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A Model for a Content Based Learning Course

Aliza Yahav and Manal Yazbak-Abu Ahmad

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Abstract

This paper chronicles the development of a course which aims to play a dual role: modeling Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), while bringing together Israeli Arab and Jewish college students (English teachers in training) in a practical application of course content: combating bias, prejudice and stereotypes. The first, theoretical, part of the course focuses on the subject matter and takes place in parallel sessions at each of the two colleges— one in Jerusalem, one in the Galilee-- separately. The second stage opens with a face-to-face meeting at one of the colleges, where students become acquainted, and begin the process of collaborative learning which continues in a virtual environment throughout the second semester. Small groups consisting of Arab and Jewish students from each of the colleges collaborate on a joint project and present their work at a face-to-face meeting at the end of the year. The paper explains the choice of materials and activities, describes the dynamics and difficulties of the collaborative work carried out in mixed (Jewish-Arab) groups, as well as the students' reactions and their wider implication for EFL teacher education.

Key words: CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning, collaboration, bias, prejudice, stereotypes

Introduction

In the summer of 2009, two lecturers – one Arab, one Jewish – from two teacher's colleges – one in Sakhnin, one in Jerusalem, met to develop a joint course which aimed to play a dual role. The course would model Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), while bringing together Israeli Arab and Jewish college students (English teachers in training) in a practical application of course content: combating bias, prejudice and stereotypes. The idea for the course grew out the conviction that the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher is not simply a language technician, but an educator, and the EFL curriculum is a powerful tool insofar as the development of language skills cannot be divorced from their pragmatic content, which can act as a compelling social agent. (Duffy, 2009; Milofsky, 2001; Jacobs & Cates, 1999; Morgan and Vendrick, 2009)

A study by Horencyzk & Tatar (2004) highlights the degree of fragmentation existing in Israel's society, and the tremendous metaphorical distance between minority groups living in close physical proximity. The research focused on Arab and Jewish school counselors, and their views of Israel as a multicultural society. The results showed that whereas the Jewish counselors regarded Israel as a multicultural society, the only 'other' they viewed as part of

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1   Dr. Aliza Yahav is a lecturer at The David Yellin Academic College of Education; Dr. Manal Yazbak-Abu Ahmad is a lecturer at the Sakhnin College for Teacher Education.

that society was the Jewish immigrant to Israel. Arab counselors, on the other hand, regarded Israel's society as 'plural' rather than 'multicultural'— since, from their point of view, there are only two distinct cultural groups in society: Jews and Arabs. According to these results, the Arab minority is simply invisible to the Jewish population whereas, to the Arab, population, the Jewish population appears to be uniform in character. Thus, any attempt to move from a plural society, made up of separate cultures lacking mutual recognition, to a multicultural society based on mutual recognition and respect, must include a program for pro-active multicultural education. It was with these elements in mind that the two lecturers met to design a course based on content cultivating awareness of bias, and stereotyping, and respect for diversity— using foreign language teaching as a vehicle, and creating an educational setting which might challenge future teachers' limited cultural perspectives.

This article chronicles the development and application of this course, explaining the choice of materials and activities, describing the collaborative work carried out in mixed (Jewish-Arab) groups, as well as the accompanying difficulties and attempted solutions. Following the description of the ongoing course development, student reactions and their implications for designing and implementing similar courses and for EFL curriculum materials in Israel are discussed.

Factors involved in course planning

The power of a common language: *English*

Many of the encounter group programs aimed at reducing prejudice and stereotyping in Israel are guided by the classic contact theory (Allport, 1954), which functions under the premise that direct contact between two groups, in and of itself, will contribute to prejudice reduction. However, a number of studies question or qualify this assumption, regarding both its application in general and specifically in the case of Arabs and Israelis. Bramel (2004) notes that the contact theory is based on the premise that mutual knowledge will lead to recognition of basic similarity, thus ignoring any real cultural difference in favor of an illusion of social unity, while Dixon (2006) points to the fact that the contact hypothesis generalized from a perspective of the black-white racial conflict in the United States, remarking that not all racial or ethnic prejudices are subject to the same conditions. Qualifications of the theory stipulate that positive outcomes of intergroup encounters are a condition of "(whether) the contact takes place between groups of equal status in the pursuit of common goals in contexts in which there is institutional support for the closer cooperation of the groups concerned." (Brown, Vivian & Hewstone, 1999). On a particularistic level, Abu-Nimer (1999) criticized Arab-Jewish encounter groups in educational settings in Israel, concluding that such programs merely 'accept and maintain existing power relations' (1999: 166). One reason noted for this maintenance of the status-quo is the fact that interaction generally takes place in Hebrew, which empowers the Jewish students and disenfranchises the Arabs. In addition, Maoz (2002) found that interaction programs aimed at adult and student populations were often dialogue oriented, demanding little genuine involvement, and suggested

implementing tasks that required collaboration. Indeed, it was shown that contact groups could reduce prejudice when participating groups are given a task focus—but in cases where a simple social focus is involved, the ensuing dialogue could become counterproductive—reinforcing rather than overcoming stereotypes. (Maoz, 2004)

The course designed for students in Sakhnin and Jerusalem aimed to avoid some of the pitfalls of encounter groups, first, by the very fact that English—a culturally neutral vehicle—would be used instead of Hebrew. This was an important step toward creating a symmetric power relationship. Whereas the use of English might limit the fluency of expression of non-native speakers, it provided a 'universal handicap', enforcing equality between the groups. Equally significant was the adoption of a 'micro-cultural' approach to multicultural education, as delineated by Wurzel (1988). The lecturers did not pretend or aspire to deal with the macro-cultural aspects of ethnicity or nationality as they shape the students' reality. Instead, they intended to utilize the 'micro-cultural aspects of human existence—family, religion, occupation, age, sex, avocational interests, etc.' (1988: 2) as a platform upon which to improve cross-cultural communication. This exploration of the "Other" would take place not as part of a dialogue encounter, but within the framework of a structured collaborative task setting.

Lowering barriers with technology

From the outset, it was clear that some form of technological solution to the problem of communication between the two groups would be applied. The use of digital platforms was, on the one hand, a decision dictated by limitations: time, distance, and budget. Students who studied a full program could not take the time to meet once a week with other students living and studying some 180 km away. Nor was there funding for transportation for more than two face-to-face meetings. This decision was also supported by the literature: The benefits of collaborative e-learning in order to develop communicative skills have been extensively documented. Razak and Asmawi (2004) discuss the benefits of dialogue journals and email technology in their ESL courses, emphasizing the fact that the need to 'meet the requirements of actual communication in a social context' enhances language fluency and calls for the student to invest effort in clear and organized modes of expression. Bollati (2002) adds important aspects of online- learning—that of developing a sense of community, where students feel closer as a result of the back-and-forth nature of the communication, and the fact that students who might be reluctant to speak in a classroom (because of shyness or lack of proficiency), can express themselves with fewer anxieties. Gonglewski, Meloni & Brant (2001) point to the fact that e-learning is student-centered; students control their learning, and participation (unlike the classroom situation where the weaker students may make minimal contributions). Liao's (2002) study of e-mailing versus face to face conversation showed how the medium can 'defuse' intercultural differences such as demand for direct answer, policy of avoidance or differences in wait-time, and therefore can enable a smoother, less tension fraught intercultural dialogue. Thus, collaborative e- learning can provide a platform for intercultural dialogue, giving all students equal access, requiring cooperation, and removing potential barriers.

In addition, it has been documented that the extent to which teachers use technology in the classroom is linked to their own sense of self-confidence, and that their degree of self-efficacy depends greatly on their preservice experience with technology tools, and that, "Preservice teachers should have more current technological experiences, models and learning tools if they are to be deemed competent."(Rogers, K. & Wallace, J., 2011: 5). Therefore, we felt that the use of technology would not only augment fluency in group discussions, easing possible tensions or feelings of insecurity, but would also benefit the preservice teacher who would be using such tools in their future classrooms.

Course design

The lecturers envisioned the course as a hybrid: a cross between a content-based English proficiency course with a distance learning element, and a methodological model for future EFL teachers who would apply the content and demonstrated activities in their classrooms. The first course was modeled on a workshop which one of the lecturers had attended in 2008, given by the US Institute of Peace, that had provided course participants with a curriculum guide entitled Conflict Resolution for English Language Learners (Milofsky, 2008), including guidelines for using content-based material in the EFL classroom. It was decided that the first semester would be taught separately, in each college class, and the semester would conclude with a face-to-face meeting between the two classes in Jerusalem. The second semester would focus on a collaborative project, using the Moodle platform to link the two classes, and would culminate in a second face-to-face meeting in Sakhnin where the projects would be presented. The decision to hold the first meeting in Jerusalem was not a random one. The introductory lessons made it clear that the idea of visiting the other group's 'territory' gave rise to anxiety in both groups, most strongly among the Jewish students, many of whom expressed fear at the very idea of visiting an Arab college in an Arab city. This anxiety was mirrored by the unease expressed by a few of the Arab students during the first year of the course, which followed one of the cycles of the armed conflict in Gaza. These students feared that West Jerusalem would be unsafe for them to visit, as visibly identifiable Arabs. Their fears, however, were somewhat placated by the assurance that they would be safe within the college. The Israeli students, on the other hand, felt that the very journey to an Arab city put them in physical danger. Holding the first meeting on the Jewish students' home turf aimed to decrease the Jewish students' anxiety regarding the second meeting, which would take place at the college in Sakhnin. Unfortunately, these fears intensified on both sides following an escalation of conflict and violence in Jerusalem. The effects of these episodes will be discussed later in the context of the two populations.

Topics and activities: The first semester of the course focused on topics which highlighted individual identity and group identity, beginning with an activity requiring each individual student to fill in a diagram entitled 'we all belong to many groups', delineating the 'groups' she identified with, placing their major group identity in the center. These diagrams were then

saved to be used for intergroup discussions in the face-to-face meeting between the Jerusalem and Sakhnin students.

Students were assigned a number of texts that served the CLIL purpose of content-based work on English language proficiency, and focused on the topics of conflict resolution, bias awareness, stereotyping and prejudice. As the course has developed, a greater emphasis has been placed on texts and activities that can be adapted for use in the EFL classroom. For example, Dr. Seuss' 'The Sneetches' (1961) is presented as an example of how the theoretical basis of multicultural education has changed since this classic children's story was written in 1961, and how the message can be presented to children in the 21st century. The story, an allegorical tale of discrimination and prejudice in a society of imaginary creatures whose privileged class sports green stars, concludes with a message focusing on the essential similarity of all human beings. This philosophy is in keeping with the 'contact theory' premise mentioned earlier (Allport, 1954), which views prejudice as springing from imagined or inconsequential differences between groups of people who are basically the same. This message is discussed in the context of the modern perception of multicultural education and its aims: from the essentially uncritical monocultural perspective that overlooks difference in order to achieve an imagined social unity, to one which not only recognizes but embraces and cultivates awareness of cultural diversity and differences (Beckerman, 2004; Gay, 2004; Hill, 2007).

It is this perspective which is reflected in the choice of materials such as 'Understanding unconscious bias and unintentional racism', which presents and substantiates the assumption that stereotyping is an inevitable social norm, and that, 'Individuals need to become less focused on feeling very tolerant and good about themselves and more focused on examining their own biases.' (Moule, 2009: 326). The reading and discussion of this text was accompanied by students taking the Harvard Implicit Associations Test (2011), which underscores the human tendency to ignore our own 'bias blind spots' as a self-enhancement strategy.

Collaboration: The second part of the course involves an active and cooperative learning element, in which students are required to prepare projects in mixed groups of 4-6, constituting students from both colleges. This course component was devised to provide a hands-on application of content. Studies of teachers who participated in preservice courses focusing on developing a sensitivity to multicultural issues, (Smith, 2000; Garmon, 2004) found that theoretical courses had little significant influence on attitudes without the essential element of experience with diverse cultural groups. This course component began with a face-to-face meeting, in which students got to know each other by introducing the source and/or background of their names—their meaning, why their parents chose them, etc. Such an exercise revealed similarities between the two cultures (both Arab and Jewish parents choose names which embody ideals: hope, beauty, etc., but were sometimes a step into a metaphorical mine-field; i.e. the Arab student whose name—Haifa—was chosen to remind her family of the town which they were forced to leave in 1948.) Names, then, were the first element which revealed to the students common cultural values – even while throwing light on divergent narratives.

Students were then placed in random mixed groups and asked to work together on a number of tasks. These ranged from rewriting a story, "After you, Alphonse"(Jackson, 1943) --the story of how a friendship between two boys, one black and one white, during WWII in the United States, reveals adult-held bias and stereotypes--in a culturally or socially relevant framework, to sharing objects which they felt symbolized an important part of their identities. Groups then received randomly distributed topics connected with course content, with the emphasis on the role of the classroom teacher. Topics included:

- The power of language in education,
- Creating a culture of peace in the classroom,
- The inclusive classroom,
- Who am I? Awareness of identity (self and others) in the classroom
- Using music and song to increase bias awareness,
- Bias and stereotyping in children's literature,
- Dealing with 'isms' in the classroom,
- Combating bullying (including cyberbullying),
- Socially relevant multicultural education in Israel.

The groups brainstormed for questions about their topic, settling on subtopics and areas of interest which they would like to emphasize in their project. The distance learning element of the course began with their return to their home colleges, where the groups searched for articles relating to their topics and posted summaries of articles on group forums. The forums were used as a platform for reading and reacting to each member of the group's summary (which included clarification questions regarding content or simply reflective reactions to the content itself), and then as the basis for planning a PowerPoint presentation. Finally, each group was required to plan an activity which would involve the entire group in a dynamic, language-based activity connected to their topic, and which would be carried out at the final meeting of both groups in Sakhnin.

During the first two years the course was offered, all student interaction took place on the Moodle forum. Students were asked to post summaries, questions and replies on the Moodle forum; they were required to work on drafts of their presentation over the Moodle, and even to discuss planning the activity on the forum. This requirement gave the lecturers maximum control over student interaction; they could intervene if and when they perceived possible cultural pitfalls (for example, when an Israeli male student used a vulgar expression, and Moslem female students reacted in shock and dismay to their lecturer; the student, who hadn't even considered his remark controversial, apologized for insensitivity and learned something about culturally bound linguistic norms). In addition, the lecturers were privy to all the group dialogues which took place on the forum—which, of course, provided fertile ground for research. However—as the course developed over the years, the lecturers realized that the Moodle was no longer the platform of choice for their students, and that it was therefore necessary to relinquish a certain

amount of control. During the past two courses, most student communication has taken place on Facebook or in WhatsApp groups. This has meant, of course, that the group dialogues are no longer shared with the lecturers—and that the communication channel between the students themselves has become more open, and more authentic. Thus, while there was no conscious decision on the part of lecturers to change the format of the course, the change was dictated by the students themselves, and by their familiarity with and use of various social networks.

Most of the second semester (approximately 12 lessons) was spent in collaborative work—primarily through the use of digital devices. Much of the dialogue was characterized by negotiation: which topics were suitable for presentations, what kind of activity was preferable for the final meeting, etc. This type of negotiation required students to weigh their words and comments carefully before posting them—thus bringing home one of the course axioms: language is a powerful tool, bearing both meaning and attitude, often conveying messages which have nothing to do with literal translation. (This extends to the area of pragmatic EFL awareness, when a student who wrote, "Why don't you answer me?" to a group member realized—before sending the message—that it would be more acceptable to word the message, "I see you haven't answered me yet…').

In addition, the course developed the students' English language proficiency in all four skill areas: reading (searching data bases, reading articles), writing (summarizing, corresponding with group members regarding the material, the presentation and the activity planning), oral (all spoken communication between lecturer and students and among the students themselves was in English), and aural (a major aural component was, of course, listening to and evaluating the group presentations and participating in the activities in the final meeting).

The format of the final meeting, which takes place in Sakhnin, has also evolved over the past six years. Originally, the meeting centered on group presentations, and the groups were each given twenty minutes in which to present their topic, and then five or ten minutes in which to present an activity which would involve the two classes. Active listening sheets distributed to students, required them to comment on content, organization of slides and other presentational attributes. However, the feeling was that the slide shows were too long, containing too many quotes from articles which seemed to lack student reflection and personal relevance. And so, each year, the time and space allotted to presentations has diminished, and the group-planned activities have come to take center stage. Students were urged to plan activities which both reflected their topic and were language based in order to suit an EFL framework. Some of the activities students devised in past courses included group work which explored common stereotypes based on photographs, word games which categorized descriptive adjectives and then discussions of reasons for categorization (also revealing subconscious bias), an exploration of the power of classroom language which opened with group leaders writing various commands (such as 'shut up right now') on the board and then asking groups to react in terms of their reactive feelings and suggestions for alternative phrasing, and even an exploration of the significance of bread in different cultures: asking groups to choose photos of kinds of breads which meant something

to them and explain why. These activities and others have become the central component of the final meeting, as students explore their educational and linguistic content and consider how they might adapt and apply them in their future classrooms.

Student reactions

Student reactions to the course were gleaned from a variety of sources: in-class discussions, forums, questionnaires, and meetings with individual students (both student and teacher instigated). An initial attempt to quantify results was disappointing, as the results of anonymous questionnaires were in stark contrast to classroom discussions: questionnaires revealed little apprehension prior to the first face-to-face meeting, and there was almost no self-report (despite anonymity) of bias or change in attitude. It was felt that the highly loaded issue of Arab-Jewish coexistence resulted in a number of bias effects, including the subjects' wish to retain a certain 'enlightened' image in her own eyes and in the eyes of the researchers (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). In fact, it has even been shown that anonymity may lead to distortion; in two studies, Lelkes and Krosnick showed that anonymous self-reporting did not lead to more accurate findings—on the contrary, "perhaps because of a reduced sense of accountability, completely anonymous participants executed the cognitive response process more superficially and generated less accurate self-reports as a result." (2012: 1296). This would seem to explain the 'telegraphic', formulaic quality which was characteristic of replies to the anonymous questionnaires (for example, to a question regarding expectations of differences from the "Other": 'nothing but politics', or 'religion and culture'), whereas, as will be seen below, class discussions and replies on the group forum were more thoughtful and revealing.

Reactions to the course can essentially be divided into three categories—those which were elicited prior to the first face-to-face meeting, which reflect student expectations, those which were elicited during the course of the group work, and those which requested students to reflect, in retrospect, on the course experience.

Pre-meeting expectations

Across the board, Jewish students were more apprehensive than the Arab students regarding the requirements of the second semester (meeting and working together). Although there have been a sizeable number of Jewish students who expressed both interest and willingness, a vocal minority has expressed apprehension or resistance to the idea—especially the idea of travelling to Sakhnin. As mentioned earlier, the lecturer from Sakhnin also reported some degree of apprehension on the part of her students—apprehension which was not based on unwillingness to meet the "Other", but fear for physical safety which was equivalent to the fear some of the Jewish students felt about travelling to Sakhnin. In fact, the Jewish students were surprised to hear that their Arab peers had such reservations about coming to Jerusalem— especially because they too felt equally at risk in a city where violence consistently ebbs and wanes.

Some of the Jewish students who expressed willingness to meet the Sakhnin students did so in the negative: "Not all Arabs are terrorists." This statement is evidence of what Moule terms defines as 'unconscious bias': "while used to deny bias, it has within it the seeds of a defense of negative feelings" (2009: 322), revealing fears and mistrust. Varying degrees of political correctness often characterized the Jewish students' expressions of unwillingness to meet or work with Arab students. On the whole, the self-consciousness (or lack of it) regarding expressions of bias can be traced to current events. Following the Pillar of Defense Operation (2012), there were Jewish students who said they 'had nothing to say to them', or 'weren't going to sit with our enemies.' During 2013-14, as the memory of those events receded, students who might have held the same views felt somewhat less free to voice them: they expressed said they would feel 'unsafe' traveling to Sakhnin, but were willing to meet with Arab students in Jerusalem.

In order to clearly understand the student responses, one must understand something of the makeup of the student population in each of the colleges. The students in the Sakhnin college are mostly traditional or religious Moslem students from the villages in the Galilee. In the Galilee, Arabs—who are citizens of the State of Israel-- and Jews live in close proximity, and many come into contact on a daily basis. Despite events which have polarized and politicized the Arabs living in Israel's north[2], they remain somewhat insulated from the day to day friction which Jerusalemites experience.   The Jewish student population of the David Yellin College in Jerusalem (some 20% of the college students are Arab; much the same as their statistical representation in Israel as a whole) is made up of approximately 40% religious and 60% secular students, primarily from the Jerusalem area. A considerable number of the religious students come from settlements situated in the West Bank , and face security issues of personal safety on a daily basis. Arab students living in East Jerusalem often find themselves the objects of verbal, or even physical attacks on Jerusalem's public transportation. Both groups are faced with the real danger of sporadic terrorist attacks in the city. There is, therefore, a considerable lack of symmetry between the David Yellin and Sakhnin students' experience—both actual and imagined-- with the "Other", one which clearly fuels the fears and apprehensions of the Jerusalem students.

Student reactions following the face-to-face meeting

Following the first meeting, students in both colleges expressed surprise at what they had experienced—a surprise which, while underscoring the importance of the personal, one-on-one meetings, threw further light on the Jewish students' often overt bias, and equally revealed

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2   During October 2000, as the second intifada gained intensity, demonstrations and riots erupted both within and beyond the green line. "In trying to quell the demonstrations, police officers (including police snipers) fired tear gas, rubber-coated steel bullets, and live ammunition. Thirteen Arab protesters (including a Palestinian from Gaza) were shot and killed by the police, and many more were injured… Since the events of October 2000… The Palestinian minority and the Jewish majority in Israel have been caught up in a negative spiral in which the suspicion, fear, and animosity one intensifies the suspicion, fear, and animosity of the other." Waxman, 2012, p. 11-12)

some of the hidden bias of the Arab students regarding their Jewish peers. The Arab students spoke to their teacher about the 'friendliness' of the Jewish students, and some wrote on their feedback questionnaires that they had been surprised: "I never thought they were that kind", "I thought they won't be nice to us, but they were great hosts." The stereotype of the religious Jew was also shown to be just that: "One of them was religious…and she was so nice. I didn't expect that from (a) religious (Jew)." Indeed, one of the course participants in Jerusalem was an ultra-orthodox woman (whose head covering, long sleeves and skirts were mirrored by the religious Moslem women's clothing), who came from one of the ultra-orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem. She participated willingly in the second semester group work, and was one of the few students who—following the Gaza operation and subsequent demonstrations in the Galilee, joined the end of the year trip to Sakhnin. Her conduct served to shatter stereotypes regarding ultra-orthodox Jews which were often held both by Arab and Jewish students.

Jewish students expressed surprise and even anticipation at the idea of working together: "At the meeting, I realized that the girls from Sakhnin were just like me. They are students in college, friends, girlfriends, sisters and daughters—just like me. My initial thoughts about the project were a bit negative, but now that I've met my partners for the assignment, I'm feeling much more positive and excited."

However, one incident revealed how deeply entrenched the Jewish students were in their monocultural framework. During the second year of the course, a group of students in Jerusalem asked to meet with the lecturer following the face-to-face meeting. They had come to complain about the 'rude' behavior of the Arab students, who had occasionally lapsed into Arabic during the meeting. To the lecturer's question as to whether they themselves had lapsed into Hebrew during the meeting, they answered, 'Yes, of course.' But that was not considered rude behavior… as they expected the Arab students to understand their language.

"They were talking about us and laughing," said one student.

"But you told me you don't understand Arabic," answered the lecturer.

"No…but they were looking at us."

The suggestion that, perhaps, if Jewish students were to learn Arabic, they would not feel like outsiders, was simply met with shrugs. There seemed to be an overall consensus that the Arab students were 'guests' and should behave accordingly; the idea that there should be a symmetrical relationship was rejected out of hand.

Student post-course reflections

On the whole, students in both colleges viewed the course as a positive experience, and recognized the value of applying the theoretical material they'd studied in the first semester— of being required to 'walk the walk' of bias awareness.

Jewish students from Jerusalem:
"Before the meetings, I, as Jewish, never came in contact with Muslims and Christian Arabs the

way we did in the course. I think that this idea was brilliant, because even if we don't agree with each other's opinions, we got to know them, their culture and their background… In conclusion, I believe this course and meeting has high importance and effect, and I would recommend every student in the English department doing it."

"I feel that this course and meeting the students from Sakhnin has changed my perspective of the Arab society in Israel as a whole. I think many of the stigmas I had were changed and I'm glad I took this course."

"My project coped [dealt] with the Arabs and the Jews, and my part of it was about the Moslems and their tradition. Those made me think different and connected us all together for one goal – this project."

Noteworthy was the fact that comments written after the course by students from Sakhnin revealed their 'surprise' at attributes they discovered in their Jewish peers—revealing bias which they had claimed was non-existent:

Arab students from Sakhnin:

"I learned how diverse they are among themselves. I hadn't given much thought to their diversity besides the obvious religious- non-religious."

"After I met the other people from the other college my overall perspective had changed. I thought they wouldn't be nice to us, but they were great hosts. They were hard working, serious to learn and unbiased (most of them, not all). However, I have learned not to judge anyone by their ethnic background, religion, or any other different aspect. Just being nice to people requires nothing more than a smile, a nice talk and sharing ideas."

The comments written by students from Sakhnin were often distinctive in their elaborate and exaggerated flowery style, an attribute of native Arabic speakers writing in English as a second or foreign language. The 'high-flown ornamented language' (Fahkri, 2004: 1134.) and the 'over assertion and exaggeration' (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983: 619) are therefore signs of linguistic convention rather than a difference in attitude:

"The course is a safe that enables one to lock his fear of communicating with others within. The course is a key to help changing one's pre-thoughts into better post-thoughts if that is right to say. The course helps building better relations between Arabs and Jews by simply getting to know them. The course is an adventure for a better cause."

Other students from Sakhnin referred to the course as 'a once in a lifetime' or 'life-changing' experience. Whereas such expressions were rarely used by the Jewish students, there were Jewish students whose discussions with their lecturer and with fellow students showed just how significant the experience had been. Two of the students in the first course volunteered to come into subsequent classes in order to present their experience: both had been 'scared' and 'concerned' by the prospect of working with Arab students, and reluctant and resistant to visiting Sakhnin (in fact, one of the young women stated that her husband had 'forbidden' her

to take part in the meeting—yet by the end of the year, she felt strongly enough to defy him). The two face-to-face meetings, in conjunction with the group work, had led these two young women to the conclusion that such a course should be required of all students in the college.

If the student feedback clearly shows the necessity for such contact-based, experiential courses, it is equally clear that there is a need for ongoing adjustment and assessment of course content and format. For example, during the 2013-14 academic year, one of the Jerusalem students approached the lecturer and explained that her fears pertaining to a trip to Sakhnin were grounded in ignorance—she had simply not been aware of the history and geography which put Sakhnin within the green line (Israel's pre-1967 borders) and made her residents citizens of Israel, nor had she realized that the Sakhnin college was not a religious, Islamic college, but came under the jurisdiction of the Israel Ministry of Education. When this point was brought up in class, students agreed that some specific introduction regarding the 'sister' college, its location and demography was important. Yet it would be disingenuous to pretend that such an introduction will solve the problem of the few Jerusalem students who, every year, categorically refuse to meet with Arab students. During the first year of the course, the lecturer in Jerusalem attempted to delve into the reasons behind such a refusal and open a dialogue with a 'refusenik' student, who claimed that she could not sit with Arabs because it 'hurt too much.' In one of the written responses to the lecturer's questions, she wrote:

"There are people that make the differentiation between the "Palestinian people"- which live at A areas, outside of the "Green line" (the border of Israel before the 1967 war) and the Arabs that are citizen of the state of Israel:" Arabs of Israel". I do not make this separation because I know all of them feel the same way, and as a Palestinian girl, a citizen of Israel said: "We, the Israeli Arabs, do not feel any contact to the Zionist conqueror. We have a blue I.D. just because it helps us to get some better conditions and it allows us to study at Israeli's colleges. We have full identification with the Arabs at the territories and we hope that one day, we will have the full control on all of Palestine…"(from an interview)… . The Israeli- Arabs, even hurt us and try to kill us by bombing themselves on busses or by helping the terrorists to come here and do that. With all the respect that I have to "David Yellin college" I feel that this kind of meeting is a long way from the way that an Israeli college should lead his students. Moreover, emotionally I cannot [have] a cup of coffee with Arabs that feel that way, while my friend's husband and many other people are fighting for their lives at the hospitals and at a time that kids from Shderot are running to safe areas to protect their bodies from the bombs."

The letter was written in 2009; the tragedy is that neither the events (the cycle of violence in Gaza) nor the blatant stereotyping have changed. The discussions and dialogues instigated by the Jerusalem lecturer – which focused on the necessity of humanizing the "Other" in a society which cannot afford to live behind a barricade of prejudice, have not succeeded in reaching those most afflicted with this fear and hatred. The extent to which these emotions blind such participants is evident in the irony of feedback from a student who decided to drop the course after the first semester (in 2014), because she 'felt too uncomfortable sitting with Arabs." She

wrote a glowing letter to the lecturer, thanking her for introducing her to the course material about 'bias and stereotyping… I will use these materials in my classroom and they are very important"—and remained oblivious to the stronger statement made by her intransigent stand.

Directions for future course development

The course format, with only two face-to-face meetings, is less than ideal. Without exception, students agreed that more face-to-face meetings would have benefited the group interaction. Even taking into account the benefits of e-learning mentioned earlier, it is clear that within this specific context, there is no substitute for human contact. However, with technological progress as swift as it is, there is every possibility that the availability and authenticity of video-conferencing will reach a level which will make such a statement obsolete. (Indeed, while past attempts to use 'Skype' failed because of poor internet infrastructure, it is quite plausible that such group meetings will be soon be enabled.)

The focus on a group project which involves negotiating content and presentation format has proven successful in that it requires collaboration and essentially enables students to learn about one another through incidental discussion. The structure of the collaborative work has changed—and will continue changing—as the course develops. The original emphasis on summary skills and reading academic texts demanded writing and rewriting drafts, which were posted on the Moodle group forums. Students were required to ask their peers content-related questions and even to write gists of each other's summaries in order to assess whether or not the writer had conveyed the main idea of the text. However, as the course developed and content came to outweigh academic form, the lecturers allowed students to widen their text searches to include internet sites (with sufficient text) and quasi-professional journals and newspapers. In addition, rather than emphasizing gists and summaries the lecturers asked students in each group to react to each other's summary by posting what they saw as the text's major contribution to the group topic, or simply to give an opinion of the stance reflected in the article in question. This change reflects the constant juggling between the dual aims of the course: fostering academic skills while eliciting introspection, reflection and involvement regarding the topics of bias awareness and dealing with diversity.

At first, as mentioned, the distance learning collaboration was strictly controlled and monitored by the lecturers through the Moodle platform. However, participants in recent courses have been encouraged to make use of all the social network platforms open to them, including WhatsApp and Facebook. To the lecturers it is clear that relinquishing control of the platforms, and thus allowing the students to choose their own channels of communication, will necessitate a rethinking of the assessment of second semester work (which was based on student participation in the discussion forums in addition to the final PowerPoint presentation and activity) and lead to a dearth of written evidence of student attitude. However, it is felt that the value of incidental mutual discovery which occurs during communication on these platforms far outweighs any potential access to generalizable data.

There is still much work to be done on improving the cooperative aspect of the project. Preparing a group PowerPoint presentation can deteriorate to the level of 'each of us prepares two slides and we put them together.' The lecturers constantly remind the mixed groups to negotiate and assess the continuity of their presentations, which should have one main theme supported by material from the group members' texts. However, the level of collaboration remains uneven—often due to the heterogeneous level of English proficiency (many of the Jewish students had spent time abroad or come from homes where one parent was an English speaker.) This lack of symmetry has been dealt with, it is hoped, by the lecturers' recent decision to match first year Jewish students with third year Arab students. This also solves another 'symmetry' issue—one of age. Overall, the Jewish students begin their studies at least two years later than do the Arab students, because of the 2-3 years they serve in the army. In addition, the lecturers are considering adding a component that would give further training and theoretical background in group work.

Discussion and Conclusions

The culturally neutral vehicle of English allows the groups in our course to function on an even footing, and this symmetry, often lacking in dialogues between Israeli Jews and Arabs, could be transferred to high school or college settings within the EFL curriculum. The materials applied in the course are highly appropriate to the EFL curriculum within Israeli schools, which includes a Domain of Social Interaction. While the lack of proficiency in the target language may appear to limit communication of abstract ideas or invite inaccuracy, it also requires both parties to use caution in lexical choices, and to consider their words carefully—a valuable, albeit incidental learning benefit.

While sharing ideas and planning activities, students also – quite 'accidentally'—learned about each other's family background, religious beliefs, personal histories, plans for the future, etc. This microcultural approach is the foundation for overcoming bias and stereotyping; seeing the "Other" as an individual rather than one of 'them' is the first step toward resolving conflict. The recognition of the Arab or Jew as, first and foremost, a fellow human being, may be the first step in legitimizing that individual's claim to group identity as well.

It is hoped that the graduates of the course will have deepened their insight on two levels: first, regarding their own unconscious bias and tendencies to both think and act within the boundaries of stereotyping; and second—of the need to incorporate such awareness in their own teaching within the Israeli public school system. The lecturers aspire to continue developing this course, which joins other 'stones in the pond' and may possibly contribute to produce further ripples that will help to move our society away from the fear and hatred with which it is plagued.

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