

## FROM THE FIELD

### PEACE EDUCATION IN ISRAEL – ENCOUNTER AND DIALOGUE

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**Abstract** – *On the background of deep feelings of animosity, fear and distrust between Jews and Arabs, a number of educational projects are sponsored in Israel aimed at furthering co-existence and peace. This paper is a report of one such project - Children Teaching Children (CTC). The CTC Project is based on a series of face-to-face encounters between two parallel junior high school classes - one from an Arab school, the other from a Jewish school, stretching over a period of two years. The project is based on principles of humanistic education, stressing inter-personal dialogue, experiential learning on affective as well as cognitive levels, furthering values of empathy, acceptance, pluralism and democracy. Some of the outcomes of CTC are described, both on the basis of pre/post measurements, as well as participant observation methods. These outcomes point to considerable changes of attitude in both groups, such as a decrease in feelings of mutual strangeness, alienation and hatred, a better understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the pain it inflicts on both sides, an intensification of feelings of similarity between children and of optimism for the future.*

#### Introduction

**I**ssues of peace and war are not determined in the arena of education. Political, economic, military and even religious interests are far more powerful than 'mere education'. Nevertheless, education can have an impact on young people's ideas, views, beliefs and behavior vis-à-vis questions such as stereotypic thinking, prejudice, delegitimation and even dehumanisation of the 'enemy', violence, the sanctity of human life and others. These are prerequisites of conflict situations and, as such, exert paramount influence on the state of mind of the people involved.

In Israel, some considerable experience has accumulated in the sphere of Peace Education. Ever since its foundation almost 50 years ago – and for many decades before that – Israel has been involved in a severe conflict with its Arab neighbors. This conflict is characterised not only by bloody military clashes and widespread terror, but also by frames of mind in which each side conceives the other as the enemy, as untrustworthy, treacherous, bent on 'our'

total destruction and conceives itself as the victim with the monopoly of truth and justice on its own side.

*It is this polarised 'black and white' mentality that efforts of Peace Education attempt to cope with.*

Let us go back in time a few years, before the courageous and wise leaders in our region - Rabin and Peres of Israel, King Hussein of Jordan and Arafat of the Palestinians – began their dialogue and signed partial or total peace agreements. Before this new and hopeful era, the major contact between Arabs and Jews was inside the borders of the state of Israel. Both groups were citizens of Israel, but nevertheless the atmosphere that prevailed was one of mutual prejudice, suspicion, distrust and hostility. Jewish stereotypic thinking considered Arabs as blood-thirsty terrorists, whereas the major Arab stereotype of Jews was one of brutal soldiers and settlers, denying the Palestinian people their land and independence. These stigmas are closely linked with the double role of Israeli Arabs – that of members of the Palestinian nation and that of citizens of the state of Israel.

Much has been written in Israel on the potentials and difficulties of direct Jewish-Arab encounters. Here are some of the major considerations proposed:

1. Inter-group tension breeds negative psychological frames of mind. Some of their direct expressions are stereotypic thinking, prejudices, attitudes (and behaviors) of discrimination, de-legitimisation of the 'other', hatred (Bar and Bargal, 1995). In an inter-group meeting, Shalvi (1996) said: 'One of the great challenges for education now, for both peoples, is to create a human version of each other to replace those stereotypes. This brings me back to the need for direct encounter, because there is no other way to break down stereotypes.' In the same meeting Landau (1996) said: 'After decades of dehumanisation, the challenge before parents and teachers today, in both Israel and Palestine, is to find ways to re-humanise the former enemy. We need to develop effective pedagogical methods of confronting the negative stereotypes that have developed because of distance and estrangement between the two peoples,' .... 'Simulation exercises and (in mixed encounters) role reversals can be helpful, if facilitated by trained, sensitive group leaders.'
2. Bargal (1992) describes workshops 'for improvement of inter-group relations and minimising prejudice and discrimination'. These are based on theoretical and applied models in fields such as group dynamics, attitude changes in small groups, group therapy, and problem-solving groups (Lewin, 1946; Lippett, 1949; Rogers, 1983).

3. Bar and Idi (1995) wrote as follows: 'The encounter is one of the channels of political education, by means of an inter-group process, that focuses on personal and educational growth of the individual in confrontation with the *Jewish-Arab conflict which involves two peoples (in contrast to the erroneous conception, widespread among Jews, that this is a 'Palestinian problem')*.'

'The aim of the encounter is often described as dealing with the inter-cultural and inter-ethnic conflict towards the development of a pluralistic culture, based on the legitimisation of the Other and on respect for his culture'. (Director General of the Ministry of Education, 1.3.1984.)

4. Bar and Idi (1995) sum up their experiences of many years in the field of Arab-Jewish encounters:
- The encounter is the means not merely to talk about the conflictual issues but to 'live' them directly and concretely.
  - In the live encounter, it is possible to learn (i.e. experience and get to know) what we do not know about ourselves and about the Other, including emotions, attitudes, prejudices, stereotypes (of ourselves and of the other).
  - By means of the various structured and unstructured activities, the participants are exposed to meaningful experiences vis-à-vis concrete individuals in the other group. These confront the individual participant with his/her ability to internalise complex reality.
  - The encounter enables individuals to confront the gap between good intentions, statements and headlines in which they believe and their ability to experience the direct implications (on feelings, behaviour and attitudes) of the complex reality on themselves, their group and the other group. The participant experiences the tension of polarity, which is part and parcel of the ability to live with the conflict: thoughts and attitudes/emotions and behaviour; closing oneself/opening up; similarities/differences; uniformity/pluralism; one-dimensional perception/complex multi-dimensional perception; specific/universal; one-sidedness/mutuality; harmony/conflict; empathic/judgemental; near/far; victim/aggressor; violence/dialogue; powerlessness and despair/hope.

Against such a background, who are the agents for peace education in Israel?

1. The Ministry of Education established the 'Unit for Democracy and Co-existence'. This unit is active in producing curricular material dealing with relevant issues of democracy, peace and co-existence. It should be noted that the Ministry's initiative came after some public opinion research found

considerable correlation among Jewish high-school pupils between high hostility to Arabs and low commitment to principles of democracy.

2. Principals and teachers in high schools in general - and in the more progressive Kibbutz schools in particular - who are inspired by their own commitment to peace and education for peace.
3. A number of special institutions, such as the Van Leer Institute, the Adam Institute for Peace and Democracy, the Jewish-Arab 'Oasis for Peace' school and the 'Kibbutz Artzi' Kibbutz-Movement's Jewish-Arab Centre for Peace at Givat Haviva, whose programme 'Children Teaching Children' I am about to describe.

I became acquainted with this programme in the summer of 1993, when I was invited to facilitate a workshop at the summer meeting of Jewish and Arab teachers active in CTC. We worked together for 8 hours and for me this was a meaningful experience. I met a group of highly motivated people, profoundly committed to Arab-Jewish peace and co-existence, most of them beginning their second or third year in the project.

Ever since, I have been following their work, talking in depth to the project's leaders and recently attending a series of class room-encounters as a participant observer. I am writing this paper as an outside observer of CTC, appreciating their work but not actively involved in the project in any way.

'Children Teaching Children' - or CTC - began in 1987 with two classes. In 1996, it encompassed 28 schools, 38 classes, 80 teachers and 1500 pupils, mainly from junior high schools. This is a two-year programme, based on a series of regular encounters between two parallel classes - one from an Arab school and one from a Jewish school - pupils as well as teachers. These encounters are run on the following lines:

- Meetings of the teachers - once a fortnight for a complete school year (in the wake of an intensive joint learning experience during the summer);
- A short period of work in the original uni-national homerooms - in preparation for the real encounter;
- During most of the school year, the two parallel groups meet each other one week and meet in their separate home rooms the other week, each meeting lasting for two school lessons.

One of the unique features of the programme is the importance it attaches not only to the bi-national encounters but to the processing of the encounter

experience in the children's original homerooms. The present director of CTC thinks that 'the most important steps in reinforcing the lessons of CTC occur in the subsequent homeroom sessions, where the children process their impressions from the bi-national encounter, explore the complexity of their own identity and learn about the other side, while beginning better to understand themselves (Dichter, 1996). Bar and Idi (1995) add that the uni-national home-room sessions enable the children 'to release pressure, to express more freely their feelings of disappointment, anger, and confusion in a climate of support and reinforcement'. I was told by the coordinator of one of the mixed groups, that their joint teachers' group has decided to have bi-national encounters only once a month, which act as a stimulus for the in-depth processing taking place in the three subsequent homeroom activities (Feldesh, 1996).

The objectives of the CTC programme focus on creating personal acquaintance among pupils as well as teachers, promoting deeper awareness of the complexities of the Arab Israeli conflict as well as of each other's daily existence, internalisation of pluralistic values, and deepening the commitment to democratic principles.

It should be stressed that special attention is paid to the educational climate of the meetings. CTC stresses :

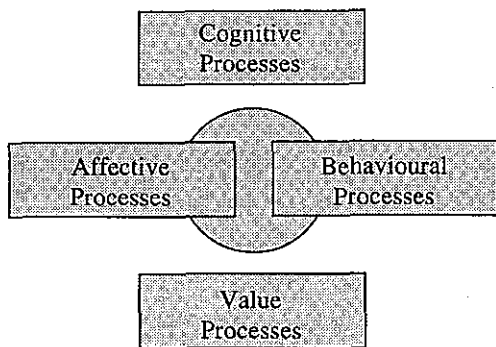
- the promotion of an educational environment conducive to openness and personal growth of both teachers and pupils;
- the development of an inter-personal dialogue within the context of an ongoing conflict;
- the exploration of the two different group identities - one's own as well as the other's - and discovering similarities and differences in a supportive climate. This type of climate enables the participants to have meaningful insights of a personal, inter-personal and inter-group nature.

The programme is based on principles of Humanistic Education (Rogers, 1983; Combs, 1974). It is process-orientated and founded on Dialogue furthering experiential learning, combining personal and inter-personal emotional experiences, cognitive learning experiences as regards the cultural, social and political aspects of the conflict, confrontation with values dilemmas, dealing with values of empathy, acceptance, pluralism and democracy. Fig.1 represents such holistic learning processes, integrating cognitive, affective, values and behavioural domains (Darom, 1988).

The 'curriculum' of the programme is an on-going joint creation. 'The particular curriculum in CTC is to be tailored to the particular schools, teachers and pupils involved. In other words, beyond general guidelines and a given, rather

*FIGURE 1: Holistic learning – Interdependence of processes*

The value of holistic educational processes is derived directly from their humanistic nature. If education is to focus on human beings, then educators must relate to learners in their totality. Humans are not divided into separate compartments; rather, cognitive learning, emotional experiences, values and day-to-day behaviour are deeply intertwined in each learner. These factors mutually influence one another. Any educator who decides to relate selectively to portions of these spheres of humanness is likely to render the educational process less effective.



flexible, framework the programme is created locally in the team-meetings, in response to the needs of the pupils and to incidents within or between the classes. The essence of CTC is the on-going creation of an educational programme based on dialogue between its participants' (Hartman, 1994).

The teachers' meetings are in fact an ongoing workshop, processing the issues, needs and difficulties experienced in the previous childrens' encounters, and planning future meetings accordingly. CTC has resource handbooks but has no 'textbook' (Hartman, 1994). Needless to say, not all teachers can adapt themselves to this open approach to classroom activities. At all stages of the planning process, special emphasis is devoted to issues such as stereotypes and stereotypic thinking, conflict resolution, fears and anxieties on personal and group levels, self image.

What then are the guidelines of the programme?

1. Teachers adopt the role of group-facilitators. This is not always an easy process. It means finding new balances between democracy and hierarchy, between pupils' initiative and those of teachers, between openness allowing freer expression of emotions as opposed to traditional, primarily cognitive studying. (Many teachers – but not all - express their satisfaction at learning new methods and attitudes, which have a positive influence on their teaching far beyond CTC.

2. The on-going teachers' workshop, processing the encounters, planning future activities and deepening their own inter-personal trust and cooperation are the core of the programme.
3. Uni-national and bi-national activities play equally important roles in the total process.
4. The encounters take place in groups smaller than total classrooms. Usually the two parallel classes are each divided into three sub-groups (approximately 12 to 15 pupils) and the actual encounter takes place in the framework of two sub-groups – one from each national group.
5. The programme goes through a number of stages:
  - Introduction to the CTC programme
  - Beginning of acquaintance
  - Deepening of acquaintance
  - Group dynamics
  - Image of Self and Other; stereotypical thinking
  - Emotional barriers - prejudice and fear
  - Conflict resolution
  - Summing up
6. Most meetings are based on structured, experiential activities and their verbal processing. These are complemented by texts, films, as well as games, 'fun' activities and visiting each others schools and homes.
7. Much of the work is done in small groups of 2, 3, or 4 individuals.

There are a number of dilemmas continually facing CTC:

- To what extent should political issues of the conflict be dealt with explicitly? The balance of integrating between the two extremes - emphasis on personal and inter-personal matters as opposed to a study-course in political aspects of the conflict - is not always easy to find.
- Should participation be voluntary or should the meetings take place with classes in their entirety? The first has obvious short-term advantages but what is the point of addressing only the previously convinced. The second alternative is more difficult, but it would bring the message of peace to wider populations in their organic class-rooms.

- How can the language difficulty be overcome? Most Arabs have a considerable knowledge of Hebrew, but only few Jews speak Arabic. If the language of the encounter is Hebrew, all participants understand what is said, but the lack of symmetry between Arab minority and Jewish majority is reinforced.

Finally, let us consider some of the outcomes of these encounters (Bar and Bargal, 1995; Bar and Idi, 1995). In pre- and post-programme measurements as well as comparisons with control groups, the results were as follows:

1. Both sides report an increase in inter-personal acquaintance, knowledge and awareness of relevant issues, and a decrease in feelings of mutual strangeness and alienation. On the other hand there was no significant increase in interaction outside the programme.
2. Both sides gain a more realistic conception of the conflict in its complexity. They report a better understanding of the severity of the conflict, which is painful to both national groups; a significant rise in the legitimization that each side grants to the national aspirations of the other; a growing awareness that each group not only suffers pain but also inflicts pain on the other; a better realisation in the Jewish group that they themselves play an active part in the conflict.
3. A significant decrease was measured in feelings of personal and group hatred towards the other national group.
4. In addition, there was a rise in feelings of optimism towards finding positive solutions to the conflict, a rise in feelings of similarity with the other group and a decrease in misgivings and anxiety as to future encounters between Arabs and Jews.
5. The ongoing CTC programme is more effective in bringing about positive change than programmes conducting one-time encounter workshops, usually lasting for about three days.

These are some of the outcomes on the macro-research level. I should like to add some of my observations on the micro level representing one particular CTC unit.

8th grade children, at the conclusion of the programme were asked 'What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others?' Here are some of their answers:



### About myself

'Not to reach hasty conclusions before examining all aspects.'

'To be open to different points of view.'

'That I am able to associate with children from diverse cultural background.'

'That I can freely express my thoughts, as well as understand and even agree with the other side.'

'Not to hate human beings.'

'To listen to opinions different from my own.'

'Some of my prejudices have disappeared.'

### About others

'To break stigmas on others.'

'I have met Arabs with whom I found a common language.'

'Not only Jews suffer pain inflicted by Arabs, but Jews also inflict pain on Arabs.'

'All in all, they are quite similar to us.'

'They are eager for good relations with us (just as we are).'

'They have fears just like us. It is a good feeling that 'we are not alone in this boat.'

'I learned about Jewish women: they are not as free as I had thought previously.'

Some children summed up their learnings in a more poetic style. One girl wrote 'CTC is a flower, and we watered it'. One of the boys came to a very realistic conclusion: 'There is a crack in the wall, but the wall still exists'. One kid said: 'This encounter should only be a beginning. Now I want to meet other groups, such as new immigrants from Ethiopia and Russia, religious youth, and other sectors of Israeli society, that I have – as yet – not encountered.' Some children related to two specially meaningful encounters, both in extremely painful circumstances – one after Prime Minister Rabin was murdered and one after a particularly severe Palestinian terrorist massacre.

At an end-of-the-year summing up meeting, the teachers also asked themselves: 'What did we learn about our pupils? What did we learn about ourselves? What did we learn about our partners?' Here are some of the points that were made:

- The kids are open, eager for new experiences, motivated to meet children 'from the other group'.
- They learned to listen to each other, to accept people different from themselves.
- The personal and inter-personal issues were more meaningful to them than the political issues.
- Relating to stereotypes gave way to relating to human beings. Our own team-work – our creating a real support group – was highly important to us.
- The key to positive relationships – in education and otherwise – is openness and sincerity.

One of the Jewish teachers made this poignant comment. 'Some of our emphases, concepts and norms of behaviour are different from theirs. But then we somehow expect them to be similar to us. For instance at one of the joint meetings at the Arab school, the rooms were not ready, the crayons were not prepared – things that we call 'bad organisation'. On the other hand, the meal they prepared for us, their warm hospitality were just wonderful. At the time I was angry, but in time I have processed my anger and become more accepting. I am learning to accept differences and rid myself of unrealistic expectations for similarity ('they should be more like us').

This expresses a higher level of encounter and dialogue. The present director of CTC, Dichter, told me that the coordinators of CTC are at present working intensively on problems such as these. How can we turn the encounters into in-depth processes of accepting diversity – even antagonism – without which real partnership is quite impossible? How much leadership am I prepared to share? In other words – our aim is no longer mere 'co existence' but real 'co-living'.

There can be two diametrically opposed approaches to peace education. One would be – as one of the CTC activists told me after a visit to North Ireland – along the lines of 'Good fences make good neighbours'. The other is furthering encounter and dialogue, aimed at 'rehumanising' the other side of the conflict. This second direction may be meaningful not only in Israel but in many of the other warring areas on our troubled globe.

Let me conclude with an anecdote quoted by Landau (1996). 'Shuki told a story about his experience in the Lebanon war in 1982, when his unit was ordered to clear a Palestinian refugee camp of PLO fighters. Shuki and his comrades fought their way into the camp, shooting as they went, taking care not to harm civilians. Suddenly two refugees came in their direction carrying an object and yelling at the soldiers. Shuki and his buddies screamed back at them, urging them to get out of the way. Since the two men were only about 20 yards distant, the soldiers could quickly make out that they were carrying a crate of

Pepsi Cola and could decipher their screams as invitations to have a drink. Shuki later reflected: 'If they had been 200 yards away, we would have shot at them and been glad to hit them.' And he asked: 'How far away does a human being have to be before he becomes a target? How close must he be before we see he is human?'"

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**Dov Darom** founded the Social Education programme at Oranim and directed it for many years. He taught, coordinated workshops, and wrote on topics such as social education, humanistic education, kibbutz education, classroom climate, interpersonal communication, values education. He was a member of Kibbutz Yassur, the father of five children and grandfather of ten children. Shortly before this article went to press, the editor received a note from Dov Darom's wife with the sad news that her husband had passed away. Shalom, Dov!

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