

# Working towards Peace through Education: The Case of Israeli Jews and Palestinians

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In the present article, I discuss current and past peace and reconciliation educational efforts conducted between Palestinians and Israelis. I concentrate on the educational initiatives conducted for Jewish- and Palestinian-Israeli citizens and not on those less common taking place between Israelis and Palestinians in the Palestinian Authority. In the first section of this article I describe the Israeli sociopolitical and educational context. I then review the main theoretical perspectives which underwrite the educational work undertaken. The third section is dedicated to reviewing the main existing programs and offering information regarding research results where research has been conducted, and in the fourth and last section I offer critical insights on the educational initiatives portrayed.

**Keywords** peace education, reconciliation, Palestians, Israelis, critical peace education, Palestinian-Israeli conflict

## Introduction

Israel/Palestine is not an easy place to live. One hundred years of unresolved conflict has brought much suffering to this area. An uncertain future, in a world convoluted by growing global tensions, leaves little place for hope. Yet in these troubled areas, many believe education offers a path to soothing conflicts while supporting recognition and reconciliation.

In this article, I discuss current and past educational efforts conducted towards these aims in Israel/Palestine. I concentrate on the educational initiatives conducted for Jewish- and Palestinian-Israeli citizens and not on those, less common, taking place between Israelis and Palestinians in the Palestinian Authority. The main reason for the latter being less frequent has to do with the fact that since the year 2000, with the eruption of the second intifada, much of the educational collaboration between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has declined (for a thorough review and evaluation of the difficulties encountered by

NGO's involved in Israeli-Palestinian cooperation see Kahanoff et al. 2007).

In general, existing research has showed rather positive results for contact interventions conducted under optimal conditions (Pettigrew and Tropp 2000; 2006; 2008). The present review adds to a growing literature which looks at processes and outcomes of encounters conducted under non-optimal conditions such as the ones reigning in deeply divided societies hoping to contribute to a better understanding of contact initiatives conducted under acute asymmetrical relations.

In the first section of this article I describe the Israeli sociopolitical and educational context. I then review the main theoretical perspectives which underwrite the educational work undertaken. The third section is dedicated to reviewing the main existing programs and offering information regarding research results where research has been conducted, and in the fourth and last section I offer critical insights on the educational initiatives portrayed.

## Israel and Its Context

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be traced to the beginning of Zionist colonialization of Palestine, claimed by Jews as the land of their birthright, towards the end of the ninetieth century. The seemingly intractable conflict resulted from at least two dominant ideological discourses (one Jewish, one Palestinian) on the control of the land and recognition of group sovereignty. Historically the region was never autonomously controlled, having a long history of colonial and imperial rule (Khalidi 2010). Two major historical events prior to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948—the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which controlled Palestine for four centuries, and the rise of anti-semitism culminating with the holocaust of World War II—serve to position the conflict in its wider international context. The 1948 war, called the War of Independence by the Israelis and the Naqbe (the Catastrophe) by the Palestinians, was the first open military clash between the Zionist and Palestinian nationalist movements. Palestinians in Israel are an indigenous minority, who formed the majority in Palestine (two thirds of the population) until 1947.

Four major wars have erupted since then in 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. In 1977, a peace agreement was signed between Israel and Egypt. The Intifada outbreaks in 1997 and 2000, organized in the conquered territories under the flag of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), brought about even bloodier events which shattered optimism for a peaceful solution that emerged after the Oslo Accords between the Israeli Government and the PLO in 1993. It remains to be seen whether the recent disengagement from the Gaza strip holds any future promise; the 2006 second Lebanon war and the overtaking by Hamas of the Gaza area of the Palestinian Authority, with its following outbreaks of hostility,

leave little place for optimism.

The Jewish-Palestinian conflict remains the most potentially explosive of conflicts in Israel, placing the Jewish majority (80 percent of the population) and the Palestinian (primarily Muslim) minority (20 percent) at perpetual odds. Though structurally there is a sharp asymmetry between both communities, they both hold to beliefs of having a monopoly on objective truth regarding the conflict and the identity of the villain in it, thus undermining possibilities for conflict resolution (Bar-Tal 1990; 1998).

Israel, since its inception, and as is clearly stated in its Declaration of Independence, has been committed to full political and social equality for all its citizens irrespective of their religion or ethnic affiliation. Yet even the Israeli government agrees that it has not been fully successful in implementing this ideal and has, for the most part, implemented segregationist policies towards its non-Jewish minorities, policies which only recently are starting to be challenged in the courts of justice (Jamal 2008; 2009).

These separatist policies are most visible in residential and educational arrangements which are fully separated for both the Palestinian and the Jewish communities (Jamal 2007). Israeli-Palestinians, though officially offered full rights as citizens, have chronically suffered as a putatively hostile minority, with little political representation and debilitated social, economic, and educational infrastructure. In general, the Palestinian-Israeli population is geographically segregated and institutionally and legally discriminated against (Hesketh 2011).

Though riddled with conflict and social cleavages, Israel must attempt to meet the often-competing requirements of a multi-ethnic national-religious society. These socio-political conflicts are reflected in the Israeli educational system which is divided into separate educational sectors: Non-religious Jewish, Religious National Jewish, Orthodox Jewish, and Palestinian (called Arab by the Jewish officialdom), all under the umbrella of the Israeli Ministry of Education (Sprinzak et al. 2004).

The educationally segregated reality of the Israeli school system results in it being very rare for Palestinian-Arab and Jewish students to study under one roof. A recent study (Shwed et al. 2014) found that though in recent years change is evident in the separation in schools between Palestinian-Arabs and Jews, today only about 5,600 Palestinian-Arabs attend schools in the Jewish sector and 360 Jews attend schools in the Arab sector. Although both Jews and Palestinian-Arabs consider the separation to be efficient (Swirski 1990), the question of whether separation necessarily means inequality has plagued more than one nation's school system. In Israel, the discrimination in education against the Palestinian-Arab minority is well documented (Coursen-Neff 2004; Jabareen 2006). When the two systems are compared, great discrepancies can be found in terms of physical facilities, teacher qualifications, retention rates, and levels of special services. In terms of achievements, though the share of those taking the matriculation exams

in the Arab education stream is similar to that in the Hebrew stream, and the gap between Jewish- and Palestinian-Israeli students qualifying for a matriculation certificate out of those who took the exams has dropped from 17 percent in 2000 to 12 percent in 2015. The success gaps are still large on the 5-unit level of the English matriculation exams: in the Hebrew education stream 58 percent pass the exams, in the Arab education stream 14 percent, and in the Druze stream 25 percent (Blass 2017).

Other disparities exist between the Palestinian and Jewish sectors. The high school drop-out rate is three times higher in the Palestinian-Arab sector than in the Jewish sector, and far fewer Palestinian-Arab high school graduates meet university entrance requirements than their Jewish counterparts: 35 percent versus 48 percent in 2011 (Yashiv and Nitza 2014). Bedouins in the Negev fare the worst in every respect (Abu-Bader and Gottlieb 2013); however, among the Christians (comprising about 10 percent of the Palestinian-Arab population in Israel) the percentage of students meeting university entrance requirements is higher than that of the Jews in Israel. We should be cautious with this last point for it isolates the strongest socio-economic sector of the Palestinian-Arab population and compares it to the average of all the Jewish sectors. In fact, when the Jewish sector is sorted according to socio-economic measures, there are also major differences in academic achievement. The Adva Center (Connor-Atias and Abu-Khala 2009) presents percentages among particular Jewish groups that are lower across the board, but the gaps between the Jewish and Arab groups are consistent.

One obvious advantage in separating students according to their various ethnic sectors is that instruction in the Arab sector schools is conducted in Arabic. However, there are numerous disadvantages. Despite what Smooha (2002) refers to as Israel's ethnic democracy, the Arab sector does not enjoy the degree of autonomy that the Jewish sector has in determining its educational priorities. Schools in the Arab sector are carefully scrutinized by the authorities and do not have the freedom to expose students to the Palestinian historical narrative; indeed, much of the educational material is simply translated from the Hebrew curriculum. Additionally, many teachers feel conflicted in their loyalty towards their employer, the Ministry of Education, and their Palestinian community.

The impact of segregation is also seen in the school curricula. While the Jewish curricula focus on national Jewish content and Jewish nation-building, the Palestinian curricula are sanitized of any national Palestinian content. Jewish students are called to engage in the collective Jewish national enterprise, but Palestinian students must accept the definition of Israel as a Jewish democratic state (Al-Haj 2003). As late as 2001, Palestinian-Arab principals and teachers still required approval from the state's general security services before being employed (Sa'ar 2007); however, this aspect of the education system of Palestinian-Arabs in Israel has improved from the conditions of the military administration from the

founding of the state until 1966.

The separation has led to other curricular discrepancies as well. Resnik (1999) conducted a study of the Jewish state schools' Bible, history, civics, and literature curricula over five decades and concludes that particularistic perspectives were emphasized at the expense of universal and civic perspectives. History curricula are particularly problematic. As noted earlier, the "official" version of history is determined by the dominant group and used to perpetuate its cultural hegemony (VanSledright 2008), leaving little space for alternative narratives that are a major part of a group's cultural rights. For example, in a detailed study of the Israeli curriculum, one researcher noted that within the curricula produced during the period 1950-1990, Palestinians were not necessarily delegitimized but were presented through stereotypical perspectives (Bar-Tal 1999) (for more critical perspectives, see Peled-Elhanan 2008; 2012). Studies conducted by Podeh (2000) note that with respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the history curricula in the monolingual Hebrew state schools have functioned as "memory agents" to crystallize the Jewish nation's collective memory.

In many ways, Israel's education system reinforces ethnic and religious clefs, perpetuating the divisions that characterize Israeli society as a whole (Amara and Mar'i 2002). The educational policies are used as a mechanism of control to secure the cultural Jewish hegemony in keeping with its self-definition as a Jewish state, supporting the Zionist ethos among Jewish students and the inferiority of its Palestinian citizens (Benavot and Resh 2003).

## **Educating towards Peace and Reconciliation**

Historically, intergroup encounters within the Israeli context have been implemented from the early 1950s. Yet encounters with a specifically educational focus designed to overcome hostility and contribute to coexistence were initiated in the 1980s (Helman 2002) as a response to the publication of a survey (Zemach 1980) that revealed anti-democratic attitudes among Jewish-Israeli youth toward the Palestinian-Arab minority. This disclosure fanned fears that Israeli society might reject its democratic character (Katz and Kahanov 1990; Maoz 2000) and brought about the formation of what Rabinowitz (2000) defines as the "coexistence sector," which focused on the development of activities geared towards building coexistence (Maoz 2009; Suleiman 2004). During the 1990s, coexistence dialogues that focused on the conflicting relations among the national groups and the possibility of reconciliation (Bar and Bargal 1995) were directed primarily by dedicated NGOs and strengthened by the Oslo Accords. Since then, other educational programs have evolved which are distinct in that they have moved their educational work from the alternative informal educational sphere to the formal one. In 1984, the first integrated Israeli Jewish/Palestinian school

was created at Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam. Towards the end of the 1990s, other players joined this direction and today there are six such schools serving a population of approximately 1,100 students. Since 2012, a Shared Education program has been developed by the Ministry of Education in mixed Israeli cities (there are six such cities in Israel—Haifa, Jaffa, Lod, Akko, Jerusalem, and Ramle—of which Ramle and Jerusalem are the main beneficiaries of the program).

Whatever their organizational context, all of these initiatives in one way or another consider their work as evolving from a variety of theoretical developments. This is not to say that they developed their programs based on these theoretical perspectives nor on the results of research produced by academic circles. Yet these theoretical perspectives, in one way or another, serve as focal points from which to approach the analysis of data gathered therein.

Stephan and Stephan (1996) suggest four types of threats as the main causes of prejudice—realistic, symbolic, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes—which separately or together may cause prejudice depending on the existing relations between the groups involved. All four could be involved in open conflict situations while at lower levels of conflict negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety might be the main causes of underlying conflict.

Berger et al. (2016) suggest three main theoretical models through which to approach educational frameworks which have the goal of bettering intergroup relations. Each relate to well established theoretical frameworks and include the contact hypothesis, the socialization and social learning theories, and the social-cognitive developmental theory.

The “contact hypothesis” (Allport 1954) is the basis of most educational efforts towards integration. According to the contact hypothesis, promoting contact between members of different racial and/or ethnic groups will reduce tensions, resulting in more tolerant and positive attitudes. The contact hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact—when it occurs under conditions of equality and interdependence that permit sustained interaction between participants as well as friendships in situations legitimized through institutional support—might help alleviate conflict among groups and improve negative intergroup attitudes (ibid.; Amir 1976; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Social learning theories propose that attitudes towards outgroups are shaped by information and knowledge gathered from immediate social contexts as well as from multiple media channels. Both intercultural training (Stier 2003) and anti-bias information (Bigler and Liben 2006) are seen as capable of breaking down negative generalizations.

Social cognitive developmental theory establishes that children’s attitudes are based on the developmental stage of their cognitive skills (Aboud, Mendelson, and Purdy 2003); moreover, research in this field has argued against a unidirectional understanding of prejudice development, anchoring it in complex

variables as these relate to social contexts and relationships with others that make particular conflictual relationships between groups and group identities highly salient or place an emphasis on the universal application of moral principles of fairness and equality (Killen, Elenbaas, and Rutland 2016).

Furthermore, Bar-Tal (2013) points at the socio-psychological repertoire (i.e., collective memories and an ethos of conflict, and collective fear, hatred, and anger orientations) which make intractable conflicts especially difficult to resolve while emphasizing their societal or collective character and the role that a shared political culture plays in their genesis and reproduction. These socio-psychological structures paradoxically work both to enable better adaptation to the conflict conditions and also to help maintain and prolong the conflict. Thus, even when the parties to the conflict find a peaceful resolution, the socio-psychological repertoire does not change overnight. For it to change, Bar-Tal (ibid.) states that a long process of peacebuilding is need which requires thoughtful planning and active efforts to overcome the narrow visions which have evolved and which exclude incongruent information and alternative approaches to the conflict.

Psychological theories provide some answers to prejudice development by suggesting their socio-contextual and socio-cognitive dependence while suggesting that reducing prejudice can be accomplished through the promotion of intergroup contact, inclusive common identities and social norms, social-cognitive skills training, moral reasoning, and tolerance (Aboud and Levy 2000; Cameron and Rutland 2008; Crystal, Killen, and Ruck 2008).

Maoz (2011) has identified four major models for planned encounters between Jewish and Palestinian citizens—the Coexistence Model, the Joint Projects Model, the Confrontational Mode, and the Narrative/Story-Telling Model—all of which afford potential benefits and drawbacks as these relate to the possibility offered to participants to feel included, able to openly express their perspectives, and confident that in some way their participation contributes to furthering possible solutions. The Coexistence Model emphasizes interpersonal similarities (“we are all human beings”) and cultural and language commonalties, as well as supporting notions of togetherness and cooperation (Maoz 2004; Bekerman 2007). The Joint Projects Model is based on the assumption that working together towards a common, superordinate goal reduces intergroup hostilities, increases friendship and cooperation, and fosters a common identity transcending the separate identity of each group (Sherif 1966). The Confrontational Model emphasizes the power relations between the conflictive sides with the hope of empowering the members of a minority by having them confront the majority directly, through discussions of national identities, national and civil aspirations, and discrimination (Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004). The fourth and last model combines coexistence and confrontational aspects of the group’s relations and uses a narrative approach in which participants from both

groups engage in “story-telling” and share their personal and collective narratives, experiences, and suffering in the conflict (Bar-On and Kassem 2004).

As these models illustrate, one of the central dilemmas of planned reconciliation-aimed contacts between members of groups in conflict is the problem of identity and identifications. Another way of organizing approaches to intergroup encounters is to negotiate between two poles of identity and identification defined as either 1) a high emphasis on individual identity with a low emphasis on ethnic group identification, or 2) a high emphasis on ethnic group identity with a low emphasis on individual identity. Indeed, studies have described contact situations as characterized by tension between individual and group identities and as moving between interpersonal and intergroup interactions (Suleiman 1997; Bar-On 1999).

Lastly, it’s worth mentioning a couple of programs which emphasize active educational approaches—sports, the arts, and social activism—rather than cognitive ones. Since 2001, Football 4 Peace has used sport to deliver values based training which aims at promoting respect, responsibility, inclusion, neutrality, and equality (Sugden 2008). Peace Child Israel was founded in 1988 to teach coexistence using theater and the arts. Their programs partner Palestinian and Jewish teens from Israeli schools to meet weekly for eight months before creating original dramas about coexistence and its challenges (Ross 2015). The Sadaka-Reut program was founded in 1983 with the aim of educating and empowering, through uni-national and bi-national programs, Jewish- and Palestinian-Israeli youth and university students to pursue social and political change through bi-national partnership (*ibid.*).

Programs for Israelis and Palestinians in the Palestinian Authority have evolved on similar bases to the ones mentioned above, and among these a few outstanding ones deserve mention. Seeds of Peace is a peacebuilding and leadership development organization founded in 1993 and headquartered in New York City. Seeds of Peace conducts a yearly summer camp program for Israelis and Palestinians (other groups in conflict are represented in smaller numbers, e.g., Indians and Pakistanis) which necessitates the complete immersion of youth in an interactive exchange with youth from the other side of the conflict, as well as with the predominantly American staff (Hammack 2006). The Parents Circle-Families Forum (PCFF) established in 1995 is a joint Palestinian-Israeli organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost a close family member as a result of the prolonged conflict. The organizations conduct a variety of educational projects with both adult and younger populations geared towards building trust and supporting reconciliation efforts (Kuriansky 2007). The Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow (MEET; <http://meet.mit.edu/>) is a three year program developed in partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which brings together young leaders through the common language of technology, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

## Research Findings

Research on the effects of educational initiatives towards coexistence, conflict resolution, and peace education in Israel are limited and not definitive (Abu-Nimer 2004; Maoz 2011; Bar-Tal and Rosen 2014). In the following, I have organized the review into two main categories: 1) research findings about mid/short-term intergroup encounters, and 2) research findings on long-term encounter initiatives (e.g. the integrated bilingual schools).

### *Mid/Short-Term Intergroup Encounters*

During the 1980s, studies were conducted on a variety of short-term intergroup encounter programs through a variety of quantitative and action research methods (Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kupermintz, and Lang 1998). For the most part, these studies replicated previous findings from the 1970s on casual meetings between Palestinians and Jews in Israeli universities (ibid.) which indicated that while the groups involved expressed a high level of readiness for social contact, the Palestinian-Arab group's desire was consistently higher than that of the Jewish group.

Bar-Natan (cited in Salomon 2004) and Maoz (2000) examine intergroup encounters in the post-Oslo era and find that youth from both groups arrived at the encounters with a limited acquaintance of each other and holding mutually negative stereotypes. Against the background of these mutually negative emotions, the qualitative analysis undertaken showed that the dialogical encounters enabled youth to change their initial perceptions of each other. The comparison of the pre/post quantitative measures showed similar results. After participating in the workshops, each group's perceptions of the other significantly improved according to dimensions such as "considerate" and "tolerant," indicating that transformative practices can be effective in spite of a harsh socio-political context. Yet in Bar-Natan's study, while for the Jewish group the encounters experience seemed to have also contributed to the legitimization of the Palestinian group narrative, the same effect was not found for the Palestinian cohort.

Biton and Salomon (2006) find that both Israeli and Palestinian participants in intergroup encounter programs became more positive about peace when compared with individuals who did not take part in such programs. Similarly, Maoz and Ellis (2008) find that Jewish individuals who reported having taken part in structured contact interventions with Israeli-Palestinians were more willing than participants who had not taken part in such interventions to support integrative compromise solutions.

In contrast to studies that examined changes in attitudes as a function of participation in intergroup encounter programs, Rosen (2006) examines the same settings for possible differential changes in central and peripheral beliefs, as well

as the durability of the impact. The study shows that peace education programs could effectively influence youngsters' peripheral attitudes and beliefs (e.g. stereotypes, prejudices, and negative emotions). Although youngsters reverted back to previous attitudes and beliefs as a result of adverse social and political influences, the subsequent use of role-play "induced compliance" activities rehabilitated their attitudes.

The results of recent qualitative critical studies show, on the whole, less reason for optimism. For example, studies that tracked university students participating in intergroup encounter courses revealed the dominance of Jewish participants in Jewish/Palestinian-Arab dialogues, linking it to the efforts of these participants to focus on the interpersonal level of the dialogue while avoiding confrontation with the Palestinian-Arabs on issues related to conflict and national identity (Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004). Bekerman (2002) finds that initial hopes for progress toward reconciliation through intergroup encounters were not always fulfilled. Examining the discursive resources used by participants in dialogue encounters, he observes that national majority-minority rhetoric was shaped within the context of the nation-state, a construct which also seemed to guide the encounters' communicational exchange, casting the participants' ethnic/national identities in an essentialist framework.

Similarly, Helman's (2002) interpretative analysis shows that when intergroup encounters were positioned in contexts of domination and structural inequality, the dialogues tended to reproduce monological discourses of culture and identity, turning the dialogues into tools that ultimately legitimized power differentials and structural inequality. Taking a more optimistic view, Maoz and her colleagues (2004) illustrate the dynamics of "good enough" dialogues that fulfil the basic purpose of an intervention in contexts of conflict, i.e. to establish a developing drama of intergroup interaction, an experience through which the participants can come to view themselves and others in a different way, one in which different and divergent voices actually can be heard. However, Maoz et al. (ibid.) also describe what could be called a "bad enough" dialogue that fulfils none of those purposes, but the conversation still continued. In that sense, a "totally bad" dialogue would mean that the dialogue disintegrated.

Hammack's (2006) study of a group of Jewish-Israelis, Palestinian-Israelis (Israeli citizens), and Palestinians from the Palestinian Authority shows mixed results. On the one hand, participants were able to construct new narratives, transcending the initial polarized identity discourse that had sustained and reproduced the conflict. On the other hand, identity accentuation was seen among the participating adolescents for as long as two years after the encounter. Clearly the process of identity intervention is not necessarily linear but allows for a host of variables to affect the ultimate narrative outcome. Taken together, these dialogical studies lead to a greater understanding of the conversational practices that might be used to facilitate more fruitful intergroup encounters.

One of the few longitudinal studies conducted about individuals participating in intergroup encounters points to positive effects. Litvak-Hirsh and Bar-On (2007) describe the results of a four-year qualitative study of Jewish and Palestinian-Arab university students who took part in a year-long encounter group workshop based on a narrative/life story model. The students were interviewed immediately before and after the intergroup encounter and then again three years later. The authors note that both groups of interviewees agreed that the narrative/life story model contributed to their personal enrichment and to the creation of a positive listening environment and favorable communication on the interpersonal and group levels. The interviews also demonstrated a change in the perception of the “other” by both the Jewish and Palestinian-Arab participants, indicating their appreciation of the inherent complexity of these issues, particularly after hearing familial stories in the workshop.

Ross (2015), in a comparative study of the Peace Child and Sadaka Reut programs, concludes that education programs and specifically intergroup encounters that offer opportunities for critically examining the role of one’s in-group within conflict contexts, particularly among members of dominant groups in society, while providing structured environments for individuals from different groups to interact, are the ones that can provide encouragement for continued participation in social change activities.

More recent research on university students encounter projects is helping define the nature of “successful” encounter programs. Hager et al. (2011) studied a college Jewish-Arab dialogue model recognized as part of a bachelor degree requirement within the Department of Education. The uniqueness of this program, which encouraged reflexive identity study and research and the examination of existing power structures, rests in that it consciously directs its participants towards activism in the institution where it is located. The program which continued for eight consecutive years was successful in turning the campus into a place which advances equal opportunities and dialogue between the national groups. Similarly, David et al. (2017), using both qualitative and quantitative methods, studied twenty-four Jewish-Israeli undergraduate students who underwent a yearlong process to learn about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, encountered Palestinian narratives, and reflected on the impact of the Palestinian other on their own identity as Jewish-Israelis. Results show that participants developed an increased capacity for acceptance of both Israeli and Palestinian collective narratives, and demonstrated a greater willingness toward reconciliation, manifested in more readiness to acknowledge alterity.

Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2014) studied thirteen regularly accredited action-learning courses (not necessarily related to peace education programs) at eleven institutions of higher education in Israel. Six of these courses were taught by joint Palestinian-Jewish faculty teams, and both Palestinian and Jewish students participated in them. Their research reveals that although the

participants were well aware of present inequalities in Israel and the courses afforded participants opportunities for critical reflection, they tended to self-define as non-political and were reluctant to engage in political discussion or activism. The authors conclude by emphasizing the importance of the institutional culture within which the educational activity evolves, suggesting that because neither the faculty nor the students in these courses were willing to challenge the hegemonic silencing of political issues pertaining to the conflict in Israeli academic institutions, much of the potential benefits of the program are lost.

### *Long-Term Encounter Initiatives*

Research on the integrated bilingual schools, though less extensive, has added educational considerations and perspectives into the research scene which has been traditionally dominated by psychological perspectives (Bekerman 2007). One of the first qualitative studies was conducted by Feuerverger (2001). Her analysis highlights the complexities with which bilingual, bicultural, and binational education must contend in its attempt to respect differences, sustain dialogue, and inspire a moral vision. The study also reveals how an ever-changing political reality constantly frustrates the participants' efforts to reshape the boundaries that divide their existence, making political contexts central to an understanding of transformative educational initiatives.

Gavison (2000) examines the school's approach towards Jewish and Palestinian historical narratives to see if it might serve as a model that the state could use to inculcate a common civil identity among its citizens while enabling (or encouraging) different groups to cultivate different cultural identities. Though conceding that Palestinians should be encouraged to include cultural elements in their curricula, Gavison (*ibid.*) points out that the ongoing conflict has repercussions on the question of a separate Palestinian cultural education in the schools. Israel, she believes, has the right and the duty to ensure that this autonomy is not used to weaken the civic connection of Palestinians to their country.

Glazier's (2003) ethnographic study focuses on classroom activities. In particular, she examines the ability of children in one of the Jewish/Palestinian schools to step back and forth between cultures, a skill she calls "cultural fluency." She also reviews the specific practices teachers implemented for cross-cultural interaction and learning. Glazier's study underscores that contact alone does not always promote cultural fluency; rather, individuals must engage in ongoing, meaningful shared tasks across borders. Such an engagement is facilitated through both curriculum and pedagogy, two critical components often omitted from the group contact equation.

Mark (2013) investigates the assumption that it was possible to identify patterns of classroom participation and interaction that characterize and

differentiate the work of Jewish and Palestinian children and teachers through routine observations of a class. Mark (ibid.) concludes that although distinctive classroom discourse patterns could be identified in the Jewish and Palestinian uni-national discussions (sessions in which the groups study separately), the patterns were associated not with different ethnicities but with different socioeconomic groups. Moreover, some of the school's educational practices reified national identities rather than offering a critical perspective.

The influence of language on discourse patterns and conceptions of identity was explored by Schlam-Salman and Bekerman (2011) in their examination of how students in a Palestinian/Jewish integrated school defined their identities when the topic was discussed in an advanced English-learning group. The authors showed that the students' use of a third language enabled them to step outside of ideologies that are "culturally embedded in Arabic and Hebrew" (ibid., 65), and that the discussion in English provided the students with resources that influenced the ways in which they constructed their identities.

Over the past two decades, Bekerman (for a review see Bekerman 2016) offers the most comprehensive longitudinal research on Jewish-Palestinian integrated bilingual education. He examines the connection between power relations in Israeli society and the difficulties of creating a truly bilingual educational program for Jews and Palestinians in Israel (Bekerman 2005), demonstrates how the different social realities of Jews and Palestinians influence families' motivation to send their children to the Jewish-Palestinian integrated schools (Bekerman and Tatar 2009), and how the different status of Hebrew and Arabic in Israeli society influences each group's motivation to acquire the language of the other (Bekerman 2005; 2009b). The practical importance of Hebrew language acquisition is clear to Arab children and to their families. As a minority group, Palestinians need Hebrew to advance academically and professionally and they regularly require Hebrew language skills to communicate on the street. On the other hand, Jewish parents generally hope that their children will learn Arabic, but there is no apparent price that the children will pay if they fail to acquire the language. Without a practical need for the language, the Jewish pupils' level of Arabic is generally far below the Palestinians' level of Hebrew, despite the great educational effort invested in the bilingual program. Amara (2007) presents similar findings regarding the place of language and the challenge of Arabic language acquisition. Bourdieu (1977) seems to have gotten it right when arguing that without a market there is no competence.

Bekerman's (2003) research also examines how the multicultural goals of the schools shapes religious and national narratives. The research has shown how parents and teachers see culture and religion as areas in which mutual understanding can help to bridge the gaps that separate the populations in Israel. Parents emphasize getting to know and understand the others' culture more deeply and believe that the schools are achieving this goal. Teachers emphasize

similar goals and educational activities/celebrations around these issues appear to be conducted with ease and in fruitful collaboration. These celebrations carry a strong religious emphasis. In fact, it could be said that religious aspects are disproportionately emphasized given that the majority of the Jewish parents belong to secular sectors of Israeli society and the Muslim populations, though more traditional, are also mostly non-religious. While at times Jewish parents expressed concerns and ambivalence about this religious emphasis, they also seemed to find solace in the religious underpinning of cultural activities given their (mostly unarticulated) fear that their children's Jewish identity will be eroded as a result of participation in an integrated binational program.

The ethnographic data also suggests that issues of national identity (Bekerman 2009a) and historical narratives have become the ultimate educational challenge for parents and educational staff alike (Bekerman and Zembylas 2010; 2012). National issues are compartmentalized into a rather discrete period in the school year corresponding in the Jewish-Israeli calendar to Memorial Day and Israel's Independence Day and in the Palestinian calendar to the Day of the Nakba. In accordance with the policy of the Ministry of Education, all schools hold a special ceremony for the Jewish cohort on Memorial Day, which the Palestinian cohort does not attend. Depending on the schools' (complex) relations with the surrounding community and the Ministry of Education's supervision, a separate ceremony is conducted for the Palestinians in commemoration of the Nakba. For the Palestinian group, tensions are apparent, particularly among the teachers, who see themselves at the forefront of the struggle to safeguard the Palestinian national narrative, which remains unrecognized by Israeli educational officialdom. For most liberal Jews, Israeli-Palestinian cultural and religious expression in school is legitimate. However, national identification with the Palestinian Authority is not welcomed, and neither are perspectives that would, in any way, try to deny the right of Israel to be a Jewish state.

A recent study on graduates of the school shows that in line with recent research conducted at bilingual and integrated educational initiatives (Wright and Tropp 2005; Cameron and Rutland 2008) the Palestinian and Jewish graduates show decreased in-group favoritism and higher perceived similarities between the groups. Exposed, as they are, to high levels of intercultural education and interethnic contact within the school setting, they show, if at all, low levels of stereotyping and discrimination supporting previous findings in multicultural and anti-bias research (Banks 2006). The graduates, for the most part, have little romantic expectations from education; they realize its limitations and yet profoundly appreciate what the integrated school has afforded them. Palestinians value the pragmatic benefits of what an integrated school has to offer relative to the benefits of participating in the regular Arab educational track in Israel, and Jews, though complaining at times about the difficulties of participating in a setting which in a paradoxical sense (at least at the high school level) reverses

the asymmetry which benefits them in the wider Israeli context, stay assured that their parents' choice has profited them significantly. All seem to have come to realize that belonging to one's group does not necessarily imply denial of the other group and that acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives does not necessarily need to be interpreted as renouncing one's own, but might enrich one's repertoire and open a path to dialogue.

Finally, the research shows school activities at the intergroup level are working well. While knowing and clearly recognizing their own ethnic/religious/national affiliation, the children seem able to create and sustain social interactional spheres where identity is not necessarily addressed. This ability of children stands in sharp contrast to the adult stakeholders' tendency to adopt a purely categorized identity approach, based on the premise that strengthening ethnic and national identities is the path to achieving their aims. The study suggests that the adoption of a categorized approach needs to be critically considered and revised if the schools do not want to replicate the discourse of the reification of rigid identities, which are central to the present conflict (Bekerman 2009c).

As the research shows, the bilingual school initiative is comprised of multiple, overlapping facets that must be viewed in concert. Moreover, even perspectives that strive to be critical often overlook alternative explanations or crucial processes that might open doors to potentially successful educational strategies. The path towards reconciliation, tolerance, and recognition in conflict-ridden societies presents difficulties that cannot easily be overcome.

## Critical Perspectives

A variety of scholars have expressed skepticism regarding the possible impact of intergroup encounters between Jews and Palestinians (Bekerman 2007; Schimmel 2009; Maoz 2011). Although the planned encounters might have some short-term effects on changing intergroup attitudes, they seem to have failed to influence attitudes in society at large. Among the reasons mentioned for this lack of influence are the short-term exposure that most encounters afford participants and the lack of follow up, added to the fact that participation in them is usually self-selected and those who oppose peace and reconciliation might avoid taking part in them (Schimmel 2009).

Moreover, encounters are for the most part detached from the daily lives of the participants, are mostly focused on culture, identity, or interpersonal issues, and avoid confronting the deep structural and institutional asymmetries between the two groups (Halabi and Sonnenschein 2004; Suleiman 2004). Lastly, the fact that the position of Jews and Palestinians in the encounters is not similar and, thus, that they might affect both groups differently goes unnoticed. Consequently,

the lessons learned from dialogue workshops are usually not applied in a substantial way in everyday life situations (Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014).

In addition to the above limitations, I want to add some more foundational obstacles. Coexistence educational initiatives lack educational theorizing and to this day when articulating their aims are guided by functional, psychologized, and idealistic perspectives. Thus guided coexistence educational initiatives echo modern white, Western, totalizing conceptualizations, and identify the individual mind as the locus of the illness which needs to be treated. The treatment, in the best positivist psychologized tradition, is to be offered to solipsistic individuals while ignoring contextual and historical factors. I question whether working on the same premises that are constituted and constitutive of the modern Western world, under which many of the conflicts that coexistence education is expected to help smooth and ultimately overcome have flourished, is the right basis for such an education.

From this paradigmatic perspective, peace and reconciliation are seen as a universal goal and sufficient efforts should result in violence and conflict being erased from the face of the world. Yet we should always remember that peace and coexistence are revealed by and are dependent on the absence of violence and conflict. This striking duality bears remarkable similarities to the paradigmatic dichotomies set by Western epistemology (male/female, good/evil, us/them) and as such seems to be able only to replicate past outcomes. Inasmuch as there is a “true” way all need to follow, the understanding, recognition, and dialogue with alterity becomes a difficult task (Biesta 2004). In the Western tradition, differences need to first be pointed at, and then assimilated or destroyed; denied differences are the secret of “our” (good, right) existence. And what is more important, differences are set in the realm of meaning and not in the realm of power relations.

When peace education is regarded everywhere as being highly desirable, it stops being relevant and loses its potential influence, for in representing its values as universally self-evident, it hides what is fundamental to conflict—the multiple representations of truth, the various understandings of justice—and what is even more important, it disregards the tight connections between conflict and the present capitalist order and global division of work. In short, it disregards the social arrangements which institutionalize inequality and injustice, avoiding the problem of questions such as who “we” are, what perceptions of justice we hold to, what dialogue we want to sustain, and under which conditions. Hence, peace education as a universal ideal cannot be a good formula for encouraging peaceful accommodation.

If indeed peace education is serious about the verbiage that sustains it—the affirmation, recognition, and rehabilitation of “alterity”—it needs to start by critically approaching the epistemological and metaphysical certainties of Western modernity. Within this context, three related issues come to mind

(Bekerman 2007).

The first relates to the complex historical processes that have enabled the West, the colonial powers of old, not only to successfully replace the force of arms with the coercion of currency and consumerism, but especially to create or construct the “other” through word and deed in such a way as to lead inevitably to the demonization of those who are not like us, who do not comply with the hegemonic standards of Western white males.

The second points at the nation-state as the definite product of modernity, a modernity which has produced a distinct social form, radically different from that of the traditional orders of the past. This modernity is characterized by very specific forms of territoriality and by surveillance capabilities that monopolize effective control over social relations across definite time-space distances and over the means of violence. The nation-state can be viewed as a political socioeconomic phenomenon that seeks to exercise its control over the populations comprising it by establishing a culture that is at once homogeneous, anonymous (all the members of the polity, irrespective of their personal subgroup affiliations, are called upon to uphold this culture), and universally literate (all members share the culture the state has canonized). Reflecting modern psychologized epistemologies upon which it builds its power, the nation-state creates a direct and unobstructed relationship between itself and all its “individual” citizens: tribe, ethnic group, family, or church are not allowed to stand between the citizen and the state.

The third and final issue is the logical corollary of the first and the second. As Michael Mann (2004) forcefully suggests, murderous cleansing is not only modern but it is also the dark side of democracy. Ethnic cleansing has indeed been known in previous times, but its frequency and deadliness are in essence modern. Ethnic cleansing does not belong to the primitive but to the modern Western inclination to confound into one *ethnos* and *demos* the two concepts inherited from classical Greece as the pillars of its democratic states. To *demos*, the rule of the people, modernity has added *ethnos*, the group that shares a common sense of heritage, thus allowing for “the people” to rule democratically but also “tyrannically” any minority in its midst. Similarly, Dumont (1966) argues that racism is a correlate of liberal democracies, for if, as its credo goes, “all men are created equal,” then the evidence of inequality requires the dehumanization of the many. Equality from this perspective is a quality of man’s “nature,” not of the context within which he evolves.

Research-wise, the above also carries implications for social sciences research which is conducted hoping to contribute to educational practice in conflict-ridden societies. The social sciences need to realize that by naturalization to the global regime of nation-states it has surrendered its analytical scope to methodological nationalism (Beck 2000; Wimmer and Schiller 2003). Moreover, the social sciences need to review their epistemological colonialism (Poulter

2012)—their secular rational underpinnings—and how these might influence the researchers' understanding of traditional cultural/religious phenomena which in no small part is the phenomena they are trying to understand. Taking for granted concepts which should be identified as being folkloristic or political and not necessarily analytical in their studies and research cannot be a good path for serious research. Countries are not natural entities, societies are not necessarily countries organized as states, minorities/immigration are not the flow in or between nations, and identities and cultures are not traits of solipsistic individuals. Taking them as such blinds research to the profound influence of political contexts and processes in shaping present realities. Such an orientation compartmentalizes phenomena into units of analysis that otherwise should be considered in wider contexts and, consequently, sets national boundaries for social phenomena which otherwise should be approached by focusing also on wider spheres.

As the political context of the nation-state is not bounded, the individual and his or her culture are not bounded either; when the social sciences uncritically surrender to conceptualizations such as identity and culture, without attending to the potential dangers of naturalizing folkloristic concepts while embedding them in analytical discourses, they risk hiding the phenomena they intend to uncover.

Peace and coexistence education is in urgent need of reviewing its paradigmatic foundations while problematizing the political structures which sustain the conflicts it tries to overcome. Even if this is done it would be good to remember that the longstanding and bloody conflicts that educational initiatives for peace and coexistence hope to remedy are grounded in and sustained by the unequal allocation of material resources more than in the heads of troubled individuals.

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