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Whose program is this? Negotiations in designing a student-initiated and student-led Jewish-Arab/ Palestinian dialogue program on campus

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Abstract
This research examines the Nice 2 Meet U intervention program which, unlike other programs promoting dialogue between Arab/Palestinian and Jewish students on Israeli campuses, was a grassroots program initiated and moderated by students. The program was designed jointly by the initiators, the participants and the researcher/advisor using action research. The objective of the current study was to describe the negotiations among all the partners with respect to a central dilemma: should the program include political discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The research proposes seeing the negotiations over designing grassroots conflict intervention programs as an arena in which the participants' academic, ethno-national and gender positions intersect and shape knowledge-power relations. Alongside the risks inherent in this process, it also offers potential for creating transformative spaces that challenge traditional patterns of power relations and encourage students to take part in changing the social atmosphere on campus.

Keywords
Action research, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, dialogue encounters, students' voice, participation, power-knowledge

Knowledge, power and participation, which are central issues in action research, raise complex questions that are the topic of extensive discussion in the literature (e.g., Lennie et al., 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). These issues become even more complex in research projects examining national and ethnic conflicts, since the asymmetric power relations between the researchers and the community members involved in the project derive not only from the academic position of the various participants but also from their ethno-national identities (e.g., Arieli et al., 2009; Hager et al., 2011). In some research projects of this type, at least some of the academic researchers usually identify with the majority group, while others may identify with the minority group (e.g., Arieli et al., 2009; Hager et al., 2011). In such cases, the power dynamics between the majority and minority groups to which the academic researchers and the other participants belong may also find expression in negotiations regarding the research project design (e.g., Arieli et al., 2009). These asymmetric power relations and the ensuing dilemmas and challenges may combine with unpleasant sensations such as pain, anxiety, anger and uncertainty inherent in the ethno-national conflict, together impairing the participation of the various partners and endangering the success of the intervention program as a whole (Arieli et al., 2009; Bremner, 2006; Elder, 2016; Lundy & McGovern, 2006a, 2006b). Hence, any discourse on action research in the context of conflict must focus on these negotiation processes. This paper seeks to contribute to this discourse by describing the power dynamics between a Jewish

faculty member and Jewish and Arab students as they worked together to design a campus program to promote dialogue between female Jewish and Arab/Palestinian students at an academic college in Israel. This program, called Nice 2 Meet U, began as a grassroots student initiative and became the focus of action research conducted by the academic staff.

Unlike the Nice 2 Meet U program, most planned dialogue programs between Jews and Arab/Palestinian on Israeli campuses are developed and operated "from above" by the institution's academic staff or by outside moderators hired for this purpose (e.g., Abu-Nimer, 2004; Ben-Ari, 2004; Halabi et al., 2000; Maoz et al., 2002). Although these programs are intended for the benefit of the students, for the most part students have little or nothing to do with designing them, thus raising the following questions: How would a Jewish-Arab/Palestinian dialogue program look if students were to initiate, supervise and operate it? What objectives and action methods would students choose to promote through the program? Upon what knowledge would they base the program design? The current paper seeks to answer these questions by examining the negotiations among the initiators, participants and researcher in designing the Nice 2 Meet U program and in deciding what relevant knowledge should serve as the program's anchor. The negotiation process is depicted in the context of a major dilemma deliberated by the program partners: Should the program include a political debate regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The paper outlines how the program partners dealt with this dilemma in the different stages of designing the program, with emphasis on the academic, gender and ethno-national positions of the program partners and on how these positions shaped their relationships and attitudes regarding the dilemma.

Different approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in models for planned dialogue encounters

The major models for planned dialogue encounters between Jews and Arabs/Palestinians in Israel differ in their objectives and in their attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Coexistence Model and the Joint Project Model emphasize the personal identities of the participants and seek to promote interpersonal relations and cooperation among them while avoiding political discussions of the national conflict (Bekerman, 2007; Maoz, 2011). These models have been highly criticized based on claims that by pushing the built-in aspects of inequality outside the boundaries of the group discourse they serve the Jewish majority's interest in preserving the status quo (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Suleiman, 2004). Contrary to these models, the Confrontational Model, which is grounded in post-colonial philosophy, seeks to emphasize the participants' socio-political identities and to develop their awareness of built-in mechanisms of oppression, exclusion and discrimination (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Maoz, 2011). Critics of this model claim that it tends to arouse hostility and lack of trust between the two

groups, and in some cases even leads to verbal violence among the participants (Maoz et al., 2007). Finally, the Narrative Model attempts to integrate aspects of the Coexistence Model and the Confrontational model so as to enable participants to develop interpersonal relations while sharing personal and collective narratives regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-On, 2006; Bar-On & Kassem, 2002). Unlike these four described models, the Nice 2 Meet U program is not based on any predefined outline, and its approach to the national conflict was designed in collaboration by all the interested parties during operation of the model.

Knowledge, power and participation in action research on conflict resolution

A guiding principle of action research is that participants should be involved in designing the research and the intervention program. Indeed, this participation is essential for generating knowledge that is comprehensive and useful for the community and for promoting social change in a democratic manner (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Yet implementing the principle of participation entails a range of challenges, dilemmas and paradoxes that are described in the literature in depth (e.g., Arieli et al., 2009; Lennie et al., 2003; Lundy & McGovern, 2006b). One reason that implementing the participation principle is so difficult stems from the power relations between the academic researchers and the members of the community. While action research studies strive to generate knowledge by democratic means and to blur the usual distinctions between "researchers" and "participants," in practice the "academic" knowledge is marked as more valid and valuable in the discourse than the "local" knowledge" and the academic researchers have more clout in generating the knowledge and making decisions about the program (Lennie et al., 2003; Lundy & McGovern, 2006b). Hence, the practices in action research are unintentionally liable to reproduce the power relations between the researchers and the community and thus lead to results that are the opposite of what was intended (Arieli et al., 2009; Janes, 2016).

The nice 2 meet U program: Female students initiate and supervise a dialogue group

The Nice 2 Meet U program began operating in the spring of 2017 at the Max Stern Yezreel Valley College. The program was the joint initiative of two female students, one Jewish and the other Arab-Muslim (throughout this paper we use the labels the Arab/Palestinian participants chose to describe themselves, as Arab, Arab-Muslim, Druze, or Palestinian). Both initiators students were dissatisfied with the social distance between Jewish and Arab/Palestinian students on campus. They sought to create a space that would encourage Jewish and Arab/Palestinian students to get to know one another. They chose women as the program's target audience for two reasons. First, the initiators believed this choice

would emphasize the common denominator between the participants and would encourage an open and intimate atmosphere. Second, they wanted to neutralize the power factor that characterizes relations between men and women and that was liable to result in dual marginalization of the female Arab/Palestinian participants based on nationality and on gender.

The initiators asked for help in setting up the Nice 2 Meet U program on campus. The program received institutional support and now operates as part of the Unit for Social Involvement in the Office of the Dean of Students, which offers scholarships to participants. The program is being investigated by action research led by the first author of this paper, who is a member of the academic faculty and advises the students operating the program. To date three complete rounds of the program have been completed. The first round took place during a single semester and included six two-hour sessions led jointly by the two initiators. Twenty students participated, half from Jewish society and half from Arab/Palestinian society (Muslims, Druse and Bedouins). In response to requests from the participants, beginning with the second cycle the program was extended to a complete academic year and included 12 group sessions and two joint tours. In addition, the participating students organized projects intended to promote joint life on campus. About half of the participants from the first cycle chose to continue for another year, and they were joined by ten new participants. After the initiators graduated, two other participants took over the job of moderators. Another participant was appointed program coordinator and was responsible for liaison with the Unit for Social Involvement.

The action research that has investigated the program from the outset focuses on three objectives that the researcher defined together with the initiators: 1) to help establish the program as a continuing program; 2) to define, together with all interested parties, the program's goals and modes of action; 3) to assess the program's impact. The research includes documentation of the program sessions, meetings between the researcher and the moderators, and running a focus group and conducting in-depth interviews with the participants.This paper focuses on the central program design issue in the negotiations between the initiators, the participants and the researcher: the decision whether political debate over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be part of this setting. The paper proposes viewing the negotiation process as a power relations arena in which the participants' academic, ethno-national and gender positions intersect to design the program. It relies on Foucault's view, which opposes dichotomous perceptions of power, e.g., weak-strong, oppressed-oppressor, controlled-controlling, instead suggesting that power is networked and multi-channeled. According to Foucault (1980), all human beings operate within a "tangle of power" that at the same time operates upon them and is operated by them. Hence, power is dynamic rather than being the exclusive possession of a particular person, group or class. Foucault (1980) also suggests that power and knowledge are intertwined in the sense that knowledge is always produced within a set of power relations and in turn produces power by itself. Based on these ideas, the current paper seeks to describe the power dynamics

between a Jewish faculty member and the Jewish and Arab students who are located at different power positions. The paper aims at shedding light on the impact of these power dynamics on shaping knowledge production in the process of designing the program, and in particular on deciding whether to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the program.

Action evaluation as a tool for joint definition of the program's objectives

The objectives and modes of action of the Nice 2 Meet U program were defined according to the action evaluation process (Rothman, 1997). The action evaluation method focuses on creating partnerships between groups with diffing interests for the sake of joint goals (Ross, 2001; Rothman, 1997). In this case, the program's success was defined as a joint goal. At the end of the first session, all the participants were given a questionnaire comprising three questions: 1) What would determine whether you consider this program to be successful? What goals should it achieve? 2) Why are these goals important for you? What motivated you to participate in the program? 3) How can these goals be achieved? What operative steps should be taken?

These questions were discussed at the next session. First, each participant described how she sees the program's goals and what motivated her to participate. After that we divided the participants into small groups, with each group including both Jewish and Arab/Palestinian participants. Each group chose a name and then prepared a poster describing the program's goals and modes of operation. In the last part of the session, the groups presented their work to the other participants.

Two of the group representatives presented their group posters as follows (the names of the students participating in the program are fictitious):

> Amira (Druse participant): *"We named our group the Kangaroo group because the kangaroo is an animal that includes, is empathetic, sociable, like us. We wrote three things we would like to accomplish: to connect to one another socially, to learn about other cultures, and to shatter stigmas by serving as a good example of coexistence for the other students at the college. We want to show that it's really possible to become integrated rather than everyone being in their own world.*"

> Shelly (Jewish participant): "*We are the Super Girls because we're pioneers. We are not afraid of anyone. We're here to change things. Our goals are to meet new people, to learn about other beliefs, to talk about men and relationships and other things that interest us as women.*"

These examples show that the program participants saw themselves as pioneers leading a social change on campus. They also integrated the discourse on social change with discourse on women and "female power." Their focus on their female

common denominator was a pivotal point in the program meetings. The participants saw "feminine" characteristics such as inclusion, cooperation, empathy and moderation as essential for engaging in alternative political discourse that would combat separation and call for promoting coexistence.

In addition to emphasis on gender identity as a common denominator, the group discourse was marked by the lack of discussion on ethnic-national identity. In the answers to the questionnaires and in the group discussion at this stage, none of the participants identified discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as one of the group's objectives. At this initial stage, the participants appeared to want to endorse their common denominator, disregarding the national conflict that threatened their relationship.

Planning the sessions and the initiators' objections to discourse on the national conflict

In addition to the group meetings, guidance meetings were held between the researcher advisor (first author) and the initiators (fourth and fifth authors). During these sessions, the participants analyzed events and interactions from the group meetings, shared their feelings and insights about these events and planned the subsequent program sessions.

These meetings constituted an arena where the participants' academic and ethno-political positions intersected. The researcher is an academic faculty member at the beginning of her career and Jewish. The two initiators are undergraduate students in the social sciences, one Jewish and the other Muslim Arab. Documentation of these meetings shows that the participants were aware of and discussed the power distance between them deriving from their different positions in the academic institutions. The following two reflective quotations, one by Yael (the researcher/advisor) and the other by Bseel, the Arab initiator, point to the challenges and dilemmas in their relationship.

Yael (researcher): "*The relations between me and the initiators were very open and cooperative. Nevertheless, I was aware of my power over them deriving from my position as a faculty member and their position as students. I was worried that my intervention from above might shape the program according to my views rather than theirs. I made sure to share my fears and hesitations with them, and I asked to put our power relations 'on the table' to make them visible and the subject of discussion.*"

Bseel (initiator): "*On the one hand, Yael's knowledge and experience helped us bring the program to a higher level. She helped us be more precise as moderators and consider dilemmas and difficulties likely to arise. On the other hand, I sometimes felt we were relying on her too much and that worried me because we are the initiators and moderators. If it had not been for Yael, we might have chosen to do things a bit differently.*"

These points raised by Yael and Bseel paint a complex picture of knowledge-power negotiations (Foucault, 1972, 1980) between women in different academic and ethno-national positions. The researcher's knowledge, which was marked as "academic," was seen as making a valuable contribution to designing the program, but also as limiting the initiators' intellectual freedom and independence and as subordinating their knowledge to it. One example of these knowledge-power relations emerged in an argument between the researcher and the initiators about whether to include political debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the program.

The program's student initiators, and primarily Bseel, preferred avoiding political debate on the national conflict. They feared that such a debate would only deepen the rift between the Jewish and Arab/Palestinian participants and "torpedo" the program, especially since the participants had not included discussing the national conflict as one of the program's objectives. Bseel, the Arab initiator, describes her objection to discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the sessions as follows:

> "*I was afraid that discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would insert conflict and fear into the sessions. As an Arab-Muslim moderator, I was afraid that what I said would be interpreted wrong by the participants. I was afraid of the possible repercussions of what I said. I wanted us to work together to create a space where things could happen differently, where we could 'run away' from the charged situation in this country, where we could talk, laugh and share.*"

Understanding Bseel's fears of discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict necessitates understanding the social context of her life as a member of an ethno-national minority. The Arab/Palestinian minority in Israel is subject to an established policy of political, social and cultural discrimination and is often perceived as a "security threat" by a large part of the Jewish majority (Boimel et al., 2009). This discrimination is also evident on Israeli campuses and is reflected, among other things, in a disproportionately small number of Arab/Palestinian faculty members and the absence of Arabic language and Palestinian culture. This situation affects relations between Jewish and Arab/Palestinian students on campus, which are marked by tension and mutual suspicion (Arieli et al., 2012). As a result, a large proportion of the Arab/Palestinian students feel socially and culturally alienated on campus (Abu Ras & Maayan, 2014; Boimel et al., 2009; Kurman et al., 2005).

Against this background, Bseel fears that if she openly expresses her feelings and opinions about the national conflict, she may endanger her reputation in the group. She is aware that a political discussion is liable to be a "trap" for her, because no matter what she says, her words may be misinterpreted, criticized and used against her by the participants. In her current situation, we can assume that she believes that such a discussion has no potential for empowerment or liberation. Rather, it would be like picking at a painful wound and would only

serve to reproduce the oppression from which she is attempting to extricate herself. Hence, she seeks to create an alternative meeting space that will free her, at least for a short time, from ongoing suffering.

Unlike the students who were the initiators and based upon critical theories, the researcher/advisor feared that avoiding discussing this topic was tantamount to covering it up and would reproduce the unequal power relations between the Jews and the Arab/Palestinian (Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004; Suleiman, 2004). She discussed her fears with the initiators and even recommended that they read relevant literature on the topic. The initiators criticized the validity of the academic approaches. They contended that academic knowledge should be considered on a selective basis and chose to rely on their own knowledge that was anchored in their experiences as students on campus.

It is interesting to note that while the academic power relations between the researcher and the student initiators were openly addressed in their conversations, the power relations arising from their different ethno-national identities remained unexpressed. This situation generated a paradox in which the Jewish researcher and the Arab initiator engaged in a hypothetical argument about whether or not to discuss the national conflict within the program meetings, while they themselves avoided exploring together how their ethno-national identities shape their relationships and attitudes regarding this debate.

Only when the research team discussed revision of the current paper did this paradox emerge. In attempting to ascertain why she unintentionally avoided speaking directly with the Arab initiator regarding their ethno-national power relations, the researcher realized she was afraid the initiator would see this as a forced move. She feared the initiator would interpret this as an act "marking" her as a representative of a social category rather than as a subject in its own right. She also understood that a reflective discussion between her and the initiators about their ethno-national power relations would force her to relinquish the comfortable position of being supposedly "above" the conflict and place herself squarely within it, thus exposing herself to criticism and unpleasant feelings she may have preferred to avoid.

Eventually, in accordance with the decision of both the initiators students, the first cycle of the program did not include any political discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the participants did refer to the topic here and there, the moderators did not encourage developing these references into a discussion. The negotiations with respect to this topic did not end or come to any conclusion, but in practice the students' position is what tipped the scales. The researcher felt ambivalent about this decision, since on the one hand it was contrary to her agenda. Yet on the other hand, she felt somewhat relieved because, like the initiators, she also feared that such a discussion might endanger the relationship between the participants and hinder the success of the program at such an early stage. Therefore, she agreed to conform to the initiators' decision on this issue.

Participant focus groups: Pros and cons regarding discourse on the national conflict

After the end of the first program cycle, two meetings were held with all the participants for the purpose of drawing conclusions and planning the outline of the program for the future. At these meetings, the program's steering team—the two student initiators and their researcher/advisor—told the participants about their dilemma regarding whether to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly. This disclosure stimulated a lively discussion in the course of which the participants' diverse views regarding this dilemma emerged. The documentation of this discussion indicates that most of the Jewish participants supported engaging in political discourse, while most of the Arab/Palestinian participants were opposed.

Netta, a Jewish participant, explained why she regretted that the program did not include political discourse: "*Everything was too good and too perfect. Being angry with someone also reflects closeness. If I can say something unpleasant to a friend, that points to openness. It's too bad we weren't more open.*" Unlike the initiator Bseel, Netta believed she had something to gain from political discourse and thought that the relations among the participants might even be reinforced as a result. This view may be tied to Netta's position of privilege as a Jew who feels safe enough to express political opinions without worrying about the price she might have to pay.

Some of the Arab participants also felt that talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was important. Nevertheless, they did not want to relate to political and public controversies but rather to share their personal experiences coping with discrimination and prejudice.

Amil, a Muslim participant, stated: *"I want to talk about my personal experience. When I hang out with a Hijab, even here in college, the guards and the students look at me suspiciously. There are workplaces that don't want to hire me because of how I look like. I understand the fear but what can I do? The Hijab is part of who I am and it's not fair to me.*"

In contrast, the major argument of those who opposed discussing the national conflict, both Jews and Arabs/Palestinians, was based on fear. Many claimed that "*it's dangerous to talk about politics.*" Furthermore, more than one participant made statements such as "*this is not why we joined the program,*" indicating they would have refused to participate if the program had directly discussed this frightening topic.

Some explained they opposed discussing the national conflict because political discourse is necessarily aggressive and divisive, is contrary to their being women and is cut off from their everyday experience. Efrat, a Jewish participant, described this as follows: "*Politics is a dangerous topic. It causes people to be judgmental and leads to arguments and generalizations. As independent and strong women we must rise above such matters and talk about issues that are more important to us.*"

It is interesting to see how Efrat used aspirations for female empowerment as an argument to explain why the national conflict should be pushed aside. On the one

hand, her remarks call for acknowledging the unique and distinctive nature of female identity and for setting an alternative feminine agenda within the program. At the same time her comments seek to exclude discussion of the participants' national identities, arguing that such discussion is associated with a male and hegemonic discourse. Her appeal to "rise above" politics can be interpreted as a two-sided political move, on the one hand calling for politicization of the female identity and on the other for depoliticization of national identities.

The second cycle of the program: the moderators decide to discuss the national conflict

In the program's second year, the student initiators had already graduated. Two students who had participated in the first year assumed the role of moderators and led the sessions. Unlike the student initiators, the new moderators decided to attempt to include direct discussion of the national conflict. Based on their personal experiences as participants during the previous year and on the group discussion of this dilemma at the year's end, they both concluded that the national conflict is an important issue and must not be ignored. The new moderators and the researcher also assumed that in the second year of the program, the group is ready to conduct a tolerant and honest discussion without causing a blow-up.

At the same time, they also had concerns as described by Marvah, the Arab-Muslim moderator: "*We wanted to hold a session like this for a long time, but we were also very worried. We asked ourselves how we could do this without hurting anyone. When we first planned the session, I did not want to participate in the discussion. I thought that if I were to state my views and talk about my opinions as an Arab living in Israel, the other participants would look at me differently.*"

Like Bseel (the program initiator), Marvah was also quite aware that she was liable to be criticized for her stated opinions about the national conflict and she even considered keeping quiet during the sessions. Yet choosing to keep quite was also likely to be problematic, for one of the principles of Nice 2 Meet U is that the moderators must serve as a model for participation for the other members of the group. An Arab/Palestinian moderator who chooses not to voice her opinion in those particular sessions focusing on the heart of the conflict between Jewish and Arab/Palestinian society is liable to transmit a paradoxical message of present yet absent participation. Ultimately Marvah decided to participate, and her words challenged the boundaries of group discourse, as will be shown below.

The atmosphere during the sessions that discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a bit more tense than usual and the discussion was quite lively. The participants brought up topics related to political and public controversies as well as personal experiences. Among other things, they discussed political solutions, issues related to army service, equal opportunity, and discrimination experienced by the Arab/Palestinian participants. Discourse analysis of the session conversations revealed interesting insights regarding the participants' covert

negotiations over the boundaries of their discourse and about what was permissible and forbidden to say. The beginning of the discussion was marked by the participants' general statements in support of seeking solutions for coexistence and against violence and extremism on both sides. For example, both Jewish and Arab/Palestinian participants stated the following: "*Extremism on both sides only makes things worse"; "I think that a solution can be found that will enable us to live together*." These statements remained within the realm of general declarations only and did not lead to any discussion to define what is considered "extreme" or "moderate" or what is meant by "living together." They seemed to serve as a kind of contract between the participants, who sought to delineate the boundaries of the discussion at the core of the non-threatening group consensus.

The ongoing negotiations focused on determining what was considered "extreme" and what was considered "moderate" from the participants' perspectives. The Arab/Palestinian participants were frequently asked the following questions both by Jewish participants and by participants from their own group: "*How do you define yourself?" "What is your national identity?"* A large portion of the Arab/Palestinian participants responded that they see themselves as "*Israeli Arabs*" or as "*Arabs living in Israel*." Only Marvah, the group's moderator, defined herself as a Palestinian:

> "*My identity is complex. I am a Palestinian Arab living in the State of Israel. That's how I always define myself... I used to really get involved in this stuff, in politics. I took part in demonstrations to release security prisoners, I was active, I belonged to political parties ... all sorts of Arab parties....*"

Marvah's remarks aroused all sorts of reactions and questions among the Jewish participants and silence among some of the Arab/Palestinian participants. From the interviews after the sessions, it was apparent that her remarks aroused criticism among some participants, as can be seen in the following two examples:

> Adi (Jewish participant): "*Marvah's remarks were a bit shocking to me... they made me feel uncomfortable. But that didn't damage my interpersonal relations with her. I like her very much as a person.*"

> Aya (Arab-Muslim participant): "*Her remarks really influenced our relationship. She is studying at a Hebrew-speaking college, but she doesn't identify with the State of Israel? I didn't know she felt that way. It put some distance between us.*"

These comments by Adi and Aya indicate that the group's power dynamics seemed to confirm the dominance of the Jewish group, incorporating a covert expectation that the Arab/Palestinian participants would express their recognition of and loyalty to the State of Israel. This is not surprising given that this is also the main discourse between the college students. Marvah's remarks, which did not conform to this expectation, were disputed among the Jewish participants as

well as among the Arab/Palestinian participants. In light of the remarks by Adi and Aya, it is understandable why Bseel, the Arab initiator, objected to including a national discussion in the program. What, then, enabled Marvah, who had previously considered refraining from the group discussion, to express a position problematic to the group's power dynamics? She explained this in the interview at the end of the year:

> *I received a lot of support from Yael (the researcher) and Einat (the Jewish moderator). I knew I could say what I really think and they would stand by me. This gave me the courage to dare to speak and also to face the criticism of some of the participants afterwards.*

Marvah also noted that despite the criticism, some participants, both Jewish and Arab/Palestinian, approached her afterwards and sought to provide her support. Both she and the Jewish moderator ultimately were proud of themselves and were pleased with the ensuing discussion.

Discussion and conclusions

This paper sought to describe the negotiations between the partners in the Nice 2 Meet U program. Unlike other programs promoting dialogue between Arab/Palestinian and Jewish students on Israeli campuses, Nice 2 Meet U is a grassroots program initiated and operated by students with the help of a junior faculty member. The paper describes the negotiations between the students and the faculty member through a major dilemma that arose in designing the program: should the program include direct discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

As this paper illustrates, this dilemma aroused controversy among the program's designers and exposed the interwoven power relations between "academic" and "local" knowledge and between different ethno-national positions. Thus we suggest seeing the design processes in action research focusing on intervention in ongoing ethno-national conflicts as a crossroads where two levels of conflict intersect. The first level is the external national conflict in the context of which program seeks to act. The second level is the internal conflict between those engaged in designing the program who identify with different ethno-national positions and have differing perspectives and emotions regarding the meaning of dealing with the conflict. These two levels of conflict are interwoven, and their combination plays a decisive role in designing the intervention project. Thus, we propose that in order to understand the dynamics of action research studies that examine ethno-national conflicts we must acknowledge the negotiations taking place alongside the political conflict. These negotiations also entail conflictual elements regarding how and to what extent it is possible, desirable or necessary to deal with the political conflict as part of the program.

One of the major challenges in designing such programs is how to create a transformative space between the participants that does not reproduce the

power relations between the majority group and the minority group (Arieli et al., 2009; Nan, 2011). Taking this challenge into consideration, we chose to describe the process of designing the Nice 2 Meet U program in terms of negotiations. Using this concept enabled us to dismantle preconceived assumptions and dichotomies regarding the power relations between academic knowledge and local knowledge, Jews and Arabs/Palestinians, and oppressors and those they oppress and to reveal the dynamics of these relations. For example, this study shows that while the academic knowledge of the researcher/faculty member was perceived as more "prestigious" and more "professional" than the students' knowledge, it was not relevant to their experiences on campus. Therefore on this issue the initiators chose to rely on their own knowledge rather than the researcher's knowledge. In addition, the viewpoints of the Arab/Palestinian moderators regarding the issue of whether to discuss the national conflict had more weight than those of the researcher and the Jewish moderators and were therefore the deciding factor on this issue in both cycles of the program.

These examples show that including students and faculty members from minority and majority groups in designing research projects examining political conflicts can encourage dialogue between varied opinions expressed by people from different social and hierarchical positions. This dialogue has the potential to generate a change not only in the relations between the partners but also in the way they understand knowledge and make decisions about designing the project and resolving the conflict (Jacobs, 2010; Nan, 2011; Schirch & Campt, 2007). This being the case, what can be done to encourage student participation in designing campus intervention programs geared to the ethno-national conflict and to promote successful negotiations between students and faculty members/researchers? We examine this question through several conclusions emerging from the process of designing the Nice 2 Meet U program.

First, we believe in the importance of generating an atmosphere in campus that supports student initiatives and encourages them to take part in designing policies and developing programs for social change (e.g., Hager et al., 2011). Evidence from the current study and other action research studies designed in cooperation with students and schoolchildren indicates that only if they are treated like agents for change and not as "clients" of the organization are they likely to assume responsibility and initiate programs to change the atmosphere on campus (Gordon & Edwards, 2012; Hager et al., 2011; Wójcik & Mondry, 2017).

Second, we believe in the importance of supporting and encouraging students as they design the program and of providing them the required knowledge and tools. The involvement of academic researchers has been found to be effective and supportive in developing intervention programs and in promoting social change (Lennie el al., 2003). Nevertheless, inherent in this involvement is the risk that the academic knowledge will overpower the students' local knowledge. In view of this risk, academic researchers require a high degree of reflectiveness with respect to the compelling power they are liable to exert on their partners in designing the research project, especially when the interested parties are situated at different

social and hierarchical positions (Arieli et al., 2009; Lennie et al., 2003; Lundy & McGovern, 2006b). As indicated by the current research, the success of the negotiations between the partners in the program was to a large extent dependent on the researcher's willingness to agree to question the validity and relevance of her own knowledge and even to give priority to the students' knowledge.

Third, we caution researchers against relying on their prior knowledge and preconceived assumptions when they begin designing student intervention programs for ethno-national conflicts and suggest they pay close attention to the students' opinions and motives. In the case described in this paper, the faculty researcher assumed, based on academic knowledge anchored in post-colonial theory, that discussing the national conflict and exposing the unequal power relations between the Jewish majority and the Arab/Palestinian minority would help "[l]iberate the oppressed and their oppressors" (Halabi el al., 2004, p. 113). In other words, a change in consciousness that enabled both Jews and Arabs/Palestinians to engage in critical examination of the status quo can potentially lay the foundations for social action that will put an end to the oppression. Despite the logic of this perspective, it also implies a patronizing attitude that disregards the students' voices (Arieli et al., 2012; Arieli & Friedman, 2013) and assumes that the two groups are homogeneous in their motives and interests (Bekerman, 2007). In contrast, the finding of the current study shows that both the Jewish group and the Arab/Palestinian group included those who supported as well as those who objected to engaging in political discussion. Moreover, the Arab/Palestinian participants who objected to such a discussion believed it might be detrimental rather than advantageous to their interests. Under such circumstances, the researcher's insistence upon including political discussion in the meetings might have been interpreted by the participants as an act of oppression rather than of liberation. Thus, we believe in the importance of discussing the motives and dangers of engaging in political discussion of the conflict with the students involved in designing programs dealing with dilemmas. Nevertheless, the decision should be left in their hands.

Finally, in the spirit of Foucault, (1980) we maintain that the tangle of power relations in which researchers and their project partners are imprisoned not only empowers researchers but also makes them vulnerable. The researchers' awareness of their vulnerability and not just of their power is important for their relations with their research partners and the collaborative learning process as a whole. In the case described in this paper, the researcher was indeed in favor of discussing the national conflict within the group meetings. Yet only during the process of writing the paper did it become clear to her that she herself had unintentionally refrained from discussing the ethno-national power relations between herself and the Arab student initiator. In retrospect, the researcher realized that she, like the Arab initiator and despite the marked differences in their power positions, was also afraid to confront fear, pain, self-criticism and negative reactions on the part of the initiators. Therefore, she unintentionally chose to avoid direct discussions of their ethno-national relations. The researcher's insight shows that researchers

may also find interpersonal discussion and reflective inquiry of their ethno-national power relations with their partners difficult. Indeed, they may even prefer to avoid such interactions because they require removing their expert's cap and being prepared to confront their own vulnerability as human beings living and acting in the context of an ethno-national conflict. This insight also demonstrates the importance of action research in encouraging reflective examination processes that are critical in designing a transformative space between project partners that does not reproduce the power relations between them (Arieli et al., 2009; Nan, 2011). The researcher's insight into how she handled her relationships with the initiators was important in the program design learning process and influenced the researcher's choices and future relationships with the facilitators in subsequent cycles of the program.

In conclusion, student participation in designing intervention programs dealing with ethnic and national conflicts can generate effective and relevant knowledge for the students that is more anchored in their experiences on campus (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). This participatory process encourages students to assume responsibility for the relationships between them and to bring about the desired social change in their own way (Hager et al., 2011; Wójcik, & Mondry, 2017). Nevertheless, it is also important to consider the risks and limitations of this process that are related to the intersection between the differing academic and ethno-national positions of the researchers and the participants. Successful negotiations in designing a program are to a large extent dependent upon researchers' willingness to question the validity and relevance of their knowledge and to be aware to their own vulnerability as well as their power in the collaborative learning process.

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