

BOOK REVIEW / COMPTE-RENDU

BARKAI, S., & PARISER, D. (Eds). *Art education in Israel: Navigating diversity and change*. Springer Nature (2025). 266pp. \$39.99USD (soft cover). (ISBN 978-3-031-88204-3).

Barkai's and Pariser's co-edited book, *Art education in Israel: Navigating diversity and change*, raises a number of timely and relevant issues for the current global context by addressing how individuals and communities can act as agents of positive social change and social justice. Although the contributors focused on social change via art education, the book's themes have critical lessons and implications beyond art education. At times of both crisis and relative peace, art education can motivate social change by building resilience for individuals and communities and constructing bridges across cultural, religious, political, and social status divides. Employing the arts as a catalyst for social change at different levels of the educational system and curricula can promote social action in communities, with teachers as agents and leaders of these advances. The notion of the teacher as an agent of social change is of wide current interest. For instance, there is an ongoing debate, within and beyond Israel, on the degree to which the "activist" teacher should be value neutral in their pedagogy. The ideas advanced in Barkai's and Pariser's book provide important insights on this question and several others that will be of great value to individuals and organizations (e.g., nonprofit, governmental, educational, cultural) working in challenging situations. The themes in the book make valuable contributions to a number of fields other than art education such as psychology, public and social policy, sociology, religious and cultural studies, as well as international and community relations.

Essentially, Barkai and Pariser bring together scholars, teachers, and practitioners of the arts on how arts education has become established in Israeli scholarly, educational, and public worlds. The result is a thoughtful, important book, especially given the relatively short history of Israel as a country. Theoretical and applied approaches developed elsewhere have become integrated in unique ways that speak directly to local cultural, religious, and secular communities. This integration was not without its tensions but indicates that this was a process of development over time responsive to Israeli realities and contemporary currents in educational thought. The insights also raise issues relevant to other countries, making the book of interest to scholars, policy makers, curricula developers, artists, teachers, and other professionals internationally.

The 14 chapters of the book are organized into four sections along with an introduction, conclusion, and afterword. The first section, "Relationships and Contexts," provides a historical and theoretical overview of the evolution of arts education (chapters by Barkai and Winner), which lay the foundation for understanding current developments.

The second section, "Curricula Adventures," focuses on the development and integration of arts education into the curricula. Evron provided a chapter on the Hamidrasha, an institution for training studio artists and art teachers. Barkai reviews the integration of arts curricula into secondary education mandated by the Ministry of Education and the broadening of the definition of Israeli art to include representation from the Jewish Diaspora and the Israeli-Arab community. Segal reports on how arts education as personal expression and artistic design was adapted by the Orthodox Jewish religious educational community. All authors highlight the cultural, religious, and identity tensions regarding recognition and adoption of the arts into the curricula for both students and preservice teachers.

The third section, entitled "Identities in Flux: An Art/Education in a Changing Society," includes case studies about how Israeli art educators developed programs designed to challenge traditional ways of thinking, being, and educating. These chapters show educators grappling with the many challenges and tensions of a diverse population in Israeli society. Fundamentally important questions regarding teacher training are raised in these first-hand accounts touching on how to engage Palestinian-Arab students (Heruti), how to integrate feminist-activist perspectives (Schefflan Katzav), and how to create a model arts-based school for the underserved Arab Christian-Muslim population (Haiin and Barkai).

The fourth section, “Activist Art Education and Teacher Training in Challenging Environments and Times,” addresses how Israeli artists and educators grapple with their professional identity (Krieger and Guilat); art as social activism and how to engage students with their communities (Schwartzberg); and art creation as a way to deal with stressful events such as Covid-19 (Lazer). The events of October 7, 2023, presented significant challenges for both high school art teachers and students directly impacted, and Lorand looks at their ability to reestablish art classes and to resume creating art.

The two final chapters round out the book. The “Conclusions and Findings” chapter by Barkai and Pariser highlights the book’s main themes including how Euro-American models of art education have been adapted, transformed, and integrated into a culturally socially relevant model for Israeli educators. They focus on the integration of marginalized communities (Arab and conservative Jewish) into evolving and dynamic art education programs; the training of educators; the Ministry of Education involvement for building a dialogue to enhance civic engagement; and collective/individual resilience. They rightly conclude that Israeli art education provides a globally relevant approach, especially in times of tension and crisis. Pariser wrote the “Afterword” following the tragic events of October 7. He concludes that even in the face of horrific events, the arts can provide reasons for hope for a better world.

Recognition of different cultures, religions, and identities is easy to promote, but challenging to integrate into curriculum and pedagogy. A main theme of the book is that lip service to respecting cultural identities can only be overcome by seriously facing the realities of Israeli society and looking closely at the contributions of art that reflect plural cultural identities from the communities of Israeli Jews, Arabs, and the Jewish Diaspora. Various chapters in the book re-open a discussion, originally begun in the 1990s, with the recognition that a more inclusive approach is fundamental to creating a more inclusive society.

Teachers who aim to be an agent of social change and social justice provide their students with experiences in critical thinking, challenges, and opportunities to enhance ideas and actions regarding inclusion in a diverse society. These efforts can be seen at different levels ranging from Ministry guidelines for arts education and the kinds of institutions and individuals that might promote change (e.g., elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary teacher-training institutions, artist-teachers). The goal is to bridge across cultures, religions, and social status to help young people learn to talk to one another about the arts and thus consider social change

via common experiences and critical discourse. These are important lessons that can be implemented in a world fraught with much division and disarray.

In sum, the book charts the evolution of arts education as a driver of social change across different cultural, religious, political, and social status communities in Israel. This history shows that ideas were imported from scholars in the United States and Europe, but many approaches were home grown. The authors highlight the unique context of Israel and innovative approaches developed there. Israel's rich and diverse cultures and identities function to inspire curricula. This process can be seen in granting arts education an important role in preservice education, such that preservice teachers become "artist-teachers" as well as aspiring artists.

In conclusion, in a world focused on Artificial Intelligence and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, the authors remind us of the value of the arts in human development and as a transformative process in helping individuals and cultural communities to build a constructive and positive dialogue, to promote healing, tolerance, and the appreciation of others. While the book focuses on the Israeli context, it provides powerful lessons for the international community in these times of turmoil and intercultural tensions. Thus, the book will be invaluable for a number of educational communities such as scholars, teacher educators, graduate students, and professionals working in challenging contexts, as well as others in a wide range of disciplines.

NINA HOWE, *Concordia University*

Publication History: Submitted 27 Sept 2025 | Accepted 16 Feb 2026 | Online first 09 Sept 2026 | Published 18 Sept 2026