

TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS IN A SHARED LEARNING PROGRAMME IN ISRAEL: INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIPS

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Abstract

For the last decade, Israel has been making inroads in education programmes aimed at peacebuilding between Israeli and Palestinian children and young people in the Israeli education system. While these efforts began with bilingual Arabic-Hebrew schools, more recently, shared learning programmes have been piloted, which promote collaboration between separate Arab and Jewish schools and are adapted from a model for shared education that was originally developed in Northern Ireland. This qualitative research study investigated how teachers in one Israeli shared education project are developing their relationships with one another to gain a deeper understanding of the successes and challenges they experienced. Intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Allport, 1954) informs the field of the special importance that friendship has in positive contact. The study found that teachers most commonly referenced aspects of friendship as markers of success or challenge in their developing relationships. Findings also suggest that developing teacher relationships were limited by tensions surrounding the inability to discuss certain aspects of the conflict and the existing asymmetrical power dynamics between the Jewish and Arab populations in Israeli society.

Keywords: *intergroup contact theory, shared education, shared learning, post-conflict societies, peace building education*

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Introduction

For the last decade, Israel has implemented education programmes aimed at peacebuilding between Israeli and Palestinian children and young people in the Israeli education system. While these efforts began with bilingual Arabic-Hebrew schools, more recently, not-for-profit NGOs, with support from the Ministry of Education in Israel, have piloted shared learning programmes. These programmes which promote collaboration between separate schools are adapted from a model for shared education that was developed in Northern Ireland. One teacher engagement programme examined in this study began in 2018 and has been running for three years. It entails Arab and Jewish teachers working together to develop and deliver a curriculum for English language teaching. Teacher participants in the programme are English language instructors from 21 schools, 9 Arab schools, and 12 Jewish schools. The programme supports the teachers through training days, a curriculum focused on the shared learning objectives and organisational management of the partnerships.

To inform the process of expanding the shared learning programme in Israel, the Centre for Shared Education at Queen's University Belfast, conducted a qualitative research study to investigate how teachers in the programme are developing their relationships with one another and to gain a deeper understanding of the success and challenges they experienced. Analysis of the data unveiled several themes focused on the particular role that friendship plays as a mediator of positive intergroup relations, a key concept in intergroup contact theory. At the centre of teachers' responses were aspects of friendship that either enhanced or hindered the development of the relationships between Jewish and Arab teachers and by extension, the overall success of the contact between the students.

Intergroup contact theory

Intergroup contact theory emerged in the early 1940's when social psychologists observed that when different racial groups had equal-status contact with one another they developed genuine bonds, helped one another, and at the very least, refrained from violence against one another (Pettigrew et al., 2011). As gradually the United States began to desegregate institutions and other aspects of society, these observations became the basis for further research in the field of intergroup relations and prejudice reduction. Generally, the field recognises Allport's (1954) outlining of intergroup contact theory as a framework for exploring instances of contact to better understand how an encounter can affect positive group relations between two groups in conflict. Allport's theory of intergroup contact outlines four elements for optimal intergroup contact: 1) equal

status between the groups, 2) common goals, 3) cooperation between the members and 4) support from institutions (for example, law, authorities, and local communities).

In the 60 years since the development of this theory, it has weathered some criticism about the role of 'optimal' contact and whether prejudice reduction, when it occurs, may actually be attributable to other factors. Addressing these criticisms, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of over 500 quantitative studies of intergroup contact. Their analysis found that Allport's conditions were key. In fact, contact alone between two groups in conflict was enough to see a reduction, but when the four optimal elements of Allport's theory were present, the effect was greater.

As intergroup contact theory became an accepted framework, researchers moved on to examine more closely the extraneous variables that contribute to positive contact outcomes and the generative processes through which transformation occurs. Specifically, the field examines the *how and why contact works* and *when contact works*, or mediators and moderators, respectively (Hughes & Donnelly, 2006). Importantly, two affective mediators- empathy and intergroup anxiety- have emerged as significant influences in positive contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)

Juxtaposed with a focus on contact processes and outcomes, some researchers have challenged the field to look more critically at intergroup contact theory. Dixon et al. (2010) argue that while intergroup contact explains a reduction in prejudice, the model exists in somewhat of a vacuum when considering an environment where two groups in conflict have an asymmetrical power dynamic within their society. Examining conflict between racial groups in South Africa, the researchers found that intergroup contact helped reduce prejudice among both groups. This, of course, was the desired effect for the majority White group. However, for the Black community, increased feelings of closeness to members of the White community decreased their perceptions of discrimination against their own group. Dixon, et.al. point out that this could negatively affect efforts made by both groups to achieve social change since the societal structures of racism are still in place.

Notably, Dixon and other researchers (Maoz, 2002; Wright, 2009) do not completely jettison intergroup contact theory, but more so draw attention to the tension between 'reduction of prejudice' and what they call 'collective action'. A 'collective action' perspective acknowledges the structural inequalities that exist in many societies in conflict and seeks to avoid promoting harmony at the expense of furthering existing stereotypes or systems of discrimination. Such a perspective in intergroup contact goes beyond merely encouraging the groups

to 'get along better', but hopefully builds a relationship between the two groups where they both work together to bring about social change and challenge the status quo.

Maoz (2011, p. 117) builds on Dixon et al.'s perspective and applies it specifically to the context of Israel, which she identifies as 'an acute asymmetrical violent conflict'. Maoz's work examined the different types of programmes in Israel that brought together Jewish and Arab groups in efforts to begin a dialogue and possible reconciliation. Through her research, Maoz found that the asymmetrical status of the two groups in Israeli society was at the crux of the limited success and mixed results of intergroup contact in her studies. She argued in some cases, intergroup contact was deleterious to the goal of reducing prejudice, and in reality, increased stereotyping and feelings of distrust of the other. The difficulty resided in the need to confront the imbalance of power between Jewish and Arab citizens in a way that challenges the collective narratives of the two sides without incurring contempt. However, the asymmetrical status of the two groups within the society must be directly discussed.

In response to the idea that intergroup contact fails to recognise the reality of protracted conflicts and asymmetrical statuses ingrained in certain countries and societies, Al Ramirah and Hewstone (2013, p. 535) point to studies that have been conducted in many challenging contexts like Israel, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda. In terms of social psychology, they argue that reconciliation can only happen when we move away from the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. This happens through forgiveness, a process which requires both sides to cancel debts and let go of past transgressions. This may require those who are members of the minority group to move away from identifying as a victim exclusively. However, it is necessary for the group with more power to empathise with the minority group and become activists on their behalf, advocating for the equal rights of those that are not a part of their own group (Dixon et al., 2010).

The tension between reduction of prejudice and collective action suggests that these two potentially opposing forces hold different keys within intergroup contact theory to lead two groups in conflict on the path of reconciliation. There is an emotional side to intergroup contact theory that involves empathy, trust, and forgiveness (Al-Ramirah & Hewstone, 2013; Tam et al., 2009; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The environment in which groups are situated also mediates relations between communities. Power dynamics and systemic issues of disadvantage and discrimination cannot be addressed solely by relational approaches to conflict amelioration.

Israel and shared learning initiatives

Advancing the objectives of shared learning in Israel faces many challenges considering the current status of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Recent current events have seen a rise in violence and loss of life and have increased tensions, making programmes such as shared learning which bring the two sides together even more difficult in the current climate. Peace remains elusive as the two sides of the ethnic and geo-political conflict remain at a stalemate (Bar-Tal et al., 2021; McLamore et al., 2019; Bekerman, 2018; Tessler, 2009; Meital, 2006; Bekerman, 2004; Bar-Tal, 1998). Bar-Tal (2000) characterises the conflict as intractable, owing to it 'being protracted, irreconcilable, violent, of a zero-sum nature, total, and central, with the parties involved having an interest in their continuation' (p. 353). This is endorsed by Bekerman (2004) who notes, on either side of the conflict are two groups which have spent the last 100 years dehumanising one another in an effort to not only justify their own group's actions but also to reify their identities and ethos. Neither side of the entrenched camps are monolithic in terms of culture or identity, however, contributing to the complexity of the conflict and its elusive solution. Within the Jewish culture and tradition, there are varying degrees of religiosity, a spectrum ranging from purely secular to moderate to orthodox. Furthermore, there are multiple religious traditions and ethnic groups in the Arab population, including Muslim (majority of the Arab population), Christian and Druze (Bekerman, 2009).

The Arab and Jewish communities are separated by language, with the Jewish population speaking Hebrew and the Arab population speaking Arabic. Students in Arab schools begin learning Hebrew and English around the third or fourth grade. Jewish students begin English around the same time, but Arabic is rarely taught, although it is offered as an elective at the high school level (14-18 age range). Universities in Israel, especially the more prestigious ones, are Jewish universities offering coursework in Hebrew. While some Arab students choose to attend Jewish universities, they must be fluent in Hebrew to do so. Other Arab students choose to study abroad in countries like Jordan or compete for a place in The American University in Jenin, a Palestinian Authority where the instruction is in English, although the student population are native Arabic speakers. Overall, the rates of Arabs attending university are lower than that of Jewish students (Bekerman, 2018).

Efforts to bring the two groups together started in the 1950s (Bekerman & Shhadi, 2003) to reduce intergroup anxiety and lower negative stereotypes in an effort to promote coexistence. The move to bring Jewish and Arab youths together in an educational setting has been ongoing since the 1980s- a reaction to a survey which exposed anti-democratic attitudes towards Palestinian Arab minority

on the part of Jewish majority youths (Bekerman, 2018; Maoz, 2002). Much of the research on programmes that bring Jewish and Arab young people together in an educational setting has used intergroup contact theory as its framework to examine elements of positive contact and lowering intergroup anxiety (Bekerman, 2016).

While shared learning is a relatively recent approach to encouraging students from the Arab and Jewish communities to engage with one another in an educational setting, research examining bilingual education and intergroup contact in Israel offers insight into some of the challenges of relationship building interventions (Bekerman, 2016; Schwartz & Asli, 2014; Bekerman, 2005; Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004; Bekerman & Shhadi, 2003). In Bekerman and Zembylas' study (2010) of a training programme for Arab and Jewish teachers, the researchers highlight the difficulties for the teachers in the integrated schools to overcome the hegemonic narratives of their national religious backgrounds. The training programme challenged these narratives and provided alternatives, and yet, teachers' efforts to see past respective narratives of their own group were undermined in large part because of the intractable conflict within Israeli society. While society in Israel can be characterised as markedly asymmetrical between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority, both sides have cast the other in the role of 'villain' and hold their side's narrative as objective truth (Bekerman, 2005; Bar-Tal, 1998).

Bilingual education programmes have been operating since the 1990s, but they remain a relative curiosity to the current system in Israel. Most schools remain separate with few opportunities for Palestinian and Israeli children to learn alongside one another. In an effort to increase the opportunity for more positive intergroup contact, educators and a few NGOs in Israel have begun to explore models of education in societies that are divided. One such model, shared education, first piloted in Northern Ireland in 2007 has been adapted by the NGO featured in this study.

Shared Education in Northern Ireland

Against the backdrop of a conflict that began in the late 1960s, and a segregated education system, various efforts were made in NI to promote peacebuilding through education. At the system level, integrated education sought to educate young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds within the same school. The first integrated school opened in 1982, and while there was initial interest and growth in the sector, this has since stagnated due to a highly competitive grammar school system and a negative public perception of the religious con-

tent and academic quality of integrated schools. In an effort to expand opportunities for intergroup contact in communities where integrating schools was not deemed desirable, or even possible, Northern Ireland formally introduced shared education in 2007 (Loader & Hughes, 2017).

Shared education encourages collaboration and interdependence between Catholic-maintained schools and Protestant-controlled schools without requiring formal integration (Gallagher, 2016). It can take on different forms in schools depending on a myriad of factors including geography, school size, and demographics, but in general, it partners schools from across the divide in an effort to have students and teachers engage in curriculum-based interactions (Hughes & Loader, 2015; Duffy & Gallagher, 2017). In some cases, this could be two schools that hold shared science lessons or complete school-wide projects together throughout the year. In other cases, the two schools are close enough where students are enrolled in different courses that the schools in the partnership have in their curriculum, and students from both schools physically attend classes on one another's campuses. The goal of shared education is to make the collaboration between the two schools authentic, sustainable, and integrated within the schools' identity.

More than 700 schools in Northern Ireland have now participated in the shared education programme, and the research of the programme has used intergroup contact theory as a framework for examining the mediators and moderators of shared education (Hughes et al., 2018; Duffy & Gallagher, 2017; Loader, 2017; McKeown & Taylor, 2017; Hughes & Loader 2015). Reflecting the unique character of shared education, which both respects the right to separate education for parents and pupils who desire it and offers an opportunity for some curriculum-based shared learning between divided groups, other countries, like Israel with histories of conflict and deeply divided societies, have begun to explore how the model could be adapted and applied.

Whereas in Northern Ireland the shared education programme is administered through and delivered by the governing bodies of education, a few non-profits in Israel work with teachers and provide resources to schools that wish to participate in the shared learning experience. Israel's Ministry of Education is a supporter of the work and is currently considering replicating the programme across the Israeli school system, however, shared learning is in its initial stages in the country.

Methodology

The focus of this study is a shared learning programme in Israel which pairs English teachers and their respective classes from one Jewish and one Arab

school with the purpose of creating opportunities for students from the two communities to learn in a shared space. The partner schools alternate traveling to one another's campuses up to eight times in a school year to participate in shared English classes. The same teachers and students are paired for the three years of the programme, with teachers advancing to the next grade level with their students. Ideally, within the three-year programme, the teachers ideally remain with the same partner from the other school, although in our research two teachers reported having a partner change within the course of the programme.

The teachers in the shared learning programme meet to plan lessons together and receive professional development training for participating in the programme. At the outset, they are provided with training and there are developed activities throughout the programme that meet the English curriculum objectives within the state school system, while also incorporating topics that encourage discussions of identity, prejudice, tolerance, and mutual respect.

The teachers are encouraged to meet in person to plan lessons when possible, but they also use text and email, with some teachers reporting they mostly collaborate digitally prior to bringing the students together. The nature of how and when teachers meet can vary, with some teachers living as much as over an hour and a half away from their partner teacher.

Three focus groups comprised of six to eight participants and were conducted during a one-hour time slot, with the researchers adopting a semi-structured interview format. Each group was organised according to the pairs of teachers that work together throughout the school year (one Arab, one Jewish), although some Arab partners choose not to participate or had not yet been recruited to the programme. Where no Arab teacher was present, the Jewish partner teacher was placed in a focus group with another Arab-Jewish partnership from the same school (if possible). The intention in the grouping was to increase feelings of comfort and familiarity, in the hope that this would encourage meaningful interaction in the virtual environment.

The research team observed that the Arab teachers spoke less in the focus group forum, with two Arab teachers contributing in Group 3 and no Arab teachers speaking in Groups 1 or 2. To try and encourage greater participation, particularly from Arab teachers, follow-up one-to-one interviews were offered. Four teachers volunteered for follow-up interviews with the research team, three Jewish and one Arab. One-to-one interviews were also semi-structured and lasted about an hour each. All group and individual interviews were conducted in English. Once completed focus groups and interviews were then transcribed by the

research team, removing any identifying information. Transcripts were subsequently analysed using a thematic approach.

The research team was particularly interested in how Jewish and Arab teachers were engaging with one another to develop their relationships in the shared learning programme and how they were navigating challenging aspects of peace-building in such a programme. Drawing on contact theory, they sought to explore teacher experiences of intergroup engagement and their perception of the enabling and inhibiting factors in respect of this as the programme rolled out.

Findings

Intergroup contact theory emphasises the ‘special importance of friendship’ in positive group contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Hughes & Donnelly, 2006), and friendship was the main feature of how teachers framed their relationships in the shared learning programme. Often, teachers in both the group and individual interviews focused on the common ground they experienced in working with their students and as English teachers, with all saying they felt their partnerships with the other were successful, though to varying degrees, as will be discussed. When reporting their friendships with one another, teachers’ responses centred on closeness, ‘personality match’ between partners, modelling friendship to students (and others), and continuity in the partnership. Each of these elements seemed to be interconnected and influenced the perceived effectiveness of the partnerships between the teachers from each community. The development of friendships or closer relationships between the teachers in the programme was it seems limited by the systemic inequalities present within Israeli society. Analysis of the responses demonstrated an absence of Arab voice and an unwillingness amongst Jewish teachers to acknowledge aspects of Arab identities, namely as they relate to religion (Muslim) and sovereignty (Palestinian). Moreover, the intractable nature of the conflict between Israel and Palestine resulting in tensions amongst the teachers suggested that such discussions could result in detrimental harm to relations between the two groups, with potentially lasting effects.

Closeness

Speaking about friendships with one another, teachers most commonly referred to the level of closeness or intimacy they felt with their partner. Teachers who reported most success in the programme described having established close friendships, to the extent that they shared details with partner teachers about their lives and discussed subjects that were unrelated to school life. The idea of

closeness centred both on the topics that the teachers shared with one another, *'we would be interested in each other's families'* and the frequency they contacted, *'We're in touch on a—I must say, on a weekly basis, at least once or twice a week, to just share what's happening.'*

The closeness described was however delimited by certain boundaries, central to which was the conflict. Teachers expressed fragility to their partner relationship if discussions veered towards conflict. The responses demonstrated that feeling some closeness allows teachers to experience positive contact, albeit with limitations. One teacher described it as *'going around a glass'* with one another. 'Closeness' can be a nebulous concept, as it can be a spectrum and be valued differently in people that may or may not pursue friendships in their professional life, regardless of community or ethnic background. However, the responses suggest that those who reported feeling successful in the programme were also more likely to have established a deeper relationship with their partner teacher that extended to life beyond the education context.

Personality Match

The next most common reference to teachers' developing friendships was 'personality match' as a factor in whether or not they were successful in developing a relationship with one another. In these responses, the words *'chemistry'*, *'openness'* and *'belief'* or *'believer'* in the shared learning programme described teachers' experiences.

While this theme came up mostly in the group interviews, it is notable that every single teacher in the individual interviews referenced personality match when speaking about their partner. When referring to degrees of personality matching, perceived group-level cultural differences are often referenced. Unfortunately, in instances where the personality did not 'match', teachers often reverted to examples that resorted to cultural stereotypes, rather than the individual personalities of their partner teacher. This often was Jewish teachers referring to the *'quiet'* or *'shy'* nature of the Arab teachers or implied references to the Arab teacher's religious beliefs and how Jewish teachers felt this limited their ability to relate to them.

One Jewish teacher saw her personality match with her partner Arab teacher as being based on open-mindedness. The evidence of this for her was based on the Arab teacher's master's work being completed in a Jewish university. The dichotomy in the narratives of the Jewish teachers where Jewish society equals 'open' and Arab society equals 'closed' was subtle, but still undermined the development of relationships between the teachers.

While the concept of personality match and its role in teacher friendships in this particular study had the potential to veer into cultural differences and negative stereotypes, there are also some suggestions of common values that had led participants from both groups to engage with the programme. Particularly, the idea of commitment to the shared learning programme and holding similar values as they relate to the desire to bring the students together for the sake of peace. The responses that referred to this particular shared value held the most positive aspects of the teachers feeling as if their personalities matched.

Modelling behaviour

The theme of setting an example, or modelling behaviour, was the next most common theme in teachers' development of relationships, behind 'closeness' and 'personality match'. Other teachers in the group interviews and individual interviews saw their example as an important part of developing their partner relationship, supporting their students' relationships, and making the shared learning programme an overall success.

Interestingly, two teachers, both of whom participated in individual interviews and reported a very high level of friendship on both sides, commented on how they saw their relationship as a good model not only for the students but also for other teachers. Each teacher referenced how both students and other teachers observed how they interacted with one another and commented that the two teachers genuinely seemed to enjoy one another's company. These responses suggested that the teachers saw their relationship as a model with the potential to extend positive feelings to other teachers and students in the shared learning programme as they observed the friendship.

Partnership consistency

The final theme constituting teacher friendships is partnership consistency, which was an obvious factor in giving teachers time to develop these relationships. Teachers that had the same partner teacher each of the two or three years they participated in the programme thought that the programme improved as they went along and that the largest benefit was the students having more time to know one another.

In the programme, a couple of teachers had different partners from when they first joined the shared learning programme. Teachers with these experiences especially focused on the effect partnership consistency had on the students' relationships and were less focused on their personal friendship development.

They also reported that students did not gain as much as they thought they would from the programme.

In addition to the limited gains that students can make in shared learning as a result of inconsistency in the associated teacher partnership, a partner teacher leaving the programme can be a negative experience for the teacher left behind. This was observed in the case of a Jewish teacher, when her first Arab partner decided to stay at the eighth-grade level, but continue with the programme, while the Jewish teacher advanced with her students to the ninth grade, as the programme was designed. The Jewish teacher was told that the Arab teacher simply wanted to stay with the same grade level and not move on the next year, that it was a scheduling issue. However, the Jewish teacher worried that this was an excuse, that the Arab teacher did not enjoy working with her. Another teacher, in this instance Arab, disclosed that her first Jewish partner teacher left the programme because, once the programme began, she realised that she was blatantly opposed to the objectives of shared learning and did not wish to continue her participation in it.

In both responses, the sense of loss of trust and anxiety around the incidents of a teacher losing their partner in the programme was apparent, however, both said they continued because they 'believed' in the programme's objectives. However, having the most severe negative experience in partnership consistency happen to one of the Arab teachers in the study should be noted, as well as the fact that there are not more Arab voices in the study to better understand the partnership experiences of the other Arab teachers. Overall, the teachers' accounts of partnership consistency and its impact on relationship development are an important reminder of the fragility of the relationships and the sensitive nature of the work undertaken by all of the teachers within the programme.

All factors of closeness, personality match, modelling behaviour, and partnership consistency are most likely interdependent for teachers' relationships developing into meaningful friendships that may then have an impact on the overall effectiveness of the shared learning programme. This was evident in the data, with many references to teacher friendship/close relationships exhibiting two or more factors.

Limitations to developing teacher relationships

In teacher focus groups, discussions related to group relations were always referred to as Jewish/Arab relations, with the identity of Palestinian never being mentioned, although it can be assumed that most Arabs would identify as Palestinian (Bekerman, 2009). However, the group interviews especially, displayed a

lack of acknowledgement of this identity, and even in one group, a Jewish teacher stopped short of the term when she started to address '*the differences between the Israeli group and the--- and the--- and the Arab group. Uhhh---*', and then a second Jewish teacher jumped in to say '*They're both Israeli groups.*' A third, this time Arab teacher, then reframes the discussion to a more comfortable '*...you mean Jews and Arabs*'.

When teachers were discussing joint lessons, one in which the students celebrated one another's holidays together, one Jewish teacher spoke about how the classes celebrated '*Channukah and Christmas together*'. Moments later, an Arab teacher reminded the group that none of her students were Christian and that as Muslims, they would celebrate Ramadan. It was unclear if the Jewish teachers were unaware of the Muslim holiday or if the omission was simply avoidance, but the combined lack of acknowledgement and unwillingness to speak about the religious and national identities of Arab teachers and students was apparent in the study. Discussions were exclusively framed in the 'Jewish/Arab' dichotomy in both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. This created tensions that the researchers observed when discussing relationships, and possible friendships, that were developing between the teachers.

Notably, within the one Jewish and Arab partnership that reported having a high level of friendship, the Arab teacher did not identify as a Palestinian, but as an Israeli. She reported that this was because she was not Muslim, although, all her students were and would likely identify as Palestinian. However, overall, she, as well as the other teachers, focused on harmonious interactions by referring to commonalities between Arabs and Jews, and framing the groups in a way that avoided the issue of Arab national identity enabled them to do this. Notably, while there were frequent references to the state of Israel and Israeli citizens in the teacher dialogue, there were no references to Arab national identity markers.

Discussion

In analysing teacher relationships and their development through contact, the role that friendship plays in positive contact is highlighted. Teachers who referred to feeling close to their partner teachers or that they matched in personality, also reported more success in the programme and were more comfortable with facing conflict that arose in the course of the programme. Studies in other divided contexts, like Northern Ireland (Hughes et al., 2017, Tam, et al., 2009) suggest that positive contact is common in models of shared education and shared learning, and that positive intergroup contact can increase trust while

decreasing intergroup anxiety (Graf et al., 2014; Al Ramirah & Hewstone, 2013. Turner et al., 2008). The findings in the study also align with findings from a wider literature that negative experiences in intergroup contact, however small, negatively impact trust in the other group. Indeed, it has been observed that negative experiences are more powerful than positive experiences, even though positive intergroup contact is more common (Hayward et al., 2017; Graf et al. 2014). In the current environment in Israel, it is more important than ever to go gently forward with the shared learning programme. Neither the teachers nor the students are prepared to discuss the more volatile aspects of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Rather than make salient identity issues or work on topics that are not yet within reach, at this stage it seems that teachers may need more time together in each other's physical spaces or indeed in their own group reflective space.

There is, however, a potentially countervailing force at work, as evidenced in the findings regarding the discussion of difficult topics between teachers. The desire for harmony and focus on everyone 'getting along' is common in programmes especially in their initial stages, as observed in Northern Ireland shared education (Hughes & Loader, 2015). Unfortunately, the absence of dialogic opportunity and space to even acknowledge the religious and national identities of the Arab teachers is likely to compound their sense of inequality within the contact environment. Where equal status is deemed a key component of positive contact outcomes (Dixon et al., 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), this is potentially deleterious to intergroup relations.

Bekerman and Zembylas (2010) found addressing hegemonic narratives of identity in teachers to be the most challenging aspect of intergroup contact, and efforts to do so were relatively unsuccessful. Teachers have deep emotional connections to the historical narratives of their identities. Bekerman and Zembylas, though, thought their findings could be framed in one of two ways: a pessimistic view where teachers would not be able to overcome these narratives without massive changes in societal structure, or an optimistic view where 'raising critical issues regarding one's identifications with hegemonic narratives does offer openings to take responsibility for both the challenges and the dialogic possibilities that are created in the process' (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2010, p. 2). In other words, finding ways to encourage teachers to think more critically about their community's history, possibly even in a same-identity environment to start, could be the impetus for this process.

Additionally, specifically focusing on ways to gain more feedback from the Arab teachers would be a priority for any subsequent studies. Unfortunately, in the absence of more Arab teacher voices, our study is yet another example of how the Arab position is underrepresented in programmes designed to bring

Arab and Jewish communities together. Gaining the Arab perspective is an important step in creating an optimal environment for intergroup contact as outlined in Allport's theory. Becker et al. (2013, p. 452) remind us, 'it seems critical that advantaged-group members get over the potential awkwardness that may accompany conversations about intergroup relations and clearly express their opposition to existing intergroup inequalities.'

Conclusion

Responses from teachers in both the focus groups and individual interviews demonstrated how the asymmetrical power dynamics between Jewish and Arab groups within Israeli society are limiting factors for the shared learning programme and its objectives. Teachers are not prepared to directly discuss issues of conflict with one another, and to do so could prove to have deleterious effects on whatever gains the programme has had thus far. Still, the special role that friendship holds in intergroup contact theory could strengthen relationships between teachers, creating an environment that provides the best chances for positive intergroup contact in shared learning within the context of Israel.

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ОДНОСИТЕ НА НАСТАВНИЦИТЕ ВО КОЛАБОРАТИВНА ЗАЕДНИЧКА ПРОГРАМА ЗА УЧЕЊЕ ВО ИЗРАЕЛ: ТЕОРИЈА НА ИНТЕРГРУПЕН КОНТАКТ И ВАЖНОСТА НА ПРИЈАТЕЛСТВОТО

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Кратка содржина

Во изминатата деценија, Израел воведува образовните програми насочени кон градење мир меѓу израелските и палестинските деца и млади во израелскиот образовен систем. Иако овие обиди започнуваат во билингвалите арапско-хебрејски училишта, во поново време се применуваат колаборативни заеднички програми за учење за промовирање соработка меѓу одделни арапски и еврејски училишта кои се прилагодени на моделот за заедничко образование првично развиен во Северна Ирска. Ова квалитативно истражување се интересира како наставниците вклучени во реализација на еден израелски заеднички образовен проект ги развиваат меѓусебните односи со цел подлабоко да ги согледаат успехите и предизвиците со кои се соочуваат. Теоријата на интергрупен контакт (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Allport, 1954) го истакнува значењето на пријателството за остварување на позитивен контакт. Истражувањето упатува дека наставниците најчесто ги спомнуваат аспектите на пријателство како показатели на успех или предизвик во нивните развојни релации. Исто така, наодите сугерираат дека развивањето на релациите кај наставниците е ограничено од тензиите околу неможноста да се дискутира за одредени аспекти на конфликтот и постојаната асиметрична динамика на моќ помеѓу еврејското и арапското население во израелското општество.

Клучни зборови: *Теорија на интергрупен контакт, заедничко образование, заедничко учење, постконфликтни односи, образование за градење мир*