The Conflict Regarding the Conflict: Challenges and Negotiations in a Conflict Engagement Intervention

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Knowledge, power and participation are central issues in action research, in particular in projects that focus on dealing with national and ethnic conflicts. Our presentation focuses on intervention held in an academic institution in Israel. The aim of project "Nice 2 Meet U" was to encourage relationships between Arab and Jewish students who spend three years studying together but often have no social interactions among them. Unlike other existing programs promoting dialogue between Arab and Jewish students on Israeli campuses that students have no input designing them, Nice 2 Meet U was initiated as a grassroots program, and is designed and moderated by students. The group is consisted of equal numbers of Jewish and Arab women students, and is coordinated by two students - Arab and Jewish.

The authors of this presentation are faculty members at the College. One author, a junior staff member, closely supports the program: she attends all meetings and takes part in designing the meetings and in supporting the students who facilitate them. The other authors, senior faculty, provide support for the first author.

This presentation will focus on a specific dilemma which is constantly negotiated among the participants of the project. The dilemma is: Should the program include a direct open discussion concerning the political debate regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Or, rather, should the group’ meetings remain a space of pleasant encounters where the participants can get to know each other without the threat of discussing the political conflicts?

We will share our initial insights on how this dilemma reflects and challenges the collaboration between the participants: students and faculty, who rely on different - and sometimes conflicting – perspectives, regarding conflict engagement.