

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Facilitating emotional reappraisal in conflict transformation

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Today emotions are seen as an integral part of conflict and conflict resolution. Research, mostly experimental or simulation based, has shown that emotional “appraisal” or “self-regulation” can have a positive effect on conflict transformation. Drawing on lessons learned from a case study of conflict transformation involving Jewish and Arab students in Israel, this paper illustrates how the “reappraisal” of difficult emotions can play a central role in creating more positive relationships. The findings suggest that reflexivity is a key part of emotional “reappraisal” and proposes a number of actions that can be taken to actively facilitate this process.

1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the role of the expression of “negative” emotions in the transformation of identity-based conflict in naturalistic settings. Over the past 20 years the role of emotion in conflict and conflict transformation has gone from being an understudied field (Jones, 2000) to being a central focus for theory and research (Halperin, 2014; Lindner, 2014; Maiese, 2006; Nair, 2008; Shapiro, 2002). This “emotional turn” (Gold, 2015, p. 114) or “new passion for emotion” (Baele, Sterck, & Meur, 2016, p. 720) in international relations and conflict studies reflects a stepping away from a purely rational actor model that separated emotion from cognition and viewed the former as irrelevant or a hindrance (Lindner, 2014; Nair, 2008). Today emotions are seen as an integral part of cognitive processes and research has shown that their effect on conflict transformation can be positive or negative depending on how they are handled (Baele et al., 2016; Bar-Tal, 2001; Behrendt & Ben-Ari, 2012; Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Halperin, 2014; Halperin, Pliskin, Saguy, Liberman, & Gross, 2013; Halperin, Russell, Dweck, & Gross, 2011; Jones, 2000; Maiese, 2006; Picard & Silta-nen, 2013; Retzingel & Scheff, 2000, Shapiro, 2002, 2010).

The vast majority of this research, however, has been carried out in either experimental studies or simulations. Very little research has shed light on the effect of emotion on conflict transformation in naturalistic settings. This paper takes a step to fill that gap by illustrating how the expression of

emotions such as anger, fear, guilt, and despair stimulated a turning point in a conflict transformation process involving Jewish and Arab students in Israel. It will show how emotional “reappraisal” (Maiese, 2006, p. 189) played a central role in changing relationships. The paper begins with a review of the literature on the role of emotion in conflict transformation processes. It then describes the critical incidents which illustrate the role emotional expression played in changing relationships for the better. The discussion section analyzes these incidents in light of the literature and sets forth a number of propositions on engaging emotional reappraisal to facilitate conflict transformation.

2 | THE ROLE OF EMOTION IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The international relations and conflict resolution literature has gravitated from a positivist approach that sees emotions as objective, fixed phenomena towards a social constructionist approach that views emotions as a matter of intersubjective interpretation (Nair, 2008). The constructionist approach claims that there is a false dichotomy between reason and emotion, arguing that emotion plays an important role in understanding the world (Jones, 2000; Picard & Siltanen, 2013). Jones (2000) posited six principles of emotional experience: they are socially constructed, elicited by interpretation of events, rule governed, constituted through discourse, a fundamentally moral experience, and developed through acculturation and learning (Jones, 2000). Linder (2014) defined emotions as “comprehensive packages of meanings, behaviors, social practices, and norms that crystallize around primordial emotions” (p. 286) and at the same time being “both hardwired and malleable, and adaptive to social and cultural influences” (p. 288). These definitions are particularly important for the mediation and transformation of conflict because they indicate that emotions, while partially instinctive or automatic, are also dependent on context and subject to control.

Recently researchers have argued that emotions are both an individual and a collective experience (Baele et al., 2016; Gold, 2015; Kenworthy et al., 2016). In support of the claim that groups have emotions, Baele et al. (2016) argued that the act of situation appraisal is influenced by a preexisting “emotional worldview” (p. 724), which they defined as an overarching cognitive framework embedded in shared axioms and myths which group members use to interpret events (p. 724). Furthermore, they argued that events trigger a complex set of emotions at varying intensities, creating an “emotional configuration” experienced at the group level (Baele et al., 2016, p. 724).

Emotions are an active component of individual and group identity because they help people to make sense of themselves in relation to others and the world in which they live (Bleiker and Hutchinson, 2014; Bodtke & Jameson, 2001; Gold, 2015). They play an especially important role in intractable, identity-based conflicts which are associated with existential needs that trigger powerful feelings when threatened (Bodtke & Jameson, 2001; Burton, 1990; Rothman, 2012; Shapiro, 2002, 2010). Shapiro (2002, 2010) argued that the gap between the current and the desired state of relational identity concerns generates emotions that interfere with creative problem solving. Closing these gaps can lead to emotions that nurture cooperative behavior and integrative solutions.

The literature points to a number of important roles emotions play in mediating conflict transformation processes. Emotions can be seen as the trigger of conflict (Bodtke & Jameson, 2001; Nair, 2008). According to this view, conflict is latent until parties cross a particular emotional threshold. As triggers, emotions are also a sign that very important issues and deeply held values are at stake and need to be addressed (Picard & Siltanen, 2013). Emotions also influence thinking, feeling, and behavioral dynamics that increase or decrease the willingness and ability of disputants to reach agreement or even to engage in transformation processes (Halperin, 2014; Halperin et al., 2013; Jameson et al., 2009; Shapiro, 2010). Finally, attending to the underlying emotions of both parties

to a conflict can increase the likelihood of conflict transformation by improving communication and mutual understanding (Jameson et al., 2009).

The constructionist view regards particular emotions as neither inherently negative nor positive in terms of their effect on conflict transformation (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Nair, 2008). Emotions such as anger, fear, or guilt can have either a positive or negative effect depending on their interpretation or context (Halperin, 2014; Halperin et al., 2011; Kahn, Liberman, Halperin, & Ross, 2014; Kenworthy et al., 2016; Lindner, 2014; Retzinger & Scheff, 2000). The idea of emotional regulation or appraisal has increasingly been used to describe the ability to reinterpret emotions so that they have a positive effect on conflict transformation processes (Lindner, 2014). Gross (1998) defined emotional regulation as “processes that are engaged when individuals try to influence the emotions they (or others) experience, when they experience them, and how they experience and express the emotions” (p. 1112). Emotional regulation implies that people can observe and interpret strong emotional impulses in ways that focus them on long-term goals and cooperative problem solving rather than immediate need satisfaction (Halperin, 2014; Halperin et al., 2011; Mischel, DeSmet, & Kross, 2014).

Maiese (2006) pointed to the importance of “emotional reappraisal” (p. 189) for significantly changing the emotions and relationships involved in a conflict situation. Shapiro (2002) made a distinction between “primary appraisals” and “secondary appraisals” (p. 72) that people make when involved in identity-driven conflicts. Primary appraisal of a situation determines whether it is relevant to their particular identity needs or concerns, particularly those concerns involving the nature of their relationship with the other party. When primary appraisal leads to gaps between the desired and the perceived state of these concerns, it generates tensions that drive identity conflict. Secondary appraisal then determines how to apportion credit or blame as well as what to do in the situation. Shapiro argued that secondary appraisal can be a process of negotiation aimed at constructing a relationship that mitigates the negative outcomes of primary appraisal. According to Shapiro (2010), negotiating secondary appraisal with the help of skilled facilitation can refocus the energy that goes into blaming the other side into finding creative, cooperative, and integrative solutions to difficult issues.

Other researchers also found that third-party intervention can have an important effect on how emotions influence processes of relationship building and conflict transformation (Jameson et al., 2009; Retzinger & Scheff, 2000; Shapiro, 2002, 2010). Bodtker and Jameson (2001) argued that enabling people to appraise conflict situations in ways which reveal previously unrecognized complexity can help them discover new options for resolving conflict. In an experimental study involving simulation Jameson, Bodtker, Proch, and Jordan (2009) found that attending to the underlying emotions of both parties increased the likelihood of conflict transformation by improving communication and mutual understanding. Furthermore, they found that these improvements were more likely when a third party was involved. The authors hypothesized that the third party played an important role in enabling disputants to reframe the situation from one of simple bargaining to relationship building as well. Encouraging people to reflect on and change their interpretative frameworks deescalated threats, fostered more constructive relationships, and led to more effective, cooperative problem solving (Halperin et al., 2011; Picard & Siltanen, 2013).

The vast majority of research on emotional regulation has been carried out through experimental studies involving the manipulation of specific emotions or cognition in carefully controlled experimental settings and simulations (Jameson et al., 2009; Halperin, 2014; Halperin et al., 2011; Kahn et al., 2014; Maiese, 2006; Shapiro, 2002, 2010). It has yielded rich and promising results for the guidance of conflict transformation. There is, however, a lack of clarity about how the expression of “negative” emotion affects conflict transformation in naturalistic settings. It is one thing to advise

mediators to engage emotions in conflict transformation processes and something quite different to put this advice in practice (Lindner, 2014; Mischel et al., 2014). Thus, there is still a need for research that guides specific methods or interventions for working with emotions in real conflict transformation processes (Kahn et al., 2014).

The goal of this paper, then, is to help bridge this gap by deepening our understanding of how emotions perceived as “negative” influence actual conflict transformation processes. It asks the following questions: How does the expression of these emotions influence the ability of people in conflict to reappraise their emotions? What is the role of the facilitator in working with these emotions?

3 | METHOD

This paper is based on systematic reflection on a conflict transformation process involving Jewish and Palestinian Arab students that was carried out through a course entitled “The College as a Natural Space of Encounter.” Two of the authors (Friedman and Aboud-Armali) were the course instructors–facilitators, and the third author (Arieli) was a critical evaluator. The course took place at a public college located in Israel’s northern periphery. The student body was approximately 75% Jewish and 25% Arab. These two groups tend to remain separate in terms of who sits beside whom, who works together on assignments, and who meets informally (Arieli, Mashiach, Friedman, & Hirschfeld, 2012). The course was a year-long research seminar for students in the third, and final, year of a B.A. program in Behavioral Sciences. It implemented lessons learned from previous cycles of action research aimed at improving relations among Jewish and Arab students (Arieli & Friedman, 2013; Arieli, Friedman, & Knyazev, 2012).

One of the key lessons from the previous action research cycles was that the majority of both the Jewish and Arab students tended to resist talking about the conflict and its implication for their relationships. Students typically claimed that there were no divisions or conflicts among them, even when there was ample evidence to the contrary—a phenomenon we called “the one big happy family fantasy” (Arieli & Friedman, 2013). When we first encountered this fantasy, we interpreted it as denial, led by the dominant Jewish majority, aimed at maintaining the status quo, and acquiesced to by the Arab minority out of fear of “rocking the boat” (Halabi, 2000). This interpretation may have been valid, but when we tried to get the students to see the actual divisions, it led to even stronger resistance. In order to find a way forward, we reinterpreted the “one big happy family fantasy” as reflecting the students’ wish to create a reality in the academic space that was different, and less conflictual, than the outside reality. Furthermore, we developed a constructionist approach to conflict transformation called “negotiating reality” aimed at helping the students build a more positive shared reality (Arieli & Friedman, 2013). This approach argued that members of conflicting groups in a natural space of encounter would be more open and able to engaging in conflict transformation if (a) they were dealing with their own immediate reality, over which they have some control, rather than the conflict in general; (b) they used their shared reality at the college as a way of exploring Arab-Jewish relations; (c) they saw themselves as active constructors of their joint reality; and (d) they acquired conceptual and practical tools that enabled them to put social constructionism into practice.

The research seminar we discuss here was intended to put these propositions into practice. Twenty-two students (18 Jewish and 4 Arab) students attended during the first year of the course, and 18 students (12 Jewish and 6 Arab) the second year. The course was conducted in a dialogue format with students sitting around a large table. The first semester focused on providing a conceptual framework and planning the students’ research projects. However, there was an emphasis placed

on dialogue and “reflexivity”; the students were trained to step back, observe, and express their internal reactions, emotional as well as cognitive, to the literature and other things that happened in the course (Kaufman, 2013). The idea here was to help students become more critically aware of how they interpret experience, how these interpretations affect them, and how their reactions contribute to the construction of reality. Throughout the course, students were asked to keep a reflective journal, which constituted the basis for a reflection paper written at the end of the course. The second part of the course was devoted to reporting on and discussing together research projects on different aspects of Arab-Jewish relations, particularly at the college.

Because this course was so different from anything they had experienced previously, we assumed that the students would not really understand what they were opting into until they experienced it. Therefore, it would be difficult to obtain true informed consent at the beginning. Furthermore, given the fact that the students would be graded by us, they might have not have felt able to make a free choice. In the first class, we explained to the students that the course itself was a form of “action research” aimed at having an impact on relations between Jewish and Arab students, including themselves. We described the course content and methods, including the reflexive journals. Students had the option to drop the course up until the second week of the course. No one opted out of the course at that time, but in 2014–2015 two students dropped out later on, though not because of the research focus. Therefore, only *after* the course was over and the students had received their final grades, did we ask for signed informed consent to use material from their reflexive journals. Only after receiving the students informed consent did we receive authorization from the institutional ethical review board to publish this paper.

Our systematic, reflective analysis of the course process and outcome made use of the following data sources: portions of the students’ reflective journals that were handed in throughout the course, the students’ final reflection papers, the facilitators’ reflective journals, observation of class sessions, some of which were tape recorded, and interviews of the facilitators conducted by the third author. Another data source was an evaluation of the course conducted by two students each year as their research project. These student evaluators based their evaluation on semi-structured interviews with the other students in the course as well as participant observation of classes, which were recorded and transcribed selectively. At the end of the second year of the course, these data were compiled into a single document and analyzed independently by each of the authors to identify major themes. On the basis of this reflective analysis and subsequent discussions, we concluded that the issue of emotions was the most salient, interesting, and puzzling aspect of our experience in the course. We then reduced the data into a case study focusing on the issue of emotion in the course. Additional rounds of analysis with the use of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature led to more specific findings and conceptualization.

4 | THE CASE STUDY

In presenting the case, we first describe the changes that occurred among both Jewish and Arab students in their own thinking, feeling, action, and relations with students from the other group. Then we describe two incidents that, in our opinion, were critical turning points in this change process. Without exception, in their reflection papers, the students reported positive changes, some quite significant, as a result of their experiences in the course. First of all, they described changes that occurred in communication as the course evolved. Most of the Arab students described changes in their confidence to express themselves and speak in class. This is very significant since Arab students tend to refrain from speaking up in class discussions, even when the discussions are not

related to sensitive issues. In the following quote taken from an Arab student's reflection of the course at the end of the year, she wrote:

Mona (all names are pseudonyms): I still remember how stressed I felt and how insecure I felt at the beginning of the year... I had never actually been in a discussion about cross-cultural issues in such an open way. I began to get to know the Jewish students in the group, to get a bit close, and to take an interest in their views. I saw that there wasn't the extremism I feared. That encouraged me, as a minority, to speak and to express my views.

The following quote from a Jewish student's reflection, illustrates changes in herself as well as in the group dynamics:

Orna: I learned to listen to my friends and their views without criticizing or putting them down. I discovered things and heard first-hand accounts—not just stories from thin air....At first...everyone was being careful about their language and were carefully choosing what they said, but with time that changed, and discussion changed. They became genuine—with people saying what they really felt.

As these quotations indicate, both students experienced themselves as being very careful in what they said and how they said it at the beginning of the course, but gained an increased ability to listen to others and to express themselves genuinely as the course progressed.

Both Jewish and Arab students reported changes in perceptions of and attitudes towards the other side. The first quote is from Yona, a Jewish student, who described the course as helping her, in her words, to “look beyond” what she saw before and recognize the feelings of Arab students as well:

Yona: At the beginning, I only saw our side, that we are the ones harmed by the behavior of the Arabs, that they are only trying to kill us and hurt innocent people, suddenly I saw that the other side, the Arab side—are themselves harmed by terror, they live in the same fear that we live in. In the final analysis, we are all people. All of us want to live in peace and quiet.

The following quote will show that Nuha, an Arab student, described a change in the way she frames the relationships with Jewish people following the course:

Nuha: I still have my own story and the story of my family as refugees, but I don't blame every Jewish person. Everything has its reasons. I began to more easily accept the story. Surely there are people who are guilty for what happened, but most important it is not you and not me.

Together with changes in perception and attitude, both Jewish and Arab students reported changes in behavior and the actual relationships that formed between them. For example:

Yafa (Jewish Student): Never before had my friends and I sat with the Arab girls and, aside from saying “Hi,” there was not real interaction between us. In addition to the effect the course had on the relations in the college...the relationships between me and my Arab friends at work began to develop and turn into an almost daily connection—and we also meet outside of work.

Rula (Arab Student): The truth is that I felt a big change during the seminar. From my first year...I thought it was impossible to develop relations and to be friends with students from the Jewish sector...In the seminar...there gradually started to be a connection and cooperation between myself and between the students from the Jewish sector. I created real relationships that I value and are very important to me. I came away from this class with completely different attitudes, feelings, thoughts and behavior....

As we can see in the above quotes, in the framework of the course, the Jewish and Arab students engaged in interactions that led to much more meaningful relationships, and for some of the students these changes in relationships went beyond the classroom and the college.

In reflecting on the course and these changes, we were struck by the fact that in both years, there were “critical incidents” near the end of the first semester in which the students expressed very powerful negative feelings about the other side. During the second year of the course (2015–2016), these feelings were so intense that we feared a breakdown in the process. Yet, in both years, when these students came back together at the beginning of the second semester (about a month later), there was a noticeable, and surprising, improvement in relations—as reflected in the previous quotations. In the following sections, we shall describe these critical incidents and the role they played in creating the change.

4.1 | Critical incident in the 2014–2015 course

In the first year of the course (2014–2015) we invited an Israeli Palestinian Arab social activist to give a guest lecture about the history and sociology of Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. His lecture turned into a crisis. When he described historical injustices and ongoing discrimination faced by Israeli Arabs, one of the Jewish students commented, “Arabs have no right to complain because they don’t serve in the army.” This sparked an argument between the lecturer and two Jewish students who rejected the lecturer’s claims that injustices had been done and are still occurring. The lecture quickly escalated into a shouting match between the lecturer and some of the Jewish students, with the Arab students remaining mostly silent.

Before the class was over, the facilitators asked the students to write down what they were thinking and feeling and to write a reflection paper about what had happened. The following excerpts are typical of what the students wrote.

Sarah (Jewish student): Without exception everyone left class highly charged. It felt like everyone was looking for someone to blame. We kept talking about it for another two hours, “wired”!

Samira (Arab Student): After the lecture, I left class feeling very confused. I thought that maybe I had not chosen the right seminar because there were things that were really hard for me to hear.

The next full class of the seminar took place two and a half weeks later. The plan was to talk about the students’ research projects, but the discussion quickly went back to the lecture. For a variety of reasons, the Arab students and the Arab facilitator were unable to attend class that day, so the meeting took place with only the Jewish facilitator and Jewish students. In the ensuing discussion, the students claimed that the lecturer focused only on the Arab point of view and only on the negative side and ignored the good things that the State of Israel does for Arabs. One student asked, “But

what if they [the Arabs] were in control? What would happen to us?”—meaning that it would be much worse for the Jews than it is for the Arabs under Jewish control.

In an attempt use this as an opportunity for learning, the facilitator asked the students to try to locate, in themselves, the “button” that got pushed by the guest lecturer and led them to react so strongly. In facilitating the discussion, the goal was to create an atmosphere in which the students felt safe to express themselves freely while at the same time reflexively looking at themselves in context in a critical way. The students spoke about guilt, fear, uncertainty, insult, anger, etc. Trying to inquire a bit more deeply into the source of these feelings did not get very far. In the discussion, the word that seemed to repeat itself the most was “terror.”

The facilitator asked them to try to put themselves “into the guest lecturer’s shoes” and to look at the situation from his point of view and his feelings, and the students said—almost in unison—“We can’t!!” It is interesting to note that the students did not say that they did not *want* to try to see the other side’s point of view, but that they were not *able* to do it.

The first sign that something “moved” in class as result of this incident was the decision by two Jewish students, who had so far resisted researching Jewish–Arab relations, to write a paper about what happens between Jewish and Arab students in the wake of terrorist incidents, a highly sensitive aspect of their relationship. Then, the student who had led the confrontation with the lecturer chose, to our surprise, the topic of improving Jewish–Arab relations as his project in a course on social entrepreneurship.

4.2 | Critical incident in the 2015–2016 course

During the first semester of the second year of the course there was a wave of terrorist incidents against Jews. Fear and tension were running high. The course plan included a field trip to neighboring Arab and Jewish communities towards the end of the semester, but some of the Jewish students were afraid to visit an Arab town and asked to cancel the trip. Others simply refused to go. Consequently, we postponed the field trip. When we announced our decision in class, it led to a stormy discussion. When one of the Jewish students said she was “afraid to visit an Arab town,” one of the Arab students said “it makes me feel like you’re afraid of me!” Some of the Jewish students responded by saying “It’s not true!” and “It’s not personal!”

Although this discussion was very tense, it was an event that was later perceived by many students as a “turning point” in the course. In her reflection paper at the end of the course one of the Arab students wrote:

It made me feel anger and humiliation because you are always talking about a “common space,” to live together Arabs and Jews despite everything, to dismantle the barriers—and then [the Jewish students] refuse to visit the place where I live. In other words, they are actually afraid of me and feel bad things about me!!...The postponement of the field trip made me speak up and say that something wrong is happening... Since then I felt like I was speaking more freely about my negative feelings, about my insecurity, and about the unpleasantness and lack of freedom about speaking—and about the barriers between Arabs and Jews.

This student’s reflection is particularly interesting because it seems to be counterintuitive. She experienced the Jewish students’ wish to avoid going on to the trip as “humiliating,” contradicting the rhetoric of the course, and exposing the truth about their real attitudes. Yet, she described this in her

reflection as a *positive* turning point, in the sense that it led her to overcome her lack of confidence and to express her real feelings.

The next week we did an exercise in which the students were to discuss their vision for the college as a shared Arab–Jewish social space. The exercise began in separate Arab and Jewish groups, so as to enable each side to independently voice its vision. In the Jewish group one of the students complained about the fact that the Arab students do not go to the army or national service. Pretty soon almost everyone was complaining about the Arabs saying things like “They don’t pay taxes!”, “They cheat on tests!”, “They get more financial aid,” and so on. A similar process took place with the Arab students group, who expressed resentment and deep anger towards their Jewish classmates regarding the field trip. The Arab students said that they felt stigmatized by the Jewish students. They expressed a loss of trust in the Jewish students and disbelief that the course could change anything. In facilitating this part of the discussion, the facilitators wanted the students to feel free to say what was on their minds without fear of being judged, reprimanded, or corrected, so they encouraged them to express themselves. At the same time, however, the facilitators directed them to be reflective, to look inside and to see where these feelings were coming from.

During the following week, a major terrorist incident took place in Tel Aviv, and the perpetrator, whose village was near the college, had not yet been apprehended. Fear and tension were running high. The next class meeting was again held in separate Jewish and Arab groups, but both groups seemed to lack interest in, or energy for, the visioning exercise. We attempted in both groups to use reflexivity by asking the students to look inside and say what they were feeling.

The Arab students expressed feelings of disappointment, anger, inequality, and injustice both towards the college and their Jewish peers. They wanted to belong but felt that when there was an opportunity to do something together, the Jewish students did not show an interest. One of the Arab students said that she expected Jewish students to treat her as an individual and not stigmatize her when something like a terrorist incident occurs.

In the Jewish group the students expressed feelings of anger, threat, despair, betrayal, nerves, insecurity, uncertainty, hopelessness. When the Jewish students were asked to try to put themselves in the place of the Arab students and to express what they believe the Arab students were feeling, they said they must be feeling “bad, blamed just for being Arabs, labelled/stained, stereotyped, shame at their own people, betrayed, unpleasantness, guilt, injustice, discriminated against.” The facilitator suggested that the feelings of the other groups were connected to their own, and led to behavior that reinforced the division between them. The students affirmed this understanding of their dynamic. The facilitator then asked them how might they act so as to change it. Their immediate reaction was to say what the students from the other side should do. When the facilitator asked what the Jewish students could do so that the Arab students would not have to feel those negative feelings in this space, most of the students said they either did not know or that they did not believe anything could help.

This was last class of the semester. The deep despair and hopelessness we felt from the students was overwhelming for us. It seemed to us that we had reached an impasse that would require a complete rethinking of the course. Given where things had left off, we expected that the atmosphere in class during the second semester would be tense and that it would be difficult for the students to communicate honestly. Much to our surprise, just the opposite occurred. The class meetings were devoted to students presenting and discussing each other’s research projects. For example, two Arab students chose to study the attempt to retain a historical memory of Palestinian villages that had been destroyed by Israel. One of them spoke of herself as Palestinian and told of her family’s experience as refugees. In our past experience, simply calling oneself a Palestinian, rather than Israeli

Arab, can be threatening to Jewish Israelis because it carries a nationalistic, and not just ethnic-cultural, meaning (Rabinowitz, 1993). Furthermore, raising the issue of destroyed villages, would almost be sure to trigger defensiveness and anger among Jewish students. The Jewish students, however, listened, asked questions aimed at understanding, and took a genuine interest in the Arab students' experience and perspective. The same was true when Jewish students discussed papers that touched on sensitive aspects of their identity and place in Israeli society, such as the experience of students whose families came from Ethiopia or Morocco. From week to week, it became clear that a barrier between the Jewish and Arab students had dropped away and that they were relating to each other in a more direct and empathic way.

5 | DISCUSSION

5.1 | “Symbolic” conflict and the expression of emotion

Our research suggests that emotions generated by these incidents triggered the open expression of conflict that the students had experienced internally but had not openly expressed (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Jones, 2000; Nair, 2008). Until that point, the students from both groups reported unease and difficulty communicating openly with each other, although no one in the class had directly experienced actual conflict with individuals from the other group. The conflict they felt between them was largely a “symbolic conflict” resulting from the fact that students from each group were aware that other class members belonged to a group with whom they, as a group, were in deep conflict. No individual in the class had a reason to feel personally antagonistic towards any individual member of the other group, but at the same time close contact with those individuals symbolized the conflict and, thus, elicited negative feelings. Prior to the course students from both groups avoided this symbolic conflict by avoiding personal interaction with students from the other group (Arieli et al., 2012). By pulling within their group and maintaining a mental separation, they could also protect themselves from the symbolic conflict.

By its very nature, the seminar changed this dynamic. It made mental separation difficult, if not impossible, and placed a premium on affiliation. It also intensified the experience of symbolic conflict and the negative emotional configuration towards the other side (Baele, 2016). The symbolic conflict became difficult to deal with because the students were unable to give it direct expression in the “here and now.” Members of both sides attempted to relate to each other in polite, friendly, and positive ways while at the same time repressing the experience of deep negative feelings which they could not fully comprehend. As long as the conflict remained hidden, this dissonance could not be resolved and the negative emotions constituted a barrier to relationship building.

By triggering the conflict, these critical incidents stimulated the students to express feelings that they had been repressing and holding in. The Jewish students in the second year, during the wave of terror, were able to give voice to the confusion they felt between their general fear of Arabs as terrorists and feelings about their Arab classmates. The Arab students in the same year were able to turn the symbolic conflict into something real in their anger over the refusal of some of the Jewish students to visit their communities. In both cases, the open expression of negative emotions appeared to lead to a resolution of the dissonance and a removal of the barriers to more open communication and relationship building. The Arab student who expressed her anger at the Jewish students for their refusal to visit her town, which she interpreted as a fear of her, said explicitly that this feeling led her to finally overcome her feelings of insecurity and to speak out.

5.2 | Facilitating emotional reappraisal through reflexivity

Our study draws from field experience in conflict transformation processes in order to complement the experimental literature on appraisal and self-regulation by identifying actions that can be taken to facilitate emotional reappraisal. Baele et al. (2016) described a cycle in which emotional worldviews influence how members of the group interpret events and communicate them to other group members such that this worldview propagates and reinforces itself. The case study indicates that this vicious cycle can be interrupted and turned into a more virtuous one if emotions are expressed and reflected upon. The students' feelings changed, or were reappraised, when they were allowed to express their feelings freely, while at the same time asking them to look reflexively at these emotions, what triggered them, and how the other side might be feeling. These findings support the experimental evidence about the positive effect of emotional expression on appraisal and self-regulation (Halperin, 2014; Halperin et al., 2011; Maiese, 2006; Mischel et al., 2014; Shapiro, 2002, 2010). We have chosen to use the term "reappraisal" (Maiese, 2006, p. 189), instead of self-regulation, because it captures how reflexivity activates the cognitive component of emotional processes. Furthermore, reappraisal is consistent with our constructionist approach, which implies a degree of self-awareness but less than the term self-regulation, which suggests more conscious control than our data indicate.

Each of the following actions provides the basis for developing hypotheses to be tested through further research and can be used to develop specific strategies for effectively working with emotion in conflict transformation.

5.2.1 | Separating the groups

For the most part, the students freely expressed their negative feelings about the other group only within their own in-group. Indeed, we believe that the fact that the students found themselves with their in-group led them to feel comfortable to openly express their true feelings. If the students had said the same things in the presence of the other group, it is likely that the outcome would have been just the opposite. It would have been very hurtful for the other side, triggering defensiveness and escalating negative feelings on both sides.

5.2.2 | Listening and legitimizing negative thoughts and feelings

The students were not criticized or corrected for expressing their negative opinions and emotions about the other side even if the facilitators strongly disagreed with them. Rather, these opinions and the negative emotions were heard and acknowledged as legitimate. There may, of course, be a limit to this acceptance if expression becomes personal or incites violence.

5.2.3 | Asking questions that invite participants to reappraise

In our case these were questions such as "What is leading you to feel this way? What buttons are being pushed?", "How do you think the other side is feeling right now?", or "What might we do to help the other side feel differently?" These statements are not direct demands to reappraise, but more subtle suggestions that there are other ways of looking at things. They are meant to gently disrupt the normal patterns of thinking so as to open a space for reappraisal, even if it does not occur immediately.

5.2.4 | Not directly negotiating to mitigate tension

It appeared as if reappraisal by members of each side separately was not only necessary but also sufficient to generate an observable change in relationship. These findings indicated that change can

occur without the direct negotiation of secondary appraisal advocated by Shapiro (2010). The students were simply asked to observe and reflect on their emotional reactions, without necessarily assuming a neutral or objective standpoint as Halperin et al. (2013) had done. However, as pointed out above, they were asked questions that might have destabilized some of their patterned ways of perceiving reality.

5.2.5 | Allowing for incubation or delay

In both years the classes in which the reappraisal occurred ended on a negative note and the effects of self-regulation were not immediately observed. In the first year, the change first appeared a few days later. In the second case, the reappraisal process took a number of weeks and change was not observed for over a month, though it is not clear exactly when it took place. In any case, the data suggests that it takes some incubation time for the reappraisal to take effect and that facilitators should not feel frustrated if it does not occur right away.

5.2.6 | Providing tools for reappraisal and training in using them

Perhaps the most important factor in explaining the change was that the students had received prior training and practice in reflexivity which probably made it more natural and easier for them to reappraise. We define reflexivity as understanding how people's worldview is both shaped and constrained by their own subjectivity (Kaufman, 2013). England (1994, p. 82) defined it as "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher." Given that the students were going to be learning about their encounter with the "other," we considered reflexivity to be a critical skill that needed to be taught.

In order to teach reflexivity, and especially reflexive writing, we devoted the third class session to an exercise on reflexive writing that was adapted from Kaufman (2013). The class began with a short presentation on the meaning of reflexivity. Next, we asked the students to respond in writing, but anonymously, to the following question: How do you experience the encounter with the "other" at the college? In our instructions we asked them to respond reflexively—that is, observing their thoughts and feelings before answering and to ask "What does this question touch in me? Where do my thoughts and feelings come from?" We gave the students 10 minutes to respond and then we collected the papers and redistributed them so that each student received the initial reflective response of a different student. We then asked them to respond reflexively to what the other student wrote. We repeated this process once more, then returned the papers to the students who wrote the original response, and asked them to respond reflexively one last time. With the remaining class time we discussed the exercise, asking students how they felt about the exercise, what they had learned, whether their thinking and feelings had changed as the exercise progressed. After this class, we asked the students to keep a reflexive journal of the classes, guest speakers, and field trips. This journal was used as the basis for a reflection paper that was a required part of the final assignment and, from which, many of the above quotations were taken.

Another way of developing skills of reflexivity was by designing the class as a dialogue process. Dialogue has been defined as "the art of thinking together" and a "living experience of inquiry within and between people" (Isaacs, 1999, p. 9). Schein (1993, p. 29) takes the idea of dialogue even further, defining it as a technology that makes "it possible for people to discover that they use language differently, that they operate from different mental models, and that the categories we employ are ultimately learned social constructions of reality and thus arbitrary." In the first class, we explained this to the students by using the metaphor of "making soup" together:

We will always sit in a circle around a large table, forming a “pot” or “container” in which we will make the soup in between us. Each one of you will add his or her particular ingredients—thoughts, feelings, knowledge, experience, questions, etc.—into the soup. If the discussion does not warm up, the soup will not cook. If it heats up too much, the soup might boil over or burn. We want it to “heat up” just enough to bubble, so the soup will cook nicely. We never know in advance exactly what kind of soup will emerge. At the end of each class, each of us will taste the soup and respond to the question “How did it taste?”

In practice, we stimulated dialogue by beginning each class began with a “check-in” and ending with a “check-out.” The “check-in” always began with a minute of silence to allow the students to collect themselves and reflect quietly and privately on what was going on with them. We then went around the circle counterclockwise and gave the students, one by one, a chance to say how they were doing or what was going on with them (“How are you?”). Each class ended with a “check-out” that also began with a minute of silence in which students could collect their thoughts. Then, going clockwise around the circle, each student had an opportunity to say how “the soup tasted” to her or him. In between the check-in and the check-out, the class could discuss theoretical issues, papers they had read, the research projects the students were carrying out, or just about anything else relevant to the seminar. However, almost every class began and ended with a check-in and a check-out, which took about 10–15 minutes each.

There were a number of important guidelines to the dialogue. If students did not want to speak during check-in or check-out, or at any other point during the class, they were free to “pass.” Usually, in group discussions, there is an explicit or implicit pressure on students to speak up publicly. In our setting, speaking up publicly is often difficult for students who are shy by nature, who are not native speakers of Hebrew (Arabs, immigrants), and/or who are unaccustomed to, or discouraged from, speaking up (e.g., Arab women). Therefore, we stressed that, in dialogue, silence is also a form of participation and a student’s silence could make a very important, strategic contribution to the class. The reasoning behind this guideline was to take the pressure off students to speak up, so that they would feel as free as possible in class. However, the paradoxical effect of this freeing-up was that eventually all the students joined into the dialogue when they were ready.

Two students, who wrote an evaluation of the course as their final paper, described the check-in as follows:

In the check-in the majority of the students shared professional and personal issues. On the professional side, the students shared with the other members of the course how they were dealing with their research projects...On the personal side, many of the students in the course, and even the instructors, tended to speak about things that touch them in their personal lives...Sharing these issues with other members of the course led the individuals to connect with the group and to build it. The individual felt that this was an open and safe place to share things and the other group members felt the connection, identification and empathy towards the individual. Thus, the check-in played a very important implicit role in building the group...It could be seen that through this sharing of their personal lives, students who came from different cultures and beliefs had an opportunity to get to know each other beyond the course content.

The same students described the check-out as follows:

During the check-out, most of the students shared their feelings about the lesson and the discussion that had taken place: what touched them, where it touched them...issues that came up or were discussed that “pushed buttons” in the students, who came away with insights and feelings—sometimes negative, sometimes positive, and sometimes with feelings that led them to think about things long after the class itself. If the check-in connected the individual to the group, the check-out moved from the group back to the individual....

As these quotations also indicate, the dialogue process facilitated the construction of a shared space among very diverse individuals and groups. At the same time that they were listening to themselves, they listening to the experience of others and how others made sense of the same, common experience. The check-in and check-out were rituals that facilitated explicit processes of connecting and enabled the students to observe the space they were creating together. These rituals also allowed the students to be themselves—that is, to express and maintain their own individuality.

Both the check-in and the check-out were weekly exercises that provided students opportunities to learn and practice the kind of reflexivity that facilitated emotional reappraisal. Dialogue made the expression of feelings a legitimate and important part of the academic learning process, along with the more cognitive, intellectual, and practical content. Indeed, students were learning that reflexivity is an integral part of conducting and discussing research. However, reflexivity was not simply about expressing emotions, but rather stepping back and looking at one’s emotions. Students became accustomed to looking at themselves at the beginning and at the end of each class meeting and making sense for themselves of what had happened. These exercise-rituals not only provided a clear structure and psychological safety in a potentially very highly charged and threatening situation, but they also encouraged a self-critical stance and taking responsibility for one’s emotions.

5.3 | The role of the facilitator

Our research also sheds light on the role and experience of facilitators in dealing with emotions in conflict transformation processes. When participants in a conflict transformation process freely express negative emotions about each other or about the process itself, facilitators too experience powerful negative emotions. During the first year of the course, we experienced it mainly during the guest lecture, and in the second year, in the discussion about the field trip when the Jewish students could not blame the Arab students. Most of the blaming occurred in separate groups, but even then, we sometimes felt that the Jewish students in one group and the Arab students in the other group were feeding off of each other’s negativity and that the discussion was getting out of hand. As pointed out above, our strategy for dealing with these moments was to accept the expression of emotions and then ask the students to reflect on them. Having such a strategy ready at hand was extremely useful when we had the feeling (fear) that things are getting out of control.

The other powerful emotion that we experienced in this case, particularly during the second year, was despair. When we asked the students to reflect on their feelings, almost everyone explicitly or implicitly expressed hopelessness and despair. Their feelings touched on threats to our own identity needs both as parties to the conflict and as teachers and at those moments we felt almost overwhelmed by despair. Our strategy for dealing with despair was to observe our feelings and to do our own emotional reappraisal. We consciously told ourselves that, as facilitators, we could not give in to despair and that our role was to hold open a space for hope.

There are many weaknesses in this study that need to be taken into account. First, as with any naturalistic study, we cannot claim causal connections. Essentially, we are hypothesizing that these

critical incidents were a key factor in causing the change in relationships. Clearly there were many other factors involved and many other events that influenced the change. Indeed, there may have been things that happened outside of class and outside of our awareness that had a critical effect on the outcome. Furthermore, there are significant gaps in our data due to the naturalistic approach and the fact that the critical incidents occurred spontaneously and not as part of conscious design. We did not try to systematically and comprehensively gauge the students' attitudes and feelings but rather depended on student self-reports, retrospective interviews and inference for observations of their behavior. The validity of these self-reports must also be treated with great caution since they might have had an interest in telling us, the facilitators, what we wanted to hear or to simply make themselves look good in their own eyes. The fact that students were interviewed by other students may have made up for some, but certainly not all, of that possible distortion.

Our findings suggest that the emotional side of conflict is as much, or more, about struggling with one's self as it is about struggling with the "other side." The idea of emotional regulation, as we understand it, is not simply a way of staying rational and putting emotions aside. To the contrary, the process requires that people express and experience their emotions as well as reframe them. The emotions that the students experienced were "negative" in the sense that they were uncomfortable. Engaging uncomfortable emotions is particularly important in dealing with the emotional dissonance stemming from what we have called "symbolic conflict" and that occurs when people, who have no direct conflict with each other, come together to try to transform the conflict between them as group members. For this reason, expressing uncomfortable emotion may be more important in conflict transformation processes aimed at improving relations rather than negotiating settlements.

The challenge in working with strong uncomfortable emotions may prevent mediators or facilitators from engaging them in spite of the growing consensus that emotion is an integral part of conflict and conflict transformation. Furthermore, the introduction of emotional work in the service of learning and transformation seemingly blurs the heavily guarded boundary between mediation and therapy (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000). We suggest that there is a middle ground between mediation and therapy, especially in intractable conflicts which leads to deeply engrained feelings of pain and trauma on both sides. Mediation and conflict transformation can be part of a healing process in the service of relationship building. From the perspective of emotional interventions, the goal of the mediator is to help people acknowledge and reframe these emotions so as to relieve pain and make engagement with the other side less threatening.

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