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Gavriel Salomon*

* Center for Research on Peace Education, University of Haifa, Israel

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Four Major Challenges Facing Peace Education in Regions of Intractable Conflict

Gavriel Salomon
Center for Research on Peace Education
University of Haifa, Israel

Although peace education all over the world faces numerous challenges, such as conflicting collective narratives, historical memories, contradictory beliefs, and severe inequalities, there are additional challenges that transcend content and method. Four such major challenges that pertain to the very core of peace education are discussed: (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 light of their easy erosion; (c) the need for differential programs given the differences in culture and in the role that each adversary plays in a 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. I argue that the four major challenges are also common to other kinds of programs, such as human rights, antiracism, and tolerance.

Peace education in regions of intractable conflict is often carried out in sociopolitical contexts that essentially negate the messages of such programs (e.g., Barash, 1997) and which are sometimes described as subversive activities during ongoing intractable conflict (Minow, 2002). However, beyond political opposition, there are other challenges facing peace education: contradictory collective narratives, charged negative emotions, severe inequalities, and more (Salomon, 2004, 2006). Some of these are dealt with head-on, as in the case of historical memories that fuel the conflict (e.g.,

Correspondence should be addressed to Gavriel Salomon, Center for Research on Peace Education, University of Haifa, Haifa, 31905, Israel. E-mail: gsalomon@research.haifa.ac.il
McCully, 2005; Roe & Cairns, 2003), or opposing identity constructions that, likewise, underlie the conflict (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004).

However, there are other challenges that need to be dealt with. In this article, I discuss four such challenges that appear to concern the very heart of peace education. The discussion of these challenges is based on research and experience of peace education in Israel–Palestine, but seems to be equally relevant 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 diverse programs, given the differences among groups’ needs and the role those needs play in the conflict; and (d) the need to find ways to bridge 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 believe these four challenges transcend questions of specific goals, methods, contents, ages of participants, or the surrounding sociopolitical contexts.

THE CREATION OF A RIPPLE EFFECT

The United Nations called for the promotion of a culture of peace by educating people to see themselves as peaceful with norms that emphasize cooperation and the resolution of conflicts through 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, 1999, para. 6)

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

The perceptions, attitudes, and dispositions to be changed are rooted in a social ethos and, more specifically, in a collective narrative and “ethos of the
conflict” (Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). It follows that if peace education is to have any lasting effect, it must affect the social ethos. 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 individuals to become more peace oriented or more tolerant may not matter much in the larger social context.

The issue here pertains to levels of influence—the level of individual psychology and the level of society. However, lest we exercise reductionism, the two levels need to be examined together; neither alone is a sufficient explanation of the spread of ideas. Changing the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of an individual, and the inter-individual spread of these changes—the ripple effect—are two different processes that require two different, although interrelated, 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. However, this line of research has only rarely examined the spreading effects of indirect contact in the context of social tension or actual conflict (one exception is the Northern Ireland study of Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004). The context of 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 United States concerning relationships between ethnic groups (Wright, Aaron, McLaughlin-Vlope, 1997), or in Finland about relationships with foreigners (Liebkind & McAlister, 1999), apply also to Kashmir or Lebanon or other regions where tension is high between majority and a profoundly discriminated ethnic minority.

According to the extended contact theory, when an ingroup person (A) learns that another ingroup friend (B) has close contacts with an outgroup person (C), then this leads, under certain conditions, to A’s more positive attitudes, reduced anxiety, and weaker prejudices toward C’s outgroup (Pettigrew et al., 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 United Kingdom (Cameron, Rutland, Brown, & Douch, 2006) to knowledge of real face-to-face contact (Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini, & Christ, 2007). A number of underlying mechanisms have been suggested and supported: reduced intergroup anxiety (Paolini et al., 2004), changed ingroup norms with respect to the outgroup (Wright et al., 1997), vicarious experience (Turner, Rihannon, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonafakou, 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 outgroup 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 or physically closer to the individuals involved in real contact with adversaries than those who are farther away or less emotionally involved.

The challenge of the ripple effect of peace education programs in contexts of intractable conflict is twofold. First, there are the psychological questions of whether ripple effects resulting from peace or similar educational programs do actually take place, how potent they are, what mechanisms underlie them, and what conditions facilitate or hinder their creation. Are the mechanisms and conditions more or less similar to the ones observed in less conflicted contexts? Second, there are the more applied questions of how ripple effects can be created, 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 the next section). Still, although extended contact and continued reinforcements may be two of the necessary conditions to attain a longer-range ripple effect, it is quite likely that peace education alone in the absence of top-down political changes would be insufficient.

Paolini et al. (2004) and others studied 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 what audience is most likely to serve as an effective lever for advancing 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 (as an exception, see Cox & Scruton, 1984). However, when considered in the context of social psychological literature on the spread of persuasion, children would not be considered the most influential social agents in society at large. Alternatively, what would distinguish peace education for the young from peace education for adults when the attainment of social ripple effects is the goal? How could school children be helped to serve as influential gatekeepers, opinion leaders, and agenda setters as suggested by the two-step flow of communication theory (Brosius & Weimann, 1996), given their unique social contexts? It might well be the case that if one aims at initiating a social ripple effect, 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 program participants’ attitudes, prejudices, desires for contact, and legitimizations of the “other side” (e.g., Salomon, 2004; A. Smith, 1999). However, these positive results are more often than not obtained when measured right after the completion of programs. When measured a while later, the effects appear to have eroded and returned to their original state (Kupermintz & Salomon, 2005). Whether there is a long-term implicit sleeper effect is, so far, an open question.

Apparently, sociopolitical events can suppress previously attained effects, 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 has faced other short “technological” interventions, such as attempts to change teachers’ understandings of “good learning” (Strauss & Shilony, 1994) and mothers’ ways of handling substance-dependent infants (Dakof, Quille, & Tejeda, 2003). Such interventions, as contrasted with “natural” ones that are more akin to socialization processes, often have only short-lived effects (L. D. Smith, 1993).

The research and theoretical literature pertaining to attitude change is rich, yet there is far less research on the issue of maintaining changes (for an exception, see Schimmel, 2009). Two fields are much concerned with this issue: the medical (e.g., Mccrady, Epstein, & 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 technological 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 2 or 3 months after the completion of peace education programs. Field experimental interventions have shown that when even brief interventions, such as forced compliance (a form of role

1A rare exception is the study carried out in Sri Lanka by Malhotra and Liyanage (2005), where positive effects of a 4-day program were detected 1 year later.
playing; Leippe & Eisenstadt, 1994), peer teaching of lessons learned 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 3 months. Such experimental interventions suggest that the changes may not have totally eroded, allowing for a certain degree of recovery. However, settings that enable such interventions are limited, such as school programs, and, thus, not an answer to the question of how to maintain changes on a larger social scale. Moreover, we do not know whether the revived changes would overcome truly dramatic or painful sociopolitical events, so common in situations of intractable conflict.

An important element may be the depth of the attitudinal and perceptual change. It can be assumed that the deeper the change, the more durable it would be. This may depend on a number of factors. One is 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, although a minority (Arabs in Israel) are driven by a need for empowerment, the majority (Jews in Israel) are driven by a need for moral justification. Kelman (1958) suggested another set of factors: compliance, identification, and internalization. Ajzen and Sexton (1999) spoke of depth of processing, belief congruence, and attitude–behavior correspondence as relevant factors for the maintenance of change. Indeed, Ajzen and Sexton’s research on depth of processing would predict that deeper 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 those already partly converted.

Another factor that seems to contribute to the sustainability of peace educational effects is the affective component—the arousal of positive affect and empathy vis-à-vis the adversary (Schimmel, 2009; Stephan, 2008). Positive affect also implies the reduction of negative feelings, such as threat and anxiety (Paolini et al., 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), they can be expected to help sustain the effects of peace education.

An important implication that follows from the previous list of desired intra-individual changes is that they cannot be easily attained and sustained with short-term programs. Depth of processing, empathy, internalization, taking the other side’s role, and the like require time (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980). However, intra-individual changes of cognition 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-à-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 inter-group 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: Although social support may be a necessary condition for sustaining a program’s 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 very messages of peace education (e.g., Magal, 2009); and hence, one cannot assume the a priori existence of social support that might help sustain program effects.

The solution may well lie in the combination of incremental bottom-up, intra-individual processes generated by peace education and top-down, policy-based governmental promotion of peace processes. In this respect, Gallagher (2007) concluded that what made Northern Ireland progress more 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)

Whereas the top-down processes provide the needed social support, the grassroot peace education efforts provide the impetus for change through the intra-individual factors mentioned earlier: satisfaction of needs, identification, internalization, depth of processing, and positive affect.

THE NEED FOR A DIFFERENTIAL APPROACH

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). The underlying assumption appears to be that the processes of reconciliation, mutual understanding, humanization, and empathy are similar for all involved, regardless of whether they are majority or minority, conqueror or conquered, natives or immigrants.

In a few cases, programs have been administered in uni-national or uni-ethnic groups. However, even then, the contents and the methods are quite uniform; 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, whereas 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 because it mainly dealt with the psychological aspects of reconciliation, not with any political solution; and, as other research has shown, the Jews, being the majority, shun the political and prefer the interpersonal (Suleiman, 2004).

Rosen (2008), applying a forced compliance intervention with peace education graduates, found positive effects that restored earlier attitudinal changes for the Israeli Jewish participants, but found no effect on the Israeli–Palestinians. This suggests that, whereas the Jews engaged in trying to convey the ideas acquired during the 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 in the same year-long, school-based peace education program, the Jews learned to give somewhat more legitimacy to the Palestinian collective narrative, whereas the Palestinians came to reinforce their own narrative. No legitimization of the Jewish collective narrative took place. Maoz (2000) found that, whereas the Jewish participants rely on formal power that emanates from institutionally provided powers, the Palestinians rely on informal factors—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 to and takes from a program. One size definitely does not fit all.

Such distinctions 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, Sonnenschein, and Friedman (2004) indeed developed differential programs, the emphasis of which was 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 acknowledgment, 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 to acknowledge its role in the conflict and give legitimacy to the other’s collective narrative (Salomon, 2002). This might well be a variation on what Ross (2000) called “good enough conflict resolution.”
FACILITATING THE APPLICATION OF GENERAL DISPOSITIONS AND VALUES TO SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

Bar-Tal, Rosen, and Nets-Zehngut (2009) questioned the value of direct peace education as commonly practiced while a conflict is in full force, as is the current situation in Israel–Palestine and elsewhere. Instead, the authors suggested engaging in indirect peace education: cultivating general abilities, dispositions, and values such as tolerance, critical thinking, and ethno-empathy. Although this appears as a sound idea, there is room for some questions. How effectively can general abilities, dispositions, and values be 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 motivations—for example, to comply with the scientist (Milgram, 1974), to avoid responsibility (Latané, 1968), to avoid effort (Salomon, 1984), and so forth—are at play. Would the acquired disposition to be tolerant apply when it concerns a threatening adversary? Would the ability to think critically be utilized when anger is aroused by news about a terror activity?

All this does not mean that general abilities, dispositions, principles, and values are not to be cultivated. The challenge is to make them more accessible when motivations that negate them come into play. This is particularly important in the case of peace education, first, because indirect peace education—the cultivation of general abilities and dispositions—is proposed to replace direct peace education under certain conditions (Bar-Tal et al., 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 that provide justification and support for the more specific attitudes and perceptions that dialogue and conflict management skills are designed to cultivate.

Cognitions, as Kruglanski (1989) pointed out, differ from each other in terms of content and certitude. Knowledge that is held with greater certainty, values that are more central, and attitudes that are held with greater strength are likely 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, found 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) did not support the idea of strongly held convictions, concepts, and beliefs. These, she claimed, are mindlessly applied even when the application is inappropriate. For Langer, practice and, thus, increased certitude make imperfect. In an interesting experiment, Langer showed 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. 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 (1997) 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 generally to routine cases, it is automatically carried out, and it is therefore quite inflexible; or, in Langer’s (1997) 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 that 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 previously mentioned. However, most other challenges do not pertain to the very core of peace education as do 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 social impact.

Revisiting the challenges discussed here raises the question of whether they apply only to peace education in the context of intractable conflict or whether they also apply, partly or wholly, to education for human rights, antiracism, tolerance, and the like. The differences between peace education and the other programs are clear enough, but there is also an important commonality. All 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 antiracism in multinational countries (e.g., Penketh, 2000). Such programs—explicitly or implicitly—aim at having a societal impact, with enduring effects, taking ethnic and social group differences into account, and combining general dispositions and specific applications. In these respects, the challenges discussed here appear to apply to them as well.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Gavriel Salomon received his PhD at Stanford. He is past Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Haifa, is the founder and co-director of the Center for Research on Peace Education and a fellow of the AERA and APA. He has published six books on mind and technology, computers in education, and research on peace education, and numerous research and theory articles in international journals. He served as editor of the journal Educational Psychologist and is the recipient of an honorary doctorate from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, the Israel National Award for scientific achievements in educational research, the AERA Scribner Award, and the Clervinga Chair at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands.

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