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The Lack of Peace Education in History Curricula and Textbooks in Israel

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Abstract

Opinions are divided on the role of history and the way it is involved in structuring the collective memory to actively further peace education. The results presented here of the investigation into how history is taught in the state of Israel reveal that it is the normalizing approach that has been adopted. Strict selection of historical chapters to be taught aims at shaping the collective memory of the pupil in an ethnocentric, Jewish manner on the basis of the Zionist narrative. The limited general history taught is subservient to chapters of Jewish and Zionist history so that they strengthen the Zionist narrative. Furthermore, entire chapters of the history of other nations' or social groups' suffering have been ignored or omitted in an attempt to preserve the centrality of the Holocaust and the struggle to preserve the state of Israel.

History curricula and textbooks have the potential to play a crucial role in either peace education or, its opposite, education that normalizes pupils, future citizens, to ideological narratives that foster conflict and violence. The results presented here of the investigation into how history is taught in the state of Israel reveal that it is the normalizing approach that has been adopted. Strict selection of historical chapters to be taught aims at shaping the collective memory of the pupil in an ethnocentric, Jewish manner on the basis of the Zionist narrative (Kizel, 2002). The limited general history taught is subservient to chapters of Jewish and

Zionist history so that they strengthen the Zionist narrative. Furthermore, entire chapters of the history of other nations' or social groups' suffering have been ignored or omitted in an attempt to preserve the centrality of the Holocaust and the struggle to preserve the state of Israel. Hence, this investigation reveals that there is a lack of peace education in the teaching of history in the Israeli educational system.

Problemizing the teaching of history in peace education

Gavriel Salomon (2004) distinguished between peace education and the teaching of conflict resolution. The latter is usually carried out in formal educational settings and focuses on clarifying self perceptions, self monitoring, and certain social skills. Peace education, on the other hand, is mainly though not exclusively involved in the interpersonal aspects of conflict and aims at changing pupils' behaviors and attitudes to those that will advance peaceful resolution of the conflict. Thus, peace education deals with relations between groups, not individuals (Salomon, 2002).

In contexts of intractable conflicts, peace education faces challenges such as collective narratives and historical memories. This can involve a struggle between two contradictory, deeply rooted collective narratives. This is why history curricula and history textbooks as authoritative factor are so crucial in shaping children's education.

In every society, history curricula and textbooks fulfill an important role in creation of the historical memory and collective consciousness of pupils, teachers, and parents. Indeed, Sara Zamir (2005) claimed that research studies that analyzed the ideological and value orientations of textbooks have found that they can be a tool for enforcing the ethos chosen in construction of the national narrative, collective memory, and uniqueness of a particular society. Hence, textbooks are without a doubt a means of socialization to nationalist or peace education. Accordingly, examination of textbooks can be a concrete way to investigate

differential trends; be they in the direction of reinforcing a nationalist ethos or the route that advances acceptance, tolerance, minimalization of stereotypes, and reduction in the use of images of war – all important aspects of peace education.

Peace Education

Salomon (2004:42) asserted that peace education in Israel, as in many other countries, is comprised of a variety of very popular activities and wonders what peace education actually entails? He suggested investigation of three categories that differ in their sociopolitical underpinning and have different implications: peace education within the context of lasting intractable conflicts, peace education within the context of tensions between tribal or ethnic groups, and peace education within a context devoid of conflict or tension.

In criticizing the perceptions of Salomon and Nevo, Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (2004) maintained that they are not proposing a conceptual clarification of the category 'peace' and certainly not of the concept 'education', which they take for granted or do not think warrants clarification in this context (Gur-Ze'ev, 2004: 154). According to Gur-Ze'ev, without systematically clarifying those two concepts, all the goodwill and financial, organizational and other efforts invested in peace education are in vain. In his opinion, "the various versions of peace education should be seen as important layers in normalizing education, responsible for the human and creative oppression they built and the degradation of human beings into objects of manipulation [as such they are] a component of an order within which they are lodged and which they are incapable of challenging, as long as the normalizing education fulfills its role" (Ibid).

History teaching

In recent years, the teaching of history has come to be perceived not just as a source of information and a tool for analyzing the human experience, but also as a major means of teaching values and for shaping learners' collective memory. In doing so, the history curriculum reflects the perception of the normative identity of the society and its aspirations regarding its future character (Gur-Ze'ev, 1999: 93-94).

Given this broad conception, public debates regarding the history curricula and teaching have occurred in recent years in various countries and societies around the world. Such debates seem especially common in democracies and often reveal trends, such as changes in perspective and the existence of multiple narratives. These debates arouse the criticism that such scrutiny undermines the authority of heritage, raise doubts about the need to recruit the past for legitimization, and nurture an alternative legitimization that emphasizes the present and need to face the future.

In his analysis of the American educational system, Apple (1993) stated that what is considered as legitimate knowledge is the result of centralized power and involves the balance of power and struggles between familiar positions, races, genders and religious groups. In this regard, we recall that Antonio Gramsci maintained that a hegemonic group is able to shape the opinions of the other groups about society, war, patriotism, and even determine for them the criterion by which to judge these concepts. This ruling group influences ideas and beliefs by means of the schools and instills the idea of 'national security' most effectively (Gramsci, 1971: 12). At the same time this group promotes the idea of the 'free world' and teaches the citizens to believe that the collective memory moves between these two poles. In fact, this group does not enable other opinions, other directions of thought, different narratives, to make its way into public discourse.

Peter McLaren built upon Gramsci in directing his criticism against educational systems in which the interests of the dominant classes penetrate into the interests of all the other groups

with the result that all the other groups join the consensus. In such situations, dissent will be considered as “abnormal and a breach of the general consensus” (McLaren, 1994: 175). Furthermore, in teaching history, there is an expression of processes constructing collective memory spaces from which identity perceptions and norms of society and its aspirations are derived regarding a society’s future image. Power and control centers of the ruling factions in society are especially emphasized in the curriculum as well as in the media. Mass communication supports the creation of a consensus in which textbooks play an almost constitutional role, in the words of Noam Chomsky, and they wish to create a system of beliefs that will ensure the effectiveness of the planning of the consensus (Chomsky, 1988). In his opinion, textbooks are still the main source for the study of history, in spite of the existence of other wide-ranging media such as television, films, Internet websites and other factors.

Basically, then, there are two approaches to the necessity for the inclusion of history in the school curriculum, both of which are anchored in the distinctly modernist assumptions with western humanistic roots. The broad conception aims to provide tools for the understanding of history as a discipline that contributes to the development of human thinking and the expansion of its horizons, maybe even as a liberating factor, enabling a close study of processes and basic issues related to human behavior and its universal aspects.

In contrast, according to the narrow perception, the aim of study of history is first and foremost to advance national education. As a result, it is assumed that the best way to strengthen national identity is by means of extensive memorization of facts related to the nation’s past that reinforce the youth’s national consciousness (Yakobi, 2003: 91- 95).

In conclusion, history curricula and textbooks have the potential to play a crucial role in developing active citizenship, non-violent communication, and so-called peace education. Realization of this potential requires clear display of the universally applicable moral ideal of

human rights and attention to the fate of unalienable rights that have been abused throughout history (Gur-Ze'ev, 2004: 152).

However, in contrast, it may be the case that teaching history remains a key tool in fashioning nationalist ethos, as a primary agent forging collective memory among social groups and nations. If so, we can expect to find evidence that curricula and textbooks are obviously and actively involved in forging the “us,” in distinction from the “them” and the otherness of the Other, whomever he/she may be: the national, the religious and the territorial Other, whether it be the Palestinians, the Christians, the Armenians or other groups.

Peace education and history teaching

Opinions are divided on the role of history and the way it is involved in structuring the collective memory to actively further peace education. Clearly, the relationship between past and future enter into the web of complex relations between history, memory, and peace education. Even if these contentions are interdependent, analytically (and also empirically) they are distinctive. They deal with the gap between memory (cultural or collective memory) and historical “truth,” the difference between the past “as it was” and its representation in the present. Here, peace education can provide a space to expand beyond the struggle between rival or neighboring narratives as part of a partnership and for purposes of self-realization.

Peace education has the power to turn certain historical events into important turning points, particularly when it seeks to serve collective national memory. Both history and collective memory are selective narratives, not chronicles that aim for nor claim straightforward objectivity. While in the long run, it may be collective memory that shapes events, this process is accumulative and includes all the images, beliefs and hopes of a collective entity (Vinitzki-Sarusi, 1998: 176). History, then, is only one component of peace education

Curricula and textbooks oriented toward peace education would be expected to focus, among other things, on preparations for or engagement in reconciliation, since the collective memories of each party about its own past underpin the continuation of the conflict and obstruct peacemaking. Such a process involves learning about the rival group's collective memory and admitting one's own past misdeeds and responsibility for one's contribution to the conflict. Achieving a positive outcome in negotiations can free the parties for a critical engagement and revision of their own past activities and lead to admitting and assuming responsibility for each party's contribution to the conflict.

Salomon argued that peace education in areas of conflict must attempt to increase the learners' understanding of the collective narrative of other groups. In this manner, it is a way to relate to the *other's* narrative in a more positive way. Such efforts can involve four interdependent aims of peace education: acceptance of the narrative of the other side and of what it implies as legitimate, without necessarily agreeing to the narrative and its implications; critical examination of "my" side's contribution to the conflict and its outcomes (i.e. the Other's suffering); empathy for the suffering of the other side and increasing trust in the Other; and the tendency to resolve conflicts between two sides in nonviolent ways (Salomon, 2000: 44).

According to Salomon (2002), one of the major goals of peace education would be to legitimize the other side's narrative. With time, these new historical accounts of events can replace each side's conflict-narrative of collective memory (Bar Tal & Salomon, 2006). Although this would make logical and moral sense when applied to the strong side of the conflict, expecting the weaker side to legitimize the narrative of the strong side would make far less sense (Ibid).

The lack of an orientation to advance peace education through history curricula and textbooks turns memory into an instrumental device advancing conflict. Such an approach

not only comprises historical knowledge and recall, but prevents acquaintance with suffering by other parties to the conflict and beyond to suffering by other peoples and nations. Such is often the case when history textbooks advance a political agenda and ideology. This approach does not present “pure” history but rather the aim is to fashion normative thinking. Such curricula contain contents that are selected and carefully sorted with a view to the creation of myths, memory and a single truth. Studying through such an approach does not enable the creation of a true dialog between rival narratives and, as such, they are a tool detrimental to education.

Teaching history in Israel: A case study

Historical education in Israel continues to be a tool in the hands of the government. Thus, Israeli educational authorities have selected specific historical chapters that must be studied and textbooks proposed for use in schools must receive their authorization. This policy has been explained in terms of an obligation to utilize the story of the past and the teaching of cultural heritage from one generation to the other as a tool to shape the future generation.

Another major point of deliberation has been, on the one hand, whether general history should be a separate, autonomous subject that would enrich the world of the Israeli student, broaden her horizons, enable him to form a universal world picture; or, whether it should serve the curriculum of the history of the Jewish people? In regard to this issue, clearly the Israeli government has determines a discipline’s contents and the evidence suggests that it does so to support the latter option: study of history is first and foremost a means to maintaining the Jewish people. In either case, peace education has not been allocated any place in curricula and suffers from total exclusion.

The aims of Israel's History curricula

Four core curricula for the teaching of history have been declared by the Israeli education system over the course of the first fifty years of the state's existence (Hofman, 2002: 132).

The 1954 curriculum laid down eight aims, including: "To foster the learners' appreciation of the partnership among nations and the mutual influence of all worthy and noble elements in each nation's culture, to promote an attitude of tolerance towards other nations and teach them about the importance of international organizations" (Curricula for Grades 5 – 8, 1955: 12). Yet, all the other seven aims glorify the history of the "people of Israel" [the Jewish people].

Amos Hofman maintained that this curriculum implemented the model of "a history curriculum in the spirit of the national perception of the fifties and in particular of the pedagogical conception that the message of the study of history should be clear-cut and conveyed by means of a historical plot that, while containing shocking periods of oppression and death, nevertheless ends in a heroic proclamation of the rebirth of Israel in its own land" (Hofman, 2002: 137).

The 1961 curriculum had five main aims, including the aim quoted above. However, overall, the aims of the second curriculum were to glorify the history of the people of Israel with study of the history the Jewish-Zionist narrative being central. Such intentions were manifest through such statements as: "the great past of the people of Israel"; "our nation, among the smallest of nations... did not disintegrate"; "love for the lofty resources of the spirit"; "to instill in their hearts feelings of admiration." The members of the committee who prepared the 1975 curriculum linked the approach focusing on historical events with structural history, and were aware of the substantive structures of both.

Ruth Firer defined 1967-1984 as "the period of the turnabout" in the history curriculum and textbooks. She pointed out that the core curriculum during this period tended to eliminate

strands of hero-worship and mythification based on Zionist history (Firer, 1985: 186-187).

This analysis is supported in the aims of the 1975 curriculum: “The teaching of history is to emphasize the autonomy of the society’s ways of life, culture and thought, including the aspirations, activities and achievements of previous generations”; “the factors to be highlighted are those that forged the history and the achievements of the people of Israel and of the nations, and describe the directions of the development characterizing them”.

The 1995 curriculum presented the following aim in the sphere of values: “To foster a thinking person, recoiling from dogmatism, to develop defense mechanisms against brainwashing or manipulative information, to promote recognition of the need to examine all items of knowledge critically and foster the learners’ ability to understand the position of the Other from the Other’s point of view” (*History Curriculum for State Schools*, 1992: 11).

The historical narrative

Those responsible for Israeli education in the domain of history have determined that history curricula and textbooks should be involved in shaping Israeli consciousness and the collective memory. This complex process involves a number of action-decisions that strengthen socialization to the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli narrative.

First, the select use of wars, kings, abbreviated periods, Jewish events in particular continents and their integration into a linear continuum - even though it is not linear - is not accidental. Such fashioning creates a seemingly meaningful whole for the pupils and actively shapes a collective memory dominated by military and political history. It shows that any factor outside them is irrelevant and not sufficiently important.

Second, the subtle approach to general history taken in Israeli textbooks frames the presentation of basic discords and conflicts in a dichotomous manner. These textbooks substantiate the power of war and glorification of the state, the constitution, and leaders who

chose the use of power and violence. This message supports the Zionist ethos, according to which: “our side is all right, the other side is bad;” “we want peace and want to end the struggle and they want war”.

Thus, according to Bar Tal and Salomon (2006), the dominant narrative presented in Jewish-Israeli textbooks can be summarized as follows: Waves of Jewish immigration were an expression of national aspiration to build a state for Jewish people in their ancient homeland. The immigrants bought land from Arab landowners to build Jewish settlements with the will to live peacefully beside Arabs. Arab violence was aimed at Jews and is portrayed as vicious riots and massacres. The Arabs rejected any compromise to settle the conflict and in 1947 even rejected the UN decision to divide the country into two states -- Jewish and Palestinian. Instead, they initiated a war against the Jewish minority that drew in seven additional Arab states that invaded the newly established State of Israel.

Firer (1985) and Podeh (2002) add that Israel's willingness to negotiate a peaceful settlement is hardly ever mentioned in textbooks and all the major wars are described as defensive in which Israel successfully repelled Arab aggression. Thus, textbooks function as a type of “ultimate historical high court of justice” whose role it is to combine the various fragments of knowledge about the past into true collective memories, matching the national canonical narrative (Kimmerling, 1995: 57-58).

The subtle tools applied by authorities to advance these messages include the omission of whole chapters of history and important histories of Others. The addition of questions in the final school examinations that require memorization of “dry” facts about the historical chapters studied, too, reinforce the above perceptions, especially when matriculation examinations are considered to be the most important ones in the pupils’ school career.

Further, the absence of the presentation of various researchers’ positions prevents pupils from study of a number of interpretations of a given historical situation. Ultimately, such a

transparent approach is a disservice to history that seeks to be an accurate, incontestable science and in doing so impairs pupils' understanding of the principles of history as a discipline. Israeli pupils, so it is claimed by Ministry authorities, should not be burdened by the mention of various researchers and schools of thought, as it is detrimental to study, particularly in secondary school. This claim should be rejected, especially since interdisciplinary study, including in-depth research in many spheres, is part of Israeli pupils' school studies today in other disciplines. Furthermore, viewing a particular event from different historical points of view should not be perceived as threatening in any way. The preference of Israeli historical education to study historical facts in a one-dimensional way is detrimental to viewing the discipline in its true depth, inseparable from its very essence.

Otherness, exclusion, suffering, and victimization

Reinforcing the conclusion that the teaching of history in Israeli schools lacks peace education is the fact that neither the curricula nor the textbooks engage pupils in critical, self-reflective study of the ideologically-driven, national narratives of ethnic groups involved in protracted, intractable, and violent conflict in a comprehensive manner nor in a wider context of national movements (Kizel, forthcoming). For example, although the most recent, 1995 curriculum declared that there is the need "to foster a thinking person, the result is different, as can be seen from the stance taken in relating to the suffering of other nations.

The educational system of the State of Israel has related to the suffering and genocide of any nation other than the Jewish people as an accident, as clashing with the Zionist narrative. According to this narrative, the Jewish Holocaust that took place on European soil was genocide *sine qua non*; an event whose significance is unique not only for the Jewish people but for all nations. A pertinent example of this position is the lack of treatment in the general

history component of the Israeli curricula of indisputably important chapters of human suffering (Kizel, 2002).

Public questioning of such omissions returned in the 1990s when large-scale atrocities were committed in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. This debate questioned the blunt fashioning of Israeli pupils' collective memory and values. This counter position argued that Israeli youth are members of the Jewish as well as the universal human community, and as such are obligated to a dialog with other groups and to attain genuine apprehension of the pain of other societies.

Such an obvious evasion by various Israeli governments of the memory of suffering by other nations or groups, even denial it, suggests that there may have been political reasons for such an unusual decision. For example, could the omission of the Armenian genocide be due to political relationships between the government of Israel and the government of Turkey?

A second line of argument for exclusion of other groups' suffering from history curricula and textbooks is the fear that doing so would displace the claim of the uniqueness of the Holocaust in the eyes of Israelis pupils. One of the central components of the historical narrative and collective consciousness among citizens of the young Jewish state is the 'Holocaust to rebirth' connection. (Auron, 1993).

Teaching the Holocaust with an emphasis on internalization of its lessons by Israeli pupils as a way of developing Israeli consciousness also strengthens patriotic feelings. Such feelings are perceived by every ethnic group and nation as a desirable value to be disseminated among its people by means of cultural, social and political mechanisms (Bar Tal and Ben Amos, 2004: 13-28).

Finally, according to Daniel Bar-Tal, in the course of an intractable conflict, such as that in which Israel is involved, developing a lasting self-perception as a victim assists the group to cope with the conflict situation. It provides moral power and facilitates the preservation of

this image in the eyes of the international community, fostering the support of world public opinion (Bar-Tal, 1996: 23).

Yet, the exclusion of the other nations' and groups' suffering from the history curriculum is a clear manifestation of the education system's inability to engage in peace education in the modernist spirit.

In summary, only texts containing "inappropriate content" have been barred from use, even though they might have served peace education by transforming the perception of a monolithic identity into that of a complex one. Empathy with the suffering of other groups is closely related to the aims of peace education. It includes the appreciation of the suffering of the other party as it is felt by them. However, such recognition carries a heavy cost, effecting the perception of the group identity, and with practical implications hard to stomach (Salomon, 2000: 45).

Discussion and conclusion

A national educational system of a progressive democratic society, one that aspires to educate thinking autonomous individuals who are enlisted not only to serve society's aims, should strive – at least according to the aims of Israeli education – to achieve two opposing objectives. On the one hand, learners should be enabled to spin their shared dream among themselves and together with past generations. On the other hand, learners should be enabled to view that dream critically, without letting this process become a nightmarish awakening, an experience of tragedy and loss.

However, an alternative, peace education-oriented approach claims that it is important that the historical points of view portray both sides of the historical "truth" in as equal a manner as is possible. The following recent example demonstrates the difficulties in Israel involved in advancing such a position: In July 2007, Prof. Yuli Tamir, Israel's Minister of

Education announced that she approved the use of a textbook that includes the Palestinian term - The Naqbah [the disaster] in referring to what Israel refers to as the Independence War or The 1948 War. Furthermore, the textbook for use by Arab Israelis pupils mentions that some of the Arabs were banished from their homes and became refugees. The Minister explained her decision by stating that: "It is important that the Arab population in Israel be able to express its emotions." (Haaretz, 23.7.2007)

In response, Israelis politicians said that the text's presentation of historical facts is not balanced. They argued that such a textbook should include also the story of the Jews from Arab countries who were banished from the lands in which they lived for centuries and whose property was confiscated. They added that history books and curricula in Israel do not mention this narrative, though the Jews from Arab countries with their descendants, constitute about half of the citizens of Israel and it is important for peace-oriented education to include such stories in history curricula and textbooks in a manner that will enable the Palestinians to understand that in every war there are two stories and that both sides suffered. For example, programs in Arab Israeli schools teach Holocaust studies through empathy with survivors' stories. And the story of the expulsion of almost a million Jews from Arab countries, the confiscation of all their property, and the sufferings they experienced, should be taught in both Jewish and Arab schools (Aharoni, 2002)

In summary, nation building is a process in which the institutional and ideological infrastructure is created for a community that perceives or imagines itself as a nation, in the words of Anderson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1995). The educational system was assigned the clearly defined role of disseminating the image and legacy of the "nation" in order to strengthen the citizen's rapport with the state. This process was also carried out by the revival, rewriting, and even invention of historical mythology and collective memory. Thus the textbooks reflected the spirit of the times as manifest in the pioneering spirit, a sharp

sense of the concrete dangers confronting the state and its citizens, and the desire to enlist and rally the youth under one flag. This feeling led the political and educational system to prefer to educate for conformism and not to risk “education for truth” (Podeh, 1997: 67).

The founding fathers of the state of Israel, headed by David Ben Gurion, saw in the establishment of the state the revival of Hebrew sovereignty in the Land of the Fathers. They did not perceive Israel as a new creation, but a “renewed” one. The chapters of Jewish and Zionist history chosen for teaching and for inclusion in the compulsory core curriculum and the central educational system that was to supervise the studies, was not accidental and was meant to serve this narrative. In this spirit, the heads of the educational system have continued to advance the policy that teachers’, pupils’, and thereby also their parents’ collective memory would be shaped on the basis of these aims. Notably, peace education was not among them.

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