Coexistence Education

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NATURE OF COEXISTENCE

Coexistence refers to a state in intergroup relations that comes after lasting negative relations which involve negation of at least one side, de-legitimization, violence or other negative lines of behaviors that have serious consequences on at least one of the groups involved (Weiner, 1998a). It is defined *as recognition in the right of the other group to exist peacefully with its differences, acceptance of the other group as a legitimate and an equal partner with whom disagreements have to be resolved in nonviolent ways.* This phase in intergroup relations is the fundamental prerequisite for the evolvement of advanced harmonious intergroup relations such as reconciliation. The case of détente between Soviet Union and USA in the 1970s is one of the most known cases of coexistence (Garthoff, 1994).

It is important to realize that the process of establishing coexistence begins at the lowest point of the negative intergroup relations (Bar-Tal, 2000). These negative relations may have at least two origins which are not mutably exclusive. The first origin derives from central beliefs and often ideology about possessing race, characteristics, traits, religion, heritage, or culture that make one group superior (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sumner, 1906). These central ethnocentric beliefs not only underlie attitudes of prejudice, they also often lead to behaviors of exploitation, discrimination, and mass killings and even to ethnic cleansing and genocide (Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). This was the case in Nazi Germany, South Africa during the Apartheid or in USA during the segregation. The second origin pertains to intractable conflicts that go on for many years, are intense and violent, and thus necessarily lead to deep animosity between groups or societies and even atrocities and genocide (Bar-Tal, in press; Kriesberg, Northrup, & Thorson, 1989). An example of this kind of conflicts has been the Israeli-Arab conflict, Kashmir conflict or Chechnya conflict. Of importance is the fact that the negative intergroup relations in both cases are grounded in a widely shared socio-psychological repertoire among society members, have a cultural basis and in many cases are also supported by political, economic and sometimes even judiciary institutions.

After the severe negative relations, coexistence not only implies that leaders changed their minds, that there is contact between the two sides, and that there is readiness to negotiate a new status of intergroup relations, but it indicates that large and influential segments of the society must also change their repertoire and support the new nature of the intergroup relations and that different groups, organizations, and institutions see the achievement of coexistence as an important societal objective (Chayes, & Minow, 2003; Weiner, 1998b). The main components of coexistence are:

RECOGNITION IN THE LEGIMITATE EXISTANCE OF THE OTHER GROUP

Coexistence means recognition in the existence of the other group with its differences, which may be in the realm of goals, values, ideology, religion, race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, and other domains. This recognition implies that the groups have the same right to exist and live in peace and acknowledges the legitimacy of the differences between them. Moreover, there is also recognition in the legitimacy of the groups to raise contentions and grievances that are then resolved in nonviolent ways. Each group is ready to deal with them as causes to the deterioration of their intergroup relations.

Personalization

Coexistence implies personalization of the members of the other group-that is, viewing them as humane individuals with legitimate needs, aspirations and goals.

Equal partnership.
Coexistence requires recognition in the principle of equal status and treatment of the other group(s), without superiority. This principle applies to negotiations as well as to other types of contacts.

Nonviolence
Coexistence implies that although conflict and disagreement may still be intact, the involved groups have decided to abandon violent ways of confrontation and choose peaceful means to achieve their goals. It means that the groups are ready to establish mechanisms of negotiation to deal with the list of contentions in order to resolve them.

Coexistence does not involve only acts that are implied by the described requirements. But the core of coexistence refers to a state of mind shared by the members of the society. In this sense coexistence is primarily a formative process of the socio-psychological repertoire of society members. It should be seen as a first, crucial step and a necessary condition for the continuation of the process of improving intergroup relations (Kriesberg, 1998; Lederach, 1997). Only after cementing this phase of coexistence is it possible to move gradually to further steps of constructing more harmonious and peaceful intergroup relations and of even achieving reconciliation (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Bloomfield, Barnes, & Huyse, 2003; Rothstein, 1999; Whittaker, 1999).

EDUCATION FOR COEXISTENCE

Education for coexistence refers to the process through which society members are supposed to acquire the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are in line with the ideas of coexistence. This is usually a process of societal change because education for coexistence is typically launched when society members hold ideas that contradict the principles of coexistence (Hertz-Lazarowitz, Zelniker, Stephan, & Stephan, 2004). They hold a socio-psychological repertoire that supports conflict, discrimination, or exploitation, and in order to move to coexistence, as a new state of intergroup relations, there is a need to change this repertoire also via education (Salomon, 2004). In this context, two approaches to education for coexistence are suggested: a narrow approach (school approach) and a broad approach (societal approach).

School approach.
The school approach focuses on education for coexistence within the school system. It views the school system as a major agent of socialization (Himmelweit & Swift, 1969) and concentrates on its use to change the nature of intergroup relations within society. It recognizes the limitations of persuading the whole society of the importance of coexistence ideas and, therefore, focuses on one agent, assuming that it has the greatest power of influence. The systematic school approach refers to the planned and implemented policy of central educational authorities to institute education for coexistence as a mandatory program that reaches out to all school-age children and adolescents. Thus, education for coexistence in this form is intentional, planned, controlled, mandatory, and inclusive.

The objectives of education for coexistence are to form values, motivations, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behavior patterns among children and adolescents that are conducive to coexistence. This repertoire comes to support coexistence as the new form of intergroup relations and prepares the young generation to live in these relations. On a practical level, education for coexistence requires transmission of knowledge, creation of experiences, and development of skills which can help to develop the psychological repertoire that accepts, recognizes, respects, legitimizes, humanizes, and personalizes the rival or discriminated group. To achieve this objective, the educational system needs to make major preparations. It is not enough only to declare the new educational policy which supports coexistence, but it is necessary to take active steps to implement it. Curricula must be developed, textbooks written, teachers trained, experiential programs constructed, proper learning climates created, and so on.

Societal approach

 The societal approach of education for coexistence does not limit itself to the school system, but envisages changing the socio-psychological repertoire of society at large. The assumption is that there is a need for political, social, and cultural change in the whole of society since education for coexistence cannot succeed if it is not activated on a broad societal scale. Schools can play an important role in bringing about such change, but they constitute only one agent, and a major societal change requires the participation of political, societal, and cultural institutions, mass communication, leadership, and elites.

Education for coexistence in its broad, societal sense has the following features: (1) It consists of formal and planned processes (for example in schools) as well as of informal processes (for example via mass media); (2) it involves participation of the society's political, social, cultural, religious, and educational leaders on the national and community levels to disseminate the ideas of coexistence; (3) it takes place in all the institutions of the society-political, social, cultural, educational, economic, and religious-such as schools, religious centers, or the army; (4) it has to be reflected in all the societal channels of communication from advertising or films to TV programs and school textbooks; (5) it requires the creation of supportive, new norms that will be informally enforced via social sanctions; and (6) it requires the support of legislation against racism, discrimination, and exploitation in order to enforce new values of coexistence.

It is important to note that education for coexistence following intractable conflict between two societies that live or will live in two separate political systems is more viable than education for coexistence that pertains to groups that are supposed to live in one system. The principles of coexistence are more appropriate to a situation characterized by two geo-politically separate groups since separate states can have normatively different types of acceptable relations that range from coexistence to stable peaceful relations. When the groups are supposed to live together in one political system, one state, the basic principles of coexistence do not guarantee the equality, freedom, and full political, social, and economic integration that are required for a democracy. Coexistence is only a first stage that necessarily has to be followed by more progressive steps of equal integration on the way to constructing a multicultural society. In fact, in many cases (e.g., in South Africa or Nicaragua), coexistence was not even formally set as a goal and the societies moved immediately towards full integration. In other cases, as in Israel or Northern Ireland, principles of coexistence have been used as an intermediate phase on the way to full integration. But the longer the phase of coexistence lasts without further significant steps toward full equal integration, the more it is discredited. This is the case with Israel where the Arab minority considers coexistence as a way to eternalize Jewish dominance and to continue discrimination against the Arab population (e.g., see Maoz, 2000).

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