

Peace Building Through Participatory Action Research

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Victor J. Friedman
Action Research Center for Social Justice, Max Stern Yezreel Valley College, Israel

Izabel Ramadan, Oranim College of Education, Israel

Michal Razer, Oranim, College of Education, Israel

In our session we engage with three main questions:

1. How can we deal effectively with perceived "resistance" to peace building processes?
2. What is the role of emotion in the peacebuilding process?
3. How can we use reflexivity in helping people engage emotion in the peace building process?.

The plan

- Why peacebuilding is important to us? Our personal narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- What happens when young Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel meet in institutions of higher education?
- The "one big happy family" fantasy: Our dilemma in dealing with the perceived resistance of students to discussing the conflict.
- An exercise in reflexivity.
- Reframing the "one big happy family" fantasy.
- Action research as a peace building process.
- Discussion

Why is peacebuilding important to us?

Our personal narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

- Victor
- Michal
- Izabel

What happens

when young Jewish and Palestinian Arab students
meet in institutions of higher education?

Our dilemma in peacebuilding

When encountering the "one big happy family" fantasy, we face the following dilemma:

- If we do not challenge the students' claim that relations between them are just fine, then we collude with their denial of conflict and processes of "silencing" that keep inequality, injustice, and oppression undiscussable.
- If we try to show the students that they are denying the "here and now" expression of conflict then we intensify resistance and the students become closed to the process.

Reflexivity (an action research tool)

Take a look inside:

How do our narratives and our dilemma
affect your thoughts and feelings ?

Where do they touch you?

Where do these thoughts and feelings come from?

The role of emotion in the Israeli-Palestinian encounter

- The meeting between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs is deeply charged with powerful emotions such as fear, anger, resentment, hatred, desire for revenge, and guilt.
- In the case of our students, these emotions are **not personal** but they are still there – and very powerful.
- These emotions constitute a strong barrier to developing open and healthy relationships among the students.
- The students need a way of dealing with these emotions without necessarily expressing them to the other side.

Peacebuilding through Participatory Action Research in "Natural Spaces of Encounter":

Lessons Learned from Experience (Victor)

- "Negotiating Reality": a participative, constructionist approach to peacebuilding. Fostering "agency"
 - Focus first on the world/social space which the Jewish and Palestinian Arab students create among themselves, and where they have some control, and not the conflict as a whole. This approach sets the stage for discussing the larger conflict and issues such as inequality, injustice, and oppression.
 - Have the students do research projects on each other's experience and/or on the relationships among them. As "researchers", they know they have to try to observe and listen without judging.
 - When the students report their research in class, it provides opportunities to look together at the reality they share and create together.
- In order for this to work"**
- Provide conceptual and behavioral tools up front so that students have some preparation for dealing with the difficult moments.
 - Use reflexivity to enable students to become critically reflective on their own feelings. Here students "research" themselves and their own experience.
 - Expect an "explosion"
 - Provide opportunities for students to express their emotions freely, and without being judged, but in separate groups. This enables students to become fully self-aware and frees them.

The "One Big Happy Family" Fantasy

- **Initial Frame:** The students are denying the conflict because they want to keep it undiscussable. The Jews because it maintains their hegemony and the Arabs because the conflict threatens the status they have gained. And we have to unmask them.
- **Reframe:** The students have a desire to be a "happy family" – that is, they would like to keep the conflict out and to preserve a good atmosphere in class. And they see us spoiling it.

Reflexivity in Peace Building

- To be reflexive means that we are fully conscious of the lenses through which we view the world" (Kaufman, 2013)
- The ingrained *habitus* of viewing our own beliefs as we now view those held by others." (Gouldner, 1970)
- Analyzing the "unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:40).
- Reflexivity is an important component of the sociological imagination in that it requires a deep awareness of one's biography and history (Mills 1959).

Readings (In Chronological Order)

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- Arieli, D., Friedman, V. and Hirschfeld, M. (2017). Ethical dilemmas at the interface between Action Research, Conflict Transformation, and Critical Studies. Paper presented at the Critical Management Studies Conference, July 3-5, 2017, Liverpool, UK.