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Yifat Biton and Gavriel Salomon


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## Peace in the Eyes of Israeli and Palestinian Youths: Effects of Collective Narratives and Peace Education Program\*

YIFAT BITON

*Department of Education, Tel-Hai College*

GAVRIEL SALOMON

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

The authors studied the extent to which the collective narrative of a group in conflict and participation in a peace education program affects youngsters' perceptions of peace. Participants in the study were 565 Jewish Israeli and Palestinian adolescents, about half of whom participated in a year-long school-based program; the other half served as a control group. Pre- and post-program questionnaires measured youngsters' free associations to the concept of peace, their explanations of it, and its perceived utility, and suggested strategies to attain it. Initially, Israeli students stressed the negative aspects of peace (absence of violence) and Palestinians stressed its structural aspects (independence, equality). Unlike the controls, both Israeli and Palestinian program participants came to stress more the positive aspects of peace (cooperation, harmony) following participation in the program. Also, whereas the controls came to increasingly suggest war as a means to attain peace, possibly as a function of the ongoing mutual hostilities (intifada), no such change took place among program participants. Palestinian controls also manifested greater hatred towards Jews, but no change took place among program participants. That is, peace education can serve as a barrier against the deterioration of perceptions and feelings. It became evident that individuals' perceptions of peace are differentially colored by their group's collective narratives and more immediate experiences of current events, but are significantly altered by participation in a peace education program.

### Introduction

Human societies usually have, as one of their important common denominators, a collective narrative. That collective narrative embodies their shared historical memories, their sense of shared identity (Devine-Wright, 2003; Bruner, 1990), and sets of beliefs about themselves and, in case of

conflict, about the conflict and about their adversary (e.g. Bar-Tal, 2000; Salomon, 2004a). During conflict, societies also share the experiences of the conflict-events, the meanings of which are determined, not just by the events themselves, but also, to an important extent, by the group's collective narratives. This would appear to be the case also with conflict-related concepts such as 'war', 'aggression', 'reconciliation', and 'responsibility'. Of particular interest is the way in which societies in conflict differentially

\* The data used in this article are available at <http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets>. Correspondence: [gsalomon@research.haifa.ac.il](mailto:gsalomon@research.haifa.ac.il).

understand the concept of peace. As is the case with other socially constructed concepts (e.g. Schwarz & Bless, 1992), the perception of peace should reflect the coloring of a society's collective narrative and its experience of current circumstances.

Past research has identified different meanings people associate with the concept of peace (Covell, 1996; Covell, Rose-Krasnor & Fletcher, 1994; Hall, 1993; Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998; Sandy & Perkins, 2002). One of the most common distinctions was that offered by Galtung (1969) between negative and positive peace. Negative peace pertains to the absence of violence, paralleling Reardon's definition (1988: 16) of peace as 'as the absence of violence in all its forms – physical, social, psychological and structural'. On the other hand, positive peace involves cooperation, harmony, 'building bridges', and mutuality. Galtung (1990) also spoke of structural violence, which is manifested through socially built-in inequity and an unequal distribution of power. According to Galtung, peace is a 'negative peace' unless it is accompanied by the absence of structural violence and by the presence of social justice; in this way it becomes 'positive peace'.

Galtung's conception of structural violence has been often contested (e.g. Mason, 2002). However, from that conception another conceptual class of peace can be derived, namely, *structural peace*. Unlike the fluid, process-like conception of positive peace, structural peace pertains to 'hard' socially built-in structures that may foster positive peace: independence, sovereignty, equality, and structures for power-sharing. This is very much in line with Albert Einstein's conception of peace: 'Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short, of government' (1968, quoted by Sandy & Perkins, 2002: 6). To illustrate, consider peace education activities between schools, NGOs, and professional organizations such

as the *People to People* strategy (e.g. Hirschfield & Roling, 2000) as a set of civil activities leading to positive peace, as differentiated from the passing of a law prohibiting discrimination against a particular group, which constitutes a case of structural peace.

Individuals' preferences for one or another conception of peace would be expected to reflect the contents and belief systems of the collective narratives and of the narrative-colored interpretations of current situations (e.g. Raviv et al., 1999). However, most of the research in this area so far has focused on the way understandings of peace change as a function of age-related developmental processes (e.g. Hakvoort, 1996), not as a function of the collective narrative and political situation of one's group.

Given the different, even mutually contradicting collective narratives of societies in conflict (Fisher, 1997), we could predict that Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian youth perceive and interpret the concept of peace differently, reflecting their different collective narratives and their particular sociopolitical circumstances. These circumstances entail many elements, but the most salient ones are the Palestinian uprising (the intifada), its suppression by the Israeli armed forces, and the terrorist activities as experienced by Israelis.

While collective narratives and political events can be expected to serve as perception-shaping experiences, active participation in well-designed peace education (PE) programs may also count as an experience that is likely to shape one's perceptions of peace. Educational and therapeutic interventions of various kinds are based on the expectation that they might change the perception-affecting direction of other social contextual and situational forces (e.g. Resnick, 1995). This is precisely what, for example, conflictual dialogue- and contact-groups are designed to accomplish (e.g. Tal-Or, Boninger & Gleicher, 2002). In this light, participation in a PE program is likely to differentially affect

the perceptions of peace by Israeli and Palestinian youth.

Bruner (1990) has described collective narratives as social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system, and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity. Given different histories and mutually exclusive interests, it is obvious that the Israeli and the Palestinian societies entertain mutually contradicting collective narratives and belief systems (e.g. Kelman, 1999). Each side sees itself as victim and righteous, and the other side as a perpetrator with no legitimate claims, fostering a sense that acknowledging the other side's right for independence and statehood contradicts one's own claim for the same. Specifically, the Israeli-Jewish narrative speaks of an ancient but persecuted people returning to their ancestral homeland from which they have been expelled, and whose newly founded state is constantly threatened by the whole Arab world and by the Palestinians in particular. The Palestinian narrative, on the other hand, speaks of a people dispossessed by an illegitimate invader, currently being conquered and having to cope with humiliating curfews, searches, and arrests. Thus, one would expect that peace would be understood by Palestinian youth mainly as a structural matter entailing independence and freedom from conquest. On the other hand, Israelis have a war- and persecution-rich narrative and a strong sense of immediate threat of ongoing acts of terror which have made it a 'nation in arms' (Horowitz, 1993). Israeli youth would thus be expected to understand peace mainly in its negative sense – the cessation of violence and terror.

### Peace Education

Not all peace education programs are born alike; some are more likely than others to

attain their goals of greater tolerance for the other side, weakened stereotypes, weakened prejudices, more positive attitudes, and such. Much may depend on the rationale, design, and the way programs are carried out: the extent to which they touch upon the deeper roots of intolerance and collective self-righteousness; the delegitimization of the other side's perspective; and acknowledgement of the contribution of one's side to the conflict. Thus, one's own narrative becomes less monolithic and more accepting of the other side (Bar-On, 1999; Salomon, 2002). Peace education programs that offer ways of understanding the nature of conflict, one's role in it, the humanity of the other side, and ways of reconciliation are more likely to attain their goals. Research accompanying various peace education programs in regions of intractable conflict often yield positive results in the form of changed stereotypes in Israel (e.g. Maoz, 2000) and Northern Ireland (e.g. Smith, 1999), ability to assume the Palestinian's point of view (Lustig, 2002, cited by Salomon, 2004b), and changed attitudes and perceptions in other places (see reviews by Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996; Seitz, 2004).

The peace education program, the effects of which were studied here, was chosen because it included many of the desired elements of a potentially effective program. We thus chose the program 'Pathways into Reconciliation', which is carried out in Israeli and Palestinian high schools by the Israel/Palestinian Center for Research and Information (<http://www.ipcri.org/index1.html>). This program addresses three spheres concerning 'the other': 'the other inside me' – to facilitate self awareness; 'the other near me' – to facilitate understanding and awareness of, and tolerance for, others in one's immediate surroundings; and 'the distant other' – to cultivate tolerance for Palestinians (or Jews). This last sphere includes face-to-face meetings between Israelis and Palestinians, to afford the

opportunity to listen to the other side, its narrative and participants' personal experiences. Each such sphere focuses on the values one chooses to live by, knowledge of the conflict and the 'other', and skills of reconciliatory behaviors. The program is embedded in regular school curricula such as literature, history, and sociology, for two hours a week, and lasts for six to eight months of the school year. The program was carried out in a workshop fashion by the regular classroom teachers, who underwent intensive training beforehand by a joint team of experienced Jewish and Palestinian trainers.

Given the program's goals and methods, and given the different collective narratives and current experiences of the two groups, we expected participation in the program to have differential effects: to lead to a move from either a mainly structural view of peace (Palestinians) or a mainly negative conception of peace (Israelis) toward a more positive view of the concept, alluding to cooperation and mutuality. We could not formulate particular hypotheses about the differential contribution of isolated program elements to the expected changes, as the program is a complex configuration of interwoven elements that operate in an orchestrated way.

## Method

### *Design and Procedure*

The study was based on a quasi-experimental factorial design of 2 (nationalities – Israeli or Palestinian)  $\times$  2 (participation or non-participation in the peace education program) with a pre- and post-test questionnaire that attempted to tap the participants' perceptions of the concept of peace. The study was carried out during the first year of the second intifada (2001–02), which prevented Israeli and Palestinian program participants carrying out any face-to-face meetings.

Pre-test data were collected before the onset of the peace education program (in December 2001) and post-test data right after the completion of the program, in June 2002. The administration of the questionnaires lasted about one hour and was carried out in the Israeli schools by the researchers in the presence of classroom teachers, and in the Palestinian schools by an Arabic-speaking colleague.

### *Participants*

The participants in the study were Israeli-Jewish tenth-grade male and female youngsters (ages 15–16) from four high schools from different urban regions of the country and same-age Palestinian male youngsters from four schools in major Palestinian urban areas. No female Palestinians participated in the study, as the schools for girls in the Palestinian Authority declined participation in the peace education program owing to the onset of the intifada. Whereas female Israeli study participants manifested a somewhat greater tendency to see peace as a negative as well as a positive and structural entity than males at the time of the pre-test, these gender differences disappeared by the time of the post-test and, hence, were not dealt with in the analysis of the findings. Schools were selected on the basis of two criteria: (1) at least two years of experience with the peace education program, thus avoiding first-year glitches in its administration, and (2) schools in which there are at least two comparable same-age parallel classes, one of which was randomly selected to participate in the program, while the other engaged in alternative learning activities. The latter served as an appropriate control group.

In all, there were 484 Israelis who participated in the pre-test data collection (259 experimental and 225 control students), of whom 320 (186 experimental and 134 control) students participated also in the post-test. There were 334 Palestinians male

Table I. Study Participants According to National Group and Program Participation

Palestinians				Israeli Jews			
Pre-test		Post-test		Pre-test		Post-test	
Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants	Participants	Non-participants
150	184	99	145	259	225	186	134

students who participated in the pre-test data collection (150 experimental and 184 control), of whom 244 (99 experimental and 145 control) students participated also in the post-test. In all, there were 564 students for whom whole datasets were obtained (Table I).

### Measures

The main measuring instrument was a pre- and post-test questionnaire consisting of open-ended, write-in answers pertaining to participants' perceptions of the concept of peace. Most of the questions were taken from a questionnaire composed by Hakvoort (1996) and used in a study comparing youngsters' conceptions of peace in variety of countries. The questions addressed respondents' *first association to the concept* ('What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the concept peace?'), their *explanations* of the concept ('How would you explain the concept to a five-year-old child?'), their *perceived utility* of attaining peace ('If there will be peace, what would its main utility be?'), and the main *strategy* they'd use to attain peace ('If it would depend on you, what would be the main thing you'd do so that there will be peace with the Israelis/Palestinians?').

**Scoring** Responses to the questions tapping free association, explanation of the concept, and perceived utility of peace were analyzed for the mention of elements pertaining to the categories of negative peace (e.g. absence of violence), positive peace (e.g. cooperation,

harmony), or structural peace (equality, independence, freedom). Each time elements of the category of negative peace were mentioned, the respondent received a nominal score of 1; elements of the category of positive peace received a nominal score of 2; mention of elements in the structural peace category received a nominal score of 3, and 'freedom' a score of 4. In the event that more than one category was mentioned in response to one of these questions, only the first one was counted. Analyses of these questions thus yielded descriptive data expressed by the percentage of respondents choosing for each question one or another category.

Responses to the open-ended question of 'What would you be willing to do to attain peace with the other side?' were categorized into five nominal categories: Nothing = 1; only talks = 2; a few concessions = 3; major concessions = 4; don't know = 5. These five categories exhausted all the responses of the Jewish study participants. However, since many Palestinians mentioned also the possibility of war as something they would do to attain peace, it was added as a sixth category. Again, this kind of analysis yielded descriptive data expressed in percentage of respondents choosing each category.

## Results

### Free Associations

Comparisons of the free associations to the concept of peace that the students reported during pre-test time showed that, for 87% of

the Palestinians, it concerned structural meanings, namely, independence and freedom. Representative associations were, for example, 'ending of discrimination and racism', 'the establishment of a Palestinian Independent state', and 'justice and equality'. Such meanings were mentioned by only about 2% of the Israelis. On the other hand, during pre-test, 89.5% of the Israelis mentioned negative peace (that is, the absence of violence), such as 'no wars, no blood, no death, no corpses every day'. This kind of association was reported by only 13% of the Palestinians.

As expected, participation in the peace education program shifted the free associations towards a more positive view of peace. The percentage of Palestinians participating in the program that alluded to the positive aspects of peace rose from 5.4% to 26.4%, while among non-participants it remained close to 1%. Among the Israelis, participation in the program led to a rise from about 10% to 37%, but among non-participants it shrank from 6.7% to 2.3% (Table II). Also, mention of negative peace rose among Palestinian participants from 9.4% of responses to 16.5%; among Israelis, the percentages dropped from 84.7% to 60.7%. At the same time, negative peace was mentioned by non-participating Palestinians in about 15% of the responses, with no change over time. Among Israelis, the percentage rose from about 89% to close to 98%.

### *Explanations of Peace*

Students were not limited to suggesting a single explanation. They could include as many aspects and explanations as they desired. Each aspect or explanation suggested was coded as belonging to a particular category (negative, positive, or structural peace) by receiving a dummy score of 1. A category not alluded to received the dummy code of 0.

Consistent with the free associations reported, and as can be seen in Table III, Israelis received significantly higher scores (i.e. mentioned a particular aspect more frequently) for explaining peace in negative terms ( $F_{(1,1351)} = 606.4, p < .001$ ) and in positive terms ( $F_{(1,1351)} = 154.3, p < .001$ ) than the Palestinians. Typical explanations of peace as a negative entity were, for example, 'peace means that there are no wars, conflicts and fights, but rather peace all over' and 'peace is the absolute opposite of war, it means the ending of killings, something everybody in Israel hopes for'. On the other hand, the Palestinians mentioned more frequently structural peace ( $F_{(1,1353)} = 987.2, p < .001$ ), consistently reflecting their previously mentioned associations of peace as a structural entity.

As shown in Table III, participation in the program had the expected effect. Both Israelis and Palestinians raised the mean number of explanations for peace as a positive matter, indicated by a significant

Table II. Percent of Participants' and Non-participants' Free Association to 'Peace'

Group associations	Palestinians				Israeli Jews			
	Participants		Non-participants		Participants		Non-participants	
	Pre-test (N = 150)	Post-test (N = 92)	Pre-test (N = 184)	Post-test (N = 139)	Pre-test (N = 256)	Post-test (N = 185)	Pre-test (N = 224)	Post-test (N = 134)
Negative peace	9.4	16.5	15.8	15.2	84.7	60.7	88.8	97.7
Positive peace	5.4	26.4	1.1	0.7	9.6	37.0	6.7	2.3
Structural peace	85.3	57.2	83.0	84.0	2.4	2.3	1.3	–

Table III. Repeated Measures ANOVAs for the Definitions Offered for 'Peace'

		<i>Palestinians</i>				<i>Israeli Jews</i>				<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	
		<i>Participants</i>		<i>Non-participants</i>		<i>Participants</i>		<i>Non-participants</i>				
		<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>			
Negative peace	M	0.608	0.641	0.382	0.467	0.972	0.973	0.995	1.000	Nation	1,1351	606.4***
	N	148	92	183	137	256	185	224	134	Group	1,1351	21.87***
										Time	1,1351	2.69
										Time × Nation	1,1351	2.28
										Time × Group	1,1351	0.55
										Nation × Group	1,1351	36.13***
										Nation × Group × Time	1,1351	0.527
Positive peace	M	0.337	0.652	0.131	0.087	0.703	0.827	0.575	0.320	Nation	1,1351	154.3***
	N	148	92	183	137	256	185	224	134	Group	1,1351	205.2***
										Time	1,1351	2.03
										Time × Nation	1,1351	16.80***
										Time × Group	1,1351	56.46***
										Nation × Group	1,1351	1.98
										Nation × Group × Time	1,1351	0.05
Structural peace	M	0.793	0.826	0.902	0.892	0.113	0.578	0.133	0.053	Nation	1,1353	987.2***
	N	150	92	184	139	255	185	224	132	Group	1,1353	16.77***
										Time	1,1353	25.38***
										Time × Nation	1,1353	20.04***
										Time × Group	1,1353	53.20***
										Nation × Group	1,1353	71.05***
										Nation × Group × Time	1,1353	38.83***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

interaction between time of measurement and group ( $F_{(1,1351)} = 56.46, p < .001$ ): the change was more pronounced among the participants (a change from an overall mean of 0.57 to 0.77) than among the non-participants (a change from a mean of 0.37 to 0.20). There was also an interaction between time of measurement and national affiliation ( $F_{(1,1351)} = 16.80, p < .001$ ): there was a greater change among the Palestinian participants than among the Israelis. Also, the explanation of peace as a structural matter was differentially affected by participation in the program: the mean number of structural explanations of peace among both Palestinians and Israelis rose significantly, but more steeply among the latter, as indicated by a three-way interaction between time of measurement, program participation, and nationality ( $F_{(1,1353)} = 38.83, p < .001$ ).

### *Utility of Peace*

Consistent with the other results, most Israeli youth (97.8%) thought that the most important utility for peace is in the absence of violence, whereas 95.7% of the Palestinian youth thought that it is in the attainment of structural goals – freedom, justice, and independence. Participation in the PE program did not affect the Israelis' utilitarian attributions to peace, but more Palestinian program participants came to find positive utility in peace (commercial relations and friendships), a significant rise from 0.7% to 12% of the responses. This was paralleled by a decline in the percent of responses mentioning structural peace as the major utility of peace, from 95.8% to 79.3%. No such changes were found among the non-participating Palestinians.

### *Strategies To Attain Peace*

Whereas a significant percentage of Israelis (51%) expressed a willingness to make 'some' or 'major' concessions to attain peace, only

about 6% of the Palestinians expressed such a view. The most interesting and dramatic contribution of participation in the program was to the number of students who chose *war* as a viable strategy to attain peace. Among the Israeli program participants the percentage of those advocating war as a means to attain peace rose from 0.4% to 4.5%, while among the non-participants, it rose from 0% to 11%. Among those Palestinians who did not participate in the program, the percentage *rose* from 31.4% to 52.6%, a change that can be easily understood in light of the ongoing Israeli suppression of the intifada. However, among those Palestinians who did participate in the program the percentage *dropped* from 33.3% to 23.6% (Figure 1).

This finding was replicated when students' responses were carefully read for additional clues. One outstanding clue was the *expression of hatred and distrust* towards the Israeli Jews that permeated many of the open-ended written responses of the Palestinians (e.g. the consistent use of the expressions 'the Zionist enemy'; 'the murderers of the Prophet Muhamed'; 'those traitors'; 'peace is a Zionist trick to steal our land').

Negative expressions were dummy coded as follows: expression of mistrust = 1, hatred = 2, mistrust and hatred = 3. Whereas among the Palestinians who did not participate in the program, the pre-test average score was 0.845 and the post-test score 1.706, among those who did participate the scores were 0.690 and 0.782 respectively (Figure 2).

In other words, while the levels of hatred and mistrust rose among non-participants, possibly as a function of the ongoing military suppression, among the participants they remained unchanged. This finding corroborates the earlier finding regarding war as a viable strategy to attain peace. In both cases, participation in the program appeared to

Figure 1. Percentage of Responses Advocating War as a Strategy To Attain Peace

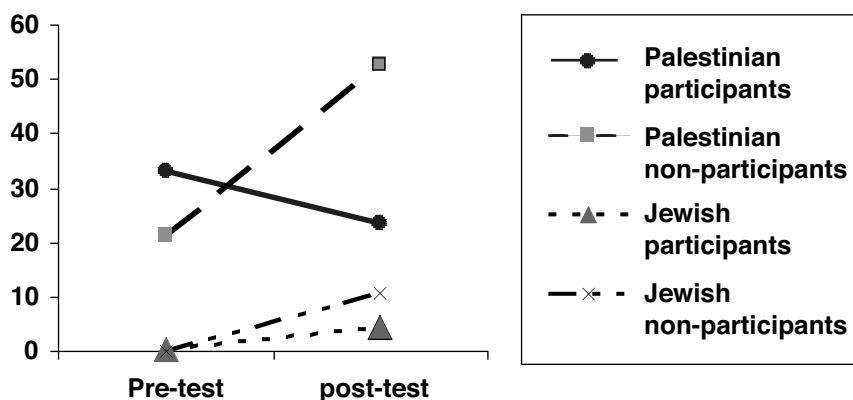
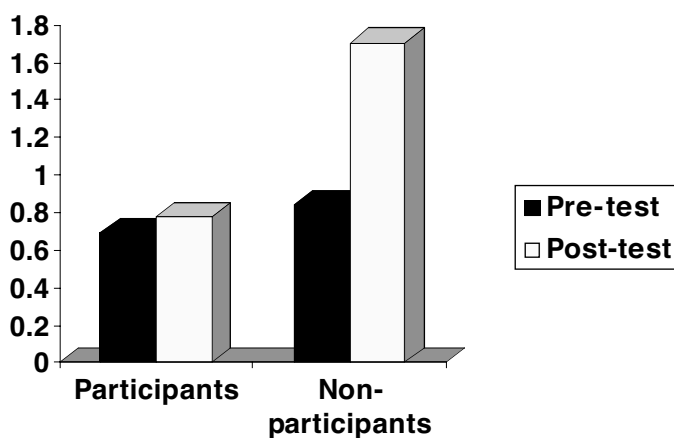


Figure 2. Mean Scores of Palestinians Expressing Hatred Towards the Jews



serve as a barrier against the growth of negative feelings.

## Discussion

Two arguments were tested in this study. The first argument was that students' perceptions of peace reflect their collectively held narratives, combined with their narrative-colored interpretations of their experiences of current events. The main assumptions behind this argument were (1) that collective narratives

serve, among other functions, the epistemic function of providing information, explanation, and justification for a group's role and actions, as well as those of the adversary (Burton, 1990); (2) that in the light of this function, the collective narrative colors the way members of a group in conflict interpret ongoing events; and (3) that individual members of that group share the collective narrative and the way it offers meanings to ongoing events (e.g. Smelser, 1962). Hence, in the light of the differences of narratives

and the different ways each side experiences the intifada, we expected Israeli and Palestinian youngsters to differentially understand the concept of peace – the former more as a structural matter of independence, freedom, and justice, and the latter as the cessation of violence.

The study's results consistently supported these hypotheses. The majority of Israeli students' free associations, the explanations they offered, and the utilitarian functions they attributed to peace pertained to the concept of peace as a negative entity – the absence of violence. Not so the Palestinians, for whom peace consistently meant something stable, structurally built into society in the form of political independence, freedom, and justice.

It is easy to see how these different conceptions reflect the real-life experiences of each side during the difficult days of the intifada. This is evident, particularly, in the responses of the Israelis, who experienced, at the time of the study, the constant threat of suicide bombers and other acts of terror; hence their consistent emphasis on peace as the cessation of violence. On the other hand, the Palestinians' responses reflect, somewhat more clearly, the influence of their collective narrative – based as it is on the absence of independence throughout their history, culminating in the current conquest by Israel. This is reflected in their consistent emphasis on peace as a matter of independence and freedom, while disregarding peace as the cessation of violence, the lifting of curfews, or the removal of movement restrictions.

Thus, although collective narratives are argued to symmetrically shape perceptions in times of conflict (Bar-Tal & Salomon, forthcoming), they may affect perceptions more pronouncedly for one side, possibly the weaker one, while current events may shape perceptions more strongly for the other, possibly the stronger side. This is consistent

with other findings that show that, given a task to be jointly accomplished, the stronger side (Israeli teachers) prefer to concentrate on the more immediate task at hand, while the weaker side (Palestinian teachers) want first to settle past scores (Maoz, 2000). For the latter, more than for the former, recognition of past experiences, now part of their collective narrative, is strongly linked with their sense of identity (Taylor, 1994).

The second argument pertained to the effects of participation in a well-designed peace education program. It was argued that participation in the program differentially affects perceptions of the concept of peace in interaction with a group's collective narrative and experiences of current events. Two assumptions underlie this argument. First, it is assumed that the peace education program studied is based on a solid rationale, well designed and well executed. We believed, on the basis of findings of another study (Lustig, 2002), that the program chosen for study ('Pathways into Reconciliation') meets these criteria. Second, we assumed that such a program familiarizes each side with the perspectives of the other, hence affecting one's views of the conflict in a less monolithic ('we are right, they are wrong') and more complex way. Thus, we expected program participants' perceptions of peace to differentially change, such that peace comes to be perceived as a more positive entity.

The results tended to support this expectation. Program participants manifested an increase in their free associations to the concept of peace as a positive matter. Moreover, the explanations offered by program participants came to reflect a more positive view of peace, particularly among the Israelis. Participation in the program did not affect the Israelis' attributions of utility to peace, but it did affect those of the Palestinians: they mentioned more positive utilities and fewer structural ones. In all, not only was there a shift towards viewing peace as a

matter of cooperation and friendship, but also the two sides came to view the concept somewhat more similarly: both sides perceived peace as a more positive entity, and the Israelis came to adopt a more structural view of the concept.

The surprise of the study was the repeated finding that participation in a peace education program can serve as a barrier against the deterioration of views and feelings, a deterioration witnessed among the non-participants. This was particularly pronounced among the Palestinians. The mention of war as a viable strategy to attain peace increased 68% from pre- to post-test among Palestinian non-participants. However, it *dropped* at the same time among the Palestinian participants by 39%. The changes among the Israelis were far smaller. Similarly, while expressions of mistrust and hatred of Jews by Palestinian non-participants *doubled* from pre- to post-test, it barely changed at all among the program participants. It became evident that participation in the program served to prevent what appears to be an intifada-induced deterioration among non-participants.

The deterioration of beliefs, such as the belief in the role of war, and of feelings towards the other side, can be easily understood in the light of the ongoing experiences of Palestinian youth being subjected to military conquest and suppression. But the absence of such deterioration among program participants is revealing. It suggests that the program may have facilitated the process of decoupling the political–military events from the Israeli Jews as individuals. Disliking and mistrusting members of Israeli society, as individuals, has not increased, despite the severity of the events. Although participation in the program did not really humanize the Israelis in the eyes of the Palestinians, at least they were not dehumanized any further. This finding is in line with the findings of Bar-Natan (2004), who found

that friendships that developed between Israeli and Palestinian youth during a three-day retreat affected both sides' readiness for greater closeness with members of the other side, but did not affect Palestinians' legitimization of the Israeli narrative. Again, participation in a peace education program seems to have decoupled the link between events and individuals, humanizing the latter in the eyes of their adversaries but not affecting perception of their perspective.

Finally, there are two questions that come up in examining the findings of the study. First, to what extent can we treat the effects of the program under study here as representative of similar programs in similar contexts? There is little research overall of peace education programs in contexts of intractable conflict (e.g. Nevo & Brem, 2002), and even less research on the way peace is perceived (Hakvoort's studies being the exception), thus it is difficult to compare the present findings with those of other studies. However, the program 'Pathways into Reconciliation' studied here is a well-reasoned one, theoretically well grounded and pedagogically well executed by trained teachers, and it lasts for a few months rather than being a short one-time event. In this light, we believe that it can be taken as a fair representative of peace education programs and that its effects allow generalization to other programs.

Second, what is the importance of affecting attitudes and perceptions in general and the perceptions of the concept of peace in particular? In what ways do changes in attitude and perception make a difference to an ongoing conflict? Seen as a policy issue, how worthwhile is it to invest time, energy, and money in programs that attempt to affect the psychological aspects of a conflict? Conflicts emerge as a function of the interaction between political, viable, concrete issues and psychological ones (Azar, 1990). Politics and perceptions affect each other

reciprocally. Conflict reduction, reconciliation, or at least conflict containment would require both top-down political and bottom-up psychological processes. Peace education, although hardly effective on its own (Bar-Tal, 2004), addresses the latter aspect. Indeed, it is often argued that reconciliation requires a common outlook on the past, reflecting a less dissimilar narrative (Roe & Cairns, 2003). Attaining a similar way of viewing as central a concept as peace may well be a step in the right direction. Similarly, reduced hatred and a more positive view of peace might modestly and incrementally contribute to the process of reconciliation; they may constitute what Rothman (1992) has called 'pieces of peace', helping to enable groups in conflict to handle their differences with less violence and a greater willingness to accept each other's existence and identity (Ross, 2000). The question of whether changes of the kind observed here have also ripple effects in the form of greater *sustained* willingness for contact with the other side, or willingness to legitimize its collective narrative, remains to be addressed by future research.

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YIFAT BITON, b. 1973, PhD in education (Haifa University, 2002); instructor, Tel-Hai and Ohalo Academic Colleges, Israel, teaching education for democracy, peace education, inter-ethnic relations, design of technology-intensive learning environments, and statistics. Research interests: peace education, stereotypes.

GAVRIEL SALOMON, b. 1938, PhD in educational psychology and communication (Stanford University, 1968); full professor, Haifa University (1992– ), past dean of the faculty of education there (1993–98); fellow, Stanford Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (1998–99); professor, University of Arizona (1987–92). Current research interests: research on peace education, technology in education and society.