Four major challenges facing peace education in regions of intractable conflict

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Abstract

While peace education all over the world faces numerous challenges, such as conflicting collective narrative, historical memories, contradictory beliefs, sever inequalities, and more, there are at least four additional major challenges that transcend challenges of content and method. Four such major challenges that pertain to the very core of peace education are discussed. They are: (a) The creation of a "ripple effect" whereby the impact of peace education programs spreads to wider social circles of society; (b) increasing the endurance of desired program effects in the face of their easy erosion; (c) the need for differential programs, given the differences in culture and in the role that each adversary plays in the conflict; and (d) the need to find ways to bridge between general dispositions, principles and values and their application in specific situations where competing motivations are dominant. It is argued that the four major challenges are common also to other kinds of programs: Human rights, anti-racism, tolerance and such as they many are carried out in socio-political contexts that negate the messages of the programs.

Peace education in regions of intractable conflict is often carried out in socio-political contexts that essentially negate the messages of such programs (e.g., Barash, 1997). Overcoming societies' opposition is one of the major justifications for those programs. But societal opposition to what has been described as a subversive activities during ongoing intractable conflict (Minow, 2002) is not the only challenge peace education faces: Contradictory collective narratives, charged negative emotions, sever inequalities, and more (Salomon, 2004; Salomon, 2006). Some of these are dealt with head on, as is the case of historical memories that fuel the conflict (e.g., McCully, 2005; Roe & Cairns, 2003), or opposing identity constructions that, likewise, underlie the conflict (Halabi & Sonnestein, 2004).

However, there are other challenges that need to be dealt with. Four such challenges are discussed in this paper as they appear to concern the very heart of peace education. The discussion of the four major challenges is based on research and experience of peace education in Israel/Palestine, but seems to be of a much more general relevance to other settings and locations where peace education is carried out within the context of an intractable conflict. The challenges are as follows: (a) The need to create a societal "ripple effect" whereby the impact of peace education programs spreads to wider social circles of non-program participants; (b) increasing the endurance of desired program effects in the face of their easy erosion; (c) the need for differential programs, given the differences of each group's needs and the role that each plays in the conflict; and (d) the need to find ways to bridge over the gap that divides the cultivation of desired general dispositions, principles and values and their application in specific situations where competing motivations are dominant. I single out these four challenges, as they appear to pertain to the very core of peace

education; they transcend questions of specific goals, methods, contents, age of participants or the surrounding socio-political context.

The creation of a ripple effect:

The UN called for the promotion of a culture of peace by educating people to see themselves as a peaceful people with norms that emphasize cooperation and the resolution of conflicts by dialogue, negotiation, and nonviolence. Two issues are involved here. One pertains to peace education of youngsters with the purpose of developing them into peace-supporting adults (e.g., Oppenheimer, 2009). This is a developmental issue. The other, of greater concern here, is the creation of a more peaceful society.

This can be achieved

> …when citizens of the world understand global problems, have the skills to resolve conflicts and struggle for justice non-violently, live by international standards of human rights and equity, appreciate cultural diversity, and respect the Earth and each other. Such learning can only be achieved with systematic education for peace." (Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign for Peace Education, 1999).

Clearly, the idea was not to educate for peace only individuals, but to affect whole societies. Thus, a major challenge facing peace education programs must be the concern for a "ripple effect" whereby programs' effects spread to wider circles of society.

The views and perceptions, attitudes and dispositions to be changed are not just an individual's; they are socially rooted in a "social ethos", and more specifically – in a collective narrative and "ethos of the conflict" (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Rouhanna & Bar-Tal, 1998). It follows that if peace education is to have any lasting

effect it must affect the social ethos, not only the minds of a few program participants. If society does not express its desire to live in peace with an adversary, (or does not condemn intolerance of a minority, or fails to promote human rights), affecting the hearts and minds of a few (usually young) individuals to become more peace oriented or more tolerant may not really matter much for the social context.

The issue here pertains to levels of influence: The level of the individual's psychology and the level of society. However, lest we exercise reductionism, the two levels need to be examined together; none is a sufficient explanation of the spread of ideas. Still, the intra-individual's changed attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, and the inter-individual spread of these changes (the ripple effect), are two different processes that require two different, though inter-related, sets of explanatory concepts.

Recent research concerns the way the fruits of intergroup contact can spread. This line of research focuses on the extended contact hypothesis (e.g., Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner & Stellmacher, 2007), whereby participation in contact groups affects non-participating friends of participants. Thus, whereas the effects of intergroup contact belong to the realm of changes in individuals, the extended contact touches upon the spread of these effects. But this line of research examined only rarely the spreading effects of indirect contact in the context of social tension or actual conflict (one exception is the N. Irish study of Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns & Voci, 2004). The context of a real tension or conflict between groups is qualitatively different from less threatening contexts as it entails strong feelings of anxiety, hatred, distrust and anger (Coleman, 2003; Salomon, 2002). It is an open question whether findings of studies carried out in the USA concerning relations between ethnic groups (Wright, et.al., 1997), or in Finland about relations with foreigners (Liebkind & McAlister, 1999)

apply also to Kashmir or Lebanon, or to regions of tension between majority and profoundly discriminated ethnic minority.

According to the extended contact theory when and in-group person (A) learns that another in-group friend (B) has close contacts with an out-group person (C) then this leads, under certain conditions, to A's more positive attitudes, reduced anxiety and weaker prejudices toward C's out-group (Pettigrew, Christ, Wanger, & Stellmacher, 2007). This argument has been supported in a variety of countries and contexts with a variety of means, ranging from reading friendship stories in the UK (Cameron, Rutland, Brown & Douch, 2006) to knowledge of real face-to-face contact (Turner, et. al., 2007). A number of underlying mechanisms have been suggested and supported – reduced inter-group anxiety (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns & Voci, 2004), changed in-group norms with respect to the out-group (Wright, et. Al., 1997), vicarious experience (Turner, Rhiannon, Hewstone, Voci & Vonofackou, 2008), and self disclosure (Turner, et. al., 2007).

However, one factor that has been studied so far only partly concerns different degrees of proximity to the actual contact. Not all candidates to be part of the extended contact are equally close to the contact itself or equally emotionally involved with the person who is in contact with an out-group member. It can be hypothesized that the effects of the extended contact and the need to establish balance (Heider, 1958) are stronger for those who are emotionally and/or physically closer to the individuals involved in real contact with adversaries than those who are farther away and/or less emotionally involved.

The challenge of the ripple effect of peace education programs in contexts of intractable conflict is twofold. First come the psychological questions of whether ripple effects resulting from peace- or similar educational programs do actually take

place, how potent are they, what mechanisms underlie them and what conditions facilitate and hinder their creation? Are the mechanisms and conditions more or less similar to the ones observed in less conflicted contexts? Second, there is the more applied question of how can ripple effects be created and how can they be facilitated and sustained? We would also need to distinguish short- from long-term ripple effects. Short-term effects may be attained through the mechanism of extended contacts but if not reinforced by continued peace education efforts it would remain short-lived (see next section). Still, while extended contact and continued reinforcements may be two of the necessary conditions to attain a longer-range ripple effect, they are far from being sufficient. It is quite likely that peace education alone in the absence of top-down political changes would be insufficient for this.

Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns & Voci, 2004 and others studies the effects of extended contact as they unfold without intervention. The question in the realm of peace education is how to engineer such effects and who is the audience most likely to serve as an effective lever for advancing of a ripple effect? Seen in this context, one may ask whether children and youths, the most common participants in peace education programs, are the most suitable target audiences. This issue has not often been discussed (see an exception Cox & Struton, 1984). However, when considered with the social psychological literature on the spread of persuasion messages in mind, children would not be considered the most influential social agents the way adults could be. Alternatively, what would distinguish between peace education for the young from peace education for adults when the attainment of social ripple effects are to be aimed at? How could school children be helped to serve as influential gate keepers, opinion leaders and agenda setters as suggested by the two steps flow of communication theory (Brosius and Weimann, 1996) given their unique social

contexts ? It might well be the case that if one aims at affecting a social ripple effect (in fact the implicit desire of most all peace education programs) then the approach for adults - the kind of influential ones studied by Kelman (2002) – ought to be radically changed when applied to younger audiences.

Increasing the endurance of desired program effects

There is ample research to show that peace education and similar programs have a positive, albeit differential impact on the attitudes, prejudices, desire for contact and legitimization of the "other side" on program participants (e.g., Smith, 1999; Salomon, 2004). But these positive results are more often than not obtained when measured right after the completion of programs. When such changes are measured a while later, the obtained effects appear to have been eroded and returned to their original state (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). (A rare exceptional study is the one carried out in Sri Lanka by Malhotra & Liyanage, 2005**,** where positive effects of a four day program were detected a year later). Whether there is a long-term implicit sleeper effect is so far an open question.

Apparently, socio-political forces and events suppress the previously attained changes, suggesting that that which can be changed by a "shot in the arm" kind of intervention can as easily be changed back by external forces, as shown, for example in Northern Ireland (Kilpatrick, & Leitch, 2004) and in Israel (Salomon, 2006). A similar fate faces attempts to change teachers' understanding of "good learning" (Strauss & Shiloni, 1994) and mothers' way of handling substance-dependent infants (Dakof, et. al., 2003). Short "technological" interventions, as contrasted with "natural" ones that are more akin to socialization processes, often have only short-lived effects (Smith, 1993).

The research and theoretical literature pertaining to attitude change is rich yet there is far less research that pertains to the issue of maintaining changes (see for an exception: Schimmel, 2009). Two fields are much concerned with this issue: The medical (e.g., Mccrady, Epstein and Hirsch, 2002) and the therapeutic fields (e.g., McGuire, 2003). Different models of diffusion and social adoption of medical and technological innovations have been suggested (e.g., Kempe, Kleinberg & Tardos, 2003) including word-of-mouth and the two-step-flow of communication. However, it may well be the case that the models developed for the fields of medicine and technology diffusion of innovation may not fit issues concerning the impact of peace education, with its potential negation of prevailing views and the dominance of the received collective narrative.

Three attempts to restore the eroded attainments of peace education programs were successfully carried out two or three months after the completion of peace education programs. The field-experimental interventions showed that when even brief interventions such as forced compliance (a form of role playing; Leippe& Eisenstadt, 1994), peer teaching of lessons learend during a peace education program to younger peers, or writing reflections on the programs are carried out, the initial changes are restored and endure for at least another three months.

Such experimental interventions suggest that the changes may not have been totally eroded, allowing for a semi-spontaneous recovery. However, they are limited to settings that enable such interventions, thus not an answer to the question of how to maintain changes on a larger social scale of other than school youngsters. Moreover, would the revived changes overcome truly dramatic or painful socio-political events, so common in situations of intractable contexts?

An important factor may be the attained depth of the attitudinal and perceptual change. It can be assumed that the deeper the change the more durable it might be. Apparently, this may depend on a number of factors. One such factor is likely to be the extent to which peace education programs satisfy the collective needs of participants. This can be implied from a study by Shnabel and Nadler (2008) who found that while a minority (Arabs in Israel) are driven by a need for empowerment, the Majority (Jews in Israel) is driven by a need for moral justification. Another set of factors is suggested by Kelman (1958): Compliance, identification, and internalization. Ajzen and Sexton (1999) speak of depth of processing, belief congruence and attitude-behavior correspondence as relevant factors for change maintenance. Indeed, research on depth of processing (Ajzen & Sexton, 1999) would predict that the deeper the processing – more elaboration and more controlled rather than automatic connections to existing cognitive schemata - would increase the chances of accessing the acquired attitudes and perceptions. However, deeper processing is less likely to take place when the desired attitudinal and perceptual changes and one's belief system are incongruent, suggesting that deeper processing is more likely among the already partly converted.

Another factor that seems to contribute to the sustainability of peace education effects is the affective component – the arousal of positive affect and empathy *vis a vis* the other side (Schimmel, 2009; Stephan, 2008). Positive affect implies also the reduction of negative feelings such as feelings of threat and anxiety (Paolini., Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004) which facilitate the effects of contact. To the extent that positive emotions sustain the effect of the persuasion (Petty, Gleicher & Baker, 1991) and facilitate changes in organizations (Forgas & George, 2001) to that extent can they be expected to help sustain the effects of peace education.

An important implication that follows from the above list of desired intra-individual changes is that they cannot be easily attained and particularly sustained with short-term programs of the brief "shot in the arm" kind. Depth of processing, empathy, internalization, taking the other side's role, and such require time (e.g., Nisbett and Ross, 1980).

However, intra-individual changes of cognitions and emotions may not suffice to sustain the kinds of changes that peace education desires. As is commonly known, one's attitudes, feelings and perceptions *vis a vis* the other side in the conflict are deeply rooted in the collective narrative and its dictates. Social support is one of the conditions for the success of intergroup contact (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998). It appears to also be a necessary condition for sustaining the effects of peace education programs. However, this entails a paradox: While social support may be a necessary condition for sustaining programs' effects, it is itself a result of the spreading effects of peace education. As pointed out earlier, peace education programs often take place in social contexts colored by that kind of conflict-related ethos that negates the messages of peace education (e.g., Magal, 2009), and hence one cannot assume the *a priori* existence of social support that might help sustain programs' effects.

The answer may well lie in the combination of bottom-up intra-individual incremental peace education generated processes, and top-down policy-based governmental promotion of peace processes. In this respect, Gallagher (2007) concluded that what made Northern Ireland attain more progress than Cyprus is that "Bolstered by formal diplomatic efforts toward peace agreement in the society at large, the educational system of Northern Ireland has been able to pursue many incremental peace education efforts that have helped to move its society along thus far" (p. 31). While the top-down processes provide the needed social support the

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continued grass-root peace education efforts provide the impetus for change through the intra-individual factors mentioned above: Satisfaction of needs, compliance, identification, internalization, depth of processing and positive affect.

<u>The need for a differential approach</u>

So far, many of the contents and methods of peace education programs are the same for all sides of a conflict. This is particularly pronounced where the contact hypothesis is applied (Mania, et.al., 2009). It appears as if one size ought to fit all, regardless of whether they are majority or minority, conqueror or conquered, natives or immigrants. In a few cases programs are administered in uni-national or uni-ethnic groups. But even then, the contents and the methods are quite uniform. The underlying assumption appears to be that the processes of reconciliation, mutual understanding, humanization, and empathy are similar for all involved.

But as research shows, they are not (Yablon, 2007). In one study (Biton & Salomon, 2005), involving about 800 Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian youngsters, we found that while the former entered the program with a conception of peace as the absence of violence ("negative peace"), the latter assumed that peace means independence and freedom ("structural peace"). The effects of that year-long school-based program were far stronger on the Jews than on the Palestinians since it dealt mainly with the psychological aspects of reconciliation, not with any political solution. And as other research shows, the Jews, being the majority, shun the political and prefer the interpersonal (Suleiman, 2004).

Rosen (2008), applying the forced compliance intervention with peace education graduates, found positive effects that restored the already attained changes on the Israeli-Jewish participants, but found no effect on the Israeli-Palestinians. This suggests that while the Jews engaged in trying to convey the ideas acquired during the

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peace education workshop, the Palestinians engaged in asserting their position and becoming empowered. This was supported by yet another study (Hussesi, 2009) where it was found that participation in the same year long school-based peace education program, the Jews learned to give somewhat more legitimacy to the Palestinian collective narrative, the Palestinians came to reinforce their own narrative. No legitimization of the Jewish collective narrative took place. Maoz (2000) found that while the Jewish participants rely on formal power which emanates from institutionally provided powers, the Palestinians rely on informal ones – their knowledge of the local history of the conflict and their sense of deprivation and injustice. Gallagher (2007) reached the same kind of conclusion: Cultural contexts, different needs, conflicting narratives and expectations, and opposing political agendas affect what each side brings with it to a program and what each side takes out of it. One size definitely, does not fit all.

Such differences require a differential approach to peace education. However, the challenge is to find some formulae in light of which different programs, based on different psychological principles, can be designed. Halabi, Sonnenshein & Friedman (2004) have indeed developed differential programs the emphasis of which is to strengthen the identity of the so-called oppressed minority and to liberate the so-called oppressor from its illusion of superiority. This then suggests that rather than striving to attain a common goal, such as mutual acknowledgement, empathy or reduced prejudices, peace education would need to accept the possibility that programs serve very different needs and goals for the parties involved: Allowing one side to "have a voice", strengthen its adherence to its own collective narrative, or become empowered and the other side learns to acknowledge its role in the conflict and to give legitimacy

to the other side's collective narrative (Salomon, 2002). This might well be a variation on what Marc Ross (1997) has called "good enough conflict resolution".

<u>Helping general dispositions and values become applied in specific situations</u>

Bar-Tal, Rosen and Nets-Zehngut (2009) question the value of direct peace education, as commonly practiced, as long as a conflict is in full force, as is the current situation in Israel/Palestine and other places. The authors suggest instead engaging in indirect peace education: Cultivating general abilities, dispositions and values such as tolerance, critical thinking and ethno-empathy. While this appears as a sound idea, there is room for some questions. Do **general** abilities, dispositions and values become applied in highly **specific** situations where strong counter motivations are at play? Do believers offer their cheeks even to those whom they hate and despise? Are victims, even those with high morals, willing to show tolerance to their aggressors?

It is commonly accepted in social psychology that general values, dispositions and abilities are not easily applied in specific situations, especially when alternative motivate ions – e.g. to comply with the scientist (Milgram, 1974), to avoid responsibility (Darley &Latane, 1968), to avoid effort (Salomon, 1984) , etc. – are at play. Would the acquired disposition to be tolerant apply when it concerns a threatening adversary? Would the ability to think critically become utilized when anger arouses by news about a terror activity?

All this does not mean that general abilities, dispositions, principles and values are not to be cultivated. On the contrary, they need to be cultivated and developed. However, the challenge is to make these more accessible and applicable when motivations that negate them come into play. While this is a general challenge, it is of particular importance in the case of peace education. First, this is so because indirect

peace education – the cultivation on general abilities and dispositions - is proposed to replace direct peace education – e.g., dialogue - under certain conditions (Bar-Tal, Rosen, & Nets-Zehgut, 2009). Second, it is also important for peace education because even direct peace education needs to be accompanied by a wider context of more `general abilities, beliefs and dispositions which provide justification and support for the more specific attitudes and perceptions that dialogue and conflict management skills are to cultivate.

Cognitions, as Kruglanski (1989) pointed out, differ from each other in terms of content and certitude. Knowledge that is held with greater certitude, values that are more central, and attitudes that are held with greater strength can be expected to be more tightly related to actual behaviors and are far more difficult to change (e.g., Abelson, 1988; Petty & Krosnick, 1995). Does this mean that the strength and certitude with which a cognition is held contributes to one's application of cognitions to situations that include competing motivations? The answer is a mixed one. Forsythe (1992), studying the morality (or rather, immorality) of business practices, founds that those who espoused lofty moral values tended to behave most immorally whereas those who perceived these values conditionally were more likely to apply them. Also Langer (1997) does not support the idea of strongly held convictions, concepts and beliefs. These, she claims and shows, are mindlessly applied even when the application is inappropriate. For Langer, practice and thus increased certitude make imperfect. Langer shows in an interesting experiment that acquiring categorical knowledge ("this **is** X") debilitates its application to a new situation. On the other hand, conditional knowledge ("this **could be** X") makes applications to new situations possible.

Is then the implication that coming to hold certain beliefs and attitudes to a high degree of centrality and hence certitude may facilitate its application in situations in which one faces tempting alternatives and competing motivations, as is the case, say, with applying knowledge of mathematics to physics (Bassok & Holyoak, 1989)? Research on transfer of learning would support this view. Good and firm mastery of the principles to be transferred is needed, says some old research. Alternatively, is the implication that doubt, uncertainty and conditional, rather than categorical knowledge are better suited for application to novel situations, as the research by Langer suggests?

The answer seems to be "it depends". There is room to hypothesize that solidly held knowledge, firmly embraced beliefs, strongly held attitudes and centrally placed values are of course easily applicable to concrete situations, but this application is to pretty routine cases, it is automatically carried out, it is therefore quite inflexible, or in Langer's words – it is automatically and mindlessly applied. Having acquired socially shared and reinforced stereotypes about colored people, the very observation of one of them automatically brings up the stereotype which is then easily applied in the form of an avoiding behavior. On the other hand, when knowledge is conditional, held with less certitude, it is more likely to be mindfully applied in a wide range of novel situations. One way or another, the very acquisition of certain socially-oriented beliefs, values, and attitudes, in and of itself, does not guarantee its application to real-life situations involving an adversary.

Discussion

The four challenges I chose to discuss are not the only ones that face peace education. Other challenges like severe inequalities, built into the social fabric of societies in conflict, are as challenging as the ones above. However, most other challenges do not

pertain to the very core of peace education as are the challenges of the ripple effect, the endurance of effects, the need to provide differential approaches and the relations between general dispositions and their specific application. In the absence of any one of the four, peace education may likely be a local, well intended activity, but with little enduring and socially impacting value.

Revisiting the challenges discussed here raises the question of whether they apply only to peace education in the context of intractable conflict. Or do they apply also, partly or wholly, to education for human rights, anti-racism, tolerance, and their likes? The differences between peace education and the other programs is clear enough, but there is also an important commonality. All these programs, pertain to changing hearts and minds in social environments that are not very supportive of their messages: Human rights and civic education in certain developing countries (e.g., Fok, 2001), tolerance for minorities in particular minority-rich countries (e.g., Weldon, 2006), and anti-racism in multi-national countries (e.g., Penketh, 2000). Such programs – explicitly or implicitly – aim at having a societal, not only individual impact, hope to attain enduring effects, need to take ethnic and social group differences into serious account and need to combine general dispositions and specific applications. In these respects, the challenges discussed here appear to apply to them as well.

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