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The Classroom as a Peace Incubator: A US-Gaza Case Study

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Abstract

This paper describes the design, implementation, and lessons from a case study in transforming two university classrooms into what we call an international “peace incubator.” In the besieged Gaza Strip, opportunities for normalization of relations with Israel are almost non-existent, and there is very limited desire or personal capacity among the student population of Gaza to do the work of peace-building. A semester-long videoconference class linking IUPUI and Gaza University students sought to address this deficit by developing a model for building ties of friendship and cooperation. West Bank peace activist Juliano Mer Khamis once spoke of a coming Third Palestinian Intifada (or uprising) that would be mounted through art, music, poetry and film. Inspired by his dedication to long term peacebuilding, we set about opening a channel of communication through our classroom experiment to allow the students to see beyond the negative stereotypes and allow friendship and understanding to flourish. Our experiment was designed to not only promote trust between US and Palestinian faculty and students, but to also creatively endorse Mer Khamis’ strategy for peace-building, and giving voice to those struggling to be heard.

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Ian McIntosh earned his PhD in anthropology at Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia in 1996. Before joining IUPUI in 2004, he was the managing director of the global indigenous rights group, Cultural Survival Inc., and also the assistant director of the Armenia Tree Project in Yerevan, Republic of Armenia. He teaches classes on truth and reconciliation, and leads IUPUI’s strategic university partnership with Moi University in Kenya. His main research interests include Australian Aboriginal reconciliation, pilgrimage and peace-building, and envisioning peace and prosperity in the Middle East. Contact: imcintos@iupui.edu

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The Classroom as Peace Incubator: A US-Gaza Case Study

Ian S. McIntosh and Jamil Alfaleet

Abstract

This paper describes the design, implementation, and lessons from a case study in transforming two university classrooms into what we call an international “peace incubator.” In the besieged Gaza Strip, opportunities for normalization of relations with Israel are almost non-existent, and there is very limited desire or personal capacity among the student population of Gaza to do the work of peace-building. A semester-long videoconference class linking IUPUI and Gaza University students sought to address this deficit by developing a model for building ties of friendship and cooperation. West Bank peace activist Juliano Mer Khamis once spoke of a coming Third Palestinian Intifada (or uprising) that would be mounted through art, music, poetry and film. Inspired by his dedication to long term peace-building, we set about opening a channel of communication through our classroom experiment to allow the students to see beyond the negative stereotypes and allow friendship and understanding to flourish. Our experiment was designed to not only promote trust between US and Palestinian faculty and students, but to also creatively endorse Mer Khamis’ strategy for peace-building, and giving voice to those struggling to be heard.

Introduction

Since 2005, IUPUI (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis) has been engaged in a multi-year project to examine whether virtual study abroad can replicate, in significant ways, a regular study abroad experience for its students. Learning from semester-long experiments in virtual team-teaching with universities in Iran, Russia, Indonesia, and Macedonia, in 2012 anthropologist Ian McIntosh of IUPUI and political scientist Jamil Alfaleet from the newly established Gaza University (formerly the Gaza Women’s College), the authors of this paper, initiated the Gaza Visioning Project. Our goal was to explore the potential use of the university classroom as a tool for international peace-building. As a virtual study abroad experience that was focused on conflict resolution, we witnessed how the shared coursework and activities were having a profound impact on our students. By bringing

our classrooms into the international realm, and the international community into the university, we added an entirely new dimension to the student experience. In this paper, we present the major findings from the first year of our collaboration, including student appraisals, a review of the underlying theoretical perspectives, and also the logistical challenges, in a reflection on the significance of such an intervention in the longer-term search for peace and prosperity in the Middle East.

In teaching anthropology we make a study of the rich diversity of the peoples of the world in the full expectation that in so doing, we will also be learning something about ourselves. We begin to see our own cultures with a fresh eye, a relativist's eye, and we see our "American" culture for example – in its many forms – as but one iteration of a complex whole. This is also the case with peace studies. When we explore the ways in which conflict is being addressed in other places, especially in cases where contested narratives and demeaning stereotypes are a daily reality, it helps prepare our own students for thinking critically about the conflicts that they face in their own societies, and how they might constructively deal with them. There can be no long-lasting solution to our differences without dialog, and the university virtual classroom is an ideal place to hone our skills in international diplomacy, with each side benefiting from the encounter in their own unique ways.

Project Context

IUPUI sends approximately 1% of its student body on study abroad each year to multiple destinations but predominantly in Europe and East Asia. Out of 30,000 students, that is about ~ 300-400 students. IUPUI is a commuter campus. Many of the students commute to the class and an ever-increasing number are undertaking their classes online. They are parents, people working full-time jobs, or first generation students. IUPUI desires that all of its students have an international experience and, through the "RISE initiative" the university insists that all students graduate with at least one research, one international, or one service experience, and ideally all three. To facilitate such international research and service experiences, in 2005 IUPUI began an experiment with virtual study abroad with an emerging focus on conflict resolution and peace-building. What better way to challenge our students than to allow them an opportunity to reflect upon how in the US they might take for granted their freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and freedom from the threat of torture, and start to develop an empathy with those for whom these are not part of their daily lived experience.

In 2012, the authors of this paper created the Gaza Visioning Project and agreed upon a joint curriculum that focused on a search for the pathways to peace and prosperity in the Middle East. Our students would partner up across the great divide in this creative exercise and work together in developing novel solutions to the conflict between Palestine and Israel. They would not be hamstrung by past failures or thoughts of intractability, but open to all manner of solutions. By taking such an approach we found ourselves in an entirely new type of virtual study abroad experience. We decided to utilize the broader community as a teaching resource and, as we will explain, our classrooms were transformed into what we call a peace incubator. So we were not just trying to replicate the study abroad experience. Rather, we were embarking on something entirely new and exciting for the students, namely education and advocacy in the service of peace and cooperative development.

The Roadmap

Earlier in 2012, project co-leader Ian McIntosh had explored possible videoconference classes with Israel and, in conversation with IUPUI colleagues, the idea came forward for a three way class involving the US, Gaza and Israeli universities where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be frankly discussed, and the pathways of peace explored. Unfortunately the timing for the Israel connection did not work but even if it had, Gaza counterparts were not enthused by the idea. While self-proclaimed peace activists, they were forthright in saying that Gaza was not yet ready for direct talks with Israel and that participants would come to understand their position over the duration of the class. So the focus became: How do we overcome such a stalemate and build capacity for making those vital connections that are so necessary for peace and reconciliation?

The ideal structure for a peace classroom would have been to facilitate a three-way Skype conversation in which US students could act as mediators between students in both Gaza and Israel but suspicion was evident from the outset. Just several months before the class began, Jamil Alfaleet was quite open in saying that the idea of his students speaking to an American, a presumed Israeli proxy, was anathema. When selecting papers for the class, one by an expert on reconciliation, Dr. Zvi Bekerman from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, co-author of *Teaching Contested Narratives* (2012), was rejected. Such is the level of distrust towards their Israeli neighbors that Jamil Alfaleet doubted that the Gaza students would even open the attachment. And yet this was a paper focused on that handful of schools in Israel that are multicultural and multilingual and which actively promote coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

Dr. Alfaleet compared the situation in Gaza and the West Bank to that of African Americans in the Deep South in the 1960s, or to South African Blacks under Apartheid. So we could not underestimate the magnitude of the challenge. Even by conservative estimate, a very significant proportion of Gaza's mostly poor and disaffected youth, have perhaps no greater desire or goal, or indeed opportunity, to be anything other than a martyr for their cause. Embittered, often traumatized, and hungry for justice, they are often drawn into the conflict in ways that are ultimately self-defeating and merely escalate tensions.

In considering the range of options for the unfolding class, it was important to stay flexible. We decided to proceed with a Gaza-only focus in terms of the subject matter but as the semester progressed, Ian McIntosh added more and more Jewish and Israeli voices, including those advocating for a one-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, a two-state solution, and even a supporter of the continued stalemate, who wanted to see the peoples of the region solve the conflict in their own way and time without any outside intervention. So apart from regular weekly Skype communication with our Gaza professor, his colleagues, and our students, Ian McIntosh connected his US students via videoconference with the aforementioned Hebrew University professor, with members of the peace-focused "J Street" group, and others. As part of this class, not only would the US students visit a mosque in Indianapolis and speak with the Imam, but they would also meet with a local Rabbi. The deep and protracted conversations with Gaza then, would be at least partially informed by Jewish and Israeli perspectives.

Of note is that Gaza University is a private institution catering to a somewhat privileged class. The students tend not to be the children of the refugee camps, many of whom eke out a living by working in the illegal underground smuggling tunnels from Gaza into Egypt, and survive in large part through UN food relief. The Gaza students that US students interacted with, and also developed close bonds of friendship, were young men and women who could more easily envision a future beyond the blockaded borders of what is frequently described by people like Noam Chomsky as the "world's largest open air prison" (2012). The offer of summer scholarships to IUPUI for the top Gaza students to undertake focused research on our topic was certainly a strong inspiration to be a part of this learning experiment and to participate fully in what were often hard-hitting and controversial discussions.

A Meeting of Worlds

The Spring 2012 collaboration involved sixteen IUPUI students and, via the medium of Skype, sixteen Gaza University students. For the Indiana students, the course was advertised as a “virtual study abroad” experience to the Gaza Strip. The US students each had a virtual host family in Gaza: they exchanged personal videos with their Gaza counterparts, and they had an opportunity to learn firsthand about Gaza lives and hopes for the future. From their new-found friends and in lectures they learned of the impact of Israel’s blockade of Gaza and the Hamas dictatorship. This unexpurgated glimpse into life in the densely populated 25-mile narrow strip of land revealed the hardship of power rationing, the high unemployment, the anarchic and controversial tunnel economy, and the nightly bombings and deadly retaliation.

The US class was coupled with another in the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies on the topic of argumentation in which the students at IUPUI role-played the multiple perspectives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, brainstorming various avenues for the resolution of the issues that appear intractable, namely borders, settlements, refugees and Jerusalem. This would be the main project topic for students in the US-Gaza peace incubator.

Indiana students included the usual mix of those with very limited exposure to life outside of their home state, as well as refugees from Bosnia and Venezuela and immigrants from Nigeria and Syria. There were Blacks, Latinos, and Whites, as well as Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians and an Anarchist. There were eight male and eight female students.

The multicultural US classroom was juxtaposed on a Gaza classroom with nowhere near the same level of diversity. Gaza is a conservative Muslim society and the majority of the students were female and veiled. They enjoyed few of the freedoms that the US students took for granted, including the freedom of speech and of movement. All were imbued with the spirit of Sumud by which is meant resilience and resistance, the inner cry for freedom, a philosophy symbolized in Palestinian minds by the ancient olive tree or the mother with child (Musleh, 2011).

Our initial goal for the course was as provocative in Gaza as it was in Indiana. As an academic who is also a peace activist, McIntosh’s interest was in first overcoming the reluctance of his Gaza partners to work with Americans on projects exploring the pathways of peace in the Middle East. Levels of suspicion ran high, for the US and Israel are perceived in a similar light. To be accused of appeasement with Israel is a serious charge in Gaza, just a short step removed from an accusation of being a spy, which can lead to serious

consequences. Alfaleet was therefore under considerable pressure to prove to his administration that building the capacity of both US and Palestinian students to collaborate and begin the work of long-term peace building was in everyone's best interests.

Barriers, both physical and political, prevent meaningful contact between Palestinians in Gaza and Israelis. Knowledge of life on the other side of the separation barrier is all but non-existent. It is a most unfortunate scenario, typical of intractable conflict, where each side considers the other to be the embodiment of evil: Israel views Gaza's Hamas government as a terrorist organization bent on the destruction of Israel; and all Gazans, whether or not they are affiliated with Hamas, are considered as legitimate targets and suffer therefore from a form of "collective punishment." But then the official Hamas political stance is a refusal to acknowledge the right of Israel to exist.

In the classroom setting, the Palestinian students openly debated the relative merits of Hamas rule and the circumstances of life in the Gaza strip; the lack of elections, endemic poverty, erratic service provision, pollution, and high reliance on foreign aid. In terms of Israel, however, the Gaza students spoke with one voice. Most were refugees or from refugee families from cities outside of the Gaza Strip and they wanted to visit their homes in Israel (to which many still possess keys) and their holy site in Al Quds (Jerusalem) – Haram al-Sharif. They wanted to see a one state solution where Jews and Palestinians lived side by side with the same rights and responsibilities, and an end to the Jewish character of the Israeli state.

Our challenge was to provide Indiana students with an opportunity to hear from both sides of the separation wall and to reflect upon, and respond to, Palestinian perspectives on reconciliation not readily available or accessible elsewhere. For Gaza students, the goal was to impart the basics on processes of peace-building and reconciliation in a way that might inspire some consideration of the preconditions for moving forwards. But it was very hard to speak of peace and reconciliation, when, during March 2012, for example, Israeli bombs were raining down on Gaza for five straight days killing many innocent civilians and traumatizing not just the Gaza students, but also their new friends in Indianapolis. How would the students respond to a Gandhian "sermon" on non-violence? By the moving words of Martin Luther King on the arc of the moral universe being long but bending toward justice? By Desmond Tutu's Ubuntu philosophy for instilling that sense of courage necessary for envisioning a better future and also pathways leading to that destination?

With the very real possibility of an escalating conflict and a ground war, we began our lectures addressing the pressing issues that divide Arabs and Jews without specifically

mentioning the protracted conflict at all. We wanted the students to be thinking “outside the box” so we began with a discussion of Enlightenment ideals and the associated vision of social inclusion or plurality. We had already initiated a series of introductory lectures on the history of the Middle East by both IUPUI and Gaza University political scientists. But we wanted to provide a framework for considering international relations from an entirely different lens.

Theoretical Framework

Enlightenment thinking prioritized the interests of humanity over the interests of nations. Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1795), for example, envisioned a future federation of free states bound by laws of universal hospitality where a violation of rights in one part was felt everywhere. But, at the beginning of the 21st century, we asked the students, are we any closer to overcoming the narrow confines of national self-interest and achieving a universal cosmopolitan existence, as described by Appiah (2006), where members renounce patriotism and nationalism and defend universal values as opposed to national ones? We discussed whether there was an emerging global division between those states where the majority believed that their country should be either: 1. A home to all and that race, color, religion, and creed should be no bar to belonging; or 2. Home only to their own. The rallying cry of “one nation, one state” among various ethnic and religious groups strikes a note of terror for those non-majority or oppressed peoples seeking a sense of belonging, equality, and self-worth in their adopted or native homeland.

Globalization and Multiculturalism

We then debated the ways in which globalization was reducing the economic sovereignty of nations and we emphasized how the clash of rival nationalisms within states was still the main cause of violence in the world today. It was once presumed (in Enlightenment thinking) that ethnicity would decline in the face of a shrinking planet, as people became increasingly interdependent in economic and cultural terms, and there was increased awareness that we are “one world” facing common ecological, political, and security problems. Yet the rapid dissolution of the known has led to the now well-documented phenomenon, described by Thomas Friedman (2000) in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, of people clinging to the familiar and reaffirming and reifying what is believed to be true at the local level. In so doing they are re-energizing the primordial standard-bearers, namely, ethnicity, tribe, race, language, religion, and nation. Mortimer and Fine’s (2002) excellent volume *People, Nation and State: The Meaning of Ethnicity and Nationalism*

informed much of the class conversation.

David Napier (2003), in his book *The Age of Immunology: Conceiving a Future in an Alienating World* speaks to this alarming and divisive trend by reference to a metaphor; the immune system and its all-consuming drive to protect the self from the other. In the battlefield of the body, the role of the immune system is to distinguish between the self and the non-self and to subdue the latter. All things “other” are viewed not as a means of learning and growing stronger through a process of incorporation, but as a potential threat to the body’s integrity, well-being and future survival. Napier suggests that we are immunizing ourselves against the possibility of systemic change or adaptation in this new global dawning. When seen through this lens, the blending of peoples and the merging of civilizations that have given rise to the greatest breakthroughs of human history is an anachronism. The idea that Israelis and Palestinians were in the process of immunizing themselves against each other did not require amplifying.

In a related narrative, Steven Pinker (2011), in his book, *Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* argues that human civilization has become steadily less violent over recent centuries and that the years since 1945 have been especially tranquil. But, as Ross Douthat (2011) argues, there has been a price for this advance. The most successful modern states have often gained stability at the expense of diversity, driving out or even murdering their minorities on the road to peaceful coexistence with their neighbors. Europe’s harmony, for example, was made possible only through decades of expulsions and genocide. Douthat (2011) quotes Jerry Z. Muller (2008) essay *Us and them. The enduring power of ethnic nationalism*, on how the two world wars rationalized the continent’s borders, replacing the old multiethnic empires with homogenous nation states and eliminating minority populations and polyglot regions. A decade of civil war and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia completed the process. In 1900 there were many states in Europe without a single overwhelmingly dominant nationality, but by 2007 there were only two, and one of those, Belgium, is close to breaking up. Consider also, for example, the fate of Coptic Christians in the new Egypt. Douthat suggests that if a European style age of democratic peace awaits the Middle East and Africa, it lies on the far side of ethnic and religious re-sortings and he asks whether it will be worth the wars, genocides, and forced migrations that might make it possible.

From an Enlightenment perspective (Kant 1939), the doctrine that each state should be composed of one homogenous nation is pernicious. No state is an undifferentiated

monolithic whole. Most modern societies are socially, culturally, sexually, religiously, and ethnically heterogeneous. But how do we promote multiculturalism in a globalizing world where some view this concept as inherently evil and a threat to their integrity? Consider in silence for example, the shooting rampage by Norwegian Anders Breivik who was concerned for the purity of Norwegian blood and the danger posed by immigrants, in particular Muslims (Borchgrevink, 2013).

Our classroom conversation then turned to how the survival of “homogenous” states around the world depends on their relationship with the multicultural states, and their pockets of homogeneity. We see the threat of homogenization or “Balkanization” not just in the Middle East but on multiple fronts around the world, following the European pattern in the twentieth century. Confronting these new waves of ethnic and religious separation and the associated “cleansing” requires fresh and imaginative thinking regarding borders, citizenship and nationality and this theoretical perspective informed the students’ thinking with regards to their main assignments.

The Peace Curriculum

The course content included the full range of experiences expected in a normal study abroad program. There were films, lectures, and a range of readings supplied by both project leaders. An Iranian expert on Middle East history and politics, Dr. Manochehr Hosseinzadeh, provided additional context with his lectures. This coursework was complemented by presentations by a Rabbi, who was also a member of the Jewish NGO J-Street, to both the US and Gaza classes. In addition, a former Israeli military officer who is a self-proclaimed “dove”, and a professor of education at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, who specializes in the study of those few schools in Israel that foster coexistence and have a multilingual (Arabic and Hebrew) curriculum, also made presentations to the US classroom. A number of documentaries were shown to the students and, where possible, these were also shared in the Gaza classroom. With limited internet connection in Gaza and restricted access to some web sites, this was not always possible. These films included “Tears of Gaza” about the devastation caused by the Israeli attacks in 2008/9, and “Peace, propaganda and the promised land,” where the classes debated the biased or pro-Israeli reporting in US media, and the controversy generated by the film in places like Canada where it was condemned as being one-sided in favor of Palestinians.

As our goal was to familiarize the US students with Palestinian life and culture, we provided an opportunity for them to meet with IUPUI-based Palestinian students, faculty, and

staff, and also Palestinians from the broader community. They visited a local mosque where there was a lively discussion with the Imam on the place of women in Moslem society. They also enjoyed Middle Eastern food on several occasions and learned some basic Arabic language.

We assessed student learning in Gaza and the US through a journal of reflections on the weekly private communications that each student had with their partner through email, Skype and Facebook. The task of interviewing their partners to learn about their hopes and dreams was coupled with an exercise where each student made a short 6-8 minute video of their life. This was a surprisingly difficult and eye-opening exercise for us all. What do we include or exclude and why? There were certainly many preconceived ideas held by the US students about Gaza lives, and vice versa. One Gaza student, for example, spoke out in her video about her love of marathon running, of chocolate milk-shakes, and horse-riding along the beach, which all seemed totally at odds with the reality that we expected to hear about. But then we learned that in order to enjoy such privileges, both the horse and also the chocolate, needed to be smuggled 60 meters beneath the ground through the illegal tunnels from Egypt into Gaza.

Apart from the individual pairing of students, we also placed them into groups of four US and four Gaza students in order to tackle the larger topic of the course which was to explore solutions to the four main points of division between Arabs and Jews namely settlements, borders, refugees and Jerusalem. Both project leaders were on hand each and every day to answer questions from the students as were the various visitors who had come to the class throughout the semester.

Reconciliation Studies

The starting point for discussion of the pathways to peace was the literature on reconciliation, most notably the foundation text “From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation” edited by Yaacov Bar-Suman-Tov (2003), and also the work of Cynthia Cohen (2005) on creative approaches to reconciliation. Cohen says, for example, that:

Reconciliation refers to a set of processes designed to transform relationships of hatred and mistrust into relationships of trust and trustworthiness. Reconciliation reflects a shift in attention from blaming the other to taking responsibility for the attitudes and actions of one’s self and one’s own community. Former enemies must empathize with each other’s suffering, express remorse, grant forgiveness, and offer reparations. (p. 10)

The tasks or preconditions of reconciliation that Cohen (2005, pp.10-11) describes, are in broad agreement with those of Bar-Suman-Tov (2003), and include, but are not limited to:

1. Appreciating each other's humanity and respecting each other's culture
2. Telling and listening to each other's stories, and developing more complex narratives and more nuanced understandings of identity
3. Acknowledging harms, telling truths, and mourning losses
4. Empathizing with each other's suffering
5. Acknowledging and redressing injustices
6. Expressing remorse, repenting, apologizing, letting go of bitterness, forgiving
7. Imagining and substantiating a new future, including agreements about how future conflicts will be engaged constructively

All of these tasks, Cohen (2005) says, require

... learning new skills and unlearning what was formerly believed to be true. In many instances, however, the very notion of trust has been destroyed. Ethnic violence and long-standing oppression can leave people and communities with insufficient capacity to undertake this work. And yet, this is the only way forward... (p. 11)

As McIntosh (2013, 2014) details elsewhere, the quest for reconciliation has three broad dimensions, namely desire, personal capacity, and opportunity. In the Gaza Strip, opportunities for peace-building and reconciliation are extremely limited. The massive separation walls that are mined and lined with barbed-wire prevent any meaningful contact between Gazans and Israelis. In terms of personal capacity to do the work of peace, this has been seriously eroded on both sides by repeated attacks and counterattacks. A number of the Gaza students had PTSD and were very bitter and emotionally scarred. One showed a photo of a burning Israeli flag on her Facebook page. She exclaimed "Let them drink from our cup," when a Hamas missile took off towards populated Israeli townships in retaliation for the killing of a Palestinian civilian. When asked by one of the US students if she was afraid of being injured in the repeated bombings raids she replied, "Sister. We are not afraid. The Israelis are nothing." And yet even with this widespread level of mistrust and even hatred, many of the Gaza students opened up in their conversations with the US students, and expressed a strong desire to find a way to work out differences in some meaningful fashion and to end the conflict.

Gestures of Reconciliation

How do we ensure the official recognition of all peoples in a manner that honors their traditions and secures their rights, and legitimizes and values their existence and membership? McIntosh's work in the field of peace and reconciliation and in the development of a methodology called Reconciliation Process Analysis (RPA) complements that of Gene Sharp (2002) and his development of a vocabulary of non-violent resistance to dictatorship. He is engaged in building a similar vocabulary of reconciliation initiatives suitable to any specific setting. Apart from an examination and analysis of the full range of reconciliatory gestures for making amends for historical injustices, from trials and truth commissions, apologies and forgiveness, material and symbolic forms of reparation, and so on, he also explores strategies for building inclusive national identities, and he stressed this in his lectures with Gaza.

In Israel and the West Bank we can witness many impressive grass roots peace and reconciliation initiatives designed by some of the most creative brains in the academic field of conflict resolution. Noted mediator William Ury, author of *Getting To Yes* (2011) and *Getting Past No* (1991), advocates for a pilgrimage through the Holy Land to build a sense of solidarity between the Abrahamic *Peoples of the Book*. Maestro Daniel Barenboim who started the Divan East-West Orchestra with Palestinian and Israeli musicians is another inspirational peacemaker. Then there is the mathematician who won Israel's most coveted prize and donated the proceeds to Palestinian mathematicians and to an Israeli organization working for coexistence in the West Bank. Chefs for Peace, Combatants for Peace, the Israel Palestine Comedy Tour, Rabbis for Palestine, Anarchists against the Wall, and so on, are all making a contribution. But as Karen Brouneus (2003) reminds us, the total number of reconciliatory gestures in any given location is no measure for determining if reconciliation is actually being advanced. It can often mean the very opposite; that the society is moving away from peace.

Small scale initiatives like the above can be harbingers of meaningful change but on the whole, the net result is usually minimal and the most that can be expected is "first order change" which occurs within a system that remains unchanged. Focused programs like the Arab-Israeli Mt Everest Climb, or Football for Peace, do not, ultimately, speak truth to power, and they rarely empower the oppressed so that they can pursue their political interests more effectively. While based on the contact hypothesis that intergroup interaction can bring about attitudinal change which can result in a reduction of tension, the breakdown of

stereotypes, and the promotion of more harmonious relationships, group prejudices and taken-for granted images live on in the post-game, post-climb and post-pilgrimage period.

How do we deliver second-order change where the system itself is transformed? How do we reach “tipping points”, those decisive moments when there is a significant movement or development of a positive sort in human relations? An example of such a tipping point is when South Africa’s Nelson Mandela chose a new national anthem for his country that incorporated the words and music of both Afrikaner and African songs, or when he made a new flag for the rainbow nation, or created the National Day of Reconciliation to coincide with the Afrikaner sacred Day of the Vow. Mandela also embraced the white-favored Rugby Union football over soccer and inspired South Africa to become World Cup Champions in the mid-1990s. His white bodyguard, whose story is reflected in the Hollywood movie *Invictus*, spoke of how Mandela’s wearing of the “Springbok” jersey did more for reconciliation than any other single gesture in the whole post-Apartheid period.

For Mandela, civic rather than ethnic nationalism was in focus; that is, promoting a form of nationalism that appeals on the basis of shared allegiance to certain constitutional principles (Habermas’s constitutional patriotism) and not on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion, or race. Michael Ignatieff (1999) has also argued for the grounding of national symbols and traditions in civic values with which all can easily identify—like France’s “liberty, equality, and fraternity”—symbols and traditions that will unite citizens in patriotic attachment to a shared set of values that celebrate plurality and difference, and not the old standard bearers. This was Mandela’s challenge, and it is a challenge that Israelis and Palestinians now face.

Rabbi Michael Lerner (2012) in *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East* examines how the mutual demonization and discounting of each sides’ legitimate needs drive the antagonism, and he explores the underlying psychological dynamics that fuel the intransigence. He describes the importance of being both pro-Israel and pro-Palestine and argues that long term peace and security is best achieved through an ethos of caring and generosity toward the other. In accord with Bar-Suman-Tov (2003) and Cohen (2005) he calls for a psychological change in the way that we approach the conflict, believing that we must first work at becoming friends. But as Andrew Rigby (2001) argues, for any of peace and reconciliation initiatives to be successful there must be equal status and common goals in and out of the encounter, and participants need the endorsement and support of opinion leaders. Such gestures, in other words, need to take place within the

context of a society that wants them to succeed. Is this the case for Israel and Palestine?

Student Reports

US and Gaza students presented their final reports jointly via Skype to an audience that included professors and administrators from both universities and community members. In this “public” setting, the Gaza students were somewhat restricted in what they were prepared to say but, as none of the topics focused directly on Gaza, but rather on Palestinians in general, they were forthright in their presentations.

In one essay, US and Gaza students made reference to a very powerful article by noted Jewish blogger Robert Cohen (2012) entitled *Occupy the Haggadah-Radical Thoughts for Passover*. Cohen quotes from the scriptures:

Wandering in the desert, without our own land or borders, we recorded the commandments that were meant to shape us as a people. “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9)... “The stranger who resides with you, shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:34)

Robert Cohen’s plans for his own family Passover celebration were quoted by the students:

This year when my family sits down for the annual retelling of the Exodus story, there will be some new additions to the evening’s order of service. We will include prayers for justice, thought-provoking reflections on the meaning of the Holocaust from Jews and Palestinians, and acknowledgment of our own complicity in taking freedom from others. We will dip into salt water three times to remember not only our tears but the tears of our neighbors too. And alongside the salt water, Elijah’s wine glass and Miriam’s cup, we will make an addition to the Seder plate. Next to the bitter herbs, the horoset, the motzah, the shankbone, we will add some Palestinian olive oil to remember that the land has meaning to another people too. And when we break the motzah, we will do so as a symbol of sharing the land. And to soften our brittle “bread of oppression” we will pour on some of the Palestinian olive oil.

At least one Gaza student was moved to tears by the sentiments expressed here. She had never encountered such language from a Jew, and was quite overwhelmed. She saw this article as having the potential of helping pave the way for reconciliation between Arabs and

Jews.

This same group of students, when considering creative solutions for the future of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, then reported on the need for laying the foundation for reconciliation. They suggested the creation of “reconciliation establishments”, actual physical structures that could be used to help foster good relationships between Israelis and Palestinians on the ground. They saw a need for:

- **Economic Centers:** The Jewish settlements in the West Bank could potentially serve as centers of economic integration, and facilitate cooperation, while fueling political reconciliation.
- **Educational Centers:** The settlements could serve as centers of education in a new Israeli-Palestinian state, in which Arabs and Israelis would come together to build multi-cultural schools.
- **Sports Arenas:** The settlements could also house sports arenas in which Palestinians and Israelis would enjoy soccer and other games together and begin to develop teamwork skills that would allow them to forget about the tensions between their parents and government representatives, and serve as springboards for reconciliation.
- **Shopping Malls/Amusement Parks:** Israelis and Palestinians would enjoy shopping and hanging out with friends, temporarily forgetting their problems, prejudices and fears.

Reflecting back on the preconditions for reconciliation expressed by Cynthia Cohen (2005), the students understood that their proposed solutions would require a significant shift in the current political and social atmosphere in Israeli and Palestinian territories. By embracing these tasks and principles and by putting in place actual physical structures in the settlements dedicated to the promotion of peace, the pathway can be laid and the journey to reconciliation initiated, they said.

Teachable Moments

It is important to mention that this class was not free of controversy. From the US side, the subject of the Gaza class caused an immediate flurry of interest and suspicion on the part of Indianapolis Jewish community organizations. As one Jewish colleague and friend at IUPUI was quick to point out, our subject matter was the “third rail” of US politics; dangerous both personally and professionally.

The fireworks came early in the semester when we decided to host an Arab-Israeli dialog in the broader Indianapolis community in order to model for students the sort of

discussion that we would like to see on the global stage. A local NGO, the Center for Interfaith Cooperation, arranged for two Israelis and two Palestinians, now US citizens, to speak on the pathways to peace and they all enthusiastically agreed. However two days before the event the Israelis demanded one hour alone with the US students as a precondition for their involvement. They assumed that the students were all biased in favor of Palestine. A series of conversations through an intermediary identified their stance as being triggered by the proposed date of the event, which coincided with a global “Anti-apartheid Israel” protest and rally in support of the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israeli settlements and industry in the West Bank). They believed the session was timed to embarrass them but this was not the case. The dialog was cancelled. Finally, we agreed on a three part process which would culminate in the Israelis and Palestinians being invited to a general celebration of Middle Eastern culture where we would watch a film on reconciliation but with no open discussion on the peace process. Some Jews came to this final session, but no Palestinians.

There would be more fireworks later, and more teachable moments after the class had ended, when IUPUI invited the top two Gaza students, both young women, to spend two months over the Summer in 2012 working on their research topics. One focused her studies on domestic violence and women’s empowerment in the Gaza Strip, and the other on the potential role of social media for social change in Gaza. The planned public event was entitled *Film, Food and the Future*. The two students would share their research and we would show some of the films that Gaza faculty had made as part of the class, including one on the controversial Gaza Tunnel economy, where not only food and building products arrive into Gaza, but also missiles, drugs and other contraband.

The reaction of some members of the local Jewish community to an event flyer was swift, as the advertising was perceived to be misrepresenting the tunnels primary function, which they deemed to be military-based. From some Indiana University Alumni including from as far away as Fort Wayne, Indiana came an ultimatum: The event should be cancelled, or, if it proceeded then 1. the Gaza students should not be permitted to speak about the future of Gaza; 2. the film of the tunnels should not be aired and; 3. Jewish spokespeople should be present on stage to refute the Hamas propaganda of the students. These individuals indicated that the penalty for not addressing these demands would be the withdrawal of continued generous support to the Alumni Association. McIntosh cancelled the event against the wishes of both the US and the Gaza students because he did not want to expose the students to an

ugly encounter with seasoned lobbyists, especially given that their summer experience at IUPUI had been so positive and life-changing.

A legal request under the freedom of information act from a California individual to IUPUI came soon thereafter, requesting all correspondence connected with the cancelled Gaza event, the memos, emails, flyers and so on. This action, we gathered, was designed to intimidate us and dissuade us from proceeding with anything similar in the future. The university lawyer forwarded a package of over 1500 pages of emails to the Californian for we had nothing to hide. This was a class designed to promote peace-building and the search for solutions to problems in the Middle East which are often described as insoluble.

Conclusion: Embracing a Vision of Change

To host a successful program, the onus is on the project leaders to create a learning environment where there is a willingness by students to step outside of their comfort zones and to interact with and learn from people from quite different cultures and ways of life. Some students, both in the US and Gaza, reported that this was their favourite class in their student careers. Others, while remaining staunch in their support of one side or the other, appreciated the opportunity to see beyond received stereotypes. We can expect no more of a study abroad experience.

The intercultural component allowed IUPUI students to see their own culture in perspective, and to appreciate the diversity of human experience. The reviews emphasized the need for the students to be open-minded, to reconsider previously held beliefs and to adjust their thinking based on newly received information. The students also understood the necessity of being able to operate civilly in a complex world, and to recognize the connectedness of local and global communities.

US students came to value their freedom of speech and of politics, something that they often take for granted. They greatly appreciated their access to social services, electricity, water, to equality and also respect for diversity and pluralism. They also appreciated the opportunity to develop long-term friendships with a people often derided as “the enemy” in our media. These friendships have extended beyond the classroom.

From the Gaza perspective, student reviews showed that the opportunity to connect to the outside world has provided an avenue of hope. The wall had been breached, if only virtually. This was a strategy of liberation championed by the late Jewish-Palestinian peace activist Juliano Mer Khamis of the West Bank village of Jenin. The instigator of the “Freedom Theater”, Juliano spoke of a coming Third Intifada or Palestinian uprising that

would be mounted through art, music, poetry and film to empower actors and audiences to transcend the walls that imprison them. Through drama therapy or art therapy, for example, Palestinian youth would have a chance to deal creatively with their torment and tormentors. They would develop the capacity, currently lacking, to do the work of long-term peace building and not resort to violence. Words would become their Molotov cocktails, one of Juliano's students exclaims in the sad and yet ultimately inspiring film "Arna's Children" (Mer Khamis & Danniell, 2004). For Gaza students, it was this glimmer of hope that was most pronounced

In the science of visioning, as conceived by peace scholar Elise Boulding (1990), students will anchor their dreams for the future in intensely real images, compelling action in the present to fulfill them. Designing a plan of action to realize the dream and inspiring participants to believe in their vision, was our goal. With our class, then, we hoped to contribute in some small fashion to this grand "third intifada" for reconciliation as this was understood by the Gaza students as being a necessary first step forwards. The late Christopher Reeves (1996) once remarked, "So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable." It is with this spirit that we embarked upon our experiment in peace education by transforming our classrooms into a peace incubator. There were many challenges, and also many lessons and rewards. The most noteworthy was a chance to see a vision of the future emerge from our incubator that was quite different to that constrained and defined by the politics of walls, rockets, drones, tunnels and warships, and the futility of endless retaliation and revenge.

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