made by Canadian art educator Pat Tarr at the Early Childhood Art Educator (ECAE) in the National Art Education Association (NAEA) National Convention of 2011 that I attended. She observed that, in pre-schools in North America, the word *play* was considered a “dirty word”, unless there was a justified learning outcome from it.

### **Islamic Aesthetics**

In his book on Islamic Aesthetics, Leaman (2004) revealed some of the attitudes of the Arab culture that have influenced Islamic art. Much of what is referred to as art in the Islamic world are manuscript illustrations, Islamic calligraphy used in the Qur’an, interior details in Mosques and mausoleums (Leaman, 2004). Visual representations are a limited artifact in Islamic culture, and sculpture does not exist (Blair & Bloom, 2003). To differentiate itself from Christianity, with its tradition of logocentrism<sup>3</sup>, Islam has adapted “an alternative

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<sup>3</sup> “It refers to the tradition of “Western” science and philosophy that situates the logos, ‘the word’ or the ‘act of speech’, as epistemologically superior in a system, or structure, in which we may only know, or be present in, the world by way of a logocentric metaphysics. For this structure to hold true it must be assumed that there is an original, irreducible object to which the logos is representative, and therefore, that our presence in the world is necessarily mediated. If there is a Platonic Ideal Form then there must be an ideal representation of such a form. This ideal

approach to representation” (Leaman, 2004, p. 37). Instead of a literal connection between text and meaning, the beauty of a text intertwined within a calligraphic composition had more value than the meaning of the words themselves, and is, therefore, the opposite of logocentrism. Some of the texts that are engraved on pots, bowls or plates are meaningless, yet this does not detract from the beauty of the form.

The twelfth century Moslem theologian al- Ghazali, accused of contributing to the death of Arab painting due to his ascetic views, believed that physical, bodily experiences were not so important (Leaman, 2004). He discussed in his writings ways that beauty is a source of pleasure. Leaman (2004) described al-Ghazali’s thought as follows:

Beauty is significant because it provides us with pleasure, and the essence of beauty is the recognition of perfection. Everything has its characteristic form of perfection, but the outer appearance is often a misleading guide to the perfection within, where it really lies. The eye can assess the *outer*, but it is left to the heart to get to the *essence* of the thing. The problem with appreciating paintings and beautiful objects is then that it encourages us to concentrate on the outer, not the inner, and to regard the superficiality of the external world as representing how things really are [emphasis added]” (Leaman, 2004, p. 25).

Leaman suggested that the death of Arab painting was because it did not fit the criteria of European or American art, where “originality and novelty” are requirements for great art. This paradigm, which champions creativity, has deemed Islamic art as “unoriginal and as a result unexciting” (p. 26).

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representation is according to logocentrist thought, the logos.” From (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logocentrism>)

## **Zahir / Batin Dichotomy**

The ideas that al-Ghazali writes about are what the mystics of Islam, the Sufis, believe in: it is through focusing on the surface of an object that a mystical experience is achieved (Leaman, 2004). This experience leads to transcending the material object, penetrating what is on the surface, *al-Zahir*, or it is *mathhar*. There is a relationship between the surface of an object and its essence, just like the relationship between the visual data to the underlying implicit behaviors of the participants. Leaman (2004) described this binary as *zahir* as the visible, and *batin* as the invisible (p. 58). This *zahir/batin* dichotomy represents the exoteric verses the esoteric knowledge (Conrad, 1996) and has been represented in the Moslem writer Ibn Tufayl's (born c. 1105- died c.1185) literary work *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* (before 1185).

In my narratives, I have adapted those two dialectic concepts, in writing first about the *zahir*, what I experienced in each school as a participant observer. Second, I wrote about the *batin* in my experience, a deeper interpretation based on a constant comparative analysis (Fram & Margolis, 2001) and (re)viewing of the data.



*Figure 4.* Kuwait City, retrieved from (<http://nebras.nuks.org/?p=8013>)

## **The Problem**

A small country, much coveted for its wealth, Kuwait has had accessibility to the best of everything. It opened up to the rest of the world so quickly and became globalized at an accelerated rate. The traditional mud village was replaced with ultra-modern glass-clad steel constructions, and the traditional *abaya*<sup>4</sup> worn by my grandmother and many of the women living in the city, were discarded for the latest western attire. There were an influx of foreign workers who were able to fill the immediate need for the country's labor force needs. The government guaranteed that every Kuwaiti had access to free education, healthcare, a secure job and other monetary benefits. Tetreault & al- Mughni (1995) discussed those benefits at length and describe them as means to encourage “dependency on the state” and that they are “affecting work incentives negatively” (Tetreault & al-  
<sup>4</sup> The abaya is a black, long cloak-like attire that is worn by women on top of their long dresses called *dara'a*. The abaya is something worn when the woman leaves her house, and ventures into the public domain.

Mughni, 1995, p. 70). In her book on class dynamics of Kuwait, Ismael (1993) states that:

the problem for the ruling class is one of exploiting the expertise of immigrant labor to serve the functions of dependency while isolating their political involvement and maintaining the legitimacy of class power when the tribal base of legitimacy is diminishing (p. 125).

With much of Kuwait's population sedated by, and dependent on, material wealth, I decided to investigate how the youngest members of that society were initiated to these cultural expectations. The process of educating a child is "humanity's unique methods of *acquiring, transmitting, and producing* cultural knowledge for interpreting and acting upon the world" (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001, p. 38). Spradley & McCurdy(1984) defined culture as "[t]he acquired knowledge that people use to interpret their world and generate social behaviour" (p. 4). The ways in which art is administered in classrooms was an entry point for me toward understanding underlying cultural attitudes and *embodied knowledge*<sup>5</sup> (Anderson-Levitt, 2002, p. 8) visible through actions and activities relating to art production.

In many Gulf States, domestic workers are heavily relied on; in some cases, parents designate one maid for each child. The maid becomes the *acting parent*, in charge of feeding, dressing, cleaning etc. In her dissertation, Anna Karola describes Kuwaiti children as having "every need met without any need to even talk" (Karola, 2002, pp. 36-7). This concept of *dependency* will be articulated further through the auto-ethnographic text below and my discussion on the abrupt transformation of the society.

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<sup>5</sup> Described also as *knowledge-in-practice*, embodied knowledge is a representation of a culture.

## The Research<sup>6</sup>

Kuwait is a place where people are financially comfortable but intellectually deprived. People are paid a monthly salary for a job that has become the ‘wig’ that is concealing the real reason for this money, a humble stipend to make up for the billions that are engulfed by those in power, from the oil returns. How can I begin to understand the curriculum for an early childhood art school, in a society that is ‘wiggling’ (de Certeau, 1984) much of its time? Michel de Certeau’s (1984) concept of *la perruque* (the wig) is that the weak try to pretend that they are busy and productive, when they are actually not. Yet the country is also pretending, paying workers a salary for a job that, as a Kuwaiti, you could not be fired from. The country is securing its people with a monthly stipend in return for unconditional loyalty; a loyalty that is bought by those who are in control. We become conditioned to feel indebted to, with no need to complain, or to accuse those in power of abusing the country’s resources. After all, economic deprivation is often the root of most popular uprisings.

*I will keep my mouth shut, because the one thousand Dinars came at the perfect time, now I can pay my credit card debt on time!*

The Government does not demand much from the bourgeois majority, other than to be absorbed in a performance of everyday life. Between weddings, parties, or social obligations, who has time to question the legitimacy of those in power? In other words, we barely have time to ‘shut up and live!’ This threat is always the last resort from anyone in power:

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<sup>6</sup> Wilson (1997) described research “as *re-search*, to search again, to take a closer second look” (p.1).



*Just be thankful that you have healthcare, education, and freedom that many countries around us only dream of!*

### **A Shortcut to Late Capitalism**

The oil wealth has expedited Kuwait's economy from a closed pre-capitalist economy, to a globalized late capitalism. Jameson (2003) has described the postmodern consciousness as a *cultural logic of late capitalism* (p. 25). Some of the aspects that he mentioned were superficiality, the loss of meaningfulness or *waning if affect* (p. 11), and *commodity reification* (pg. 18). We are alienated from everyday events, with a servant or a service to fill our every need. The *waning of affect* has spread like an epidemic. The remedy for any ailment such as depression, boredom or even obesity can be bought. *Anything advertised, with a click of a button, can be delivered to your doorstep!* On the surface (*al-Zahir*) we are surrounded by all material needs and wants. Yet, *the void within (al-Batin) is filled with consumption and more consumption.*

We have surrounded ourselves, as a society, with the best of everything, as we tapped into this inevitable *cultural logic of late capitalism*. This logic has placed more value on the surface(s) of things, rather than on their content (Jameson, 2003, p. 12). The abrupt shift in Kuwait - which was different from other countries that had grown incrementally- has produced an obvious strife between the generations. My great-grandmother had one outfit to wear for the whole winter season, with extra sewn- arm pieces to patch it up. In contrast, my mother would travel on seasonal trips to gather the latest *coutures* from Europe. There is no direct relationship or consequence between action and reaction. The signified has become the signifier; the image has become our reality, a *simulacrum* (Baudrillard, 1994) that is used and reused in a performance, and we are caught in a cycle of reproduction. Actions are performed to fulfill an expectation or an



obligation. Living, in this *everydayness* is all about dressing up in many outfits, pretending to know all there is to know about cleaning, cooking, parenting, food shopping, yet all you really need to know is how to order another person to do something you never needed to do!!!

We have adorned our households with a multi-skilled domestic staff often consisting of several cleaning maids, a cook, a driver and a gardener. They all live in an annex to the main house, expected to run the backstage of the 'Everyday Living' performance. The daily activities (social, religious, and work obligations) are part of this performance. Much of one's energy is consumed in social obligations, wakes, weddings, births, punching a work card, performing the daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan etc. Each one of those *rituals* has a certain protocol that is expected to be followed. Otherwise, the performance will be ridiculed by the public, bringing shame or embarrassment to those affiliated to this *performer*. We have become alienated from this *everydayness* of living, that much of the motions are meaningless like "speech in a dead language" (Jameson, 2003, p. 17). Even family relationships are performed. You are expected to have loyalty towards your immediate blood relations above all other relations; this pressure guarantees the reproduction of roles played by each family member e.g. the mother nurtures, the father provides, the elders are taken care of by the young, the unmarried daughter takes care of her mother. By trying to hang on to the sanctity of the family tradition, ironically we have lost the meaningfulness and authentic connection to one another.

Education as a commodity, a sign, an image and a status symbol was facilitated through the material wealth gained after the discovery of Oil in 1938. The government spent, and is still spending, much of its money on education. Educational institutions are adorned with the best facilities, and the latest

technologies. Hundreds of students were sent annually on scholarships to the USA, Canada or the UK. This has transformed the cultural scene from simple pearl diving, and “traditional desert culture to [a] hyper-modern, oil-fuelled, media saturated econom[y]” (Kraidy & Khalil, 2008, p. 337). The youth bonded “through rituals of consumption, like wearing the same clothing brands, listening to the same pop artists, eating the same fast-food and watching the same movies” (p. 338).

*Education has become a thing,*

*a label,*

*a sign of prestige.*

There is no value for it as a process of knowing. Thousands of teachers from all over the world came to Kuwait, to perform what is expected of them, as part of the educational assembly line. Hence, there is alienation and estrangement (Marx, 1844) on both sides. The student is not engaging or questioning through the process of learning, but is more interested in succeeding in school by any available means. Cheating has become a business between the student and the teacher, where exam tests are sold for hundreds of dinars. Hence “the educational institution succeeds in imposing cultural practices that it does not teach and does not explicitly demand, but which belong to the attributes attached by status to the position it assigns, the qualifications it awards and the social positions to which the latter give access” (Bourdieu, 1984). The teacher is concerned with the material return of the job, *or was it someone who did not have much choice in the matter; someone merely employing a survival tactic.* The teachers are part of the marginalized group called *expatriates* (Longva,1997) and the students are

mostly Kuwaitis who have more power. So the teacher does everything he/she can to have this child succeed, including hourly private lessons, or providing answers to exams for a nominal fee. If the child does not succeed, the parents of the child will make *sure* that the teacher is unhappy in his/her residency in Kuwait. In some incidents, teachers are blacklisted with the authorities, and prevented from leaving Kuwait for their annual summer break, but this is if, and only *if* the child did not succeed, which is not a common event.



*Figure 5.* This a bedouin woman in 1918 Kuwait. The photograph is from the book *Eastern Arabia : Kuwait Historic Photographs 1900-1936 Volume II* by Ahmad Mustafa Abu-Hakima

I searched for how education could be more engaging for a specific child, at a specific moment. I looked at three classrooms to find more questions in the *liminal*<sup>7</sup> spaces where dialogue begins from a reflection within. Entering into the field with my suppressed pre-conceptions, I gave precedent to the knowledge that childhood<sup>8</sup> and art are social constructions, they are both changing, both in flux.

Through adopting a post-structural framework, I questioned any *taken-for-granted* cultural construction. I stretched myself in many directions; I scrutinized my own ideologies. I observed, internalized and learned.

By looking at three classrooms in private schools with the same academic agenda, that of Bilingual Education,<sup>9</sup> I used a camera as a tool to uncover implicit evidence of the visual dynamics and cultural artifacts (Prosser & Schwartz, 2004). Geertz (1973) viewed culture as a web spun by the people in that culture. This ethnographic research employed visual artifacts and experiences in each school to provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) as an attempt to untangle the webs my intersubjectivity<sup>10</sup>. My definition of visual culture for this study was the ‘embodied knowledge’ that children possess, or are expected to acquire, through their visual environments (home, school, mall, television, computer etc). This definition aligns to the Freeman and Stuhr definition of visual culture as “the totality of humanly designed images and artifacts that shape our existence” (Freeman & Stuhr, 2004, p. 816). My interests lie in the ‘visual texts’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and the many ways that they are created by children, who, through that process of knowledge making, produce and reproduce culture. I viewed young children as active participants in this endeavor. Art could become

7 When a dialogue is opened up between the three sites it creates a space, a threshold without hierarchy, a space that new orders and priorities may be established and changes to occur.

8 Hatch (1995) described childhood as a “cultural invention” (p. 117).

9 English in Kuwait is considered a second language. Since over 60% of its residents do not speak Arabic, English is a necessary means for communication. .

10 “[I]ntersubjectivity recognizes that meaning is based on one’s position of reference and is socially mediated through interaction” (Given, 2008, p. 567).

the means for negotiating their visual realities to make and re-make their culture. Similar to Malin's (2012) view, I recognized that art making in the classroom is "a personal and cultural meaning making activity" (p. 19), and that vision and visuality is "a socially embodied practice" (Trafi, 2006, p. 3).

There has been an increased focus on academic achievement in the United States due to the *No Child left behind* Act and *Race to the Top* Fund, leading to the decrease in funding for the arts. I became curious about the state of Art Education in schools in Kuwait where the majority of the population are considered middle class. Since Kuwait, a *rich* country with accessible funds for the arts and education, why is art education still secondary to academic literacy, and not emphasized in early childhood institutions.

### **Organizing the Dissertation**

In the next chapter, I described *my lens*; my epistemological framework and guiding interests. In the third chapter I described the method used for this study. The next three are visual narratives for each of the schools involved in this research, ending with a visual collage. The seventh chapter describes each of the categories that emerged from the data when comparing the three classrooms. The eighth and final chapter summarizes some of my reflections and future research possibilities and interests.



## Chapter 2. Situating the Narrative



Figure 6. This is a photograph I composed and shot, titled *My Lens*.

### **My Lens**

I am a painter whose canvas is life, whose paint can be anything, paint, fabric or even emotions,

a mother who champions all children,

a teacher who searches to learn,

a Moslem whose beliefs are inspired to action,

a Kuwaiti who is an Earth-citizen,

a researcher who is a protagonist for answers and understanding of my own and

everyone else's world,

I am a process, creating and seeking:

*I am a bricoleur.*

The entry point into this story for me as an artist and a Kuwaiti mother of three pre-schoolers, was to investigate the *pre-school scene* in Kuwait. In an attempt to unveil the struggles between the surface and its content, I looked at three distinct kindergarten classrooms. Through this visual narrative, I invite you to explore with me the factors and events that contributed to the visual artifacts in those three different schools. In each school we are taking a glimpse at how “different versions of child or adult emerge from [this] complex interplay, networking and orchestration of different natural, discursive, collective, hybrid and ... technological materials” (Prout, 2008, p. 34).

Adapting a Western ideal such as the educational system is inevitable for a third world country that has become globalized at an accelerated rate. Even though Kuwait was never physically colonized, it was a British Protectorate until 1961<sup>1</sup> as well as a subject to “informal colonization” (Cannella & Viruru, 2002, p. 198) which spread through the missions from Great Britain and America. Anything that was brought from the West - i.e. Europe or America- was and still is considered modern and progressive for most Kuwaitis. Yet this method of education was the only available option for its people to be part of the global community. Our indigenous identity as Arabs developed along the margins within the framework of the dominating Western paradigm. The cultural theorist Stuart

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<sup>1</sup> In the late 1900's the ruler of Kuwait has reached out for British protection from the Ottomans which gave Britain the control over Kuwait's foreign policy. This British presence, through medical or educational missions provided an interesting contrast between the literate civilized intellectual Anglo-Saxons, and the 'illiterate' intuitive Arabs. Even though Kuwait was never physically colonized by British forces, I believe that this alliance marked the beginning of the Kuwait's cultural subordination to the West (Alghanim, 1998, p. x).

Hall (1997) described this tension that existed between the local communities in relationship to globalization being “the most profound cultural revolution in this part of the twentieth century has come about as a consequence of the margins coming into representation...not just to be placed by a dominant, imperializing regime but to reclaim some form of representation for themselves” (p. 183).

I was taught by Kuwaiti teachers in the early 1980’s in a public kindergarten, and then I was transferred by my parents to a more *progressive* private school that followed an American curriculum and had American staff members. I faced anxiety and difficulties with the method in which knowledge was objectified through quizzes and tests. My only salvation was my creativity in negotiating my way out of each subject’s limitation. I made an effort to *humanize* each subject’s notebook with my doodles and drawings that animated some of the content taught. For my English reports I spent hours pasting, coloring, drawing the subject matter that I wrote about. I engaged myself by engaging creatively with knowledge that was *given* by the teacher. My creative outlets were never acknowledged or even commented- on by my teachers.

In the *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*, Sullivan supports “creativity as both a site for ‘making’ new knowledge, and as a place for ‘making’ inquiry, confirms the critical importance of creativity *as* a research practice” (Sullivan, 2007, p. 1192). Being educated and trained in studio-based environments, my instinct and intellect became my guide throughout this research study. Knowledge was acquired through a process of negotiations, hence I shared Sullivan’s believe that:

[N]egotiation process as evidence is interpreted from different perspectives and represented in different visual and verbal forms. For creative-led research that focuses on relationships of forms and structures



there is an interest in understanding how sets of ideas and systems of knowledge are explored. Here, the theorizing process involves being able to enact and explain how things work and this requires the forms of inquiry used to be represented in multiple ways. (Sullivan, 2007, p. 1190). Hence, through creative practice I tried to find my voice. I crafted a



*Figure 7.* This is a frozen moment from a projection on the wall, layered with fabric, sounds and aromas of Kuwaiti culture. This is a screen shot from the video of my *Suspended Enclosures* installation at Pratt Institute 2006.

collage produced by weaving my fieldwork experience, cultural knowledge, literature, visual imagery into a cohesive narrative within the criteria of an American academy. Mediating, negotiating and using many methods and parts of methods, research tools, computer software, images and pieces of images I attempted to graft and re-graft a method that was emergent, adaptive and adaptable to suit the nature of the problem.

The way meaning is embodied in artworks is one of the basic tenets of artistic knowing and rightfully remains a core belief in shaping arts educational research, policy, and practice (Sullivan, 2007, p. 1185).

My main concern in this study was to investigate how has the image as a consumable entity, contributed to the reproduction of ideologies. We, the people of Kuwait, have become consumers of images rather than of beliefs (Barthes, 1981). We are lost in continuous performance of *re-delivering* the image. In an attempt to weave a visual narrative, I used photographs as ‘visual quotes’ (Prosser & Schwartz, 2004, p. 336). My own experience as an insider, the video and audio recordings coupled with my field notes, were all intertwined with my grandparents’ and parents’ stories to give an impressionistic retelling of how *the image* (al-Zahir or al-mathhar) has captivated the concerns of the Kuwaiti people.

## A Story about Image Consumption



Figure 8. Image of the baby through an LCD screen. Photograph taken by Moudhi Al-Mutawa, compiled collage by author.

Through this LCD screen, I looked at my baby when she was a day old. It was right above my bed, and my companion was the *remote control*. I buzzed the nurses to bring her to me, or for more pain killers. I had a hair dresser come the next morning, as my mother laid her special persian carpets to cover the floor, her antique French bedspread on the bed and a delicately embroidered Italian gown to cover my body. This all was to to set the stage for the ‘Istigbal’<sup>2</sup>, the reception for the delivery of a new child.

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<sup>2</sup> The word *istigbal* translates as reception, from the root *istagal* which means to receive. Receptions are usually held for births, recovering from a sickness, coming back from a honeymoon, or receiving a higher degree. This is an event which involves and invited relatives and friends to be part of important events in a member’s life.

“*Mathhar el Insan muhim..Ya’ti geema li bani Adam*” (The surface (mathhar)<sup>3</sup> of the Human is important..It provides value to Adam’s children, own translation)

decreed my mother

This story is about consumption .... of images.....what is on the surface and what is beyond it.



Figure 9. A photograph of a wedding in Kuwait. Photograph taken by Umang Shah.

A story about a group of people, who never had enough time to reflect... and they believed in what was on the surface. Their strength became to *consume* and generate more images. Images are all around us...and we learnt how to perfect the game of images. We know how *to talk the talk and walk the walk*, this is what I learned in school... how to walk and talk like an American.

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<sup>3</sup> This word is described in the Arabic dictionary as “anything that is opposite of internal” (<http://www.baheth.info>) and *internal* is the same word for stomach here.



Figure 10. A Bedouin woman weaving, (adapted from the image in (<http://www.greenprophet.com/2008/12/bedouin-project-interchange/>))

*I have been searching for this opportunity most of my adult life...through my impressions...photographs...writings...weavings of many images.*

Through tearing apart the images into disassociated pieces I attempted to sew, weave, and interconnect it together, the way Cezanne fragmented the surface into shades, tones and shapes that were structured to fit the form. My reflections happened as I intertwined the multiple realities all around me. It was a time of solitude and introspection that came from a pain within me. Why was this decay all around and within me? Like the mother weaving her *bait el shair*,<sup>4</sup> to contain

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<sup>4</sup> The 'Sadu' is the traditional weaving of wool craft that is scattered all over the Arabian deserts. This craft was necessary to make the traditional Bedouin tent, partitions within the tents, and the indoor furnishings of the Bedouin tent (pillows, bags for food, carpet), the camel saddle bags and ropes. The wool used was usually from sheep, camels, or goats. There is an abundance of this type of live stock in the area; hence the Bedouins live on herding camels and cattle moving from place to place in search of water and pasture. The most important product made of the wool is the *bait el shair* and this is the home of the people of the desert. It is usually made of rows of goats' hair which is dark black which absorbs the heat of the desert. On rainy days the interlocking of the embroidery is strengthened and amalgamates into a more unified weave. Due to the oily nature of goat hair, the weave is a great repellent of water and harsh desert winds. (From <http://alsaduweaving.wordpress.com/>)

and enclose her loved ones...I built my *Suspended Enclosures*.<sup>5</sup> This story is about a small desert land, and its peoples' struggle to 'glocalize'<sup>6</sup> their education.

Sandwiched between my daughter and mother, I try to balance...balance the future with the past. Technology is our common bond, my mother posts my daughter's picture into the *Aunts Chat* on the WhatsApp using her iPhone... and the wonder they feel watching Lulu, my three year old, unwrap a baby bell© cheese ball with skill and patience. "Adults here in Kuwait don't have such patience" said my mother, as Daisy, our live-in maid, cooks our dinner and Wanda, the other live-in maid, puts the baby to sleep. The luxury that we have, the time and means to do anything we want...but we chose to indulge...then indulge even more.

I feel the frustration and annoyance as my American husband is worn like a necklace

"your bodyguard"

my mother chuckles with a subtle bitter taste of jealousy, or is it just the annoyance...that she can't have her cake and eat it.

"*Kalas...Ba'ad mabi aakil hel baglawa abadan*" (enough I do not want to eat anymore of this baklava ever, own translation) as my father fantasizes about his next serving. There are many parts of this puzzle, many bits and pieces of unfit marriages...of lost souls and good milk gone sour.

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5 This was an installation constructed for my MFA show at Pratt Institute in 2006.

6 This term is used to describe services or products disseminated globally with a specific local market in mind. An example instead of the beef burgers in India you have the McVeggie or the Mahraja Mac.





*Figure 11. Collage created by author, titled *Suspended Enclosures**

### Chapter 3. Method



Figure 12. My two year old daughter painting.

I started my PhD journey as an artist and mother of a two year old girl; she was my fuel for inquiry and a constant data-generator. I collected thousands of videos and photographs of her involvement with drawings, paintings and her encounters with the world. Through viewing and re-viewing those encounters, I gained a situated understanding of the process of her art-making and her artistic growth. Having access to her words and actions through the video recordings was more important to me than framing or hanging the piece of paper with dried paint. This is a major reason why the design of this study revolved around the *relationship* between the children with the context. Hence, the drawings are viewed here as residual artifacts (Pearson, 2001) that are produced within a specific setting, each created by a specific child, and are a product of his/her negotiations of those specific factors involved.



I am an artist; my paint, fabric, glue and canvas are the means for my expressed experience.

The realm of the visual arts inherently overlaps with other disciplinary domains. Artists and other cultural producers draw on all types of knowledge and cognitive processes to create” (Freeman & Stuhr, 2004, p. 819).



Figure 13. A collage I constructed using torn fabrics that is sewn and painted over with oil pastels on canvas.

I would describe my work as *bricolage*, or collage making. My method, as a bricoleur, was to use all sorts of materials and scraps at hand. With no pre-planned product in mind, I would connect, disconnect, sew, rip out. The emergent result: scraps of fabric, paper, buttons, and paint, juxtaposed together, form a new *whole*, a unified piece. Similarly, I approached the presentation of my research with the same logic of bricolage, weaving visual data with text and quotes from relevant literature.

Children are also *bricoleurs* - they are able to improvise using materials available to them in the classroom, with the resulting products creating new

meanings (Paley, 1995;Thompson, 2007). My use of video and photographs provided an opportunity to interpret and understand young children’s *embodied knowledge*, as Flewitt described:

Multimodal ‘events’ have always characterized children’s learning in early years settings through the subtle interweaving of eye contact, body movement, facial expression and the manipulation of objects to supplement or replace talk (Flewitt, 2006, p. 25).

Like the children, I have also used my many tools, including my multiple subjectivities of being a Kuwaiti insider, an architect involved in school designs, a researcher, artist, art educator, and mother of young children.

### **The Structure of the Design**

To understand the pre-school *scene* in Kuwait today I decided to conduct a multi-sited (Marcus, 1995) visual ethnography. I conducted fieldwork in three ideologically distinct pre-school classrooms located in the same country. The ethnographic method used for this study primarily follows the approach taken by Joseph Tobin and his time in the work *Preschools in Three Cultures*, which has been referred to as “video-cued multivocal, ethnography” (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). In Tobin’s work, video and photographic data of three pre-schools in different cultures were analyzed and used in conjunction with interviews to arrive at a rich understanding of each. Similarly, the visual data I collected from 3 kindergartens in Kuwait was my main source of data, in addition to audio recordings of interviews in naturalistic classroom settings.

Since I was living in Arizona, I would travel to Kuwait for a full week at a time, recording the events, which were then analyzed back in Arizona. My data from video, photo, audio and field notes provided me with a plethora of data to *ground* the emergent categories and directed as well as triangulated my research. I

spent approximately one year to analyze the data and complete my research, from Xdate to Ydate. Video footage and photographs were used to elicit comments via individual emailed conversations, and in analyzing classroom activities, and triangulation of data from interviews and field notes.

### **The Emergent Design**

I entered the field with no specific theory. I was curious about whether attitudes about art at each site might affect the art activities differently. Adapting grounded theory methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to the data was most suitable in this case, allowing the theory to emerge from the data, in Patton's words:

[G]rounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content. It emphasizes steps and procedures for connecting induction and deduction through the constant comparative method, comparing research sites, doing theoretical sampling, and testing emergent concepts with additional fieldwork (2002, p. 125).

Instead of taking a position of an objective researcher who is not influenced by the literature, my role unfolded with a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory supports the "interweaving the literature throughout the [ongoing] process" of data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 5). Hence, I was analyzing data "by constant comparison, initially of data with data, progressing to comparisons between their interpretations translated into codes and categories and more data" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, p. 3). This continuous cycle of comparing of the analysis, grounded my theories of the field.

The merging of ethnography with grounded theory compliments the inter-subjective nature of this study; the ethnographic researcher knows the situation from within whereas grounded theory methods "generate a map of the object from

the outside” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 163). This emergent<sup>1</sup> study design, borrowed from *Preschool in Three Cultures* (Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009), was my starting point for the research design. I was the sole researcher, and I used my iPhone to record most of my data, both visual and audio. Visual evidence produced by me and the students in my study were my main source of data. Audio and video recorded interviews, and field notes from naturalistic observations in the field (Patton, 2002) were used to inform and validate my visual data. I also had informants representing the three different ideologies of the schools as my *participant researchers* (LeCompte, 1982, p. 42).

### **Ethnographic Sites and Participants**

Kindergartens in Kuwait have three stages, and age groups vary depending on the school’s admission date. In general, the Nursery (Pre-K) is for children from 2 to 3 years of age, Kindergarten 1 (KG 1) is from ages 4 to 5 and Kindergarten 2 (KG2) is from ages 5 to 6. The study was designed to compare and contrast three very different schools in Kuwait. Since the population is less than three million, and only a third of them Kuwaiti citizens, snowball sampling<sup>2</sup> was most appropriate. I started with interviewing a few people that I knew which lead me to the final informants and schools for this study. As I describe the three schools and the participants, all the names used are pseudonyms, to protect the anonymity of the institutions and participants. I named each school based on the color of the children’s uniforms.

Parents of children at the Turquoise School (TBS) consider themselves liberal and *open-minded*. Relative to other schools in Kuwait, TBS is more

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<sup>1</sup> Patton (2002) asserts that qualitative design needs to remain flexible even after the data collection, to allow for exploration needed for the inquiry.

<sup>2</sup> Snow ball sampling starts with a few members who direct the researcher to the larger community. Here members of the administration of staff who have connections to other schools provided data to connect to other schools’ administration who gave access to the individual schools (Patton, 2002).



Figure 14. Those are the locations of three schools in Kuwait. Photo from Google earth.

secular; Kuwaiti tradition or religion does not influence the school's agenda. The Orange School (OBS) operates within a religious Islamic framework and the third one is the Navy School (NBS), which is in Al- Jahra, a center for the bedouin community, where those with nomadic roots are referred to locally as *bedu*. The three schools in this research are not 'typical' representatives for each community. By choosing three distinct classrooms in a small community of less than a million Kuwaitis, I am interested in the variations that are present in each school, and how they reflect the attitudes on art, art education as well as the visual culture. I see this as an entry point for a dialogue between the subcultures within Kuwait.

I chose these Kuwaiti schools for my research for a number of reasons:

- 1- As a Kuwaiti myself, I had easy access to contacting people and conducting research. I was also able to gain trust from the teachers and students more readily, as I was not considered a threat by most.

- 2- This insider/outsider position provided a great advantage in fieldwork and in reporting findings (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001).
- 3- Problems can be more pronounced and visible in a culture that has gone through an abrupt and rapid shift in its economy and in the process of modernization (al-Naqeeb, 1990).
- 4- All three schools were private institutions with the same academic focus of providing a bilingual curriculum.
- 5- The population's economic stability meant I did not have to focus on the socio-economic condition of the children, but could instead concentrate on illuminating ethno-cultural or ideological frameworks within each community.

### **Visual Narrative as a Collage**

Collage is defined as “the juxtaposition of images or ideas to create new meaning” (Marshall, 2007, p. 39). In this research, I employed the framework of collage making for analyzing the data as well as representing the research. Within this framework I approached the data as “a *bricoleur*, as a maker of quilts, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). Through a constructivist process that involved images and words, “ideas [were] shaped into images and the resulting images shape[d] further thought and imagery” (Marshall, 2007, p. 24). I connected the multi-dimensional bits and pieces of data that addressed the practice of art education and the visual culture in the three distinct classrooms.

This bricolage of images or non-verbal clues accumulated to produce additional keys that unlocked the narratives, enriched the life stories and enhanced the analyses (Jones, 2001, p. 3).

## **Visual Data as a (Re)search Tool**

The way that I had used visual data in representing the research has been preceded by the growing interest in photography in the research of anthropologists in the late 1930's. As a specific example, I looked at the work of Gregory Bateson and Margret Mead in Bali, where they “used motion picture and still cameras to record aspects of social life and culture” (Margolis, 1990, p. 372). This research was described as “a photographic essay linked by words” (ayabaya, 2009).

Collier (1967) was one of the “founding fathers of visual anthropology” (Margolis, p. 372) and identified “photography as a research method” (Collier, 1967, p. xv). The accessibility of digital technology and portable cameras has “allowed virtually anyone to become a producer. As society became more visually literate and generations raised on television entered the social sciences, visual methods began to play an increasingly important role in both sociology and anthropology” (Margolis, 1990, p. 373).

For some art educators, images when used as a “primary mode of exploration” (Marshall, 2007, p. 22) and are generated by the researcher through a *practice-based research* (Sullivan, 2005,2006,2007) are considered “in line with qualitative research procedures in other domains” (Marshall, 2007, p. 22).

## **Photovoice of Children**

To understand the visual culture of the students in the classroom, I used photographs taken by the children, showing their environments at home. This method is referred to as ‘Photovoice’ (Wang & Burris, 1997). Since I had three Kidizoom Cameras™, I gave them to every 3 children at a time to take home for two days, along with the consent forms to be signed by a parent. Each child had general guidelines encouraging them to take photographs of their environments,



including toys, books etc. I specified in the letter that if the parent disapproved of any photograph to please feel free to erase it. Examples of such images are displayed in Chapter 7.

### **Ethnographic Concepts**

Geertz (1973) viewed culture as a web spun by the people. Visual data, interviews, and time spend in the field provided insights and contributed in providing employed a 'thick description' to untangle those webs. My definition of culture for this study is the 'embodied knowledge' that children possess or expected to acquire through their visual environments (home, school, mall, television, computer etc), this definition aligns to the Freeman and Stuhr definition of visual culture as "the totality of humanly designed images and artifacts that shape our existence" (Freeman & Stuhr, 2004, p. 816).

Some of the basic conditions for conducting a traditional ethnography study based on Malinowski's (2005) account are: Prolonged engagement in a 'foreign'<sup>3</sup> environment as a participant observer in the field of a particular culture (traditionally it is for a full calendar year), producing of deep, thick description of daily events and observations, the researcher needs to understand and establish emic or insider knowledge (Malinowski, 2005). Historically, ethnography has been done by outsiders; this prevented the insiders from studying their own culture and to have a voice within the outsiders' interpretation. Yet recently more ethnography is being conducted by locals. Through this transformation "a respectful emphasis on the meanings that insiders attribute to their own behavior and a corresponding recognition that insider and outsider status in regard to a particular "culture" is a relational matter cultural knowledge develops along a continuum, rather than taking the form of an either/or proposition" (Foley,

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<sup>3</sup> Ethnographic studies are traditionally conducted by anthropologists who are from a dominant culture immersed in the field for a year, experiencing all the seasons and cultural activities.



Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001, p. 40). Even though I am a native Kuwaiti (an insider), I am an adult who has never taught or attended a pre-school active classroom (an outsider). Yet, being a Kuwaiti, speaking the language and having access to people and places provided an advantage in this study. Even though I spoke fluent Arabic and looked Kuwaiti, I felt like a foreigner in my own country<sup>4</sup> from the long years away, adapting and adopting a frame of mind that is considered foreign for most Kuwaitis.

The use of the camera in collecting the data, channeled through my subjectivity as a visual artist and delivering it through an interwoven visual narrative, has positioned this work as Visual Ethnography. Visual Ethnography is a natural evolution of ethnographic research in a visually dominated globalized culture.

Global culture is rapidly shifting from text-based communication to image saturation. Visual culture is seen on television, in museums, in magazines, in movie theatres, on billboards, on computers, in shopping malls and so on (Freedman, 2003, p. xii).

Sarah Pink is a contemporary researcher who is engaged in writing about and conducting visual and sensory ethnographies; she describes ethnography as “a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers’ own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced” (Pink S. , 2007, p. 22).

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<sup>4</sup> I came for my undergraduate education in 1992 and stayed until 1998 (maintaining regular trips back and forth to Kuwait in the summers). I then worked for six years in Kuwait in an Architectural office, a school administration to design schools, and at Kuwait University teaching architectural design, and art in a studio environment. I left Kuwait to pursue my MFA again in 2003 and returned in 2007.

## The Steps

**Data collection.** By employing constructivist grounded theory, I was able to provide myself with a flexible framework for inquiry that is reflective and spiral (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006) and is congruent with my way of

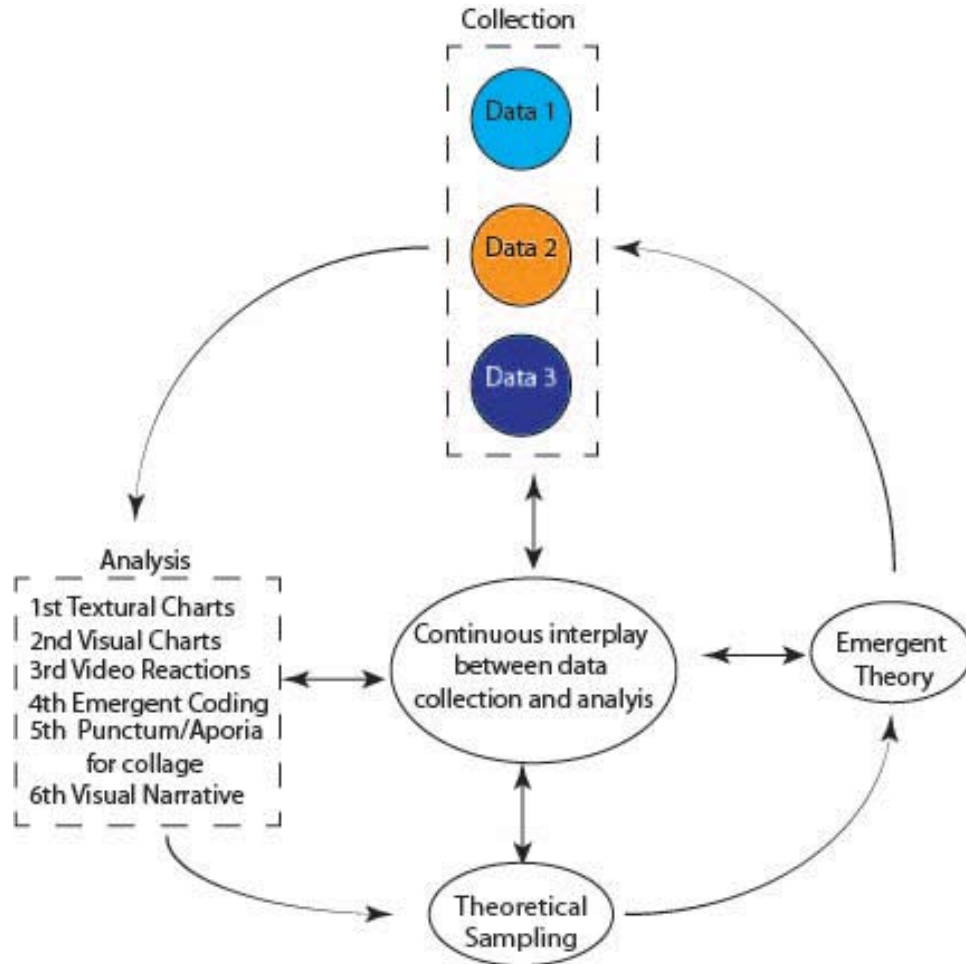


Figure 15. A diagram describing the steps in the process.

working. For each preschool, I was a participant observer for one full week. I was able to collect field notes, photographs, video footage, as well as audio and video unstructured interview with the teachers and children. The fieldwork was

conducted on three different weeks over the span of seven months. At the end of each week of fieldwork the data was ‘processed’ and reduced simultaneously (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21). I had a notebook for each school where I recorded my field notes. I also had the photographs taken by at least six children from each school uploaded in designated files.

**Data analysis.** I went through the field notes as I made a log situating the images and videos and identifying the important ones, and those that stuck out during and after the fieldwork. Every school had a separate folder for its data in the computer, and each school’s folder had 5 sub-folders each representing a day. Contact sheets of the photographs were printed and pinned onto the walls, with memos and notes directly on them. The *continuous data analysis* (Fram & Margolis, 2001) has progressed throughout several cycles; each cycle is completed after there was saturation from the data.

*a) First cycle.* I chose the most important images that related to art education, and those that showed the obvious nuances in each school. This was necessary due to the large number of visual data collected. Data was then displayed in textual as well as visual charts which “are designed to assemble organized information in an immediately accessible, compact form” (Miles & Huberman, pp. 21-22). The textual chart had a column with initial descriptive codes for each school describing children’s drawings, paintings, worksheets, art supplies, classroom decoration.

*b) Second cycle.* Visual charts were then constructed for each classroom showing images for children's drawings, clay, paintings, and hallway and classroom decorations. Themes were directly related to the art activities in the classroom, as well photographs that showed special aspects in a school, not found in the others. As an example, a school had specific posters in the hallways gave clues on the ideological framework of the community, those images were coded as 'The hallway'. I began to look at literature on the difference of creativity in Modern verses traditional environments.

*c) Third cycle.* I then used images and vignettes of videos, and compiled some into a short one minute video using Avid Studio©<sup>5</sup>. I then e-mailed the images and video composition through Picasa 3©<sup>6</sup> to my informants and the teachers of the other schools, to elicit their reactions, and give me a better understanding of how they viewed their own art activities in comparison. The receiver was not able to download the video, only view it. Some of the discussions were conducted through my iPhone's "Whats App" texting feature, since I was able to send the videos and photographs. In this cycle I started to code interviews conducted via email, and transcribed and coded the relevant audio and video interviews.

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<sup>5</sup> Avid© is a software package used for editing videos and audio productions.

<sup>6</sup> Picasa 3© is a free Google© photo and video management software that also enables sharing of videos and photo using Gmail©.

Categories			
Children's Drawings			
Children's Paintings			
Other (Visual Activities)			

Figure 16. The is a chart composed to show arts in the classroom in TBS

Categories				
Children's Drawings				
Children's Paintings				
3 <sup>rd</sup> Dimension				

Figure 17. The is a chart composed to show arts in the classroom in NBS



Figure 18. The is a chart composed to show arts in the classroom in OBS.



Figure 19. The is a chart composed to show the classroom in OBS.



*d) Fourth cycle.* Since I had over a thousand photographs and videos for each school, I needed to group images based on emerging codes; I needed to see the grouped images as if they were pinned up on a wall in a studio critique<sup>7</sup>. I experimented with Google's Picasa 3, which allowed me to compile images into separate albums, and tag individual photographs as a way to code, and a method to retrieve them using the designated tag name.

As the process of coding and re-coding progressed, so did the emergent themes (e.g. encouraging creativity, teacher as authority, child as performer, child as worker, child autonomy, dependent vs. independent child etc.). Differences in attitudes began to emerge between the schools. In an attempt to give meaning for the themes that surfaced, I looked at previous research that addressed the context, the culture and its relation to art and creativity, and then I re-interviewed



Figure 20. Screen shot from Avid Studio when I was composing the video.

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<sup>7</sup> As an artist/architect I am trained with a Studio Habits of Mind (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007) methodology, where at the end of research session the work is usually 'pinned up' on the walls of the studio so that others including the teacher and fellow students would share their input and criticism.

my informants and teachers, and then began another cycle of coding to assist in developing a theory. This process continued throughout the research process.

*e) Fifth Cycle.* During this cycle, I started to look deeper into the data. I used the concept of *punctum* referred to by literary critic Roland Barthes, in his book *Camera Lucida*, which refers to the qualities in the photograph that *punctures* or *pierces* the viewer (Barthes, 1981). As a visual researcher and artist, I first identified images with punctum, and categorized a group of them for each school. Similarly the concept of *aporia*, borrowed from literary theorist Derrida (1992), was used in identifying images or video vignettes that had gaps, or stir

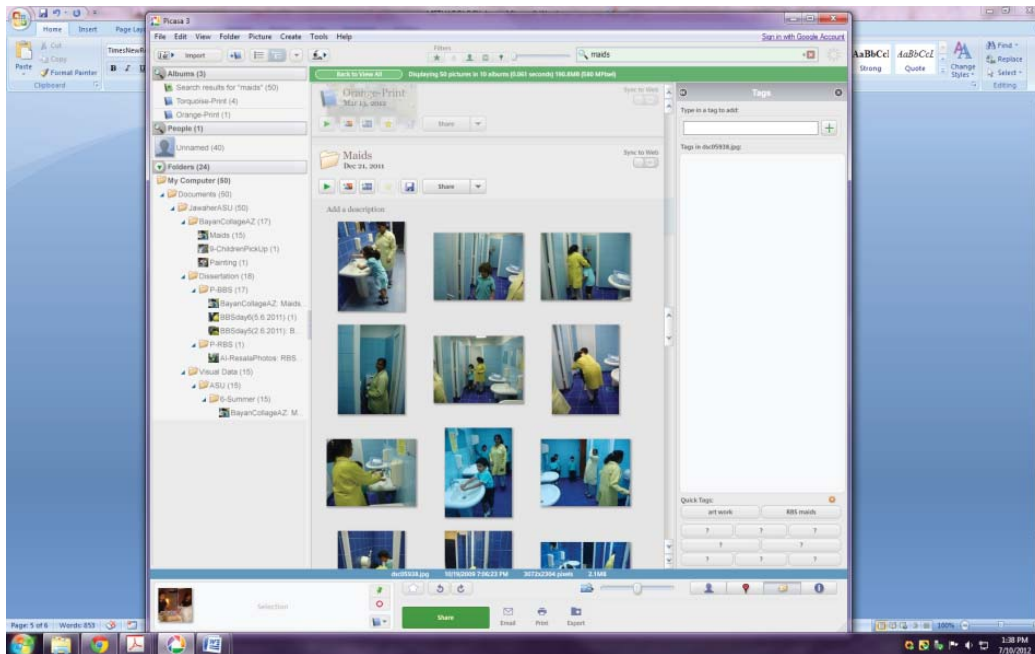


Figure 21. Screen shot from the Picasa 3 program.

confusion. I froze some scenes from those video and added them to this category. My mind started to make connections and relationships base on those categories forming a ‘conceptual collage’ (Marshall, 2008, p. 39) which was manifested through visual narratives as a collage in a literal and physical sense. This was a process that occurred between reading, coding, or writing. I found this method of



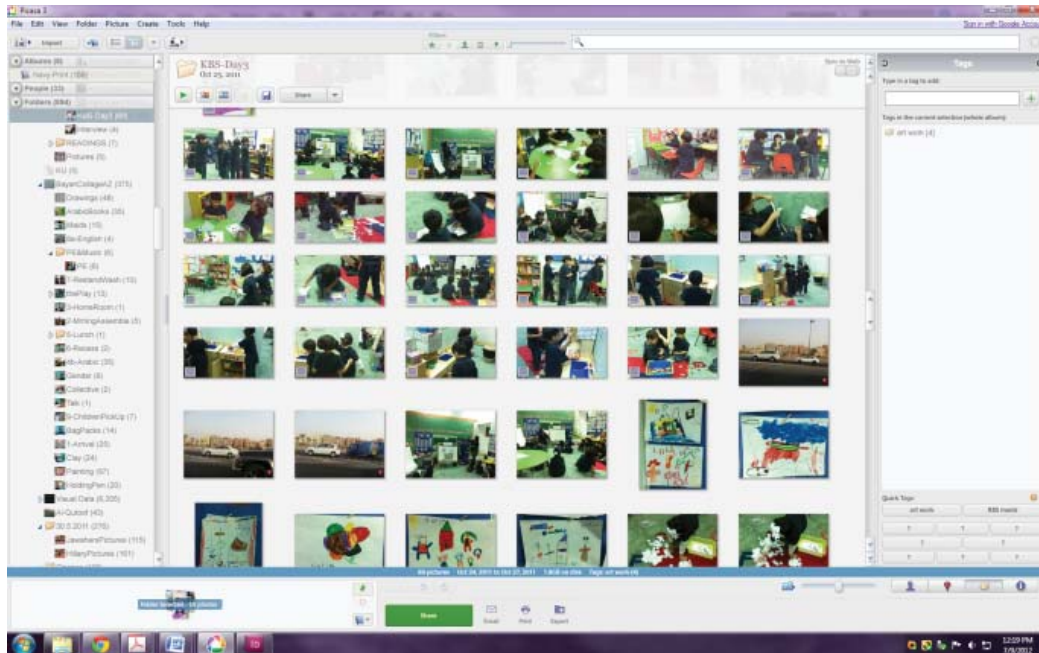
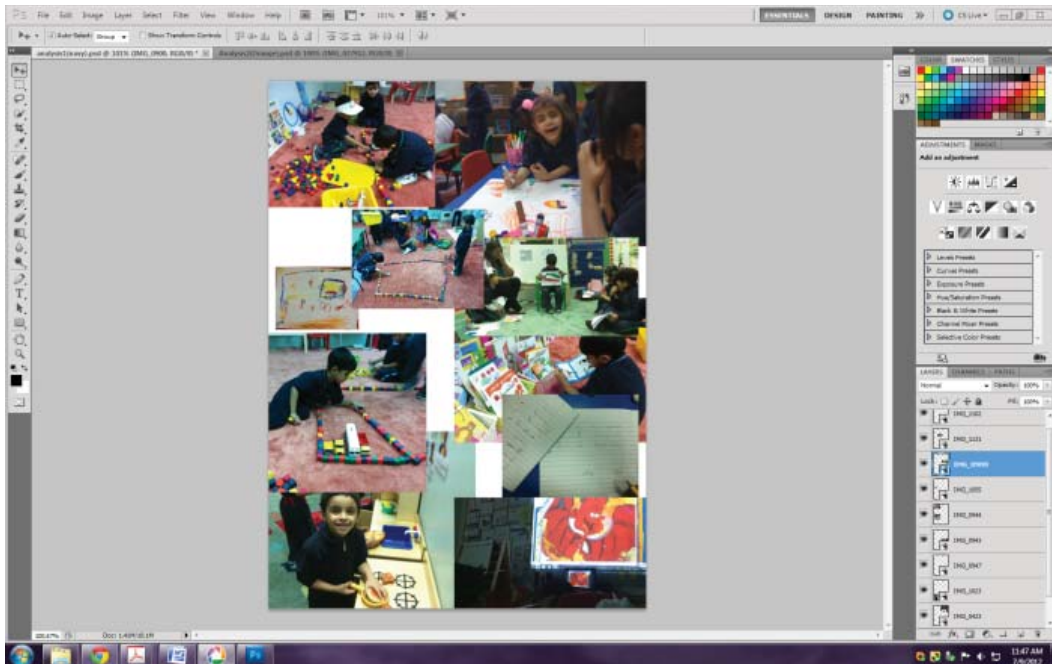


Figure 22. Screen shot of the one school's specific Album.

working interchangeably, between the multiple modes of knowing, micro to the macro, and use of theoretical and technical tools in analyzing the data provided a rich cyclical process that was grounded in the data.

*f) Sixth cycle.* During the sixth cycle of data analysis I began to construct, through writing/ bricolage, the narratives of each school. I worked with both the text and the images to construct a (thick/textured) picture of typical events of a day in each of the three schools. To construct these narratives, I reflected on the data I had gathered, such as my field notes, memos, video, and images. My constructed visual narratives were an attempt to “address an individual situation, but still open up a new world of experience and understanding” (Brophy, 2009, p. 36).



*Figure 23.* This is a screen shot of the beginning process of compiling images in Photoshop before constructing the collage.



Figure 24. The is the physical collage that was compiled using Photoshop CS5.1.

## Chapter 4. The Turquoise School (TBS)

In each chapter I will start by introducing each school with a quote from their website, at TBS the first most important quality viewed for students to acquire is:

“The mastery of communication skills, including writing, reading, speaking and listening” (TBS[pseudonym], 2012).



*Figure 25.* This is a photograph of the school from the side where the kindergarten students come in.

I began my fieldwork with the kindergarten classroom at TBS. I had easy access to this school, since I attended as a child and worked for later as an architect. I then got access to the next two schools the following semester. TBS is one of the oldest private institutions in Kuwait as well as the Gulf region (Fact





Figure 26. This is a photograph of the early morning traffic at TBS.

Sheet, 2012). It is set in Hawalli, one of the original governorates of Kuwait, and is the most congested city, with the largest number of private schools (Central Agency For Information & Technology, 2012). This is a K-12 campus, mostly managed by American principals. I involved a co-researcher, Hillary Andrelichik, for this school; she is a fellow graduate student interested in ethnographic research. Her presence helped in creating a tension needed for an ethnographic account of this school. By experiencing the fieldwork together, I was able to look at TBS through her eyes, transforming everything that was familiar strange.

### **Al-Zahir (The Surface)**

For Kuwait, TBS is one of the original *madrassa ajnabiya*, which translated as a foreign school. Anything foreign is more valued than it would be if it were native to Kuwait (Al-Otaibi, 2005). One could argue that TBS is closer to the ‘source’ for the local community, closer to the more advanced and dominant



*Figure 27.* There is an obvious Binary that exists in TBS. It is explicitly mentioned in their website that the school offers a “happy marriage” between *modern* and *traditional, Western* and *Arab* (TBS[pseudonym], 2012). Photograph taken by Hillary Andrelichik.

culture. Many of the teachers and those in higher administrative positions are American or Canadian. I remember when I was a child at the old TBS campus in the 1980’s, every fall semester would be the time for show -and -tell. The students who spent the summer in the United States would be *on-stage* flaunting their new fashions to the rest of us. I also remember the first American teachers who came; Ms. Judy with her much coveted *smelly sticker folder* and Mrs. A’s scorching temper as she overlooked our cursive in the *D’Nealian* workbook. They were the *ultimate authorities* after all. In contrast, the Arabic teachers, Ms. Salam and Ms. Fatima and Ms. Hadiya were our nurturing mothers away from home. Arabic class was just *not cool enough*; that somehow their warmth and nurture was a tactic to keep us interested. The older teachers who are part of the more



Figure 28. This doll was made to fit the background with the head cover and the long dress. Photograph taken by Hillary Andrelchik.

permanent staff school's are usually Arabs (mostly Palestinians) or Westerners (i.e. British, Americans) who are married to Kuwaitis. Today the more transient teachers, who would come for a couple of years then leave, are an aggregate of North Americans, Europeans, Arabs (from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan).

We commenced our fieldwork at TBS, the first school of its kind in the country. After getting Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education approvals, we began our week as participant-observers. Hillary's observations helped me gain a more ethnographic view; through her eyes, the school lost its familiarity as she questioned some of my taken-for-granted situations. We were equipped with digital cameras, audio-recorders, and notebooks for field notes. We also had digital cameras for the children to record their environments at home, to provide us with the children's *emic* account, an insider sense of their visual culture. We attended a full week, with the intention

of compiling a 20-minute video taken from the visual data, for later use in our interviews. This was an attempt to adopt the “three-preschools in three culture method” (PCin3C) (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). Photographs were taken of children’s artwork (paintings, drawings, clay work, and mixed media). Notes from observations, and audio recordings of open-ended interviews with the children, were gathered as they showed and talked about their digital photographs. Open-ended interviews were also conducted with the teachers and audio-recorded. This was the data compiled from the next two schools as well.

The campus is set on government property <sup>1</sup> in a highly congested location. The school day ran from 7:30 am to 12:30 pm. Most children were brought to school by a nanny, but a few came with a parent. During after-school pick-up, a flood of uniformed maids<sup>2</sup> colonized the hallways.



Figure 29. The hallways at the end of the day.

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1 As a child, I went to a campus originally housed in a suburb, but the government provided the current campus for the condition that TBS move out of the suburbs. Private schools are now centralized in a commercial city, away from suburbs. Yet, every suburb has designated public schools that serve the population with no fees (Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations, 2012).

2 The word *khadama* or the person who serves is used to describe the maid, who is a multi-tasked woman in the household. TBS staff refers to the maid as a nanny. I will use nanny to refer to TBS’s domestic worker, and maid to the household domestic worker.



TBS was established in 1977 by a group of women who were members of influential Kuwaiti families (from the merchant and ruling class), who were searching for an education that balanced the “Modern” with the “Traditional” (Fact Sheet, 2012). Many of the children’s parents are TBS Alumni and/or children of parents who consider themselves ‘progressive’ like the Americans but want their children to speak Arabic and to be networked within the elite of Kuwait. For this school, the saying ‘it is not what you know but who you know’ offers the best description of its agenda.

The administration introduced us to Ms. Karen, a teacher who was enthusiastic about Fine Arts, and was willing to share her room for the week. Ms. Karen has been working in TBS for over 18 years. She is from the United Kingdom and is married to a Kuwaiti, and their children attend TBS. Her assistant, Ms. Noor, is a Kuwaiti; she is the daughter of one of the original American teachers at TBS. The Arabic Teacher is Palestinian with a Jordanian passport; she has also been in TBS for 18 years and has a love of the arts, including drama. Children spent half the day in the Arabic classroom and the other half in the English classroom. Both rooms are spacious and filled with a plethora of art materials, books, puzzles, games etc. The children have Physical Education with Ms. Irina from the Ukraine twice a week and a lesson with an Egyptian music teacher for Arabic Music and another Lebanese music teacher for English Music, taught in separate classrooms. There is a yellow uniformed assistant dedicated to each classroom, and is referred to as a nanny<sup>3</sup>. They are usually from central and southern parts of India.

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<sup>3</sup> Domestic help in an institution is a natural occurrence in Kuwait. Maids are usually hired from a company that mediates the process, and the salary is usually not more than \$300 a month.



Figure 30. The children are accompanied by their *entourage* as they head to the Music classroom.



Figure 31. The Nanny is tying a boy's laces.



*Figure 32.. The nanny is wiping the tables after the children were done painting.*



*Figure 33. She also tends on the children in the bathroom.*

## **The Day**

The majority of the children are greeted by both the Pre-School Principal and the Deputy Principal, as they arrive at the gate. The former is a Canadian woman who has been in the school for a year, and who left the year after our fieldwork was completed. The latter is a Palestinian woman and has been in the school for over twenty years. The children play in the playground until the bell rings for the morning assembly. The morning assembly is a ten-minute routine that starts with exercise with Ms. Irina, then a Qur'anic prayer recited by a child, a flag salute performed by three children as the Music teacher supports them with her digitized piano, and concludes with the Kuwaiti National Anthem. Every twenty children are assigned a homeroom, this is where they station their bags, and meet in the morning and after classes are over.

After the morning assembly, the children go to their homerooms. Children sit on the floor and wait for the teacher to go through the attendance. This is an important time for the children to socialize. Each group of children has two rooms located next to each other, one for English and the other for Arabic and each language group lasts for an hour and thirty five minutes. The Language group teacher, with an assistant and a nanny, teach two groups of students in a specific classroom. The Nanny is the extra hand that the teachers have in the classroom, from cleaning after an art project, to helping the children in the bathroom to tying laces. Between each language group, the children have a 25 minute recess, and another 25 minutes to eat a lunch that packed at home. The second Language group begins after washing-up. The day ends with the return to the Homeroom. Children are picked up at 12:30 pm, by the usual duet of the driver and the maid.

## The Arabic Classroom

The large classroom was separated into a carpeted section with a whiteboard, and this is where the teacher-led performance takes place. Mr. Reham began the day with *al-Salamu Alaikum* (peace be upon you) using a puppet; she greeted the children and asked about their well-being.<sup>4</sup> The puppet and the children giggled and talked in classical Arabic.<sup>5</sup> Ms. Reham usually explained a lesson through interacting with the puppet, by reading a story, or by demonstrating an activity at the traditional carpet.

Thirty minutes later, each child was designated to a station. Ms. Reham usually decided who- sits -where depending on what they have done the day



Figure 34. The Arabic classroom is split into two halves.

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4 This is a necessary action between two strangers, or people that you saw for the first time that day in most of the Arab countries. Greeting someone with “Al-Salam Alaikum” and asking about their well being is a method to ‘break the ice’ between people.

5 Arabic is Kuwait’s national language, but the Arabic spoken by the Kuwaitis a mix of Iraqi, some Urdu and Persian making a local spoken Arabic which is separate from what is taught in schools referred to as classical Arabic.





*Figure 35.* The traditional carpet is where the children sit in the beginning of the lesson.



*Figure 36.* Ms. Reham's and puppet started off the Arabic lesson.



*Figure 37.* The children were encouraged to use their fingers for painting.



*Figure 38.* A child is enjoying painting.



before. The tables are laid with objects and materials that are related to the lesson of the day (e.g. shapes, name writing, colors). The lesson for the day was to learn about colors, and pink was the color of choice. Each table had different objects on it; pink dolls, toys, pink dress-up clothing, pink balloons and the last one had pink finger or tempera paints. The children moved around the tables when prompted by Ms. Reham, and supported by Ms. Huda. Ms. Huda was an older Palestinian assistant who has also been at TBS for a long time and is soon to retire and move to Abu-Dhabi where her son and her grand children now live.

I found it interesting that the boys were fascinated by the activities that are usually labeled as “*girly*” or more feminine. Hamed and Ali were so excited by the activity of brushing the little doll’s hair. Ali even wore the pink head cover and insisted that we photograph him. The girls on the other hand, were not so fascinated by the dolls, the baby or the head dress.



Figure 39. The boys were attracted to the dolls and domestic activities.



*Figure 40.* Two boys loved playing with the dolls.



*Figure 41.* Cheese! I wonder if Ali would feel so comfortable with this outfit next year!

When the children were done with the paintings, Ms. Reham asked each child to identify the details in the painting as she simultaneously added her written description on the page. The teacher shared Besma's enthusiasm as she walked me through the painting. She described to me that the little girl drew two butterflies, but identified one as 'real' because it was flying and the other one as not 'real' because it was pasted on a present.



*Figure 42.* Besma's two butterflies.

The Arabic classroom was guided by Ms. Reham's directions. She used her judgment on when a child was ready to switch to the next station, or continue a task that needed more attention. She went around the tables, assisting and guiding each child when it was necessary.



## The English Classroom

An abundance of materials and books adorned the shelves that were placed against the walls. Ms. Karen *loves* art, and tries to include drawing, painting and clay on a daily basis in her stations. The children followed Ms. Karen in a line as she lead them to the Homeroom where Elora was waiting for them with 20 colorful IKEA plastic cups filled with cold water from the fountain, since they were hot and thirsty from running outside. Elora is the Nanny designated for Ms. Karen's classroom; she is from Maharashtra in India.



*Figure 43.* The English classroom had a dynamic layout for the tables, tables moved around when it was necessary.

Different from the Arabic classroom, this room did not have one traditional carpet; instead, there were three identical square, modern carpets that could be moved whenever needed. The stations were laid closer to the periphery of the room, to offer flexibility in the room layout. The children sat on the carpets

facing Ms. Karen, who was sitting a chair and taking attendance. She encouraged dialogue from and with the children and sharing news about themselves, which was a typical morning event.



*Figure 44.* This spacious, light flooded classroom with prefabricated posters and wall hangings including the *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* paraphernalia was reminiscent of American classrooms.

There were two very tired looking boys this morning. I found out later that their parents were travelling abroad. So one of the children was left with the domestic staff with his baby brother, and the other was staying at his grandparents' house. The second boy, I was told by his Nanny, took a pilgrimage to his deserted home with the digital camera that I had given him, to capture the chandelier in the living room.

This incident reminded me of my own story as a child, with our chandelier at home. My brothers and I called ours “the showing-off chandelier” which my mother had shipped all the way from Murano, Italy. Every time we had a guest, she would ask us to switch it on. The chandelier was a common theme in all the children’s photographs in every school, but by far this TBS student had the largest and most extravagant one.



Figure 45. The chandelier.

Ms. Karen went through her morning routine. She asked the children to share a message with the group, after she called their names:

*Ms. Karen: Good morning Hamed*

*Hamed: Good morning.*

*Ms. Karen: what would you like to say? What would be your message be today.*

*Hamed: Good morning. Today is Sunday*

*Ms. Karen: Good job. So any message is okay. Good morning Faisal.*

*Faisal: Good morning. I slept without a pillow and my nanny gave me a pillow...  
(and he burst out laughing).*

The teacher then reads a story, usually the same story for the duration of the week. Today she turned on the *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*<sup>6</sup> recording. She flipped through the giant book, while an American voice-recording animated the story. As Ms. Karen flips the page, the assistant prepares the stations. There are six stations set up, each with different accessories depending on the educational purpose. There is clay or paint for the art station, white boards and markers for the writing stations, reading books with telephone pipes for children to hear themselves reading, individual sketchbooks for each child with a special seat for the teacher to prompt them with subjects according to the lesson, a dress up station on the floor, and the last two table shift between puzzles and different educational toys. On the floor, there is usually a puppet station with a small puppet theatre, and a little reading corner with pillows and books.

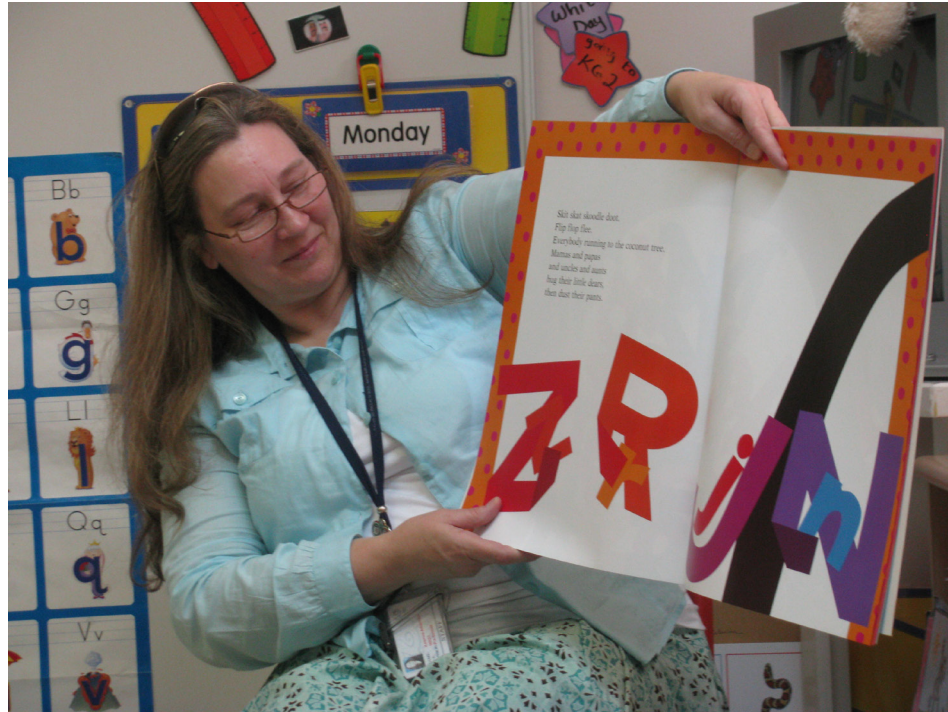


Figure 46. Ms. Karen and the children's full attention.

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<sup>6</sup> This is a children's story book authored by Bill Martin Jr and John Archambault.





*Figure 47.* Today Ms. Karen used a recorded voice to narrate the story, as she flipped the pages.



*Figure 48.* There is a ten minute timer that is controlled by a different child each class session. He/she rings the bell after the ten minutes are over; this is when the switch between stations takes place.



Figure 49. Ms. Karen listening to a child who is responding to her prompt, the next step is to draw on the paper.

Ms. Karen had two types of sketchbooks for each child, one was blank and the other had lines for writing practice. Many of the blank sketchbooks' pages were dated, and most of them had a phrase that described a child's assignment for that day; there were also reminders of fieldtrips taken, events like the national day, or spring break.

Ms. Karen viewed those sketchbooks as tools for expression and creativity, and a means to help children develop pre-writing skills. She was also currently working on a pilot study to use Apple iPads in the classroom. Ms. Karen described the work produced as "beautiful", referring to some of the children as "Budding Picasso's" (Email correspondence on August 2012). Children were encouraged to look at images pinned on the wall, to guide them as they drew.

In this classroom, drawing was not viewed as a tool for exploration; rather it is considered to be a tool used to represent a subject or a theme, prescribed by the week, depending on the goals of the curriculum e.g. *When I grow up I want to be... police officer, chef, painter etc.*



Figure 50. A girl was drawing a princess, which had a crown that matched the girl's necklace.



Figure 51. This is a drawing in a child's sketchbook titled "My home"





Figure 52. "When I grow up I want to be a police officer".

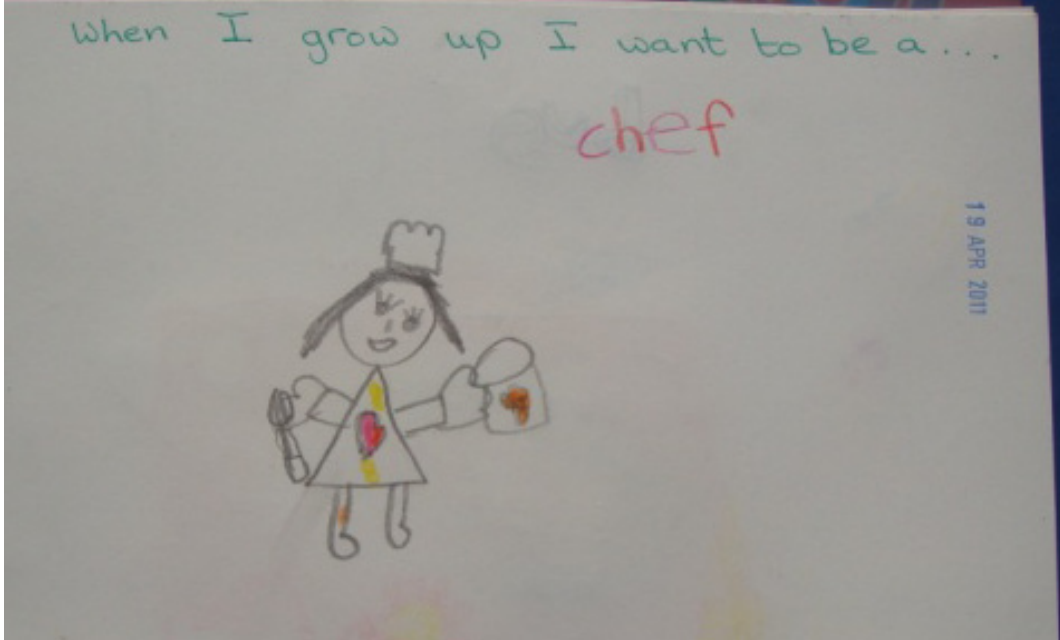


Figure 53. "When I grow up I want to be a Chef".

## Reflecting on the Play

I observed the classroom at the end of the school year, a time when special events take place. Our Kindergarten class was invited to experience two plays organized and performed by the high school and middle school students of TBS. In the first one, the children went to the upstairs theatre room, where they were entertained with a show about good and evil. This play was conceived and performed by the National Honors Society students. The “good” character was named *Dishdasha Man*. The ‘dishdasha’ is the long white robe worn typically by men in Kuwait. Dishdasha Man wore a cape made from a *gutra*, which is the typical head-dress worn by men in Kuwait.

What I found very interesting is that the children reflected upon this play for the remainder of the week. In the dress-up corner and the white-board station, conversations and visual representations of *Dishdasha Man* emerged.



Figure 54. The children were waiting to be entertained with the high school students’ play.



*Figure 55.* This is the *gutra* usually worn by Kuwaiti men. From <http://www.simplyislam.com/images/products/53323.jpg>



Ali, the youngest child of the group, was very vocal and active. He constantly tried to crack jokes, and gain the teacher's attention. Ali picked a red and white checkered apron from the dress-up basket, tied it around his neck (which was what Dishdasha Man has done with his gutra) and galloped across the class room, (holding the apron in the same way that the high school performer had done), and announced whimsically *"I am, Dish-dasha Man!"*



Figure 56. Dishdasha Man



*Figure 57. Ali here was in the process of becoming Dishdasha Man.*



*Figure 58. Drawing Dishdasha Man on the white board.*

In another instance, two of the children were drawing this character using the white board meant for writing words. I found those spontaneous, emergent representations of this popular Dishdasha Man as an opportunity to gain insights



Figure 59. “Look I made Dishdasha Man!”

on how the children were making meaning from the visual culture around them. Dishdasha Man, a character fabricated by TBS’s high school students, had become a nexus for the young children’s representation. Yet, the adults involved in the activities never commented on the children’s feverish fascination with their productions.

### **Al-Batin (The Core)**

As I looked through the visual data, I could not ignore the images that kept popping up. Puppets, dress up, plays: all are performances. Is the child indirectly taught how to perform, to *act* her way to college? What is the point of this performance? Is it to provide distractions...and more distractions, with many types of toys, activities, books...fluff. *There were also many ladies dressed in yellow, mediating life, mediating ones agency.*

Trying to look deeper, beyond the surface, beyond the image, I decided to look at it through Althusser's (1971) theory of reproduction and Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'cultural capital' and 'social capital' (Bourdieu, p. 47).

The classrooms of TBS have become a source of reference for teachers in other schools in Kuwait. Concepts and ideas that are brought in by educators from the United States or Canada are practiced and employed with minimal input from *local staff*.

*"Yeah"* Chuckled Nadia, an administrator at TBS *"this year it's a Canadian curriculum...next year 'who knows what kind of curriculum', depends who gets hired...and this keeps going every couple of years"* (personal communication, October 2011)

Nadia had a familiar smile on her face; I had seen it on my Arabic teacher's face. She is still holding up that smile after 26 years of teaching in the same school, with no power to voice her opinion. Yet, by listening closely to Ms. Reham's words in her interview, I can see how many of the Arabic teachers with extensive experience negotiate their input through whatever curriculum is given to them. It *is* a private school after all, so there is more freedom in interpreting the guidelines given from the administration.

### **Conclusion**

Children at TBS have been indulged with services provided by the nannies, individual attention from the teachers, a plethora of art materials, toys, books and costumes, as well as exclusive entertainments from the older students. The children learned many methods for expression; painting, performing, using puppets, playing musical instruments etc. Yet there was not enough reflection that occurred in relation to those representations, like we saw with the Dishdasha Man incident.





Figure 60. Camera...action!! Are children performing 'life'? Are we detached from our bodies? Are we 'Doing School'?

By making available all necessary material for the child, e.g. books, toys, games, art materials, PE and Music teachers, and equipment, TBS has become the image of a school that *has it all*. Yet, this school is only accessible to a certain population in Kuwait. When, in 1992, the management attempted to open enrollment to students on “stricter criteria based upon ‘ability’ rather than family name [they] were faced with came under fierce opposition” (email correspondence with Educator in Kuwait 1998-2008, 26 May 2012). This exclusivity has managed to *reproduce* children that possess ‘cultural capital’, and embody a sense of ‘entitlement’ (Bourdieu , 1984). They are comfortable with being part of the dominant culture, and to have dispositions to be in leadership and managerial positions.

Initiated by members of the merchant class, TBS has maintained its exclusivity to those groups. This co-educational system attracts Kuwaitis who consider themselves *progressive*, not bound by their traditional or Islamic beliefs. There was no “contradiction [for them] between Islam and economic and social progress” (Ghabra, 1997, p. 363). This limited the less urbanized and more traditional families, who were still bound by values that disregarded the coeducation<sup>7</sup>, from admitting their children into TBS. TBS has become like the laws of endogamy in the past, perpetuating the power structure of society.

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<sup>7</sup> This is part of the Kuwaiti ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984), where, men and women dominate different milieus; women dominated the private spaces, whereas the men dominate the public domain. In the past, men were absent for months on pearl-diving expeditions, whereas the women stayed on land taking charge of the household and children.





Figure 61. The performance.

## Chapter 5. The Orange School (OBS)

“[The school] offers a challenging, high quality educational program, which reflects and strengthens the Arabic and Islamic culture with an awareness of and respect for the other cultures [...] it also prepares students to be well rounded and productive members of an ever changing society” (OBS[pseudonym], 2012).



Figure 62. The entrance to the Kindergarten at TBS.

OBS is a three year old K-12 school, established and managed by a handful of Kuwaiti Educators. It is located in Al-Ahmadi, the southern-most Governorate of Kuwait. The campus is situated right off a major highway. Teachers are mostly of Arab nationalities, including those teaching the English curriculum. Children are segregated by gender, except at the kindergarten level.





*Figure 63.* Early in the morning many cars are parked illegally by the parents. This is to avoid coming into the school through the back roads which takes more time. The parents exit the main highway and into this dirt path to enter into the school through an open portion of the metal frame of the fence.



*Figure 64.* The wire gate, broken to ease the entrance to the school.



*Figure 65.* The side dirt road leading to the school.

A relative of mine was doing consulting work with this school when I was in Kuwait to do fieldwork. One of the people who established this school was also involved in the establishing the original Bilingual School (TBS). OBS was founded by a group of Kuwaiti educators, most of whom have Masters degrees in education; some are also founders of other schools in Kuwait. I contacted one of the founders who is also an owner via email about my interest doing research. I visited the school and talked to the acting head of the school, and started observing the classroom that day.

Ms. Halla was the English teacher as well as the acting head of Kindergarten. Ms. Halla came to Kuwait with her husband after completing a five year degree in Pharmacology from Lebanon. Because laws in Kuwait required her to have three years of experience before practicing Pharmacology, she chose teaching due to the flexible timings,<sup>1</sup> and started working as a kindergarten

<sup>1</sup> Many women in Kuwait chose to work in early childhood schools because of the 3 month break in the summer, and the shorter work day which is usually from 7am to 3pm in contrast to working in the private sector which could be until 5 or 6pm.

teacher. She was extremely helpful and efficient. On my request to observe her classroom, she immediately phoned the parents and received a verbal consent for my research. The next day, she attached a cover letter to the consent forms, and sent them home with the children for their parents' signatures.

Similar to TBS, half the school day was taught by the English teacher, Ms. Halla and the other half by the Arabic teacher Ms. Hana. Each teacher had an assistant who was also the religion teacher Ms. Ulla. I interviewed both teachers to get a better sense of the school's community. Ms. Hana was the Arabic teacher; she had a bachelor in Early Childhood Education from Egypt. Children attending this school were described to me as *min elmantigah el ashra*, which translates as *from the tenth areas* which are the developments close to the southern-most border of Kuwait. This description also refers to those who became naturalized Kuwaiti's after the 1950's; hence they are considered still as *badu* or bedouin in English, and have immigrated from Saudi Arabia (Longva A. N., 2006).



Figure 66. The general area of the school.





Figure 67. The side façade of the school.

### **Al-Zahir (The Surface)**

Knowing that this was a conservative school, and that women are expected to wear a head scarf (hijab), I dressed in loose fitting clothing and tied my hair back. Nonetheless, I went through the building feeling very awkward.

*Ooops....I had on blood-colored nail polish from my brother's wedding party last night. I forgot to take it off; that made me more nervous. To some, having nail polish means that you do not pray, or your prayer is not considered correct, since the water does not touch your nail underneath the polish!!*

All of the teachers are dressed in black Islamic *abayas* (which are a long black cloaks), and have the *hijab* on (the hair cover). Here the black abaya is different from the traditional one worn by bedouin women; it is referred to as *abaya Islamiya*, which translated as Islamic abaya. It is usually worn over one's regular clothes that are worn at home such as dress, skirt and even jeans. I walked through the side entrance, passing a child dressed in a Barney costume, and found

my way along a confusing path to the kindergarten. This internal entrance has a receptionist who locks the doors when school day commenced; this is because some of the teachers wear a *nikab*, a face covering which is taken off when classes begin. While it is acceptable for other women and children to see an uncovered women's face, men, other than a woman's husband or brothers, are considered *haram*, or forbidden.

The morning assembly started at 7:35am in the courtyard designated for the Kindergarten. There were two other areas that I noticed, one for the elementary girls and the other for the elementary boys. The assembly was a 30-minute event, where all the groups lined up facing the inner court. This major event of the day was a joy for me to experience; the teachers were engaged in competitions and races with the children.

Teacher on duty: "*Al Salamu aliakum ya atfal...Kaif asbahtum?*" (Peace- be-upon you ya<sup>2</sup> children, how did you morn, own translation).

The group: "*Asbahna wa asbah el Mulk li Alaah*" (we morned and the morning is owned by Allah's Majesty, own translation).

Then she says: "*Felnagif fi khushoo*" (let's stand in reverence or respect, own translation).

After this introduction, a child then recited a piece of the Qur'an, then the flag salute followed by the national anthem. Lessons began with the children collectively reciting the colors. After this, a race began, first with six children running side by side, then two children at a time raced using a plastic three wheeler.

After the exercise, around 15 children, with several teachers, held a colorful fabric of a parachute from its periphery. As they lifted it, the teacher

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<sup>2</sup> Ya is an adverb used in front of a noun to re-assert it, ya afal, is similar to the slang yo brother as used in some neighborhoods in the USA.

counted ‘one, two three’, and up it went. I was surprised to see the parachute; as an elementary student at TBS, I remembered doing the same activity. I heard the echoes of the enthusiastic claps as the teachers cheered the students; it was a euphoric moment. After this, it was the teachers’ turn to answer questions, broadcasted through the microphone held by the teacher on duty. I felt the joy and playfulness as each teacher competed for the correct answer. The children watched politely as their teachers also had fun.



*Figure 68.* The teachers with the parachute.



*Figure 69.* The children with the parachute.

## Classroom

The children headed back to their classroom following the color-coded taped lines on the floor, which also enters into the classrooms. At 8:00, the



Figure 70. Following the red line!

children entered the classroom, and placed their names on the name chart. The children had an hour and forty five minutes of English and the same for Arabic. Amin, a child who had one eye covered due to an injury the day before, caught Ms. Halla's attention:

Ms. Halla: *"Amin took plaster from his eyes...say Hamdillah ala el salama Amin"* (Thank God for the safety of Amin, own translation). *"Who can tell me what the day is today?"*

Ms. Halla: *"Yesterday was Tuesday...if you read nice; you will receive very nice things from Ms. Halla"*. (Here she was referring to rewards such as Stickers and happy faces).

Rakan: *"Wednesday"*.



Ms. Halla: *“Raise your hand”*.

Nasif: *“Today is Wednesday”*.

Ms. Halla: *“Wa Waa Wednesday, clap for Nasif everybody”*.

The assistant walked to Nasif and drew bright orange star on the back of his hand. The classroom starts getting loud with children’s chatter; Ms. Halla looked upset, turned off the light and left the room. She came back to an even louder classroom, and said, *“No no no no no... this is KG. 1;”*<sup>3</sup> then she threatens them *“or you’ll stand on the yellow line!!”* She then used the car chart tactic: every child was designated a car. By the end of each week, if a child’s the car reaches the end, it qualified them to get a chance to become the *star of the week*.



Figure 71. The star of the week! Little Red Riding Hood.

<sup>3</sup> The class is KG. 2, but in an effort to show them that she feels that they are behaving like younger children, Ms. Halla referred to them as KG.1. It is an insult to them to be compared to the younger children. So it is her hope that they will ‘shape-up’ and act more mature.





Figure 72. The Qur'an lesson.



Figure 73. The alphabets.



Figure 74. Children are reciting the alphabets.

I sat discretely in a corner of this rectangular room, on one of the children's chairs. There were three doors in this classroom: the exit to the hallway door, the entrance to the bathroom door, and the exit to the 'playground'<sup>4</sup> door. There was a floral carpet in the center of the room, and five tables, each designated to a particular station. A teacher's desk was placed close to the whiteboard, on the narrower side of the rectangle, opposite to the kitchenette and bathroom. Most of the children were reciting English Alphabets with a tone closer to screaming when I first entered the room. Ms. Ulla pasted *happy faced stickers* on the hands of those children that the teacher called out. There were many ways in which the teacher rewarded or punished the child. The ultimate reward is to be *The Star of the Week*, for a whole week the child gets to wear whatever she/he wants, and a poster that is brought in by the parents that is placed in front of the room the whole week, and a party that is hosted by the child's mother, where food and gifts for the children is brought in. I noticed some giggles from a student

<sup>4</sup> The playground is basically a Little Tikes® plastic playground unit wedged between the fence wall and the classroom wall, an after-thought in the building design.



named Sama who always got into trouble. Her car moved backwards more than it did forward! This made it harder for her to become *special* for a week and wear her fancy outfits.

The children stood on the floral carpet as they recited the morning routine. First they faced the alphabet wall and recited, “*this letter is A and the sound is aaa aaa aaalligator; aaa aaa aaligator;*” second they rotated 90 degrees and faced the “Manners Wall” as they recited, “*no kicking, no pushing, no hitting, keep your hands to yourselves;*” finally, on the last rotation, they recited the shapes and colors. The teacher then started a song, as the children followed her cue: “*point to the ceiling... point to the floor... point to the window... point to the door... put your hands up on your knees...clap clap clap.*”



Figure 75. Reading from the Scotts Foresman reading products.

Still standing, the children listened to the specific guidelines for the worksheet they were to complete today.

H: “If you don’t draw the orange line Ms. Halla will put (she pointed to her face) sad face.... What will Ms. Halla put?”

Children: “sad face.”

### **Positive Etiquettes**

In order to use the bathroom, children usually raised two fingers in the air, and the teacher would nod as he/she walked politely on the red line leading to the bathroom. After lunch, Samir swept the *fatafeet* (little crumbs) off the floor; it was his duty for this week. Self-sufficiency was an encouraged habit in OBS. The Daida (the word used here for the maid) entered the classroom once in the middle of the day, to wash cups and wiped tables.



Figure 76. Children are waiting on the red line for the bathroom.



Figure 77. The children sweeping after lunch.

### **Mischief**

When the teacher was preoccupied and not paying attention to the children, there were often incidents of mischief (in which, the children were excited to be involved). My grandfather recalled those moments as a child, when the teacher left the room; he called it “the breathing moment,” where the room was filled with *haraj and maraj* which translates as clowning around and chaos (Al-Bader, 1997).





Figure 78. Looking at each other through a blurry screen.



Figure 79. Looking at each other through a blurry screen.

## Art Lesson

Last week's art lesson, according to the neatly organized file that Ms. Halla showed me with enthusiasm, was making platypus paper bag-puppets. Twenty fuzzy beasts hung on a clothe-line stared back at me. Each one had its



Figure 80. The brown bag platypus puppet.

own character but my gaze dismissed them immediately, since my training in American art schools taught me to view this type of art as not conducive to creativity. I caught myself whenever I passed any judgment, and reaffirmed my interest in an ethnographic approach. I took a deep breath and started to extend *generous reading* (Tobin, 2000) of the art activities in the classroom. Instead of approaching the art project as lacking in creativity, reading it generously happens through the use of “intuition, empathy, and imagination” (Tobin, 2000, p. 139). This is a tool that is used in discourse analysis as a way to look at text with “the





Figure 81. The art project assembly line.



Figure 82. Children are coloring the Fireman red, following the guide on the wall.

assumption not that mistake were made but that choices were made and are being tried out and on” (Wysocki, 2004, p. 23). This offers a deeper look, into the art project as meeting the particular ideologies of the community, therefore an appropriate art project for the children of OBS.

### **Al-Batin (The Core)**

The images hung in the semi-private hallways revealed a specific ideal, a *taken for granted* (Apple, 2004) visual reality about how mothers, grandmothers, fathers and even uncles should look (Figure 83). These images assumed that all mothers wore the *hijab*, and all fathers wore the *gutra*, as well as implying that a pious and modest appearance is common to all. This presented an interesting



Figure 83. “Let’s Cooperate” was the title of this wall hanging.

contrast to the image on the facing wall (Figure 84). A poster, made at home (by either the mother or the maid) for the star of the week Taiba, provided clues to something beyond the surface. The image below has Taiba represented in very provocative poses. This provided me with important visual clues toward understanding the visual culture at home. I made an assumption that the mother



created this collage: she presented us with an image of a little girl as a sweet butterfly, a shy bride, a model with an attitude, a little scared kitty cat, pure snow white, and a daring diva with freckles giving the camera a kiss. Using an image from this poster, I constructed a collage (Chapter 8) that informed me with a deeper understanding of the dilemma faced by religious parents



*Figure 84.* The poster that I did not expect to see in a conservative school in Kuwait.





Figure 85. From the 17 family pictures, only 5 mothers were represented in contrast to the 9 fathers. One's of the mothers face was veiled and the other three had the *hijab* on.

## Intervention Attempt

By the fifth day of fieldwork in OBS, I was extremely curious about how a free drawing task would be approached by these children, who were constantly filling worksheets and following dotted lines. One of the students, Rawia, had a fever that day. She sat on the side of the classroom between idling and taking naps. I slipped her some markers discretely and a piece of paper (after getting visual consent from Ms. Halla) and asked her to do anything she wanted. This was extremely puzzling to her: *draw anything???* Bewildered and full of purpose, Ms. Ulla, the religion teacher, flew across the room in an instant, Ms. Ulla: “draw a circle, triangle...see like over there” (she pointed to Ms. Halla’s shapes lesson).



Figure 86. Rawia drawing trying to draw *anything*.



Ms. Ulla: *“We have Learning Centers!...here is a puzzle Rawia”* she handed Rawia the puzzle...and left me with one as well. I felt extremely vulnerable, and on the verge of tears.

*Remember don't take it personally...this is an ethnographic study...observe and internalize my subjects.*

This was my mantra as I took deep breaths. The event further stimulated questions: why did it bother me that *they* did not value free expression? Was my ego threatened? Why was she so resistant to having a four year old draw? What do *they* have against the natural unfolding of a child's graphic development? Why does each child have a photo-copy of houses and families that did not look like their own to color? Here I caught myself; this was my own ideological



Figure 87. Working.

framework, one that champions *free expression*. So maybe it was just my educational background in American art schools. I tried again, looking to understand the *emic* view of art education, as a part of an all-encompassing view of Islam, as a way of life, a rational for everything.

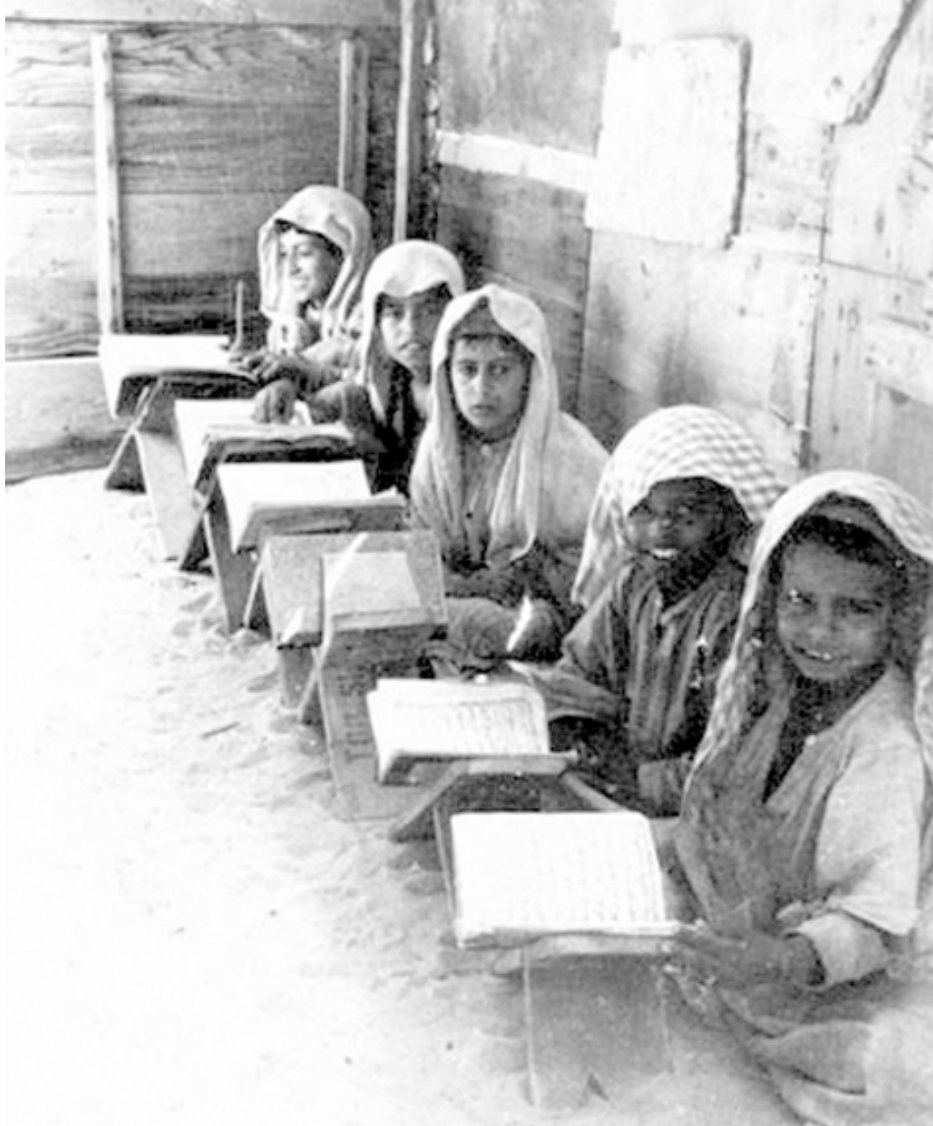
### **Concept of Hifh**

The main method of teaching in TBS was through repetition of phrases, concepts, *site words* and outlines etc. Every day, during my fieldwork at OBS, I found myself repeating rhythmic phrases and sentences that had an Islamic flavor to them. Through those phrases, I had immediate access to an insider (*emic*) discourse; it gave me a sense of belonging. The teachers had an innate strategy for *hifh*. The *emic* meaning for *hifh* is *to save*, or protect and is translated in English as to memorize. *Hifh* was the method for reciting the Holy words of Allah in the Qur'an; we *saved* it in our hearts, and then read it out loud, with *elgaa* (presentation or delivery, own translation).

To give a better understanding of this type of learning I will again use my grandfather's recollection of his own education in Kuwait, in 1918. He was six years old when he started attending his first school. This may be better described as Qur'anic lessons administered by the Mutawa'a. A religious man, the Mutawa takes on a group of boys for a nominal fee, to be taught in a simple room attached to his house. There were two doors in this room: one leading to the public walkway (or street), and the other that opened up to the internal courtyard of the teacher's house. The teacher and children would all be sitting on the floor. He had next to him a collection of multi-sized sticks, used to punish disruptive students or those who had not recited the *Surra* (a passage or stanza) from the Qur'an correctly. They repeated after him in unison, following the melody of the Holy Quran. In the pocket of each child would be crumbled dried bread and a container



with water (Al-Bader, 1997). At that time, “children smeared clay on wood and then wrote on the clay with a stick ... . The children left the school between the ages of eight and ten and celebrated the occasion by parading through the town collecting money, their reward for learning to read the Holy Quran” (Shaw, 1976, p. 139).



*Figure 88* This photograph is of children studying the Qur'an by the Mutawa'a, in a similar setting that my grandfather experienced. Retrieved from ([http://www.kuwaitculture.org/Qurain\\_2011%20pic/01%20\(7\).jpg](http://www.kuwaitculture.org/Qurain_2011%20pic/01%20(7).jpg))

This tradition of memorizing and reciting the Qur'an, the Holy book which holds all the answers to those that follow its teachings, had been also adapted to Ms. Halla's strategy for memorizing new words and numbers.

### **Conclusion**

The conflict that I experienced in this school regarding the children's lack of opportunities for self-expression led to my developing a deeper understanding of a school that was operating from an Islamic core. My subjectivity as an ethnographer became my tool for having a closer understanding of how art was viewed by Ms. Ulla.



Figure 89. "My Family" .

Islam is a way of life, and the Qur'an as the Holy text has all the answers for all aspects of life (Halstead, 2004). In an Islamic education, religion is an *all-encompassing* guide. "All knowledge has religious significance and should

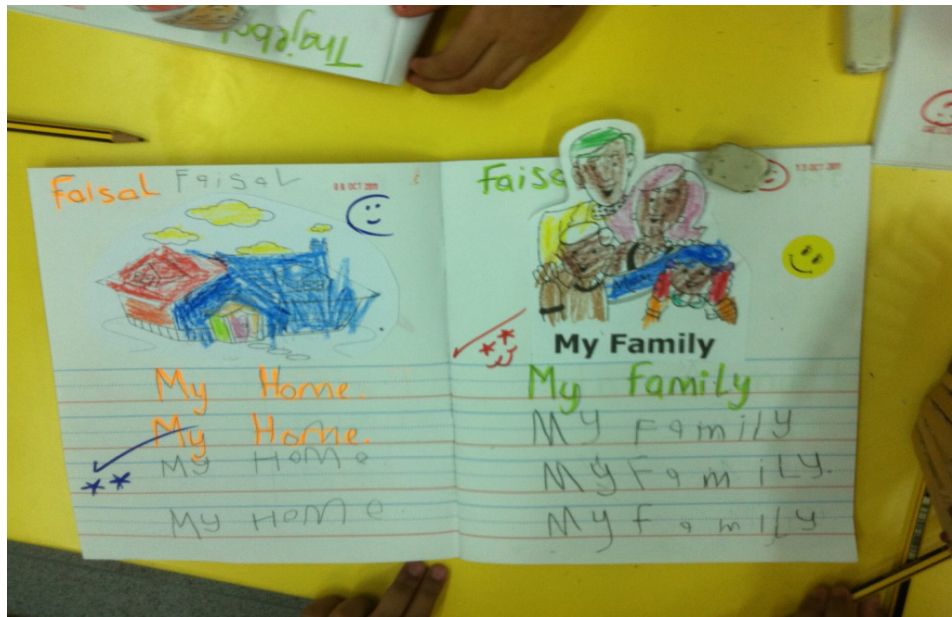


Figure 90. "My Home" and "My Family".

ultimately serve to make people aware of God and their relationship with God" (Halstead, 2004, p. 524). Hence, the concepts of *art for art's sake*, and of self expression as means to cultivate one's individual identity, are in conflict with this Islamic way of knowing.

Ms. Ulla resisted *free drawing* and Ms. Halla gave the children photocopies of outlined images at the beginning of the semester as guides to learn from. Then, by the end of the year, the child would be ready to "*draw anything beautifully*" (Interview correspondence with Ms. Halla, October 2011). The approach of both teachers was in unison with the Islamic understanding on knowledge, and that:

People do not achieve their potential automatically, for by nature they are forgetful and open to influence of injustice and ignorance; it is through

education that they develop wisdom and faith which help them to take pleasure in doing good and never lose sight of their relationship with God (Halstead, 2004, p. 523).

Ms. Halla used continuous rhythmic repetitions in teaching. She adapted the methods of hifth to fulfill the educational guidelines of tht Scott Foresman, which they are following as a curriculum for the classroom . The difference is that when this hifth framework *is* adapted to Art Education, it becomes necessary to re-search a better way to *save* or *protect* art. It may be more appropriate to work with the long history of calligraphy in the Arab and Islamic world, rather than adopting content and materials that have no relationship to the local culture. This is similar, in a way, to students making a Platypus puppet out of brown lunch-bags, readily used in America but very difficult to find and never used in Kuwait lunches.

### **Larger Context of the School**

Situated in an *in-between* area literally and figuratively; the desert and the city, from *nomadic* to a more *sedentary* lifestyle, OBS has provided the community with the rules from religion, yet using American-produced curriculum as their guide. OBS's approach to education could be viewed as an institution with an intention of combating concepts like *Desertization* (Ghabra, 1997) and *Bedoucracy* (Al-Zu'abi, 2004), which sustain the bedouin ideologies that are based on tribal loyalties, into the city. Those ideologies have contributed to the spread of nepotism and corruption in the government workforce. Money in Kuwait is a tool used by the powerful to bribe and even buy people's loyalties to receive support in parliament or to acquire more riches (Al-Zu'abi, 2004). OBS's focus on a disciplined work ethic and a religious outlook may be thought of as a



reform from corruption, which is consistent with the anti-corruption campaigns that some religious parties have managed (Brown, 2008).

The guides and disciplines used in OBS, which are also evident in their approach to art education are consistent with an Islamic framework specific to Kuwait that calls for respect for authority, discipline, and following specified guidelines in completing a task.



*Figure 91.* A collage marking important aspects of the school. Community, Skill, Discipline, Authority, and ‘Wigging’.

## Chapter 6. The Navy School (NBS)

“[The School] thrives to develop students who will:

1. Demonstrate the qualities of honesty, respect, tolerance, courtesy, concern for others, humility and self-discipline in daily practice”

(NBS[pseudonym], 2012).



Figure 92. Entering into Jahra.

I took<sup>1</sup> my mother's driver to this school since it was a 45-minute drive, and was viewed an unsafe for those who live in the city to venture into the less urbanized places, 'it is not *safe* for a woman to venture into this city alone!' The school is in Al-Jahra, which is the northern-most governorate in Kuwait. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Even though domestic workers are employed with a salary in Kuwait, they are looked at as a commodity to be borrowed and used. The *kafil*, the person who sponsors this worker, has the authority over this person. There are no regulations that protect domestic worker, hence they are not protected and are not considered citizens in Kuwait (Longva, 1997).

considered part of the “outlying areas” (Longva, 2006, p. 175), and is the least densely populated city in the country. The population that resides in Al-Jahra is largely *bedu*, which is a referent for nomad. This does not mean that they still reside in tents and herd cattle; rather it is a label used by the *hadhar*, who have been settlers longer than the *badu*<sup>2</sup>.



*Figure 93.* This is the view from the car, on my way to Jahra, a stretch of empty desert.

We got lost on our way there, because the iPhone navigational system directed me to the public all-girl high school next door. The lure of accordion melody from the morning assembly directed a row of white-scarved, navy-blue-uniformed high school girls into the neighboring school grounds. There was word graffiti adorning the thick gates of the school that were planted in sand. There was a police car outside, lights beaming in competition with the scorching sun. A

<sup>2</sup> Longva (2006) goes into detail regarding the dynamics that exist between the two groups.



teenage boy driving a *wanait*<sup>3</sup> came too close; he drove parallel to us, and gouted me with his gaze inspecting the ‘fishiness’ of my presence in Jahra. Traditionally, bedouin women covered their faces with a black *burgaa*, and their heads with an *abaya* that is supported by the head. Today, most women in Jahra have variations of *abaya*, with a *hijab*, and many still wear the *burgaa*.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 94. The burghaa. From [http://images.nationalgeographic.com/wpf/media-live/photos/000/031/cache/saudi-arabia-veiled-woman\\_3140\\_600x450.jpg](http://images.nationalgeographic.com/wpf/media-live/photos/000/031/cache/saudi-arabia-veiled-woman_3140_600x450.jpg)

We finally arrived at NBS, two hours later. Entering the gate there were two paths. On the right side, I noticed pristine glass offices and on the left was a dingy hallway that leads to the classrooms. Mr. Samir, the General Manager of the school, received me in his office. NBS is the only Bilingual School of its kind

<sup>3</sup> This is a pick-up truck, and the name *wanait* is an adaptation of the word one-eight, since it fits one driver and eight passengers. I remember seeing those trucks filled with sheep, and those *wanait*s usually associated with Bedouin drivers.

<sup>4</sup> The *burghaa* is a face cover that is worn by bedouin women in Kuwait and is different from the *nikab*, which is worn by some orthodox Muslim women.



Figure 95. The wanait.

in Jahra. A member of the ruling family originally sponsored this school in 1998, with Mr. Tristan, who is from Ireland, as the founding director. Prior to Heading the school, Mr. Tristan was one of TBS's original educators in the 1980's. Mr. Samir, originally from Lebanon, came to the school after the founding director left in 2008, was previously the Deputy Head Director of Arabic in TBS.

NBS is in the process of implementing the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program. It is a curriculum for students of ages 3 to 12, with a motto of "Think Global, Act Local" (IBO, 2012) and an interest in developing an *international person* with ten identified "attributes and dispositions" of being inquirers, thinkers, communicators, risk-takers, knowledgeable, principled, caring, open minded, well-balanced, and reflective (IBO, 2012).

Mr. Samir called Ms. Maisa, the assistant head of kindergarten, in to his office. She walked me through the classrooms as we talked about my research. Ms. Maisa closely monitors the teaching staff, making weekly rounds in each



*Figure 96.* There were hardly any windows. The school resembled a fort. This was the reality of the administration, which was extremely disconnected from the parents and community.

Arabic classroom. She is one of the original teachers that trained by Mr. Tristan, the previous head of the school. There are no teachers from the West (i.e. USA, Canada or Europe) at the kindergarten level. The Arabic classrooms are taught by a handful of *bidun*<sup>5</sup> women as well as other Arab nationalities; English classrooms are taught by women from the Philippines and India. It is extremely hard to hire Kuwaiti women from Jahra, since it is traditionally unacceptable for women to work in a mixed-sex environment.

Since NBS's management was not able to carry forth TBS's legacy of having Western teaching Staff and those with premium qualifications (Educator in Kuwait, 2012), Ms. Maisa and Ms. Elizabeth were directly involved in closely

<sup>5</sup> "Kuwait in 1959, [...] defined nationality through shared male descent and residence at a critical date, and the result, notoriously was a large, ill-defined group of people "without" nationality (the *bidun*), who claimed connection with Kuwait and Kuwaiti families but posses no documented status as part of Kuwait or of its neighbors" (Dresch, 2006, p. 203).

monitoring and training the teachers. Ms. Elizabeth, from southeastern region of the United States, is the Head of the Kindergarten. This is her second year in NBS; she was previously in another private school in the heart of Kuwait City.

### **Al-Zahir (The Surface)**

The children usually arrived at 7:40 am at the gate, with either parents or their maids. The gates closed, and those who are late get a warning. There is no morning assembly; the children go directly to their classroom. Ms. Elizabeth, the head of Kindergarten greeted the children outside the gate. Many of them were oblivious to her bubbly American “*Good morning!*” salute.



*Figure 97.* Children are greeted by the Head of Kindergarten on arrival.

Entering through the gate I passed the glass-walled administration, I always felt like I was being watched as I entered into the dark hallway. There was no natural light as I walked through the hallway, nor as I entered the florescent-lit half-classroom. I visited this campus in the school’s early years in 1999, but I had completely different impression back then. The school was only one story



high, with open classrooms (no walls separating the central area), a central sky-lit common area. This was when the school was a year old and with only a handful of Kindergarten classrooms. Today the school is three stories high, and goes up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade with a plan to be a K-12 school.



*Figure 98.* The space was very small and had few resources and art materials.

During the summer, each classroom was split by a dividing wall; this meant that instead of a teacher and an assistant for the 30 students, now every 15 students are separated to be with one teacher at a time. This split was the decision of the General Manager this summer. There were two heads to the school one is Director of Studies and the other is the Director General. The classrooms had barely any natural light, as you could see from the photographs. The teachers were not happy about this change. Having one teacher with one group of children

meant less down time. If a teacher needed to use the bathroom down the hallway, she had to ask the next-door teacher to watch over her classroom.

Ms. Joyce, the English teacher was from the Philippines, she was a bit hesitant and aloof towards my presence in the beginning. She lived in a suburb right next to where my family lives, so it takes her around 45 minutes daily to reach NBS. She has been in the school for three years, and taught at another day care center in the city previously. She described NBS as more ‘child-centered’ in comparison to the previous school in which she taught. The classroom was small, with children- height shelves and posters. There were three tables, referred to as stations, and a child-size play kitchenette. The children came into the classroom one by one, seating themselves as they socialized and started drawing on paper with markers. Children’s drawings were mounted on the walls of the classroom, with the PYP curriculum theme of “Friendship”. The drawings reflected this theme; each child drew a friend or two and sometimes included the names of those friends in the drawing.

A mother, with traditional attire of *abaya* and *burga*, came in to drop her daughter. Talking to another girl, Noora, she said: “*Intay ishfii sharich mu imashtitah*” (What is wrong with your hair, you didn’t brush it, own translation). She asked Noora why her hair was looking messy this morning, “*Umich ghasilat shaarich el barha?*” (Your mother washed your hair last night, own translation). Even though there was no facial expression to see through the black fabric, I ‘saw’ the mother’s smile that registered through her tone of voice. Noora is her niece and her mother just had a baby. This was an aunt, who was checking on the wellbeing of her niece Noora.

The first half hour of the class session was dedicated to taking attendance and asking about children’s news, and three of the children seem to have a new



Figure 99. Each child drew him or herself with one or two friends.

brother or sister in the family this morning. Then Ms. Joyce went through the calendar and the children counted the day of the year. Using a marker on a giant writing pad, she then demonstrated how to write the month and the day. The children were very curious about where I was from and thought that my accent was from Bahrain.<sup>6</sup> Three of the girls decided that my name was *Jawhara*, transforming me into one precious jewel instead of *Jawaher*, which actually means *many jewels* in Arabic. This interaction gave me immediate comfort and ease. The classroom did feel a bit chaotic and crowded at first, but after the connection made with the group of girls I felt safer. I wondered if that relief was because NBS felt

<sup>6</sup> Bedouins have a very distinct dialect, the words are pronounced with more intention and melody. Many people would confuse my dialect as Bahraini, or Iraqi or even Syrian. I feel it is because I try to be understood by every Arab, and try to be less assertive and more malleable in my pronunciations.





Figure 100. Parents of the children at NBS.  
From (<http://www.kbs-edu.com/Open%20Evenings.html>)



Figure 101. From <http://www.kbs-edu.com/Open%20Evenings.html>



familiar, since it was modeled after TBS. On the other hand, was it a relief that proved my pre-conceived ideas false, that the “outlying areas” were unsafe.

Ms. Maisa stressed that the focus of the school was to produce children who are ethical and conscientious. I asked her if this has produced tension between the parents and the children, since Bedouins are known to have different ethical ideals (Al-Zu’abi, 2004), which are based on tribal loyalties and nepotism. She expressed her pride in her previous students, who have internalized a more ethical existence and are even policing their own parents who throw trash. The school’s administration handles the parents authoritatively. An administrator who I interviewed revealed that this was part of the *white-man complex* (Anonymous, 2011). Most of the parents do not speak English, so it is not possible for them to argue or *talk back* (Anonymous, 2011) to the American Administration.

There were four stations in the classroom representing the math, reading, writing and kitchen. Children spent 30 minutes at the centers, then 25 minutes sharing what they did with the rest of the class. There were fluid interactions amongst the children: discussions in Arabic, about the latest iPad, the lentil’s cooked at Misfir’s maternal uncle’s house, the smell of henna<sup>7</sup> on Abeer’s hand, singing, humming, rocking of the neck (a traditional dance-move). All filled the room with a pleasant buzz that was complimented by Ms. Joyce’s non-threatening “please be quiet...” when necessary. I enjoyed listening-in to each table, and I was fascinated by the cohesion in the dynamic between the children. Most of the activities were group based, and collaborative. It was always difficult to transcribe any individual child’s conversation due to this constant overshadowing collective buzz.

<sup>7</sup> Henna is a paste made of herbs that die the skin orange or red, and has a distinctive aroma when the skin sweats. I remember as a child, my great grandmother had her feet, hands and hair all died with henna.



Figure 102. Social games like Bingo were the most common activity at in the English classroom. Whether it was a number or alphabet Bingo, children were constantly interacting with each other.

Then it was time for *Writer's Workshop*,<sup>8</sup> which occupied the next half hour of the class time. Ms. Joyce showed them a printed example of a little girl's process and work, printed from the Internet. Markers and paper were distributed to the children. The children folded the page in half, so that it could be thought of as a book, with a front and a back. After the children had time to work on

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<sup>8</sup> This method was also taught in TBS when I visited them in the same month; it could be that someone from the staff has attended a recent work shop that demonstrated this method. Looking through the web I found many research and videos of American teachers demonstrating aspects of *Writer's Workshop*.

their assignment, Ms. Joyce asked them to gather around in a circle and invited a volunteer to present his/her work. Adla, a strong-willed girl with a dominating presence in the classroom, raised her hand. She was the first student to make her presence known to me as she looked directly at the camera with a snarling look on her face. I was surprised to see her transform into a bashful little girl after she sat on the *author's* chair. She looked towards the teacher fidgeting and afraid to talk.



Figure 103. The process that Ms. Joyce described for the Writer's Workshop included 'think, draw/write and read.



Figure 104. The children are shown an example of another child's work as a guideline for the project.



Figure 105. Here Adla is sitting on the author's chair, looking at Ms. Joyce for support.

The School admits more boys than they do girls for their kindergarten classes, since after KG2, parents usually would transfer their daughters to a girl-only public school. The ratio of boys to girls in this classroom was nine boys to six girls. The traditional notion that girls belong in the private domain is still very strong and is evident at the reality that most women in Jahra still cover their whole bodies and faces with an *abaya* and *burgaa*. Women in the old traditional bedouin culture were in-charge of the household. Mothers weaved together the family tent and its furniture; her daughters also apprenticed in this tradition. The men and their sons went ventured to the desert, herding the camels and goats. This confinement of the women has been reproduced, and Adla's behavior may demonstrate this.

After three of the kids presented their work to the group, Ms. Joyce asked them to 'pair-share'. Hamed and Ahmed described to each other their 'almost identical' trees to each other in Arabic. It was the activity of drawing the same thing that was important to the children; they barely spoke about the drawing when asked to 'pair-share'.





*Figure 106.* Hamed described his tree to Ahmed reluctantly.



*Figure 107.* Ahmed drew the same tree but he placed it in the center of the crease.



*Figure 108.* Aziz and Mousa tried to transform their work into paper airplanes, but stopped when Ms. Joyce noticed them.



Figure 109. The children have paired up and are talking about their drawing.



Figure 110. Pair-Share

## Arabic Class

After Lunch the children go to the Arabic teacher's classroom. The room's layout was similar to the English room. Ms. Safa, the Arabic teacher was a soft spoken young woman who was from Jahra. I found out later that she was a *bidun*,<sup>9</sup> which meant 'without' a citizenship. She spoke fluent Kuwaiti, and exuded a motherly compassion towards the children. She graduated from the Open University in Kuwait, since she had no rights in Kuwait; she was not able to go to through public institutions for her education.



Figure 111. Ms. Safa is using a hairdryer to add sound effects to her story.



Figure 112. The Arabic classroom.

<sup>9</sup> "Kuwait in 1959, [...] defined nationality through shared male descent and residence at a critical date, and the result, notoriously was a large, ill-defined group of people "without" nationality (the *bidun*), who claimed connection with Kuwait and Kuwaiti families but possess no documented status as part of Kuwait or of its neighbors" (Dresch, 2006, p. 203).



The children entered the class, picked their names from the chart and placed it in the pouch designated for the attendance. Ms. Safa started her daily routine with the children by sitting in a circle, prompting the children with the first word of each greeting, prayer or song. She began this routine with the usual Islamic greeting:

Ms. Safa: “*Al Salamu Alaikum*” (Peace be upon you, own translation) in a melodious tune.

Children: “*Wa Aalaikum el Salam*” (and Peace be upon you, own translation)

In a reciprocal melody, again she repeated her greeting, but this time the children placed their hands on their forehead, like an army salute, and said:

Ms. Safa: “*Tahiat al Islam*” (The greeting of Islam, own translation).

She again in a low tone prompted them with:

Ms. Safa: “*Bismillah*” (in the name of Allah, own translation).



Figure 113. The Alphabets Train with Ms. Safa.





Figure 114. Ms. Safa has used the projector at story time.

They sang about saying the word “*Bismillah*” before eating, reading, writing, running, or playing, as they gestured together with the song. The third song was about how Allah is merciful and they ask God to fill their hearts with faith, and to protect their mothers and fathers. After that she prompted a piece of the Quran:

Ms. Safa: “*Al-Fatiha*” (The Opener, own translation)

This is usually read before any activity. Lastly, the children recited the Prophet Mohamed’s PBUH Hadith,<sup>10</sup> where he described the five pillars of Islam. Children then recited the letters of the alphabets pointing to a hand drawn and colored “Alphabet Train” (Figure 113).

<sup>10</sup> PBUH is short for peace be upon him, which is usually written and said after any Muslim mentions, the Prophets name. Hadith is anything that was said as a quote by the Prophet PBUH>

Ms. Safa remained on the floor with the children and told them a story which she used a small white board next to her to draw the characters, and used props as well as projection onto the larger whiteboard from her lap-top. She used her cell phone to add seamless sound affects to the story she was narrating as the children listened with intense focus. The teacher then asked the children questions about the story, and how it related to their own lives. The children then spread out to the different activities on the floor or the tables.

### **Art Station**

There were three stations in the room, reading, writing and an art station. Mitiib picked a green marker and said to Abdulaziz “*Abood... Ana wayak*” (he transformed Abdulaziz’s name into Abood as a form of endearment, and then pointed to their matching green markers and said: “I am with you,” own translation). Mitiib appeared helpless at the art station, constantly looking at the teacher, who was instructed not to help the children with art projects. Ms. Elizabeth had decreed this “*hands off*” policy.

At the end of the lesson, Mitiib succeeded through cultural subtleties (alternating between appearing helpless, looking at the teacher, watching the children at the table) to mobilize all three children to help him, and eventually ‘Abood’ neglected his own work, and took upon himself to finish his friend’s project. Mitiib appealed , in his appearance of *helplessness* , to the chivalry of his fellow community members. Helping each other is an important aspect of tribal communities.

### **Al-Batin (The Core)**

As a viewer, I thought of Mitiib as not interested or able to complete the task. After many viewings of the video, and watching Mitiib’s body language, I realized that this was a foreign and uncomfortable situation for him. All three



*Figure 115.* Mitiib showing Aziz the green marker.

children on this table were so absorbed in their work. They were not talking to each other, or even clowning around. Mitiib managed to turn the table around, and create a communal event out of this individualistic activity. Individuality is a foreign concept to a bedouin community (Educator in Kuwait, 2012).

### **Floor Activities**

On the floor, the children worked as a group, recreating societal dynamics. The boys were at the center of the classroom, while the girls were at the periphery. There were three boys using blocks, one of them his name was Mousa; he was the smallest boy in size and very sharp-witted. He spent much of the time making up and improvising songs or melodies as he interacted with fellow students and worked. He was the leader of the block-building clan. The three boys sat around the blocks, discussing and planning the next steps. They made a seamless rectangle with an entrance by connecting multi-colored blocks. There were many arguments and complaints amongst them yet Ms. Safa never raised her voice, always cool and composed, winning them over with her flood of warmth and empathy.



Figure 116. The building team, with Mousa as the leader and the girls watching at the periphery of this construction.

Azza and Adla, the two girls were hovering around the boys, building layers out of another kit- of -parts. They occasionally looked over at the boy's block creation as they built their own construction with so much focus and perseverance. The construction toppled over and they built it up again and again.

Adla: "*Azza Kharab...Karab baitna...karab*" (Azza, it got destroyed...destroyed our house...destroyed, own translation). Azza smiled but gathered the pieces and resumed her work. Then Mousa started singing "*Karab baitna hathi el6ayara*" (Destroyed our house this air-plane, own translation) he repeated it in a bedouin tune. The corner then breaks into a singing corner.

### **Gutra Simulation and Dance**

There was an instant during my observation where Mousa used a multi-colored plastic chain to simulate the steps of wearing the traditional gutra. He then started to clap and sing. He called his friend's name, as a cue to join in this celebration. In an instant where Mousa looked at Mitiib in the eye, Mitiib wiggled



his hands and body, and sang back to Mousa. He then continued to his destination, where he placed his folder on the yellow shelf. Ms. Joyce finally noticed: “Mousa, what are you doing?” By that time, the excitement had already dispersed, and the classroom buzz continued their daily routines.



*Figure 117.* Mousa was pretending that the plastic chains are a gutra on his head; he is wearing it with an attitude of a grown Kuwaiti man. He is probably mimicking his father or a male role models in his life.



*Figure 118.* Mousa managed to get Mitiib's attention.



*Figure 119.* Mousa has already involved Mitiib in his improvised performance by standing in his way. Mitiib wiggled his body with Mousa's tune.



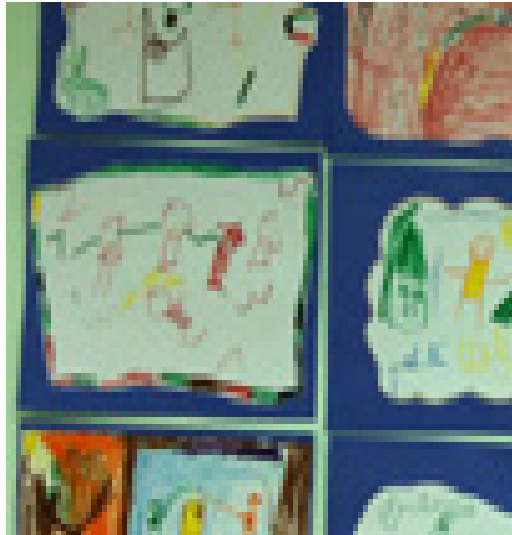
*Figure 120.* Mitiib then continued to the shelf, where he stored his drawing in a folder.

### **Drawing /Model Building Dialogue**

I found the connection between some of the drawings with the three-dimensional blocks interesting. The leader of the three boys working on the blocks usually was lead by Mousa. He worked on the floor on what he called “The



City”, and continued this representing his city in the drawings. Other children have also used this multi-colored wall motif in their drawings.



*Figure 121.* Here is a series revealing Mousa’s working of an idea using blocks and drawing interchangeably. The first drawing was hung on the wall with the rest of the children’s drawing titled “Friendship”, Mousa here drew his friends holding hands within his multi-colored wall that he built out of colored blocks.



*Figure 122.* In another collection titled “My dream is to become...” I found 3 other drawings that referenced the wall build from blocks, including Mousa’s drawing.



Figure 123. A close-up of Mousa's multi-colored wall with a car and people within it.



Figure 124. Here is the block construction that resembled Mousa's drawing.





Figure 125. “Let’s build a city...let’s put car parking”.

## Conclusion

As a researcher who is interested in art, I was intrigued by the opportunities available for the children to draw freely and explore with blocks. Yet, I found myself wondering about the dangers in *self-expression* for the sake of self-expression (Tobin , 1995). This is a culture where expression is tied in with priorities of the larger community. Leadership qualities are cultivated in western curricula, yet parents of NBS do not wish their children to have such qualities. They believed that “leadership set you apart from everyone else and might make you ‘proud’” (Educator in Kuwait, 2012).

The bedouin people posses a special logic and sense of order, qualities which are not compatible with many American ideals and ethics. Those bedouin qualities have not yet been completely obliterated by global priorities, since there has been very little social interaction between the bedouin’s and the urbanized

people. In the past, it was easier for the bedouin person to become socialized into the mainstream city culture since it was they who offered the cheap labor force; today, it is the foreign workers who provide it instead (Longva A. , 2006).

There is an obvious strife between the Western administration of the schools, and the parents who do not speak English. There is a strong emphasis from the administration towards establishing strict rules especially for the parents. The culture was described by a member of the administration as ‘chaotic’, and the children as ‘savage’ (personal communication, 2011). Ms. Maisa stressed the importance of cultivating a sense of accountability and responsibility in each child at NBS. The social cohesion that I had experience in NBS’s classrooms made it necessary for me to understand the local community as the dominating force.

NBS today has been compared to TBS in the early 1980’s (Educator in Kuwait, 2012). Being in a city that is outside of the major metropolis of Kuwait, NBS served people who are more isolated, with a more traditional bedouin lifestyle.



*Figure 126.* The NBS Community

## **Chapter 7. Comparing of the Three Schools**

In the previous three chapters, I looked at events of a typical day in each of the three schools. The analysis of the data brought to the surface common categories shared by those schools, which I would like to discuss in this chapter. Those categories include: (1) home environment, (2) dependence, (3) literacy, (4) individuality, (5) self expression, (6) art in the classroom, and finally, (7) adaptation of foreign curricula. In the last section, I discuss the relationship that each community had to *the image*, in the form of visual representations created by the children that are found in the hallways or exhibited by the teachers. Each classroom community had a distinct relationship to the image, this relationship which became my guide in situating it within the structure of society.

Within each category, there will be a comparative montage related to it. Every school will be mentioned in each category, and I will situate my findings within the larger context of Kuwait, as part of a larger globalized world. Each row of the photographic montage is color coded; starting with the Westernized school (TBS) colored turquoise, then the religious school (OBS) colored orange, and concluding with the bedouin (NBS) with a navy blue color.

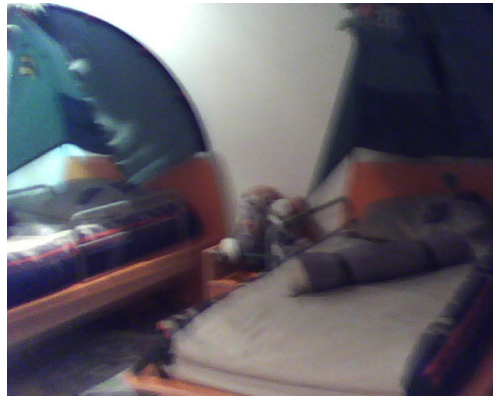
### **Home Environment**

The photographs taken by the children of their homes, and my fieldwork experience as a participant-observer, provided clues that I gathered about the aesthetic tastes of each school's population. Many of the children took a photograph of the TV screen in their home. Looking at those photographs, a child from TBS had the channel on Nickelodeon, which is an American children's cable channel. The child from OBS had it on MBC 3 and Baraem TV; the latter is an Arabic educational channel specifically designed for preschoolers, and is managed by the Al Jazeera Children's Channel (Baraem.TV, 2012). MBC 3 is



a Middle Eastern children's channel. It provides podcasts of popular American animations, like *Ben 10*, *Yu-Gi-Oh* and *The Power Puff Girls* among many others; these are Arabic-dubbed, in-house. MBC 3 also presents a block that is branded as *Nickelodeon*, employing the "highest level of censorship of all its sister channels" (MBC 3 (Middle East), 2012), as well as in-house Arabic shows. The NBS child had the TV screen on MBC 4, a channel that broadcasts older American movies and TV shows. These are edited and subtitled or dubbed for viewers in the Middle East (MBC 4, 2012) (MBC 4- Live Television from Dubai, UAE, 2011-2012). So the non-religious schools both had American TV, yet a Middle Eastern host mediated the bedouin's channel.

## Children's Homes



TBS



OBS



NBS

Figure 127. The photographs from the children's homes and children's bedrooms.

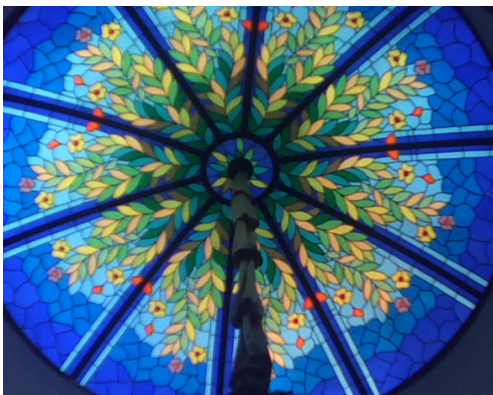
The Homes



TBS



OBS



NBS



Figure 128. Here are the chandeliers and furniture from each school.



## Media Exposure



TBS



OBS



NBS

Figure 129. The TV screens in each home.



## Dependence

This category was most obvious in the first school, TBS, where the majority of the students were from the *secular* merchant class. As I mentioned in the narrative, the nanny was an important member of the classroom, as well as at home. She helped children clean up, or use the bathroom; she organized the toys and even tied the children's shoelaces. The nanny was an extension of the child's body.

This is not the case at the *religious* school, OBS, where a large number *naturalized* Kuwaitis resided. Parents were a mixture of government employees, officers in the army, and teachers at OBS. There are even commuters from Saudi Arabia, who want an Islamic education that "meets the highest international standards" (OBS[pseudonym], 2011). Cleaning after him/her self and using the bathroom unaided was very important for the administration as a way to "prepare students to be responsible [and] productive" (OBS[pseudonym], 2011). Yet, the children at OBS were very dependent on the structure provided by the teachers, which was not the case for the other two schools. This structure was represented by rules that needed to be followed precisely by the students.

The children at NBS were not dependent on maids or on the school rules. Being in Al-Jahra, the capital city of the largest number of bedouin populated governorate, the children were dependent on each other, on the *community* of the classroom. This is a residue from the nomadic nature of the bedouins' harsh lifestyle, where interdependence within the community is important for their survival (Ismael, 1993).

## Maid at Home



TBS



OBS



NBS

*Figure 130.* TBS children had many photographs of the maids in their collection, yet for OBS and NBS those were the only images. Notice the covers on the maids' head.

## Literacy

The focus of all teachers was that the children were ready to read and write so that they were ready for elementary school. The children in TBS were the ones that had most exposure to English already at home, so the focus of the teacher was how the children use the language with confidence and expression. There was a shift in curriculum recently at TBS. With this new Ontario Curriculum there are less art activities, and teachers have been instructed to focus more on reading and writing.

In the OBS English classroom, learning to read and write the alphabets and new vocabulary was more rigorous than in the TBS classroom. This was due to two reasons: similar to NBS, English is not spoken at home, and the school's Islamic framework demands a quantifiable account for the children's progress. Every week, the teacher focused on a new letter of the alphabet, a number, and a color, in addition to many new site-words.

The Arabic curriculum at OBS was a hybrid between what the teacher has learned from the Scott Foresman curriculum, and what she has acquired from experience. I found the Arabic curriculum, as well as the Qur'anic recital at OBS, were more developed as systematic product-oriented approaches than in the other two schools. The teachers used repetition of phrases, and made sure that each child had an opportunity to perfect the phrases aloud.

Even though literacy was also important for NBS, there were no strict guidelines for the child to follow, like there were at OBS. For *hadhar* (Kuwaitis who had lived in urban environments for a long time), the bedouins' traditions and mannerisms were incompatible with their own (Ghabra, 1997). Hence, since NBS was established by a member of the ruling family, with an administration that was much influenced by TBS, it was important to first acculturate the bedouin child

according to the norms of the dominant group. The administration had focused on such norms as part of the IBPYP's<sup>1</sup> description of the student as “principled - they have a sound grasp of the principles of moral reasoning and have acquired integrity, honesty and a sense of justice.”



*Figure 131.* A photo from the website, showing Ms.Elizabeth and Ms. Maisa talking to the mothers of the Kindergarten children.  
From (<http://www.kbs-edu.com/Open%20Evenings.html>)



## Classroom



TBS



OBS



NBS



Figure 132. TBS had the largest and most equipped classroom, OBS was in the middle, and NBS had the smallest and least equipped classroom.

## Literacy



TBS



OBS



NBS

Figure 133. TBS had a classroom with variety of activities, OBS was more about the teacher leading the classroom, and NBS the teachers were involved with the children as part of the community.



## Teacher/Student Dynamic



TBS



OBS



NBS



Figure 134. The teacher student interaction was different in each classroom. More intimate in TBS and NBS, and more formal in OBS.

## Individuality and Self Expression

Compared to the other two schools, TBS had embraced the American attitudes on creativity, individuality and self-expression, which are “central to contemporary American middle-class cultural beliefs and practices” (Tobin, 1995, p. 233). Children were classified as “Budding Picasso’s”, where anything that a child made was beautiful. This seems to be in agreement with Cizek’s (1927) attitude that the child’s creativity unfolds without any adult intervention. In practice though, the child at TBS was surrounded by images on the walls that provided implicit guides for the children to follow, and sometimes the teacher directly pointed at the images for the children to use as guides.

In the OBS classroom, there was no time allocated or space designated for *free-drawing*, or for any type of unguided expression in general. Every activity had an expected *right answer*. In the children’s workbooks, there was only one way to write a word, one image to circle around and one way to fill the blanks. The children’s creativity was revealed when they were able to fill the tasks, as well as by expressing themselves through ‘wiggling’ (de Certeau, 1984).

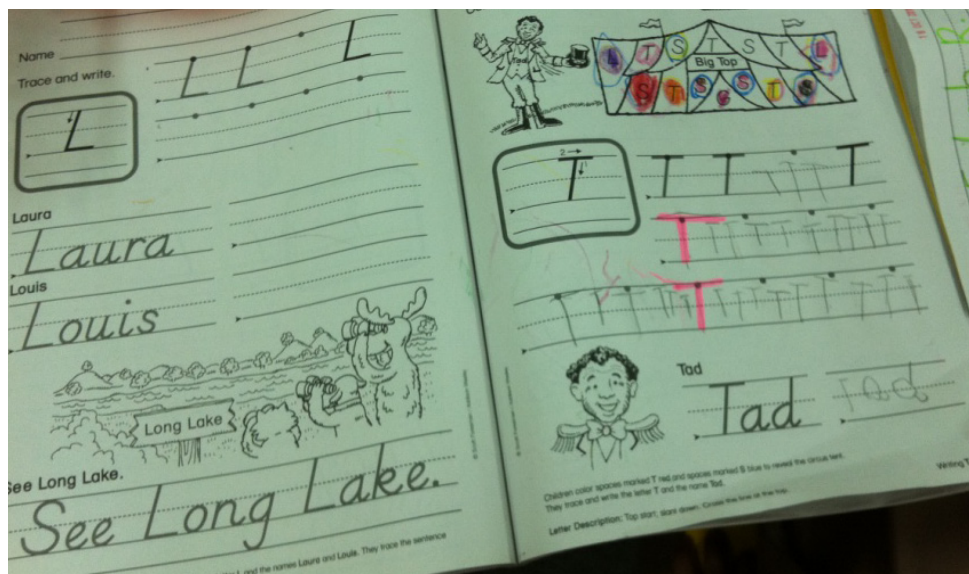


Figure 135. The workbook.



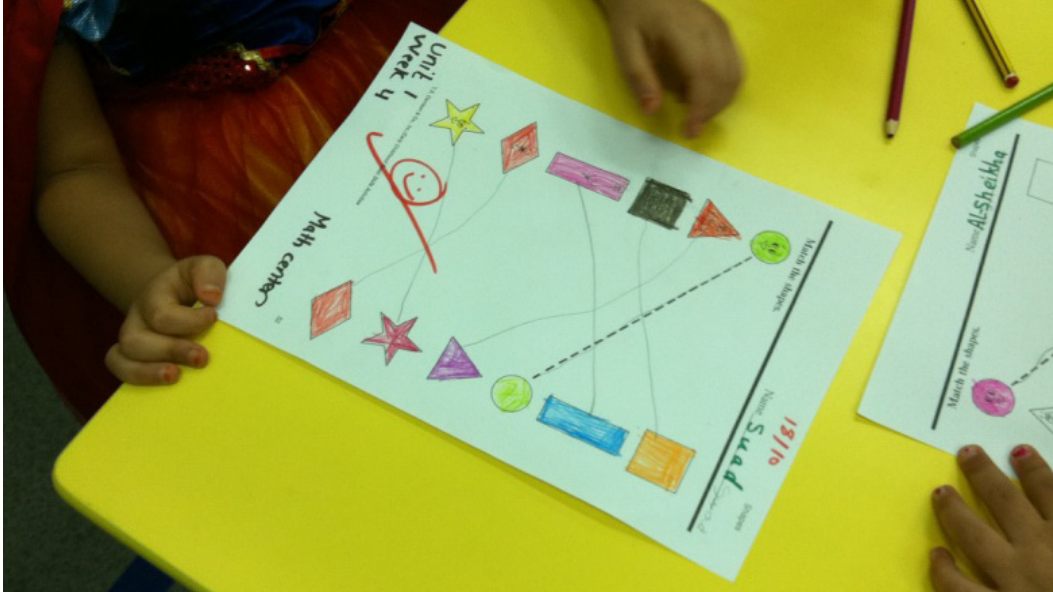


Figure 136. This is an example of a task with only one right answer.

There was no room for deviation, but there was still room to “wig”. This is what de Certeau (1984) defined as “la perruque” or the *wigging*, for example, when a worker would use the company’s time to write a love letter. According to de Certeau, this is a harmless deceitful act, part of the weapons of the weak (p.26). Here, it is how children are able to function under the strict rules of the authorities (teachers). The children were coloring-in sections that were not required of them, and using a plethora of shades on one subject, the way Obaid colored in the Arabic letter ‘waw’ (Figure 141). He was asked to color in the outlined letter, so he did, using many colors. A couple of children were also *sneaking* doodles, or drawings on their individual whiteboards, which they erased quickly to hide them from the authorities. Children’s expressions were revealed through the color choices within those outlines, producing vibrant colors that were contained within the lines of fireman worksheet or the alphabet outlines.

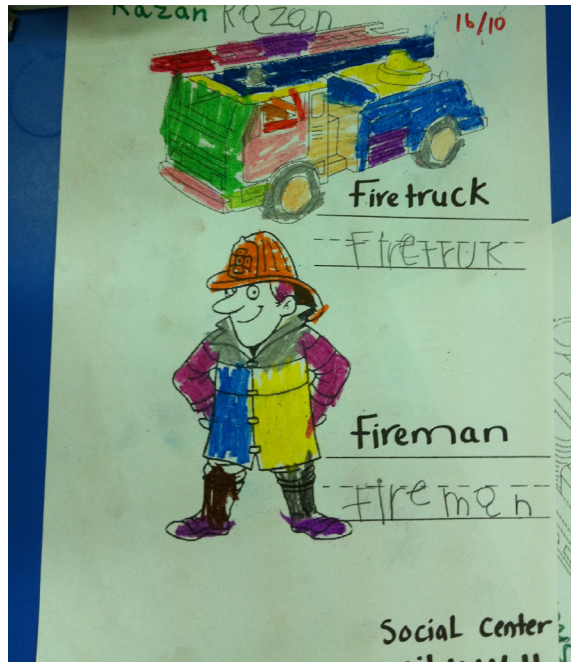


Figure 137. In this worksheet, the child spent most of her time making a multicolored fireman after she quickly completed the assignment of writing.



Figure 138. The letter Arabic letter 'waw' colored carefully by Obaid using four different shades.



*Figure 139.* Here are the children trying to sneak doodles instead of writing.

For the third school, NBS, there were two equal forces present in the classroom. As I had mentioned in the narrative, the idea of individuality was not an encouraged trait by the community, but it was encouraged by the administration. Ms. Elizabeth viewed art as a way for students to “learn to express themselves and to tell stories of their lives” (email communication, September 2012). Because of the dominance of the community over the individual in a bedouin society, the child viewed her or himself as a part of the whole; she/he was interconnected with the rest of the classmates. The children were given blank pieces of paper several times a day, to fill with whatever content they desired. Children made drawings, and attempted to represent words as well. Many of the children that sat at the same table would criticize or comment on each other’s work. Sometimes all the five children at one table would be drawing the same subject, and other times with the same drawing style and color combination. When sitting on the ‘author’s chair’ the children were uncomfortable and not very interested, yet between them I noticed a fluid expression of intertwined poetry, dancing, and the mobilizing other fellow students to join in!



*Figure 140.* The children here are coloring the fire man's uniform red just like the example pinned by the teacher on the wall behind them.



## Classroom Activities



TBS



OBS

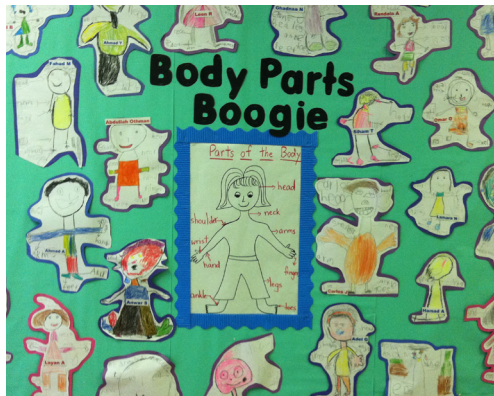


NBS



Figure 141. A photo of group art activities

## Wall Hangings



TBS



OBS



NBS

Figure 142. The hallway work



## **Art in the Classroom**

TBS's shelves are stocked with paint, crayons, glitter, clay and many more other art materials. There was usually a clay station, a drawing station and occasionally a painting activity, in which all the children participated. The child was encouraged to engage in art at TBS, but there was no time for the teacher to interact or reflect on such expressions. The example I mentioned in the narrative, where the representations of Dishdasha Man in TBS were not discussed by the teacher in the classroom, is an example. Nonetheless, children had the opportunity to produce such representations without any resistance from the teacher.

The art materials are limited in OBS and are usually used to create an object where the child pasted pre-cut elements to create the product prescribed by the lesson plan from the curriculum. When I sent photographs of the artwork done by the OBS children to teachers from the other school, it was described as "craft". There were no free-drawing opportunities for the child, workbooks and photocopied outlines were the children's main output. Providing an activity with no *measurable* learning outcome was considered a waste of time for this compacted curriculum. This approach was what Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) cautioned against:

We need to provide children with the confidence in their expression.

There is no right way of drawing or painting. The success of artists who have rebelled against tradition and against their own culture is well documented. There is no place for mindless copying of others' art in a meaningful art program. (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, p. 180)

In NBS, there also were limited art materials in the classroom, but there were plenty of opportunities for the children to draw without guidance. Children's main materials were colored markers on photocopy paper. Ms. Elizabeth, the

head of KG in NBS, told me that there were no specified art projects for the KG level. The projects that were recorded during my fieldwork were administered by a teacher who was considered “craftier” (email communication, September 2012) than other teachers were; there are no criteria or guidelines for conducting art projects in the classroom. Even though children drew in the classroom for long stretches at a time, this was not considered as relating to art. Rather, Ms. Elizabeth considered drawing as “the first stages in the writing process” (email correspondence, September 2012). For a child, “[l]earning to write can sometimes become a meaningless activity... . The physical problems of trying to copy or trace the written word are tremendous” (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, p. 51). Hence, for Lowenfeld & Brittain (1987), drawing offers a meaningful act that can facilitate a child’s desire to communicate through his/her representations. This practice was used as as a method for training the children to represent their ideas graphically, as well as verbally, to the group. I also feel that connecting literacy with drawing helps the administration justify this activity. Since the time when NBS was in its formative years, some of the parents considered art and music as “anti-Islamic”, and in some instances children, themselves, “refused to sing or paint because it was against Allah” (Educator in Kuwait, 2012).

**Drawing as social practice (TBS vs. NBS).** Pearson (2001) described drawing as a fluid entity with a value that is dependent on the situation:

Whatever value drawing has for children is bound to the context in which it takes place, and as the context shifts so does the value. This is why drawing can be play activity, narrative activity, a measured strategy for social approval, or the equally measured pursuit of the inductively grasped competence appropriate to given representation systems. (p. 358)



Looking at the drawings made by NBS, I realized how the drawings had narrative qualities to them, in contrast to the TBS sketchbook, that usually had static images (Figure 146, 147). In NBS, the children were encouraged to within a fluid, social environment, where group work and teamwork were encouraged. On each table, children were involved in a dynamic process that involved their speech as well as bodily gestures and activities. They were drawing on top of each other's work, commenting on things they liked or did not. Some drawings had variations of one theme, and others were very particular preoccupations of some children.

Pearson (2001) stated that in viewing drawing as a social practice, the researchers must "open up the possibility that the occurrence and the non-occurrence of drawing are equally important for theorizing" (p. 357), hence it is not the product but rather the activity of drawing that is important in understanding the situation better. In Boyatzis et al. (2000), evidence from naturalistic observations adapting ethnographic framework confirmed that when children drew together there was "a deep conformity to peers' thematic preferences and technical styles, as well as to broader gender stereotypes in art" (Boyatzis & Albertini, 2000, p. 43). Therefore, the drawings made by the children from TBS were more dynamic because the classroom environment was that way.

**Privileging the academic over the arts.** Teachers in all the schools seemed to be bombarded by high expectations from the parents and administration to *stuff* the child with knowledge and literacy. Art was not integrated into the curriculum as a legitimate or serious part of the education of the young child. Even for the teachers who are interested in art, their own limited educational resources and initiative are what guide any art education activity in the classroom. The *social practice* of drawing in NBS was meaningful for the students, but was



Figure 143. Two examples of drawings from the sketchbooks of children from TBS.



Figure 144. Two examples of drawings made by children from NBS.

a *means to an end* for the teacher; the drawings were sent home in a folder at the end of the week.

### **Adaptation of Foreign Curricula**

TBS had adapted a variety of American and Canadian curricula and resources (books, wall hangings, games) in developing its own curriculum over the years. They were in the process of adapting the bilingual Ontario curriculum during my research there. There are variations in each teacher's approach to her lesson. TBS prided itself in having 85% of its graduates attend Universities that were in Europe of the United States (International School Services, 2012).

Having a *teacher-proof* curriculum, OBS had a *product-oriented* approach to learning: the Scott Foresman lesson plans and D'Nealian workbook pages were its backbone. Most of the parents were more religious than the other two schools. Many of the parents were government employees with fathers in the Army. The environments in their homes were more austere, and family dynamics were more traditional than those of TBS. In OBS, the curriculum was a guiding mold, with a framework that was followed by the teachers, verbatim.

NBS had adapted the International Baccalaureate curriculum, concepts like *Literacy through Immersion* as well as the use of social games to facilitate literacy and learning in a community oriented population.

Each school had adapted to, and interpreted each imported curriculum in ways that fulfilled the demands and needs of the administration, the parents, society and/or the children.

### **Relationship to the Image**

Children attending TBS were from the merchant and ruling families (refer to Chapter 2). They were the most westernized population in relationship to the other three schools. They were exposed to many art activities in the classroom,

such as of painting, drawing as well as exploring with clay. Children had exposure to cultural events in the school, as well as in their travels, which were usually to Europe or Northern America. For children in this site, the image was a *shell* at their disposal, a surface to be used and re-used through their desired representations. As we saw in the example of “Dishdasha Man”, one child drew and re-drew him on her whiteboard, another decided to dress as the character and gallop around the room with this disguise.

For OBS the image is conceived as an *outline*, a guide, a framework for the child to follow and internalize. I referred to this framework in Chapter 5 as the *hifth* method. I discussed in the narrative how the method of memorization of the holy text of the Qur’an has been represented even when approaching art projects at OBS. The idea of memorizing, or *learning by heart*, had been carried through to art education in the classroom. Ms. Halla believed that the child needed to be given photo-coped images (as the ideal) to color-in and, with time, the child would slowly internalize those idealized images and shapes (personal communication, October 2011).

For NBS, the image was an unfolding story, a narrative that was constantly in process. There was no direction from the teacher on what and how to draw. It was not the image produced by the child that the teacher was interested in; rather it was the way that the child expressed the content to the group. For Mousa, the drawing of the colorful wall was a representation of the blocks constructed (see Chapter 6).

**Reproducing images of power.** Each school had different expectations from children of the same age group. Children of TBS who are children of the major merchant families already have access to capital, so to maintain this they need to be creative chameleons and performers who are able to carry-forth the



family wealth. For OBS, children are taught to be hard workers who complete every task with perfection, following rules and authority. OBS teachers were training the children to be 'efficient' workers (Marx, 2008), having continuous rewards (salaries, bonuses) to keep them motivated and on task. As long as the student completes the task, it is possible to 'wig', and do what he/she really wants to be doing. I have experienced this when I was an employee in the government, when many of my colleagues owned businesses and did small projects on the side.

An act of *free drawing*, encouraged and cherished in the *secular* school (TBS), was a *no no* - a taboo - that needed to be hidden from the teachers (authorities) in the *religious* school (OBS). The administrators of NBS were like missionaries, attempting to acculturate the children into *global citizenship*. All three schools were sites for reproducing the *best* version of *a child* for each community within a globalised country. Education was viewed as a commodity in which a child is to gain cultural capital to facilitate future success (Bourdieu, 1986).

Similarly, NBS the school is situated within a bedouin community, who are known for their loyalty. The ruling class in the past had offered Kuwaiti citizenships to many Bedouins in the hope of gaining more support and power (Ghabra 1997; Longva 2006). Today the Bedouins are around 65% of the country's citizens (Ghabra, 1997). The government naturalized the group "without adequately acculturating them" (p. 366) which Ghabra (1997) claims resulted in "the transfer of the desert's customs, traditions, beliefs, dress codes, and mentality into the city", which he referred to as "Desertization" (p. 367).

The juxtaposition of the urban liberal values to the "ultraconservative values of the desert" has destroyed "those aspects of urban life that allow for the assimilation and the acculturation of new comers and new ideas" (p. 366). So,

there exists this problematic divide between the traditional bedouin culture and cultures that are more *open*, which usually means *westernized* and not swayed by what Ghabra refers to as “Islamic fervor” (p. 367). This background gives a better understanding of the place of NBS in relation to the larger context. The administration viewed their progressive teaching ways as *empowering* the children; I wondered, however, if focusing on the individual is rather de-powering a collective who are already in-power because of their strong traditions?

### **Summary**

Operating from three different ideological and educational paradigms, each school applied a different approach to art education. Since both TBS and NBS’s ideologies were not bound by strict religious doctrines, adapting Western ideals that were considered more progressive than the local ones has made them sites for the elite within their own communities. Yet, in the bedouin classroom (NBS) there was evidence of local folklore and community based activities in the children’s embodied actions than in the students of the urbanized school (TBS). Lastly, the authoritarian Islamic paradigm (OBS) activated the children’s agency where they *sneaked in* creative acts through their graphic representations or mischievous behaviors in the classroom.

## Chapter 8. Reflections

The inquiry process that led to the conclusion of this study inspired reflection and questions on issues that surfaced from the research. I reflected on my individual way of knowing and my method of analyzing the data, searching into the cultural heritage of Islam as a way to give myself more clarity. This led me to re-think the meaning of Truth, to an individual, and the group.

### **A Culturally Responsive Approach to Teaching Art**

From previous research (Brittain, 2011; Kellogg, 1979), it is clear that there are no drastic difference in children's graphic representation when they are younger than the age of six. This implies that looking at the images generated by the preschool aged children will not provide us with clues to understand their visual culture. By conducting this research, it was clear that a "socio-anthropological basis for studying the aesthetic production and experience of culture" (Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Wasson, 1992, p. 16) was necessary to understand the *implicit cultural practices* (Tobin, Hayashi, & Zhang, 2011)<sup>1</sup> in each school.

### **Art Education in Kuwait**

For a country with an unprecedented situation of abrupt wealth and power, it is important to have a situated and suitable method for involving art education into the school curriculum. In his review of art education in Kuwait discussed in Chapter one, Alenezi (1999) has presented us with the most comprehensive review on the development of art education within Kuwait's society. Yet, I question the statement of the causality between the art education and the society's evolution from a traditional to a postmodern one. On the surface, and by looking at the decrees established by the Ministry of Education (that were sometimes a

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<sup>1</sup> This has been described by the authors as "practices that though not taught explicitly in schools of education or written down in textbooks reflect an implicit cultural logic" (Tobin, Hayashi, & Zhang, 2011, p. 157)

direct applications of foreign curricula), we could argue that yes, *we in Kuwait have followed the latest trends and the 'popular' methods of teaching*. Those methods were relevant to where they originated (USA or UK). Yet, having capital and access through technology to *shop for* and consume any attractive educational theory, method or philosophy presents opportunity for *critical* consumers, but dangers for those who do not question.

This research has been guided by my epistemological framework as an interdisciplinary researcher with the hope of understanding where, how, what, and when was art education happening in three distinct classrooms in Kuwait.

A dialogue that explores a culturally sensitive and more situated method of including art activities in the kindergarten classroom is needed in most third world countries. For the children at NBS, having a classroom with multiple age groups can be a rich experience with art making. Previous studies (Boyatzis & Albertini, 2000; Pinto, Gamannossi & Cameron, 2011) demonstrate that when children are intermingled with older siblings, peers or/and adults, this provides a rich opportunity for planning, making and interpreting images. Embodied knowledge, that includes craft, is transferred to the younger members by observation or *patterning* (Stokrocki , 1986) lead by a teacher or a resident local artist of activities like weaving, or metal smithing in the desert.

In Tobin et al.'s (2009) comparative study of preschools in China, Japan and the Unites States over time, revealed that :

some cultural practices have been replaced by practices borrowed from abroad, but other cultural practices have emerged unscathed from their encounter with globally circulating ideas, still others have evolved into hybrid forms, and along the way some new cultural practices have been invented. (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009, p. 232)



Similarly, Kuwait has propagated a variety of adaptations to early childhood approaches to education. Private schools have mushroomed and diversified in many directions over the past forty years and continue to do so. In the three schools that I observed, it was clear that Western curricula were viewed as a more legitimate resource for each community. Yet, every school community followed a different curriculum and approach to art education, one that was deemed the *best-fit* for the community that it served.

**Visual data as a way to access implicit practices.** Collecting visual data for the three schools provided me with a rich resource to access implicit messages and knowledge. When experienced during fieldwork, the visual information left me with an impression and knowledge that was difficult to express in words. By viewing and re-viewing the videos and photographs, I started to deconstruct the imagery in an attempt to *problematize* (Wilson, 2003) common-sense knowledge.

**Using collage as analysis tool.** I will use this image (Figure 145), as an example, to describe how I used the art of collage as a tool for analyzing the data. By taking an image out of its context, then reinserting it within a different image from the field, framing it with new *knowledge* that was developed through the process of *making* this collage, I was able to explore an inconsistency that I experienced while doing fieldwork at OBS. Here I used an image of a girl with red pigtails that was part of the activities in the classroom, and a photograph from a ‘star of the week’ poster of a student named Taiba, in the hallway.

**Looking closely at the video.** I chose pieces of video that revealed the distinct embodied practices of the children as well as the teachers from each school. I was able to pause the footage, dissecting every moment as it all fit in the practice. I took screen shots of the sequences to unveil the deeper meanings, and their relationship to the whole context. My presence as a participant-observer was



*Figure 145. Taiba*

crucial for the important moments to be documented, yet the (re)viewing of the data helped me have a deeper understanding.

**Knowing through making.** Through conducting this research, I was confronted with my own epistemological views. Before I started this research, I was trained and worked as an architect. This discipline included months of research before designing a building. It was always important for me to understand the whole context that the building was to occupy before attempting to design. After conducting extensive interviews with the clients, users and neighbors followed by rigorous site analysis, I would then begin a continuous process of sketching and making models of a site-specific design.

All the knowledge that has been gained through the research is transferred, through making, reflecting, then re-making, until the process is frozen into a moment, which is represented through the final building design. The building was

*not* conceived of before exploring through drawings and models; rather it came to existence through the process of negotiating between data, drawing, re-drawing, building, re-building and continuous reflection.

The unifying theme in this study is the multimodality of the methods used; there was a shifting and deconstructing of different forms of knowledge as it all re-emerged with a new understanding. Sullivan (2006) has summarized this process poignantly in these following lines:

Rather than seeing inquiry as a linear procedure or an enclosing process, research acts can also be interactive and reflexive whereby imaginative insight is constructed from a creative and critical practice. Oftentimes what is known can limit the possibility of what is not and this requires a creative act to see things from a new view. An inquiry process involving interpretive and critical acts is then possible as new insights confirm, challenge or change our understanding. If an agreed goal of research is the creation of new knowledge, then it should be agreed that this can be achieved by following different, yet complementary pathways. (Sullivan, 2006, pp. 19-20)

### **Future Research**

**Logic of late capitalism within an Islamic framework.** I discussed in the first chapter how late capitalism has brought about a depthless-ness, an increased focus on the surface, and loss of connection between the signified, the actual object, and the signifier, the image of that object (Jameson, 2003). Through my future research, I wish to understand this condition as experienced by a culture in the Middle East, which is still comparatively more traditional than the West in its values and outlook. I started to acknowledge some of the emic concepts like al-

Batin and al-Zahir, and looking at the images more deeply through my multiple viewing of photographs and video and analysis.

Indigenous tools and concepts provide a rich resource in my research in unraveling the implicit as well as the explicit cultural practices. Erzen (2007) in her work *Islamic Aesthetics: An Alternative Way of Knowledge*, has exposed the many differences between Western and Islamic aesthetics. She has stated that the mystics of Islam believed that *literal* interpretations using words are viewed as *superficial* and that it is through riddles, symbolism and artistic expression that discussions unfolded (p. 70). This brings to mind the Post-structural literary critics such as Derrida (1992), Barthes (2001) and Bakhtin (1982), who have argued that there are multiple meanings to the words, texts and utterances. Using tools from the local culture provided a more rewarding exploration for me personally; it opened up a new curiosity in my own heritage.

**Islamic aesthetics and the body.** Perceiving the world through unison of the senses directs the inquirer to “a profound knowledge of the Absolute” (Erzen, 2007, p. 71). The Sufi tradition has established the importance of stimulating all of the senses to attain the truth, or authentic situated knowledge. For this tradition; it is through symbols that one is awakened; it is through symbols that one is transformed; and it is through symbols that one is expressive... . The entire journey to God is a journey in symbols, which refer to both the universal aspect of creation and the particular aspect of tradition (Erzen, 2007, p. 71).

Those symbols are not created by the individual artist, rather they “are given; they are there to be discovered” (p. 71). Art-making in this tradition is viewed as a self-less act and a process of spiritual awakening that bonds the maker with God. It



is through the *process of making*, working with the symbols of geometry that the artist becomes involved in a *journey to the spiritual* (p. 71).

Hence, the body is the *channel* for the artist through the involvement with making art that he/she is able to be unified with the ultimate Creator, God. My interest for future research is to investigate a method that adapts Islamic aesthetics in a studio based environment, using it as a rich resource for an arts-based curriculum for early childhood in the Middle East. This path, of being involved in art-making, may be a possibility for awakening a disembodied society that has lost its purpose, and its sense of agency.

### **Final Thoughts**

On the surface, and before analyzing the visual data, the bedouin school NBS presented itself as the least sophisticated and in need of more structure. Yet, through a deeper and ethnographic analysis of the data, I realized that the children's actions and improvisations had brought to the classroom the cultural heritage that was missing in the more sophisticated classroom of TBS.

Being taught and cared for by people from outside of their indigenous cultures, Kuwaiti children will no longer carry forth the *embodied knowledge* from their elders. The system of dependence on oil, government and expatriates has produced a *token* society with no agency. The alienation that is felt by the Kuwaiti people with the loss of their *bodily* agency as a result of their over-dependence on servants and services, has contributed to the *waning of affect* (see Chapter. 1). This disconnect from the body is a growing reality all around the world. With the development of technology, human agency will no longer be a necessity; many jobs are already replaced by automated systems.

This research is only a starting pointing, a beginning for future research that addresses how children are thriving in an *in flux* environment of Kuwait. This

also may be a *cautionary tale* for the future of many developed countries, where more value has been placed on academic excellence and less on involving the child's body (bodily agency) for exploration. I have touched upon many issues that need further investigation. Some of those issues are: the relationship of societal structures to educational institutions, early learning and indigenous ways of knowing (dancing, singing, *wigging* ); the *glocalization* of education (adapting global concepts to local values); and, finally, embracing *implicit cultural practices* (Tobin, Hayashi, & Zhang, 2011) of students in the curriculum.

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
## Appendix: IRB Letters



### Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

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**To:** Bernard Young  
ART

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair   
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 05/08/2012

**Committee Action:** Renewal

**Renewal Date:** 05/08/2012

**Review Type:** Expedited F7

**IRB Protocol #:** 1105006436

**Study Title:** Visual Ethnography in Three Subcultures in the Middle East (Kuwait)

**Expiration Date:** 05/22/2013

The above-referenced protocol was given renewed approval following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.