

The Israel/Palestine Conflict: Opening Student Minds to Both Sides and Solutions Through Educational Solutions' International University Dialogues

Judith Rahima Jensen, Ed.D. and Susan Luxton
Educational Solutions

International Conference on Education for Peace & Democracy
Antalya, Turkey, November 19-23, 2006
Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information

It is Difficult to Teach about the Israel/Palestine Conflict in the University

In 2006, Britain's largest faculty union, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, voted to call "its 67,000 members to consider individually boycotting Israeli academics" (Chronicle of Higher Education, 9 June 2006).

In 2005, Columbia [University]'s "Arab-studies professors . . . [came] under heavy fire from politicians and newspapers like the *Sun*, which have accused the professors of promoting pro-Palestinian views, disparaging Israel, and intimidating pro-Israel students" (Chronicle of Higher Education, March 4, 2005).

Over the past few years, American Jewish philanthropists "have sought to counter what they see as a pro-Palestinian propagandist view of Israel by endowing chairs, centers, and programs in Israeli studies (Chronicle of Higher Education, June 24, 2005).

In 2004, Duke University ran into high security expenses as well as "thousands of e-mail messages and phone calls from parents, alumni, and strangers who opposed the decision" to host a student meeting on Palestinian rights (Chronicle of Higher Education, October 29, 2004).

How to Teach Both Sides and Solutions

So we at Educational Solutions had an idea;

- Create a balanced curriculum so that both sides feel heard and can learn about “the other.” (A difficult task indeed)
- Have university classes paired “across the divide”
 - Students study same curriculum for one month
 - Students dialogue (in a civil manner) via text over the ES Website and via videoconferencing

Objectives of the April 2006 Pilot University Dialogue

- Students learn both sides of the conflict
- Students learn about possible solutions

Participants

American University of Sharjah (AUS), United Arab Emirates

- Dr. Larry Woods and 24 students in an International Relations class.
 - All students were Muslim and came from 11 different countries: UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Russia.

Oregon Institute of Technology (OIT), U.S.A.

- Dr. Mark Clark and 22 students in a Western Civilization class.
 - All students were Christian or secular and American.

Course Content

- Eight PowerPoint units (about 40 slides each) ***carefully developed*** to communicate both sides of the conflict:
 - Introduction
 - What are the Claims to Israel/Palestine?
 - After the British Mandate and the 1947 UN Partition Plan, why did Israel become a state while Palestine did not?
 - How does the suffering of the Jews feed the conflict?
 - How does the suffering of the Palestinians feed the conflict?
 - How do Israeli and Palestinian histories from 1947-1955 differ regarding the creation of refugees? (Palestinian refugees from the state of Israel and Jewish refugees from Arab countries)
 - Why has the peace process failed?
 - What do you think are the best solutions?
- Three DVDs: *Occupied Minds*, *West Bank Story*, *The Arc*

Results: AUS and OIT students were asked what was the most important point(s) you learned

AUS 79% (15/19) stated both sides of the conflict and/or solutions. 33% responded more generally – origin, history or more information.

OIT 67% (19/15) stated both sides and/or solutions. 33% responded more generally – reasons for the conflict, difficult to solve, and you can't always trust the media.

Three of the OIT students noted that they had known nothing about the conflict before the course insert and had learned a great deal.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

What is the most important point(s) you learned in this I/P Course Insert?

MMk: Western view on the I/P conflict; Cooperation between the west and Arab world can work; with peaceful negotiations a solution would rise.

AAa: The most important point that I've learned is the discussion of Palestinian refugees and Arab Jewish refugees.

EAI: Listening to the other side is always beneficial, because even if we don't come up with solutions we will be reducing the amount of hatred and misunderstanding between different cultures and states.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF SHARJAH

What is the most important point(s) you learned in this I/P Course Insert?

AFa: That the two sides have legitimate reasons for claiming the land as theirs.

SFa: About the Arc and suggestion of a future Palestine.

AAj: The possibilities for solutions to the conflict – what ideas and thoughts have both sides come up with.

MIs: View of American students on Israeli-Palestinian issue.
View of both Israelis and Palestinians on this issue.

OREGON INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

What is the most important point(s) you learned in this I/P Course Insert?

RJo: What is happening in Palestine, why and how the Jews settled in Palestine, what happened to the Palestinians when the Jews settled, the current arguments between the two.

BBa: I learned a lot from this course. It was all important. I didn't know anything about Israel/Palestine before this.

AWr: That neither side can come to a resolution unless they understand the suffering of the other.

OREGON INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

**What is the most important point(s) you learned
in this I/P Course Insert?**

CBo: Both sides of the conflict, not just those presented by the media.

MDu: What caused and is causing/fueling the Palestinian Israeli conflict. The possible solutions.

ACr: The level of suffering and hostility on each side.

JWe: Historical roots for a conflict that I knew nothing about. I didn't really know what was going on between Israel/Palestine.

Other Results

For AUS and OIT students combined:

- 100% said they gained a better understanding of the conflict.
- 97% said they improved their understanding of the Palestinian perspective.
- 100% said they improved their understanding of the Israeli perspective.
- 94% reported improvement in their critical thinking skills.

Two Examples of Solutions

Taba 2001 – Israeli and Palestinian Negotiations

“We made progress, substantial progress. We are closer than ever to the possibility of striking a final deal,” said Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel’s negotiator.

“My heart aches because I know we were so close. We need six more weeks to conclude the drafting of the agreement,” said Saeb Erekat, Palestinian chief negotiator.

- Before the course insert, none of the OIT students and only 14% of the AUS students knew about any progress on the Palestine refugee question at Taba 2001.
- In the posttest, 71% of the OIT and 67% of the AUS improved their understanding.

“The Arc”

A Rand Proposal funded by Guilford Glazer

The Arc is a sophisticated and inspiring vision of what a Palestinian state could look like.. It is estimated that the Arc would cost about 6 billion and that it would help the Palestinians power their economy by employing 100,000 – 160,000 Palestinians a year for five years.” NYT 5/15/05

The backbone of the Arc is a light rail line which starts in Jenin in the north of the West Bank, connecting historic Palestinian towns, and hooks through Israel to Gaza. In addition to the light rail, there is a greenbelt, waterway, road, and fiber optic/electricity line. For each of the major towns there are state of the art development plans to connect the terminals to the old city centers. These plans include space for a variety of new housing and industrial development. The city plans include much open space and avoid suburban sprawl.

- None of the OIT or AUS students knew about the Arc before the course insert
- In the posttest, 93% of the OIT and 90% of the AUS students understood what the Arc could offer the Palestinian people.

Please Join Us – Fall 2007-2009

- We will be submitting proposals for funding in February 2007
- If you are interested in having your class participate in a month-long course insert with text and videoconferencing dialogue please let me know.
- If you know of a colleague who would be interested, please let me know.
- Professors review curriculum and add their own perspectives.
- We are planning 55 dialogues involving 110 universities our first year. Our goal is to involve 800 universities by 2011.

Notes on Taba 2001

January 2001 Taba Talks

Great Progress but Ran Out of Time

In an effort to save the Camp David II peace process, Israeli and Palestinian negotiation teams met for a week at the Egyptian resort of Taba in late January 2001.

Outgoing U.S. President Bill Clinton had developed parameters for a new agreement in December 2000, terms of which took the process farther than Camp David II. security.

No Americans were present at Taba as newly elected President George W. Bush had decided not to get involved in the Middle East for the time being.

At the end of the Taba negotiation period, an announcement was made that the two sides had gotten closer to reaching a Final Status agreement, but had simply run out of time politically.

After Taba talks, the new leaders, Bush and Sharon, were in office. The intifada continued and the possibility of peace became remote.

What is the European Narrative?

- **Unofficial Paper Presents Taba Results**

In February 2002, Miguel Moratinos, European Union Envoy and Special Representative to the Middle East Process, consulted with those present at Taba and prepared a paper outlining the negotiations.

This paper is called “The European Narrative of What Happened at Taba in January 2001 in the Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations on Permanent Status Issues.” Moratinos’ work “had no official status, [but] it has been acknowledged by the parties as being a relatively fair description of the outcome of the negotiations on the permanent status issues at Taba.”

The paper further “draws attention to the extensive work which has been undertaken on all permanent status issues like territory, Jerusalem, refugees and security in order to find ways to come to joint positions. At the same time it shows that there are serious gaps and differences between the two side, which will have to be overcome in future negotiations. From that point of view, the paper reveals the challenging task ahead in terms of policy determination and legal work, but it also shows that both sides have traveled a long way to accommodate the views of the other side and that solutions are possible.”

(“The Taba talks, 2001”, <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/pal/tabam2001.htm>)

Taba 3. Refugees

(excerpt from *The European Narrative*, Miguel Moratinos, European Union Envoy and Special Representative to the Middle East Process)

Non-papers were exchanged which were regarded as a good basis for the talks. . . . Both sides suggested, as a basis, that the parties should agree that a just settlement of the refugee problem in accordance with the U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 must lead to the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Both sides maintained their respective narratives regarding the essence of UNGAR 194, namely the right of return vs. the wish to return.

3.1 Narrative

The Israeli side put forward a suggested joint narrative for the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian side discussed the proposed narrative and there was much progress, although no agreement was concluded. . . .

3.2 Return, Repatriation, and Relocation and Rehabilitation

Both sides engaged in a discussion of the practicalities of resolving the refugee problem. The Palestinian side reiterated that the Palestinian refugees shall have the right of return to their homes in accordance with UNGAR 194. The Israeli side expressed its understanding that the wish to return as per wording of UNGAR 194 shall be implemented within the framework of one of the following programs:

Taba 3. Refugees (continued)

3.2 Return, Repatriation, and Relocation and Rehabilitation (continued)

A. Return and Repatriation

1. to Israel
2. To Israel swapped territories (Israeli territory transferred to the Palestinians in a land-swap agreement), which will be over and above territories discussed in the territorial negotiations.
3. To the Palestinian State

B. Rehabilitation and Relocation

1. Rehabilitation in a host country
2. Relocation to a 3rd country

Preference in all these options shall be accorded to the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon

The Palestinian side stressed that the above shall be subject to the individual free choice of the refugees.

The Israeli side, informally, suggested a three-track 15-year absorption program.

The first track referred to the absorption to Israel. No numbers were agreed upon, but with a non-paper referring to 25,000 in the first three years of the program (40,000 in the first 5 years of this program did not appear in the non-paper but was raised verbally. The second track referred to the absorption of Palestinian refugees into the Israeli territory that shall be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty, and the third track referring to the absorption of refugees in the context of the family reunification scheme.

Notes on The Arc

The Arc

Guilford Glazer funded a Rand's study, *The Arc: A Formal Structure for a Palestinian State*, a remarkable vision of a modern, prosperous Palestine.

Glazer, a prominent American Jew and a staunch supporter of Israel, emphasizes one of the most important components of conflict resolution: make sure all parties have a vision of a better future.

“My father used to tell me that a man with nothing to lose is very dangerous ... We need in our self defense, to make sure they (Palestinians) have something. Failure is not an option. A seething, destabilized state of Palestine would pose a constant security threat to Israel. A viable sustainable state might just ensure a regional calm.”