

The “School For Peace”: A Conflict Resolution Program in a Jewish-Palestinian Village

© Grace Feuerverger
Associate Professor
OISE/University of Toronto

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Both Jews and Palestinians in Israel are caught up in webs of hatred, fear and mutual suspicion that are layered and multiple in their complexity. The conflict resolution program, named the "School for Peace" (SFP), is rooted in personal and political struggles for peaceful coexistence. The “School For Peace” (SFP) is located in a cooperative village in Israel where Jews and Arabs live together within a social, cultural and political framework of equality and mutual respect. This paper intends to discuss my ethnographic exploration into the three-day intensive workshop encounter which represents one dimension of this outreach conflict resolution program bringing Jewish and Palestinian adolescents together from all over Israel and increasingly from the West Bank.

One of the central issues explored in this paper is the extent to which these conflict resolution workshops can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with the immense separation between both Jews and Arabs inherent in the wider society. These SFP encounters, in contrast to the participants' normal life contexts, open a space where dissension within reflection and protection becomes possible, and interconnections between the personal and political are honoured and not shunned. The workshops provide an opportunity where the participants' stories of humiliation, vulnerability, trauma and fear can surface in a place of safety and trust. Indeed, the underlying goal of the "School for Peace" is to enable the participants to transcend the tyranny of established structures and to reinvent a framework upon which their understandings, relations and identities with one another can be built. The manner in which the facilitators communicated their ideas with honesty, but tried hard not to impose them; their appreciation of the unique qualities in each of the participants; their empathy towards the moral dilemmas and experiences of injustice that have crippled so many on both sides; and their intellectual capacity in supplying knowledge about the historical realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from both points of view, offers a pedagogical paradigm that is entirely remarkable.