



Hatred and violence: The role of education

The non-Zionist educational systems – Palestinian and Haredi – have displayed weakness in regard to peace and tolerance

THE LATEST surge of violence began with the murder of three Jewish teenagers, the murder of a Palestinian boy, waves of incitement and finally – war. Whatever the specific circumstance of the violence, it is clear that the various Israeli and Palestinian educational platforms influenced the way events unfolded.

Palestinians first: Hamas was responsible for the kidnapping and murder of the three Israeli teenagers after repeated calls for such actions. Launching a war intended to cause maximum civilian casualties on both sides is commensurate with the organization's educational focus, for example its malicious Jew-demonizing child-oriented Internet magazine *Al-Fateh* (The Conqueror).

Research, conducted by the independent NPO, IMPACT-SE (the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education) and others, has established that this type of child-oriented press is an effective tool in the hands of both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, which publishes a similarly anti-Jewish youth magazine *Majallat Al-Zayzafuna*.

The Palestinian education system in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem is not designed to neutralize this type of incitement. The official Palestinian curriculum is part of an independent education system that includes typical Hamas-style agitation. For example, the PA's educational system calls for an eternal holy war against the "Israeli invader," depicted as an evil, foreign and illegitimate element in the region. It gives no context to the Jewish national movement and cherishes martyrdom.

However, it also educates toward a national state identity enabling a moderate leader like President Mahmoud Abbas to calm things down when he sees fit. Still, its overall messages, denying the "other" and worshipping martyrdom, easily translate into violence by individuals or organizations, as the latest military flare-up between Israel and Hamas shows.

Israeli state and state-religious curricula fulfill the international UNESCO-set standards for peace and tolerance education

Although angry demonstrations and riots in Israeli-controlled Arab East Jerusalem in late June after the Arab teenager's brutal murder were spontaneous, the Palestinian school curriculum in East Jerusalem did nothing to cool tempers. The Israeli municipality had randomly excised a few paragraphs from Palestinian textbooks – but the curriculum remained hostile and rigid, totally unsuitable for life in a dynamic multicultural, multiethnic metropolis. Without any countervailing balance, the thrust of Palestinian education has been and remains a disaster waiting to happen.

What about the Jewish-Israeli education system? Studies have demonstrated again and again that the Israeli state and state-religious curricula fulfill the international

UNESCO-set standards for peace and tolerance education. Although in the state-religious sector there is less emphasis on the "Palestinian narrative" than in the secular state system, both put clear emphasis on education for peace as well as for peaceful coexistence with Muslims and Arabs, while respecting their religion and culture. Contextual information is provided and a culture of debate and discussion encouraged.

Although state school students participated in the Jewish-Israeli parades of hatred and calls for revenge following the earlier kidnapping and murder of the three Israeli teens, and although there are indications of growing racist tendencies among Israeli teens, the state education system has, by and large, given an effective peace-education infrastructure to counter rage, anger and incitement.

The ultra-Orthodox Haredi education system, on the other hand, is a different matter. Due to daunting methodological challenges, it has not been studied closely enough with regard to international standards for peace and tolerance education.

Those who have studied it found some harsh messages against the national "other" in the various curricula, but it is still unclear how these are expressed at the system level and how they coexist with the anti-national, anti-militarist and pacifist notions that characterize traditional Judaism. Shas and Chabad present hybrid positions that include hawkish approaches to the Arab-Israeli conflict along with wider nonviolent attitudes.

It is highly improbable that references such as "God save me from the gentile's violence"



IBRAHIM ABU MUSTAFA / REUTERS

are at the heart of the problem here. On the contrary, the Edah Haredit, the leading Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox community in Jerusalem, recently warned against violence on the triple grounds that it constitutes blasphemy, that Jews should avoid provoking the gentiles and that they should adhere to the Jewish ideal of peace. It is a case of a weak minority warning its children against the “dangerous” majority. Hence, what could be construed as demonization of the “other” may actually be more a call to keep the peace by stressing the consequences of provoking the “other.” We know from other cases, such as that of Ahmadiyya Muslims, that a strictly pacifist approach can be accompanied by harsh language toward the “other.”

Still, in at least three recent cases of hatred and violence, ultra-Orthodox Jews were involved. Soldiers from the Nahal Haredi Brigade were court-marshaled for expressing threatening anti-Palestinian views in ways “unbecoming to a soldier”; many Haredi youths marched in hate-filled demonstrations in Jerusalem; and Haredi drop-outs are suspected of the murder of the Palestinian teenager.

Regarding the ultra-Orthodox curricula, we can point to four fundamental problems: The lack of in-depth civic education as part of the core curriculum; the lack of any national or universal peace education; the neglect of teenage yeshiva dropouts, often throwing them into the arms of right-wing extremists; and, when it comes to Jerusalem, like the Palestinian curriculum, the Haredi school system simply isn’t relevant enough

for life in a multicultural, multiethnic and multi-faith city. Both systems fail to include education toward respecting the “other” or cooperating with the elected authorities.

In Jerusalem, the Zionist state and state-religious school systems have withstood the tests of nonviolence and self-restraint. The non-Zionist systems – the Palestinian and the Haredi – have both displayed weakness in regard to peace and tolerance, each in its own way. Indeed, IMPACT-SE has already recommended to the head of Jerusalem Education Administration, the Jerusalem mayor’s advisor on East Jerusalem Affairs and the Knesset’s Education Committee that all children in Jerusalem, without exception, receive a city-provided curriculum for peace, coexistence and interfaith understanding.

Finally, riots also occurred in the Arab-Israeli sector, even though a meaningful coalition for calm and coexistence emerged in many centers across the country. As far as we know, those who participated in the riots studied in the Israel-sponsored Arab language school system, which does not incite against Israel. So how can the violence be explained there? It seems that there is some truth in the claim of Arab-Israeli researchers that, given the lack of a convincing or relevant national message for Israel’s large and ambitious minority, the state educational system finds it difficult to shape a sense of moral or civic duty among Arab students.

So what are Israelis and Palestinians to do? First, it must be said that there are a number of positives. In Israel, the very existence of an Arab minority education system, teaching through the medium of the Arabic language

and immersed in Arab culture, is a unique achievement. At the heart of Haredi education there is an encouraging pacifist element for those who believe in peace and pluralism. The fact that Israeli Jerusalem accommodates Palestinian education is also, on the face of it, a positive phenomenon.

The problem is that all these minority curricula amount to “too much of a good thing,” with mixed results as regards violence and intolerance. Jerusalem is a case in point. To counter the tinder-box situation there, the Israeli state, the local municipality and the leaders of the various communities and PTA’s need to put far more emphasis on the commitment to peace, sharing and coexistence in all the curricula.

In addition, Jerusalem needs a city-wide peace, interfaith and coexistence program in all schools. Ways of creating benign expressions of minority identity must be developed. In parallel, problems such as school dropout rates, non-enforcement of education frameworks as well as illiteracy and ignorance in schools must be addressed.

As for the Palestinian education systems in the West Bank and Gaza, there is much to be desired. First and foremost – both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority need to teach peace and coexistence and genuinely give up dreams of eliminating the national “other” soon or at some point in the more distant future. ■

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