Paulo Freire and the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: The Pedagogy of a Social Justice and Experiential Educational Program in Israel and Palestine

Paulo Freire y el Conflicto Israel-Palestina: La Pedagogía de la Justicia Social y un Programa de Educación Experiencial en Israel y Palestina

Paulo Freire eo Conflito Israel-Palestina: A Pedagogia da Justiça Social e Programa de Educação Experiencial em Israel e na Palestina

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This article explores the theoretical and practical approaches of a social justice education program in Israel and Palestine called Beyond Bridges: Israel–Palestine (BBIP), with particular attention paid to the pedagogical underpinnings based in Paolo Friere's thought. In this pursuit, the article's three objectives are to examine Paulo Freire's approach to education and social justice, which forms the core of BBIP's pedagogical orientation; to look at a number of ways that Freire's pedagogies play out during the immersion in Israel and Palestine; and to describe BBIP while exploring Freire's imprint on a daily program activity called "Group Process." Our underlying argument is that the Freirean pedagogies of social justice education have positively impacted conflict transformation educational programs such as BBIP because they underscore the necessity of critical reflection and tangible action, establishing both as essential elements of the process and goal of social justice education.

Keywords: Paulo Freire, Social justice education, Critical pedagogy, Social identity theory, Experiential education.

Este artículo explora los enfoques teóricos y prácticos de un programa de educación para la justicia social en Israel y Palestina llamado "Beyond Bridges: Israel-Palestina (BBIP)", el programa pone especial atención sobre los fundamentos pedagógicos del pensamiento de Paulo Freire. Los tres objetivos del artículo son examinar el enfoque de Paulo Freire sobre la educación y la justicia social, que constituye el núcleo de la orientación pedagógica del programa BBIP; estudiar las formas en que la pedagogía de Freire incide en la inmersión en Israel y Palestina; y describir el programa BBIP mientras se explora la impronta de Freire en una actividad llamada "Proceso de grupo." Nuestro argumento subyacente es que las pedagogías freireanas de la educación para la justicia social han impactado positivamente sobre los programas educativos de transformación de conflictos como el programa BBIP ya que señalan la necesidad de reflexionar de manera crítica y poner en marcha acciones concretas que establecen elementos esenciales para alcanzar el objetivo de la educación para la justicia social.

Descriptores: Paulo Freire, Educación para la justicia social, Pedagogía crítica, Teoría de la identidad social, Educación experiencial.

Este artigo explora as abordagens teóricas e práticas de um programa de educação para a justiça social em Israel e na Palestina chamado "Beyond Pontes: Israel-Palestina (BBIP)", o programa presta especial atenção para as fundações educacionais do pensamento de Paulo Freire. Os três objectivos do documento são de rever a abordagem de Paulo Freire na educação e na justiça social, que constitui o núcleo da orientação pedagógica do programa de BBIP; estudar as formas em que a pedagogia Freire afeta imersão em Israel e na Palestina; e descrever o programa BBIP enquanto a marca de Freire em explorar uma atividade chamada "grupo de processos." O nosso argumento principal é que pedagogias freireanos de educação para a justiça social tem impactado positivamente sobre os programas educacionais de transformação de conflitos como o programa BBIP porque eles ressaltam a necessidade de refletir criticamente e implementar ações específicas que estabelecem fundamentos para atingir a meta de educação para a justiça social.

Palavras-chave: Paulo Freire, Educação para a justiça social, Pedagogia crítica, Identidade social, Educação experiencial.

Introduction

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is all too often taught and studied only through the lens of economics, history, politics, religion, and sociology, among numerous other academic disciplines[1]. Although the academic reasons behind these approaches are sound, it is equally if not more important to study ways in which the how and why behind this seemingly intractable conflict can lead to its ultimate end. By examining this decades-long conflict through the lenses of social justice and conflict transformation, including social justice activists in Israel and Palestine, it becomes possible to de-exceptionalize this ostensibly exceptional conflict. Such a framework empowers students to understand ways to end conflicts that plague those living in Israel, Palestine, and beyond.

This article looks at one program that integrates social justice education and conflict transformation. In this effort, it aims to add to the already rich literature of how Paulo Freire's pedagogies have manifested in educational immersion programs, including those taking place in Israel and Palestine, as well as how his work has been applied to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict generally (Gur-Ze'ev 2000; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano 2002; Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Khsheiboun 2009; Platt 2012; Hahn Tapper 2013; Silwadi & Mayo, 2014). Based at the University of San Francisco, this program, Beyond Bridges: Israel-Palestine (BBIP), takes students to Israel and Palestine for a three-week immersion program to learn about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict while simultaneously exploring larger issues of conflict, identity, and social justice. Like other immersion programs, BBIP combines rigorous academics and text study with experiential education, allowing participants to explore questions at the core of all conflicts. It creates spaces for both personal and collective growth, helping participants gain new understandings of the roles they play in international conflicts and how this relates to their political identities. This program also allows students to investigate their multi-layered social identities, while focusing on both personal development and conflict transformation.

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[1] Please note that sections of this article are taken from the following source, which was written by Aaron Hahn Tapper: Hahn Tapper, A. J. (2013). A pedagogy of social justice education: Social identity theory, intersectionality, and empowerment. Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 30(4), 411-445. Not all of these sections have been put in quotation marks so as to make this article less cumbersome to read.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is complicated. From a United States-based perspective, it also garners more attention than most other global conflicts (Bernstein 2010). In order to establish a pedagogical framework that takes these factors into account, it is essential to introduce students to the historical chronology and context of this conflict while also exploring and analyzing the roles that the various stakeholders play in terms of culture, economics, nationalism, politics, religion, and nonviolent and violent behaviors. This includes the varied interpretations of these historical events from the perspectives of Jewish Israelis, Palestinians, and others. Arguably the best place to do this is in Israel and Palestine; this gives students the opportunity to engage in issues where they take place. Through carefully designed hands-on activities, students can be taught to develop their awareness of the potential to transform this conflict and bring it to an end.

As the directors and lead educators for BBIP, we have been intimately involved in every aspect of the program and traveled with the students to Israel and Palestine for its duration. Although this creates an obvious partiality, the goal of this article is not to evaluate the extent to which the program has succeeded or not in terms of its pedagogy. Rather its intent is to describe the program's rare approach to social justice education in both theory and practice. This article does not set out to heighten the stature of the program, offering its model of conflict transformation and social justice education as the yardstick to which others should compare themselves or even aspire. Instead, it explores one form of social justice education in an effort to add to the larger field. In this light, our relationship to the program is not a hindrance but makes us exceptionally well situated to carry out this task.

This analysis also integrates participatory observations made during the program as well as in-depth interviews conducted with, and surveys completed by, BBIP student participants, in particular a 137-question student evaluation completed the penultimate day of the program by all participants. Using these data, we begin by looking at Paulo Freire's approach to education and social justice, which forms the main educational pillar upon which the program's pedagogy is based. Second, we discuss multiple ways that Freire's pedagogies of social justice education play out during the three-week immersion in Israel and Palestine. Third, we focus on the dialogic encounter during the program's daily "group process" sessions. At the end of the article, we briefly look at ways this program impacts its students, not in terms of using the evaluative criteria of success/failure but rather by utilizing students' own words and program descriptions. The article's underlying argument is that pedagogies of social justice education positively impact conflict transformation educational programs, exemplified by BBIP, because they focus on critical reflection and tangible action as essential to the process and goal of social justice education.

1. Paulo Freire, Conflict Transformation, and Social Justice Education

1.1. Freire and conflict transformation

Over the past few decades, practitioners and theoreticians in the fields of conflict resolution, conflict transformation, education, and service-learning have begun using the term social justice education in increased numbers (Enns & Sinacore, 2005; Zajda,

Majhanovich, & Rust, 2006; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel. 2009; Adams et al., 2010; Cipolle, 2010; Zajda, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2011). Such practitioners and scholars are increasingly integrating elements of social justice education into their programs and scholarship because such a framework focuses on shifting social imbalances manifesting in the status quo. More specifically, "it centers on understanding disparities in terms of societal opportunities, resources, and long-term outcomes, particularly among marginalized groups" (Shakman, et al., 2007, p. 7).

One key principle in conflict transformation theory is that conflict transformation requires both systemic and personal transformation (Fisher et al. 2000). Integrating principles of social justice education into conflict transformation programs allows practitioners to better investigate the possibilities of personal transformation as a key element of transforming conflict. Personal transformation requires *conscientizacao*, the Portuguese term Paulo Freire (2007) uses to describe the process of critical reflection and tangible action. This method helps students learn "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35).

Critical reflection allows students to move beyond simplistic understandings of a given conflict because they are taught how to analyze their multi-layered social identities in relation to the world around them. They are not encouraged to explore a conflict as some sort of objective phenomenon, as something that exists irrespective of those that study it. Instead, they are taught how to connect their social and political identities to a given conflict, whether as a witness, member of a so-called third party, or another role entirely. This creates opportunities "to deepen awareness of the interconnected moments in the process of individual and collective emancipation" (Giroux, 2001, p. 227).

1.2. Freire and social justice education

For renowned Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, education is the key to enacting social justice (Freire, 2007). Freire contends that education provides venues for students to achieve freedom, both intellectual and physical—the "indispensable condition for the quest for human completion" (Freire, 2007, p. 47). This, he says, should be a primary pedagogical goal of all educational activities. Drawing from his own life experiences as someone born into socioeconomic poverty, Freire asserts that education either domesticates or liberates students and teachers (Rozas, 2007). For this reason, education often plays a major role in perpetuating the status quo, especially in terms of power, something Freire thinks needs to be challenged and transformed (Freire & Faundez, 1989). In his words: "It is impossible to think of education without thinking of power…the question…is not to get power, but to reinvent power" (Evans, Evans, & Kennedy 1987, p. 226).

In his monumental treatise Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (2007) explores common classroom dynamics, illustrating the role that identity plays in the shaping and implementation of educational settings. One of his most important arguments is that students' identities need to be taken into account in every educational situation. Freire explains that students should not be approached as if everyone in a classroom, including the teacher, is starting from the same place in terms of social status and identity.

Although virtually no one discounts the central role that teachers play in the classroom, Freire extends this point, expounding upon how a teacher's social identities play as

much of a role in a classroom environment as anything else. He says that an ideal educational experience exists between a teacher and students rather than emanating from a teacher to students. A teacher needs to create experiences with, and not for, students, integrating students' own experiences and voices into the educational experience (Freire, 2007). Teachers' and students' identities are thus tied to one another in an interlocked relationship (Rozas, 2007).

Unfortunately, Freire laments, most educational milieus solidify patterns of inequality, ultimately reinforcing and regenerating domination rather than breaking free from them. This commonly happens through the banking system of teaching, where educators try to "deposit" a set amount of information into students' minds (Freire 2007, p. 109). Such a form of education fails its students because, among other things, it does not take into account their realities, their "situation in the world," especially in terms of "their social statuses and identities" (Freire 2007, p. 96). Instead, it ignores these critical elements of the classroom in an effort to impart or impose "knowledge" (Freire 2007, p. 94).

Freire does not merely critique the field of education; he offers ways to transform all educational endeavors. He asserts that one way to move students toward freedom is to create an educational structure whereby both teachers and students engage in habitual, critical reflection, a model that takes into account their social identities. According to Freire (2007)

> *Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.* (p. 77)

2. BBIP: Freire and Social Identity Theory

BBIP bases its educational methodology in Freirean thought, exemplified, perhaps above all else, in its effort to put the social identities of the students and staff (whether teachers, facilitators, or coordinators), as well as the power dynamics that exist in relation to these signifiers and roles, front and center in the educational experience. Put another way, BBIP strives to embody the very ethos to which it aspires for its teachers and students to internalize and enact. BBIP even extends this approach in its aim to analyze the social identities of its students and staff in relation to the people in whom the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is primarily embodied, Jewish Israelis and Palestinians (as well as minority groups living in Israel and Palestine), and in relation to larger social, cultural, and political dynamics.

As such, BBIP's model is rooted in social identity theory, which posits that intergroup encounters must be approached in and through students' larger social identities. This theory assumes that structured intergroup encounters reflect or are influenced by the dynamics that exist between the communities "outside the room," that is, in the larger societies in which the encounter is embedded. Ellemers and Haslam (2012) describe the theory in this way:

> *Social identity theory is a "grand" theory. Its core premise is that in many social situations people think of themselves and others as group members, rather than as unique individuals. The theory argues that social identity underpins intergroup behavior and sees this as qualitatively distinct from interpersonal behavior. It delineates the circumstances under which social identities are likely to become important, so that they become the primary*

> *determinant of social perceptions and social behaviors. The theory also specifies different strategies people employ to cope with a devalued social identity.* (p. 379)

Social identity theory maintains that human beings are social by virtue of their relationships with one another, an existence embedded within a vast web of networks that are constructed by identity-based associations. Everyone, to one degree or another, is a member of a multitude of social groups that are shaped in relation to ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, socioeconomic class, and other categories. People normally relate to one another through the entry points of the social groups to which they belong, sometimes regardless of whether other individuals actually identify them with these groups. Perhaps most importantly, social identity theory contends that when individuals relate to one another, actions are usually perceived, first and foremost, as being representative of the assorted social groups to which they belong rather than as individual examples of behavior. Consequently, individuals have group identities that they choose, as well as group identities that are imposed on them. People-to-people interactions exist within this context. In fact, according to social identity theory, individuals' behaviors are shaped more by their collective identities than personal identities.

Scholars of social identity theory attribute the establishment of this theory to Henri Tajfel (1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner 1979, 1986), who posits that social groups regularly express special attributes or characteristics that define their behaviors. Such conduct is linked to individuals who identify with collectives, which often manifest in terms of how particular groups interact with one another in society at large (e.g., dominance or subordination). Social identity theory also speculates that groups favor "their own," frequently at the expense of "the Other" (Goar, 2007). In this sense, social identities are one of the primary criteria through which power is produced, enacted, and maintained, as power exists in terms of social relations (Foucault, 1972, 1980).

Using social identity theory to examine power, privilege, and oppression, above all else the program aims to transform, not perpetuate, the status quo. This is where the pedagogies of social justice education and Paulo Freire's contributions are most significant. BBIP does not try to impart an ideologically based set of information onto students. Rather, the primary goal is to have students teach one another about social identities and intergroup dynamics using critical thought. Teachers and facilitators are understood to be gently guiding, rather than fervently leading, students through this process, assisting in steering the experience while not actually piloting it in a top-down, dictatorial manner, always using and reinforcing academic methods of critical thinking and serious reflection. As the program reaches its conclusion, students and teachers co-construct knowledge based on their collective educational and personal experiences developed through the program. It is precisely in this dialogic encounter between teacher and student (as well as student and student) that critical thinking and self-reflection is generated, something that often inspires action among the program participants.

3. BBIP: Freire, Program Specifics, and Pedagogy

3.1. Description of program

BBIP is one example of an educational program whose pedagogy is rooted in Freirean thought. This short-term study abroad immersion program is open to university

students of all social identities and backgrounds who are interested in conflict transformation, social justice, Israel–Palestine, and/or international relations, among many other topics and academic disciplines. (This said, BBIP is suited to work with non-university students as well, ranging from middle school through those who have retired from the work place.) BBIP is run in partnership between the University of San Francisco's Center for Global Education and the Center for Transformative Education, the latter a non-profit educational organization whose goal is to educate students about social relations between communities, including issues such as social inequalities and power relations, and to empower students to mobilize their communities to practice just alternatives to the status quo.

BBIP takes university students to Israel and Palestine on a journey of comparative conflict analysis and conflict transformation. It combines rigorous academics and practical hands-on training, allowing students to explore questions at the core of all conflicts. BBIP also creates spaces for both personal and collective growth, helping students gain new understandings of the roles they play in international conflicts, and how this relates to their political identities. Moving beyond the stage of practical peace agreements, or "beyond bridges," the program challenges participants to look at long-term solutions to end inter-communal conflict, exploring potential ways to assist in transforming societies into their potential. Focusing on the ways in which student identities are practiced and how they are linked to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict specifically and inter-communal conflict generally, the program relies on Freire's belief that "without practice there's no knowledge; at least it's difficult to know without practice" (Horton & Freire 1990, p. 98).

This case study presents and analyzes educator and student experiences from the three summer programs that took place during June and July in 2010, 2011, and 2012. During these three programs, there were a total of 37 students, 28 of whom identified as female and nine of whom identified as male (every student self-identified in terms of the dominant gender binary). The students were racially, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse. They had a range of experience with regard to international travel and cross-cultural immersion, and varying knowledge of and familiarity with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict prior to participation in the program. Over the three programs there were eight different educators who had varying roles and responsibilities, from coordinating the daily schedule to leading workshops and facilitating group process dialogues. Out of this group of educators, four identified as Palestinian and four identified as Jewish American or Jewish Israeli, including the authors, who are both Jewish Americans.

3.2. Pedagogy—general

BBIP is unique in three fundamental ways. First, it uses a comparative approach to studying the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is utilized as an entry point into re-examining and de-exceptionalizing conflicts around the world, such as conflicts in the Balkans and Northern Ireland. This also allows for analysis of the ways similar social patterns, in terms of the relationship between power and social identities, exist in the Middle East and elsewhere, such as in the United States. Virtually all immersion programs in Israel and Palestine focus exclusively on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Second, it uses study groups to transcend simple understandings of the conflict. BBIP considers each participant to embody particular self-defined political (or social) identities. As such it not only engages with Palestinian and Israeli sites, speakers, and academic texts, but also provides spaces for students to study themselves and their location in the world (see "Group Process" below). Third, the program is rooted in experiential education; the conflict region is studied with local Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, giving participant's insights and opportunities they cannot get from books alone. For example, when writing the BBIP program director, one female student who participated in the program after her first year of university (when she also took a course with the same educator) said, "The educational materials have been interesting and thought provoking, but the materials we have learned from the outside world have been far more worthwhile. Using what I learned in your class last semester and actually seeing it first hand has been probably the most amazing educational experience I've ever had."

3.3. Pedagogy—day-to-day content

In terms of structure and educational content, during BBIP participants spend three weeks together in Israel and Palestine while engaging in three distinct activities: presentations, workshops, and "group process." During presentations, students meet members of various Jewish Israeli and Palestinian communities, including scholars, religious and political leaders, activists and organizers, and members of civil society. The topics of these presentations range from "Nationalism and Ethnicity in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza" and "Communal Narratives and War" to "The Role of the Media in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict" and "Nonviolent Activists in Israel and Palestine." Though interactive and always creating spaces for "questions and answers," presentations are more frontal in nature, with students engaging through listening more than speaking.

In contrast, the workshops are much more interactive and involved. Providing spaces for students to examine various themes in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and how they compare to patterns found in other conflicts, examples of these workshops include "Introduction to Comparative Conflict Analysis," "The Politics of Identity," "Violence and Nonviolence in Conflict Areas," and "Gender and Society." Workshops, which are led by BBIP educators, are much more about the students and their intellectual thought process, as opposed to learning with and from local Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. BBIP educators lead students through specific themes that help connect the content of Israel and Palestine—whether embodied in speakers or visits to important sites—to social in/justice patterns present outside the general location where the trip takes place. Finally, group process sessions allow participants to engage in facilitated sessions where they reflect on their social backgrounds, socialization processes, and systems of knowledge production (see "Group Process" below).

During BBIP, students meet individuals who identify with positions found across the social, cultural, and political spectrum in Jewish Israeli and Palestinian societies: scholars of all stripes and across all disciplines; soldiers in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF); Palestinian militants; Jewish Israeli settlers; nongovernmental workers staffing organizations committed to human rights or people-to-people encounters; Shoah (Holocaust) survivors; Jewish Israeli conscientious objectors (who refuse to serve in the IDF); rabbis; sheikhs; politicians representing the Israeli government or Palestinian Authority, who identify with parties deemed left, center, right, or none of the above;

Jewish Israelis of Middle Eastern and North African descent; Palestinians with Israeli citizenship as well as those without it. Since 2010, when BBIP was first launched, students have not traveled to Gaza due to its inaccessibility.

In a typical week, students might visit a Palestinian refugee camp and Israeli settlement in the West Bank; tour sites in Jerusalem's Old City sacred to Muslims, Christians, and Jews; meet with a staffer who works for an Israeli member of Knesset; speak with one of the founders of the Israeli Black Panthers; tour the Israeli "Independence Hall"; travel to Yasser Arafat's mausoleum; walk around Har Herzl, Israel's military cemetery; visit destroyed Bedouin villages; tour Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial complex; swim in the Mediterranean Sea; and have a pizza dinner overlooking the Dome of the Rock. These seemingly disparate experiences expose students to multiple narratives, cultures, histories, communal truths, and political ideologies, enabling them to draw on the experiences of those engaged in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict every day.

Since BBIP gives students only three weeks to learn about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict experientially, it has basic limits in terms of time. The program recognizes that, by definition, this experiential educational trip has a built-in bias insofar as there are a limited number of things that can be done during this period of time, even if the partiality is multi-perspectival and exposes students to as much difference as possible. Perhaps more importantly, the program does not have a position with regard to the best way to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (e.g., a two-state solution, a one-state solution, etc.), though many speakers insert individual and organizational perspectives during presentations. Instead, BBIP exposes students to a variety of Jewish Israeli, Palestinian, and international opinions as to what the best political resolutions are, aiming for students to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of each position and to formulate their own political opinions based on experiential learning, witnessing, dialogue, and reflection.

3.4. Pedagogy—goals

In this effort, BBIP has five main goals: To explore students' understandings of their individual and group identities; to deepen students' awareness of the existence of social inequalities; to assist in developing students' conception of the interconnection between social inequalities and social identities; to examine the roles students play in both perpetuating and working against patterns of inequality; and to empower students to work toward societal transformation in and through their identities.

Connected to all five of these goals, an overarching BBIP objective is to teach students how people function within the context of social identities and power relations, the latter as they exist in and through interpersonal and inter-communal interactions. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a springboard and starting point for examining these complex and multilayered social, cultural, and political interactions, human patterns of behavior that exist in virtually every country in the world. In fact, the educators of the program are trained to work toward students' gaining a deeper understanding of all of their multilayered social identities while also internalizing that although social identities play a major role in shaping how people interact with one another in society, this does not necessarily need to be the case. The educators therefore help students to imagine more just and equitable societies.

Indeed, conflict transformation is rooted in the ideas that current realities can be changed into something else and that conflict transformation on a communal level

requires transformation at the personal level. In this regard, BBIP exemplifies Freire's pedagogy of critical social justice education because its approach makes students aware of both social inequalities and the ways in which their own social identities play a role in how they experience what they learn. BBIP student participants learn that the personal is political and the political is personal. Put another way, they are taught the Freirean idea that it is impossible to remove politics and social identity from the context of learning.

3.5. Pedagogy—BBIP educators and "neutrality"

The social identities of the program's educators are integral to the program's pedagogical approach to social justice education, since the personal is political for the educators as well. The authors of this article were personally involved in all three BBIP programs that took place in 2010, 2011, and 2012, and took on multiple roles as educators in each one. In addition to directing and organizing the program, we designed the curriculum, planned the daily schedules, facilitated group processes and workshops, and gave lectures. Each of these three summers at least one of us lived with the students in Jerusalem and immersed in everyday life in Israel and Palestine alongside our students.

BBIP educators do not claim to be "neutral" nor do they take an "objective" approach to the education of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Rather they recognize that their own social, cultural, and political identities play an important role in how they understand, experience, and teach the conflict. Just as BBIP students are expected to engage in a deeply reflexive process during the three-week immersion program, the educators are also expected to critically reflect on their social identities as connected to larger struggles of privilege, oppression, and social justice. Since the educators are both Palestinian and Jewish, they model for the students the liberatory possibilities of building alliances across different social groups, exhibiting the power of the dialogic encounter. We, the authors, regularly brought attention to our Jewish American identities, modeling for our students the myriad ways in which it is possible for Jews and Palestinians to interact in meaningful, nonviolent, and substantive ways. In this sense, everyone is "simultaneously teachers *and* students" (Freire 2007, p. 72).

But we are also quick to shed light on the process whereby the authors, other BBIP staff, students, and more, all embody multiple identities simultaneously. In other words, the authors are forthright about identifying as Jewish Americans. Although our Jewish and American identities play a profound role in our educating and learning about, as well as our engaging with, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we have multiple other identities in terms of age, able-bodiedness, gender, race, sexual orientation, socio-economics, and so on, each of which plays a role in how we approach the conflict. BBIP focuses on the weaknesses of approaching conflict transformation using a universal lens (i.e., "We are all humans so we should stop killing one another") as well as a particular lens (i.e., "We are Jewish Americans so you know what we think about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict"). Approaching comparative conflict analysis and transformation from either end of this spectrum -refraining from constantly being mindful of complex social identities and their relationships in the world around us- is myopic at best and harmful at worst (Hahn Tapper 2013).

Although ideological and pedagogical balance is challenging and ultimately imperfect, a key objective of BBIP's approach is to expose, examine, and teach students about the

complexities of both conflicts and identities. The program openly acknowledges that its two primary methodological goals are to complicate students' understandings of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and to leave them with more questions than answers. This technique helps students sharpen their critical thinking skills and develop their own thoughts rather than socializing them with a particular point of view, as do other programs that focus on teaching about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Kelner 2010).

4. BBIP: Freire and Group Process

The most important aspect of the program wherein students engage in a daily process of critical thought and self-reflection is group process. This intentional space is created for students to understand and articulate the ways in which the personal becomes political. In these sessions, they are encouraged to reflect on their social identities and personal experiences. This structured time gives students the opportunity to interact with other BBIP students in order to debrief their experiences -often connected to deep and contentious issues- in a safe and controlled environment.

Each group process is approached as if what goes on between the students is a reflection of the larger political realities in which the program is entrenched, using both what is in the room and outside the room as central elements of the educational experience. In these sessions, participants are always confronted with difficult questions, such as, "Will this program change anything in the larger scheme of things? If so, how? What do you plan on doing about social injustice once the program ends?"

During group process sessions, co-facilitator teams work to place the relationship between individuals and groups at the center of the educational experience rather than to explore political developments as something separate from students. Through this framework, students deepen their understanding of what it means for each one of them to be part of a particular group while simultaneously holding onto an individualistic identity (i.e., as a unique human being) and identifying with multiple other social groups. This exploratory process involves an intricate method where students learn about other students, their social identities, their personal identities, and how these identities impact both how they experience the world and interact with others. In other words, they learn about a number of things concurrently: their individual identity, their group identities, other participants' individual identities, other participants' group identities, and how each participant sees herself in relation to larger social movements, structures of oppression, or political dynamics. Interspersed within these reflections, students are also encouraged to reflect on what they have learned and experienced during their immersion in Israel and Palestine.

Group process practices education as a political act. It exemplifies for students the ways in which education is a form of liberatory politics. The facilitators challenge students to think critically together and to articulate their understanding of the world, modeling Freire's (1985) understanding that "education of a liberating character is a process by which the educator invites learners to recognize and unveil reality critically" (p. 102). Group process allows students to embody *conscientization* and recognize the world "not as a 'given' world, but as a world dynamically 'in the making'" (Freire, 1985, p. 106). Students are therefore approached as if each participant is a living text, so to speak. Put another way, if the content of presentations and workshops are speakers and texts, the content of group process is the students themselves.

In group process, participants are brought together into a space where they can literally talk about anything, though the conversation is almost always about the students' thoughts and feelings about their recent experiences in Israel and Palestine and their interactions with Palestinian and Jewish Israeli social and political actors. Facilitators strive for these sessions to enable participants to behave freely, so that students can delve into the assumptions upon which their individual and communal narratives are based. This state of being—where one feels an independence of thought, no longer experiencing the confines of social norms—is commonly experienced as liberating, even in transient doses.

As part of this process, facilitators are responsible for reflecting back to participants what they perceive to be the intergroup, intragroup, and one-on-one interactions taking place in the room (McNamee & Gergen, 1999a, 1999b; Maoz, 2000a; Halabi, 2004b). The intent is for students to gain new insights into the roles they play within these interactions and outside the room in their everyday lives. By gaining such a self-understanding, students begin reconsidering what they want to do with themselves once the program ends in terms of their social identities and the larger patterns of social justice and injustice that they now see as omnipresent.

More precisely, with this method students are taught about intersectionality, a core idea facilitators integrate into all of their reflections. If a discussion revolves around Palestinian–Jewish relations as they relate to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, facilitators underscore the method of comparative conflict analysis, drawing connections between this conflict and others. If a session focuses on the roles and responsibility United States citizens have in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, facilitators shift the students' attention from social inequalities in Israel and Palestine to those existent in the United States, which students are commonly more familiar with based on their proximity to them in their everyday lives (and those with which they are arguably less ready to engage).

Because of the way dominant and subordinate roles manifest in and through social identities, regardless of the content of a given conversation, facilitators are able to consistently assist students in connecting their learning about dynamics in one place to considering archetypal patterns found elsewhere and vice versa. This also holds true in terms of making connections between how dominant and subordinate roles play out among and between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians and how such relations manifest in terms of those with normative and non-normative gendered and sexualized identities.

Group process is rooted in Freire's understanding of dialogue. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (2007) writes, "only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 92-93). The dialogic encounter in each group process session enables students to think critically about their learning and experiences in Israel and Palestine, which in turn helps them, develop consciousness about specific social, cultural, and political dynamics they experience. As they develop a consciousness of these dynamics and make connections between them and issues of social in/justice, they realize their simultaneous capability and responsibility for making critical interventions. Perhaps the program's biggest challenge is translating the practices of critical thought and self-reflection into meaningful action once the program has ended, when students are no longer in Israel

and Palestine and have returned to the familiarity -and comfort- of their university classrooms.

5. Post-BBIP Impact: Evaluation, Challenges, and Effect

5.1. Evaluation

As with all intensive encounter and immersion programs, the ultimate challenges come once the program formally ends (Hammack, 2006). The majority of the analysis of the program's efficacy herein is rooted in questionnaires filled out at the beginning and end of each program as well as through interviews and correspondences conducted with administrators, staff, and alumni. In the beginning of the program, the evaluation is relatively short, asking open-ended questions regarding students' perspective on a number of ideas rooted in social identity theory as well as international conflicts generally and the Israel-Palestinian conflict specifically. At the end of the program (given on the second-to-last day) students are given a 137-question evaluation, asked to rate and assess every activity, site visit, guest speaker, film, and workshop both quantitatively and qualitatively. (A three-hour block of time is carved out for students to complete the evaluation.) This allows us to evaluate student experiences based on quantitative and qualitative responses, the latter also allowing opportunities for substantive feedback.

For example, at the end of the program we ask students questions such as, "How has your participation in the program affected your understanding of the role of 'inter-communal encounters' between groups in conflict? How effective was the program in raising awareness about the conflict and your own identities? Did you experience a personal transformation during the program? Did the program meet, fall short of, or exceed your expectations?"

The following comments, though from specific individuals, are common responses to the last question listed above:

> *It confused me. It pulled emotions and thoughts out of me that I didn't know I had. I have so many questions that I want to keep working to answer. It inspired a passion in me that I have never felt for anything academic before.*

> *I got a lot more out of it than I thought I was expecting. I expected to have my opinions reaffirmed and simply become more in tuned to my previous understandings. The program shook everything I thought I knew, and I still have no idea what I'm going to do with all I've learned...or unlearned.*

> *When I first came I didn't know what to expect. I had some assumptions for sure, but nothing that I expected. However, I didn't expect anything about personal narrative, which was empowering in some way.*

> *I learned an insane amount in the brief time being here. I definitely expected to see some things that I wasn't accustomed to seeing, and in that sense I got what I paid for. I appreciated that we visited speakers as well as important sites (Church of Nativity, etc.). Being outside, engaging with the environment, and actually seeing places that are holy to so many was very important to me.*

> *The program met my expectations in almost every way possible. I don't believe that as a group we could have accomplished much more than we did in such a short period of time. More than that however, I'm having a hard time imagining my life and the changes in how I view my identity had I not come on this program. It has truly been a personally transformative experience.*

> *It exceeded them. I wanted to learn more about the conflict, and I have learned so much about the complexities of the conflict that I currently feel like I'm just beginning on my journey. I was skeptical about the ability of a three-week program to have any profound effects on me, but the past three weeks have had more of an effect on my perspective than most of the last year. I am both appreciative for the program and apprehensive about how I will use what I've learned in the future.*
>
> *I would never ever take back the experience I had this summer. This has been one of my most productive summers. I always say I want to make a difference and make this world a better place but until this trip I didn't realize that just learning and being open is the first step to making a difference.*

Students have shared that the program's strength is largely a result of their experiencing the freedom to both reexamine and reconstruct their individual and group narratives -not at the expense of whatever identities they enter the program with but in and through a commitment to and relationship with such identities. During the course of the program, students are so deeply immersed in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and related processes of reflection that it is hard for them to imagine that when the program ends they might struggle to articulate what they experienced to others.

5.2. Challenges - articulating personal transformation

Many students expressed that in the months immediately after the program the hardest thing for them was not the challenge of learning about the conflict while in Israel and Palestine, but rather returning home and attempting to make sense of their experiences abroad and how they fit with the experiences and politics they had prior to the program. Students struggle to explain to their friends and family what they experienced in the three transformative weeks they spent abroad. Further, although they know they have had a transformative experience, the major challenge is that while many of their worldviews have changed dramatically, their communities at home haven't changed along with them.

Most students charge themselves with the task of educating their communities about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict beyond what people normally learn about from dominant media sources. Some students have felt responsible to make this, and other conflicts, central to their life's work from that point forward. One female Jewish student remarked, "This program has changed my life and certainly changed how I perceive this conflict and the world. I have no doubt that working to resolve this conflict is now going to dominate my future." Mostly, students understand that the personal transformation they experienced was an integral aspect of transforming the conflict, albeit an infinitesimal part of working to create a more just world.

5.3. Challenges - changing the world as an individual vs. as part of a group

Regardless whether or not students learn to internalize a responsibility to change the world around them and feel empowered to do so, students are repeatedly reminded during the program that social change is ultimately a lifelong process. They are taught that the program's goal is to start the process but not to finish it. The program gives students tools to engage in critical reflection, and students are encouraged to take action in their own communities. Further, students are not tasked with the responsibility to change the world overnight nor are they expected to impact large-scale change as isolated individuals.

They are cautioned from putting too much responsibility on themselves and are encouraged to strive for balance in their lives. (For example, they are introduced to

important ideas in the world of social justice such as activist burnout and compassion fatigue.) Students are constantly reminded of Freire's powerful axiom of the necessity to build alliances and work with others in order to make liberation and social justice possible. Program alumni commonly internalize Freire's idea that "we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other" (Freire, 2007, p. 133).

5.4. Effect - critical thought and reflection

Every student who has participated in BBIP has acknowledged the transformative power of their experiences and the depth of knowledge they gained as a result of going on this three-week trip to Israel and Palestine. For many students, BBIP is the first time they traveled outside of the United States; for some, it is the first time they left the state in which they were born and lived in through this point in their lives. The opportunity to immerse themselves in a new place and culture challenges their perceptions of their own cultures and ways of living, radically transforming how they understand themselves as individuals in relation to the world around them. In an e-mail sent to the director a few weeks after the program, one student wrote, "More than ever I can appreciate different ways of life." This immersion in a new culture forces students to undergo a process of deep self-reflection in regard to their individual identities, a process that turns out to be life altering. As another student said in her final program evaluation, "This program made me question a lot of what I believed in."

Perhaps most importantly, the success of BBIP as a case study of social justice education is seen in the fact that the program cultivates and develops the capacity for critical thought and reflection. An overwhelming percentage of students surveyed at the end of the program noted that the program helped them learn to think critically about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, as well as larger issues of social justice and their personal and political identities. When asked what skills they learned over the course of the three weeks, most students acknowledge their ability to think more critically.

One student, reflecting on her BBIP experience a few months after she had returned to the United States, said, "I can't tell you how much of a difference I feel in my studies after BBIP. My mind is picking up on many things I had never really thought about in previous classes and I find myself just a better learner. A new dimension has opened in my classroom experience." This student later reflected that the end of the program was merely the beginning of her personal and political transformation. Upon returning to her university and traditional classroom setting, she recognized a shift in her ability to think critically about the things she was reading and learning in her courses. She made sophisticated connections between theories and how they manifested in the world in various time periods.

This student was a Latin American Studies major, and as such was taking many classes pertaining to the history, culture, and politics of Latin America. A few weeks into her first semester after returning from Israel and Palestine, she wrote an email articulating the precise ways in which her experiences on BBIP had transformed her ability to think in the classroom, particularly regarding the multi-layered complexity of history: "Th[e] idea [that history is complex] really helped me with everything I learned in Israel–Palestine…After the trip, my thoughts were still influenced by different biases and I was

not seeing things as clearly as I could have. But I now look back on our trip and acknowledge *everything* is relevant to the history, not what I pick and choose." Additionally, from our group process sessions she learned that writing -which we sometimes incorporate into this daily part of the program- can be an effective method of social change. As a result, upon returning to campus she decided to contribute articles to her university's Latin American Studies Department magazine.

Another student noted in the final program evaluation, "I feel much more confident with my ability to critically analyze something from many perspectives as well as to be able to formulate intelligent questions." The focus of multi-narrative and dialogue-based learning is integral to the success of the program because it allows students to draw their own conclusions about how communal truths circulate in dominant discourses. Still another student acknowledged, "I am happy that I am leaving the program without feeling that I am attached to one side of the conflict. I feel that I now have a better understanding of the complexity of competing narratives." Learning community narratives doesn't only help students see a given conflict's complex and layered forms, but it also enables critical reflections regarding their own community's narratives and communal truths. Raising critical awareness of communal truths inevitably begins the process of *conscientizacao*. In the end, students understand that social justice is both a process and a goal (Bell, 2010, p. 21).

6. Conclusion

Despite what the program's name and curriculum suggest, Beyond Bridges: Israel–Palestine is ultimately not about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, per se. BBIP utilizes the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a platform for and window into developing students' critical thought and self-reflection. Further, it focuses on how patterns of social inequality manifest not just in Israel and Palestine or even in the United States but in places all over the world.

The program practices one form of social justice education, one that relies heavily on both Paulo Freire's pedagogy of critical reflection and tangible action and social identity theory. It attempts to infuse social justice education into a conflict transformation immersion program with the aim to bridge the standard gaps between the pedagogies of conflict transformation and social justice education. Through the educational space that BBIP provides, participants are taught to understand themselves as individuals and members of larger collectives, helping them gain insight into processes whereby group identities are constructed through encounters with the Other.

The educational model BBIP utilizes strives to serve all parties involved in the educational process, allowing participants to gain deeper insight into the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and get to know one another -culturally, ethnically, nationally, personally, politically, religiously- through an exploration, rather than an avoidance, of differences in social identities. Students are challenged to not only take responsibility for the way they enact their social identities within the program itself, but also to commit to figuring out how best to work in terms of improving society after the program formally ends. When most successful, BBIP empowers students to return to the communities they came from (as opposed to create new identities having nothing to do with their pre-program identities) and work from within to create positive change. The long-term effect of BBIP has not yet been proven. But it is clear that program participants are

constructively influenced and inspired to create a more just world, not alone but in communion with others.

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