

MEPEACE.ORG CHAT WORKSHOP ON 28 FEB, 2010 - SUMMARY

TOPIC: The Role of Educational Institutions in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Education

The MEPEACE.org Chat Workshop started at 20.00 Jerusalem time.

Participants and moderators introduced themselves.

MODERATORS

Cigdem Yilmazer, Jessica de Souza, Johanna Silverthorne, Oliver Haack

ATTENDING PARTICIPANTS

Eyal Raviv, Gail Robinson, Manal Abbas, Waleed Hammad, Layla, Faisal al-Khatib, Ayala Leah Mosenson, Julie Arts, Libby and Len Traubman, James S. Oppenheim, Galit Feldman, Maor Shani

(remark: In the summary which follows, all participants and moderators will be referred to by their first names only)

The moderators introduced the topic and the leading questions:

- 1 *What is the role for educational institutions in conflict resolution/transformation and active peacebuilding? Based on the experiences from workshop participants, which examples could count as good and constructive ones, and which ones as rather bad?*
- 2 *How do 'external factors' (political guidelines, cultural/religious tradition, ...) make themselves felt? What difference can we - as active peacemakers and maybe parents or teachers or professors at the same time - make to establish 'our' educational institution as one that promotes peace instead of prolonged conflict and narrow-minded nationalism?*

Personal experiences of active peacebuilding education

Oliver starts the workshop by asking the participants about their experiences regarding the feasibility of effective peacebuilding education.

Waleed claims that he as a teacher [in the West Bank] needs - in general - to follow the laws of the

Ministry of Education, but admits that he feels 'free' in class with his students.

Julie says that - up to now - she has gained no such experiences. She is Belgian, and currently in Jerusalem and Ramallah working on educational projects.

James argues that - at least in his 'teaching days' - he felt there had been "too much politics" involved in education/around educational issues, including peace education.

Gail asserts that teachers might not - depending on the group of students - always be able to adapt the content [of peace education] for their students. She claims that effective peace education might be easier in smaller groups of students.

Manal says that she - as a teacher in Israel - isn't allowed to discuss political issues with her students. She is strongly in favour of an institutionalization of peace education.

Waleed is of the opinion that schools first and foremostly must teach "academic skills" to their students.

James claims that in certain subjects (art, culture, humanities, language) a "direct confrontation" with politics is unavoidable.

Waleed tells the participants about his intention to establish "Open Days" in his school, which could help foster cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Manal argues that it would be great if Jewish teachers with similar plans could be found.

Waleed and Manal agree on cooperating in this respect.

Becoming 'Peace Educators' ?

Oliver asks whether teachers can/must be the "better politicians", i.e. those that really yearn towards peace in an active way. What is it that 'makes' a 'peace educator' ?

Maor claims that when it comes to peace education there generally is a tension between "interpersonal vs. the intergroup-political approaches".

Layla asks her fellow participants (especially the professional teachers among them) whether it is possible to choose different textbooks (ones that might be more 'pro-peace').

James argues that "there's more in us that loves than hates". Thus we have to cling to positive thinking and search for common ground. This could be a basis for peace education. He further argues that artists and art are very important elements in establishing positively-shaped peace education approaches.

Ayala mentions that we all from time to time "share difficult feelings and thoughts that affect our actions". Thus it should be a part of effective peace education to mutually talk about those difficulties. Dialogue is the only way to overcome them.

Peace Educators as agents of change ?

Johanna and Oliver ask what 'we' can do to promote and establish effective peace education.

Waleed hopes that both sides - Israeli and Palestinian - will encourage peacemakers to work for peace education in the respective schools.

Ayala argues that achieving "harmony" is a very difficult task. What is necessary is, in her view, a "heart-opening process". Thus, in her opinions, peace education requires - to an extent - a

transformation of ourselves.

Johanna clarifies the above question in asking what direct steps there are to convince the powerful to embrace peacebuilding education.

James asserts that "intellectual fearlessness, honesty and integrity" are the rivals of "narrow political agenda".

Eyal argues that in order to ensure productive peace education each of us should be involved in educational institutions close to us.

At the end of the workshop all participants agree that our own agency and willingness to transform are crucial requirements for achieving the goal of educating peace to our young generations.

Looking forward to see you in the next Chat Workshop on Sunday, 14 March 2010.

Thanks to all for having shared your opinions and ideas with us.

MEPEACE.org Dialogue Team

Cigdem Yilmazer, Jessica De Souza, Johanna Silverthorne & Oliver Haack