Citizenship Education in Israel – A Jewish-Democratic State

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Abstract: Our point of departure is that the education of future citizens is a field that is greatly sensitive to the macro-political cultures of nations and the micro-political culture of schools within these nations. To comprehend the enormity of the task of preparing youngsters to become citizens in Israel we discuss the major features of both Israeli society and the schools. Israeli society is characterized by great heterogeneity and wide rifts among segments of the population that hold contesting views concerning the very foundations of the state of Israel. This context makes the emergence of a shared civic identity a mission that’s hard to accomplish. We trace the major milestones of citizenship education from the pre-state period (Yishuv) until today and conclude that citizenship education progressed from a highly emotional nationalistic focus, centering on civic obligations, to a more cognitive, discipline-oriented civic education with greater awareness of civil liberties and human rights. We also conclude that citizenship education is still inadequately implemented in the schools.

The education of future citizens is a field that is frequently institutionally ill defined and greatly sensitive to the macro-political cultures of nations and the micro-political culture of schools within these nations. Thus, to comprehend the enormity of the task of preparing youngsters to become citizens in Israel the major features of both Israeli society and the schools must be considered. Israel, as stated in its Declaration of Independence, was founded as a Jewish and democratic state. Achieving a balance between the particularistic-Jewish component and the universalistic-democratic pillar is more problematic in Israel than in many other Western democracies, as will be demonstrated and explained in this chapter.

We begin by examining the tenets of citizenship education in democracy. Next, in order to assess the role of Israeli schools in fostering and inculcating democratic citizenship orientations it is necessary to analyze the major milestones of citizenship education from the pre-state period (Yishuv) to the present. The historical account will be followed by

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a discussion of current key challenges and problems facing citizenship education. We argue that although citizenship education progressed significantly over the years to encompass concerns of minority groups, and civil and human rights, citizenship education is still inadequately implemented in the schools.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

Citizenship orientations are the outcomes of a cumulative process of political learning. Democratic societies assign schools a prominent role in the development of citizenship virtues, values and skills. Niemi and Junn maintain that ‘schools, along with their teachers and curricula, have long been identified as the critical link between education and citizenship, as the locus from which democratic citizens emerge’. While Converse characterizes formal education as the ‘universal solvent’ that explains more aspects of democratic citizenship than any other factor.

The term ‘citizenship education’ commonly refers to institutionalized forms of political knowledge acquisition that take place within formal educational frameworks (such as schools and universities) and informal frameworks (such as youth movements). A distinction should be made between specific and diffuse citizenship education. Specific citizenship education proceeds through curricular and extracurricular school activities (such as civic classes or service learning programmes) that are specifically designed to prepare youngsters for citizenship, as well as through the ‘hidden curriculum’ of the school (this includes, for example, instructional styles and patterns of authority relationships), better known as the school climate. Diffuse citizenship education refers to educational attainment in general. It is based on the assumption that ‘schooling provides civic education even when its content is not explicitly civic’. Citizenship education in Western democracies aims at inculcating simultaneously particularistic identities and values, such as patriotism and national pride, and universalistic and shared democratic codes such as tolerance and respect for a variety of civil liberties. Achieving a shared concept of citizenship that would bridge over ethnic, national and socio-economic rifts is considered vital for the functioning of democracies because it ‘helps to tame the divisive passions of other identities’. It is generally agreed that pluralism must fit within certain kind of overarching unity, and certain ultimate values must be shared if the diversity in a democratic society is to be contained democratically. There has been a growing awareness of the potential tensions between cultural, national and social heterogeneity and the virtues and practices of democratic citizenship and national unity.

Studies have shown that forming an affinity with one’s country is often more problematic for national and ethnic minorities than for those who form the dominant group, and developing a common civic identity in
multicultural societies is not as simple a matter. Educating the younger generation for citizenship in a deeply divided society is an especially sensitive and difficult task.

A major attribute of Israeli society is the wide and deep rifts between religious and non-religious groups, between Israeli Arabs and Jews, between the political left and right, and between the rich and the poor. The multicultural and ever-changing texture of Israeli society can be attributed mainly to the constant flow and at times the massive waves of immigrants arriving from all over the globe. These waves of immigrants create a vertical mosaic, in which ethnic and socio-economic rifts merge, as well as rifts between veteran Israelis and newly arrived immigrants. These divides, that often intersect and overlap, represent contesting visions of Israel as a Jewish-democratic state and profoundly shape Israel’s political culture.

Israel’s engagement in a long intractable conflict creates an aura of constant threat. The sense of threat is reinforced by the vivid memory of the Holocaust that is transmitted to students via the teaching of history and visits to the death camps in Europe. Consequently, Israeli society has become so radicalized that it is more difficult than ever to arrive at a broad consensus on political and territorial issues, social issues and issues related to state and religion. It is not surprising that under these circumstances society is looking to education to try and solve some of the social and political implications of these basic rifts. So, can Israeli schools make a difference? Can schools provide students with learning environments that would be conducive to the acquisition of democratic orientations and inculcate a shared civic identity that would bridge existing divides?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Zionist Citizenship during the Yishuv Period

‘Citizenship’ is conventionally defined within an existing state. It is, therefore, interesting to note that citizenship education preceded the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and was entitled ‘education for Zionist citizenship’. Israel, as stated in its Declaration of Independence, was established as a Jewish-democratic state, a state that attempts to promote simultaneously Jewish nationalism and democracy. The debate that is still relevant today, concerning the emphasis that should be given to national and universalistic values, and the recognitions that these two sets of values may be at odds with one another, preceded the founding of the state. During the Yishuv period, this duality was viewed as an abnormality caused by Diaspora life. One of the major goals of Zionism was to do away with this split identity, and educate a person and a Jew as a unified entity. However, given the emphasis during that period on the revival of national life, the resurrection of the Hebrew language and the renewal of the use of
the Hebrew calendar, clear precedence was given to national values. The aims of education for Zionist citizenship were to instil in the younger generation a strong loyalty to the ideas of national rebuilding and the redemption of the land. The ideal was to produce ‘pioneers’ dedicated to the cause of erecting the foundations of the future state, who are willing to postpone the fulfilment of their personal wishes and give priority to collective goals. Zionist education permeated all school subjects, and the entire web of school life became a passing parade of national symbols and an identification rite.\textsuperscript{13} Teaching the Bible to youngsters even in non-religious schools was a central pillar of Zionist education. It was aimed at making youngsters aware of the historical roots of the nation, and of the source of modern Hebrew, and was also designed to instil in children universalistic values such as compassion for the weak, social justice, desire for universal peace and respect for other people and their way of life.\textsuperscript{14} History, too, was enlisted to highlight periods of Jewish independence and heroism, and to bridge the gap between past periods of statehood and present national revival.\textsuperscript{15} Geography books aimed at creating affinity and love for the country, emphasizing that the essence of Zionism is the realization of the right of Jews to return to their ancestral homeland. Even arithmetic was mobilized, and students were asked to calculate the number of trees planted by the pioneers, the age of Zionist settlements, or the sum of donations made to the Jewish National Fund. The inculcation of strong national emotions was considered more important than the cognitive aspects of civic education. Educators were nonetheless aware of the dangers entailed in emotion-based education and attempts were made ‘not to bring into the schools the emotionalism of propaganda, but vital national emotions. To stay away from the sensational character of propaganda, and stress instead emotional maturity through education’.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Citizenship Education during the First Years of Statehood}

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was a turning point that affected citizenship education as well. One of the major objectives of the leadership of the newly born state was to create a strong central government that would transcend narrow partisan interests and affiliations. The institutional framework that had operated during the pre-state period lacked sovereignty and consequently depended on the voluntary compliance of citizens. In addition, these institutions were affiliated with the various factions within the Zionist movement. The educational system, for example, was divided into so-called ‘streams’: the religious, the general Zionist, and the socialist labour, which persisted until 1953. The tasks of centralization and de-politicization of various organizations and institutions and the creation of an effective central government dominated the first years of statehood. The first years of statehood were also marked by mass immigration of Jews into Israel.
During the first decade of statehood, the Israeli Jewish population almost tripled. About half of the immigrants came from Europe, having survived the Holocaust and war, and half were refugees from Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Immigrants arrived mainly from non-democratic countries and from countries in which Jews had at best limited citizenship rights. They therefore lacked the experience of participatory citizenship in a democracy. This situation presented a challenge to Israel as a young democracy: there was a need to re-socialize the immigrants to enable them to function effectively within a democracy, as well as preparing the younger generation for the citizenship role. It became clear that pre-state citizenship education must be adapted to the new reality, that schools must carry the burden of educating citizens to function within Israeli democracy, and that schools cannot rely much on families and emerging communities. Initially, however, much of the ideological fervour of the Yishuv period continued to dominate the first years of statehood.

Educators were debating how to refocus Zionist education following the fulfilment of a central Zionist aim: the establishment of Israel. A teachers’ organization (Teachers for the Jewish National Fund) that took charge of Zionist education in the pre-state period, convened in 1950, two years after the establishment of Israel, to deliberate the course that national education should be taking. During the pre-state period, the redemption of the Jewish people and land was the central theme in Zionist education, and the Jewish National Fund, an organization that collected money to purchase land in Palestine and build Jewish settlements, came to symbolize the Zionist enterprise in schools. Educators expressed the idea that following the establishment of Israel, new goals should be set for Zionist education, and it has been suggested that the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) be adopted by the schools as a symbol of the new national mission. It was naively anticipated that Israel would enjoy a period of calm following its victory in the War of Independence and the armistice agreements that were signed with neighbouring Arab countries. During the pre-state era, military service was voluntary. It was feared that a transition to compulsory service could erode youngsters’ respect and affection for the military, and their motivation to serve their country during peacetime. It was decided that schools should provide para-military education, that would nevertheless be anti-militaristic: ‘from the dawn of childhood youngsters embroider their role as pioneers … Hebrew youth should never regard the army as an adventurous cult, sharpening its swords … our army is an army of defense and fulfillment of Zionism’. The third Israeli chief of staff, Igal Yadin, addressed a teachers’ meeting, and shared with educators his views concerning the partnership that should develop between the IDF and the schools. He claimed that the War of Independence was won because each soldier had a sense of mission, knowing what he was defending and what he was fighting for. Therefore, the most important educational objective is...
to raise conscientious Zionist soldiers. It was suggested that students should visit army camps, and soldiers should visit the schools, and that school clubs would familiarize students with aviation and nautical affairs. In later years, pre-military training (GADNA) was offered in high schools. Overall, the schools played a key role in inculcating the view that military service is an integral and central component of Israeli citizenship.

In 1953 the State Education Law was legislated. The goals that should be achieved via the state educational system clearly give primacy to national aims and to the ethos of the pioneers, mentioning also the wish to impart to the younger generation the desire to establish a society based on the foundations of liberty, equality, tolerance, mutual help and love of people. The educational system was administratively centralized and was dissociated from the various political parties. The de-politicization of the school system was accompanied by strict instructions that politics and ideological controversies should not enter the schools. Instead, schools should emphasize consensus and avoid partisanship, and even youth movements were barred from schools. Civic education focused on the structural and legal aspects of state institutions. The emotional emphasis that was dominant during the Yishuv period became marginal and cognitive elements took precedence. Civic education came to rely largely on concepts rooted in the social sciences. Civic education during that period centred on the obligations of citizens, rather than on citizens’ rights, expanding the pioneer role from involvement in settlement and defence activities into additional social spheres such as science and industry. The teaching of civics centred on the legal and structural attributes of governmental institutions. These trends remained dominant well into the 1980s.

**Democratic Education in the 1980s**

During the 1980s the Ministry of Education was alerted to the need to foster democratic education in the schools. A series of studies examining students’ knowledge and perceptions of democracy revealed great ignorance and intolerance especially among vocational programme students. A policy directive issued in 1985 by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports assigns unprecedented importance to the universalistic aspects of citizenship while allotting national values a much more minor role. The document asserts that there exists an inevitable conflict between national and humanistic-universal values. Educators are instructed to teach students that when faced with dilemmas emanating from the clash between national and universalistic values ‘citizenship rights that are derived from fundamental democratic principles and procedures should gain precedence [over national values] and provide behavioural guidance’. This policy represents a total reversal of the pre-eminence of Zionist values during the Yishuv period and first years of statehood. Each year, the Ministry of
Education announces a central theme that should be embodied in and articulated through diverse educational activities in the schools. To enforce the new policy, a unit for democracy and peaceful coexistence became part of the Ministry of Education, and the central theme for the academic years 1986 and 1987 was education for democracy.

*Education for Citizenship in a Jewish-Democratic State*

Developments from the 1990s on, that inspired a more balanced emphasis on national and democratic values, and a much greater attention to civil and human rights, will be discussed in this section.

Two committees were especially instrumental in setting a new agenda for citizenship education. The committee for the examination of Judaic studies in Hebrew state schools was appointed in 1991, and was given a broad mandate to examine any aspect that could promote Judaic education in schools\(^\text{21}\) (the ‘Shenhar Committee’). A steering committee appointed in 1995 was commissioned to ‘develop a comprehensive program for the inculcation of citizenship as a common value and behavioural framework for all Israeli citizens’ (the ‘Kremnizer Committee’).\(^\text{22}\)

The Judaic studies (‘Shenhar’) committee submitted its recommendations in 1994. The committee acknowledged that the nature of ‘secularism’ itself had changed over the years. During the pre-state period, most of the secular pioneers were raised in traditional or orthodox families. They were familiar with Jewish traditions but took the liberty of interpreting them from a non-theological perspective, infusing in them national, historical, socialist, humanistic and aesthetic meanings.\(^\text{23}\) Secular Jews also resented the claim of religious Jews to have a monopoly over the interpretation, preservation and teaching of Jewish traditions, asserting they have the right to interpret Judaism from a non-theological perspective.

During the pre-state period and first years of statehood, a sizeable share of the curriculum in the non-religious schools was dedicated to Judaic studies (such as the Bible). The interpretation, however, was secular. Over the years the representation of the humanities, social sciences and Judaic studies in the high school curriculum greatly diminished.\(^\text{24}\) Consequently, the number of hours dedicated to the teaching of Judaic studies declined considerably. Few students choose these school subjects as part of their high school matriculation certificate, or choose to pursue university degrees and teaching certificates in these subjects. These trends are considered to erode the ‘Jewishness’ of Israel, and to foster alienation among religious and non-observant Jews.

The committee’s point of departure was that the non-religious sector is not alienated or detached from Judaism. Instead, it forms a public which considers Judaism to be ‘a national pluralistic culture that is still emerging’.\(^\text{25}\) The committee further asserted:
The Jewish component in the identity of the non-religious public is a combination of elements derived from religious traditions; attachment to the land and its past; its historical and natural sites; the Hebrew language, and the variety of works written in Hebrew or translated into Hebrew; the Jewish calendar with its religious and national holidays; forming new patterns for celebrating the holidays by combining religious elements, ethnic traditions and elements that were renewed as part of the Zionist creation especially in connection to the land and workers’ settlements; personal and social moral values that derive from Jewish traditions, the Zionist ethos and universalistic moral ideologies.26

This approach resembles and revives the secular interpretations of Judaism that were prevalent during the pre-state era and the first years of statehood. The major recommendation of the committee was to intensify the study of Jewish heritage in Hebrew state schools from a pluralistic point of view; ‘Hebrew state schools should focus on the development of a plurality of options for Jewish Israeli cultural existence that is independent of Jewish religious law (Halacha), and that builds on attachment to the history and creation of the Jewish people using a critical, pluralistic and innovative perspective.27 The committee’s recommendations were adopted by the Ministry as one of the curricular pillars of the state education system (alongside science education and democratic education). However, they have scarcely been implemented for a variety of reasons, such as lack of resources and the shortage of educators capable of teaching Jewish traditions from a pluralistic and critical perspective.28 In time, the Shenhar and Kremnizer reports were structurally incorporated into the new Department of Value Education which was established by the religious minister of education, the late Zevulun Hammer, which might be one more explanation for their relatively minor impact on the educational system.29

The steering committee on education for democracy (The ‘Kremnizer Committee’) was commissioned to provide detailed recommendations concerning the contents of civic education such as the values, knowledge and competences that students should acquire at each stage of their educational career, the pedagogical practices that should be employed, and the organizational frameworks and tools for implementing and evaluating the new citizenship education programme. The decision of the committee to restrict its work to the study of regular state schools and leave out religious Hebrew state schools, Arab, Bedouin and Druze schools, not to mention ultra-orthodox schools that are outside the state educational system and do not follow the state curriculum, enabled the committee to avoid many controversial issues.

A report was submitted to the Ministry of Education in February 1996 providing an overview of the major issues and problems concerning citizenship orientations within Israeli society together with
recommendations regarding educational objectives and practices. Three major objectives that should be addressed by the schools were identified. First, prevalent civic identities were described as weak and poor in content, and the committee emphasized the need to create a strong universalistic civic identity that would provide a common basis for allegiance, solidarity and consensus. Secondly, the need to develop a ‘culture of discussion’, or civilized public discourse, based on tolerance, attentiveness to other views and willingness to settle conflicts through negotiation, was stressed. And finally, to combat alienation and passivity, the development of a realistic approach to politics, i.e. neither one that presents a utopian idealization of politics nor one that condemns politics as ‘dirty’ was recommended. Citizenship education should aim at the acquisition of knowledge, and the inculcation of attitudes, values and motivations, as well as the necessary civic competences. The achievement of these goals must be given high priority.

This report gained great public attention because it was submitted during a most turbulent and traumatic period for Israeli democracy; only three months after the earth-shattering assassination of Prime Minister Rabin.

The committee identified three subject areas that should be taught in schools. First, Israel as a Jewish and a democratic state should promote the understanding of the foundations of Israel as both a Jewish state and a democracy. Secondly, citizenship obligations and civic and human rights must be articulated in schools. The third area was identified as the study of the principles, processes and institutions of democratic regimes. Thus, the first subject area addresses Israeli society, while the other two address the more universalistic aspects of democratic regimes in general, as well as human rights. The competences that students should acquire included: the ability to consider the overall complexity of issues and to assess the merits and drawbacks of various solutions; ability to offer well-founded and constructive criticism; and to have discourse with those who agree with and those who are opposed to one’s own views.

It was recommended that a great variety of teaching methods, such as discussion of controversial issues and simulations and role-play would be employed to engage students. The school climate should enable students to experiment with civic competences and to internalize civic values. This includes mutual respect among teachers and students, democratic decision making processes, active student councils, production of school newspapers, discussion clubs and developing a school’s code of students’ rights and obligations. Thus, the report calls for a comprehensive change concerning the implementation of civics in the curriculum, and concerning the entire school climate. The recommendations were adopted by the Ministry of Education, but so far have not been implemented.
Three significant events inspired the discourse on the place of civic and human rights in education. One of these was the signing (in 1990) and ratification (in 1991) by Israel of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention advances the view that children have inherent rights that should be respected and implemented within various social frameworks, including schools. These rights clearly include citizenship rights, such as freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14), freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 15).

The Ministry of Justice appointed a committee to implement the Convention in Israeli legislation pertaining to the various spheres of children’s life. A subcommittee on education was subsequently formed to implement the principles of the Convention in educational legislation. The report is about to be submitted to the new minister of justice, hence its effect on the education system cannot as yet be assessed.

These developments prompted the amendment of the State Education Law that was legislated in 1953. In 2000 the section of the law that explicates the aims it seeks to achieve was amended to include individualistic rather than just collectivist goals, as well as new social agendas such as gender equality and environmental concerns. Included are equal opportunities for self-development, acceptance of and support for ‘others’, inculcating intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, voluntary work and social involvement. Another significant event was the legislation of the Students’ Rights Law in 2001, a law that implements many of the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child within Israeli schools, and advances a democratic school climate.

A second major event was the signing of the Oslo Accords and the initiation of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This process, that lasted until the recent outbreak of violence, inspired the introduction of peace education in schools. The central theme for the school year 1994–95 was dedicated to ‘the peace process’; it was aimed at introducing youngsters to the idea that the era of peace has dawned. To help educators implement the message of peace, the Ministry of Education circulated a catalogue containing hundreds of ideas and programmes illustrating the idea of peace to children K-12.

The third, and perhaps most important, event of the 1990s was the shocking assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by a Jewish right-wing radical. ‘The assassination of Rabin plunged Israelis into bewilderment, shock, and deep anxiety.’ The immediate reaction was the intensification of communal emotions, into a so-called ‘epidemic of commects’. An analysis of the media in the weeks following the assassination reveals the efforts made to construct a collective identity, based on Rabin’s legacy, emphasizing mainly the constituting elements of the Israeli Sabra, peace making and Zionism.
The reaction of the Arab population in Israel was complex and multidimensional. The secular-civic character of the peace rally in which Rabin was assassinated gave the Arab population an opportunity to participate in the Israeli civic discourse. But the discourse that has developed around the assassination was claimed to be a Jewish-Israeli one, and not a civic discourse.\textsuperscript{36} As an immediate reaction by the education system to the assassination several interesting programmes were developed and adopted. Since no special budget was allocated, the Department of Curriculum Planning in the Ministry of Education took the initiative to adapt the materials of the Shenhar Report and turn them into new and appropriate programmes. ‘Choose Life’ (Deuteronomy, 30/19) is a programme that discusses the different meanings of the command, ‘therefore choose life’ through ethical dilemmas around problems of life and death.\textsuperscript{37} The programme does not address directly Rabin’s assassination, although it was triggered by it, and is taught these days as part of studies of Jewish philosophy.

Another programme, ‘Diversity and Controversy’,\textsuperscript{38} mentions Rabin’s assassination directly: ‘The assassination of Prime Minister Rabin is a tragic warning sign to what might happen in our society if we don’t learn to cope with deep and painful controversies in thoughtful ways’.\textsuperscript{39} Unfortunately, this programme did not find its way into mainstream education.

A special memorial day to commemorate Rabin’s assassination was announced and is observed in schools. However, it was later ‘balanced’ by a memorial day for Rechavam Zeevi (‘Ghandi’), a member of parliament, and the leader of the ‘National Unity’ party who was assassinated by Palestinian terrorists. In all, it appears that Rabin’s assassination left little direct impact on civic education, echoing the observation that ‘the suppression of public discourse after the assassination did not mould the Israel collective memory or foster the reinvention of Israeli collectivity’.\textsuperscript{40}

Recent studies convey the impression that knowledge concerning the legal-structural aspects of government is emphasized more than democratic values. Thus, while 80% of junior high school students identified correctly the branch of government to which the Knesset belongs, only 34% provided a correct answer to the question: ‘Tyranny of the majority is a situation that…?’\textsuperscript{41} Similarly, an international comparative study of citizenship orientations of upper secondary school students in 14 countries revealed that Israeli youngsters were significantly above the international mean concerning ‘love for one’s country and pride in its achievements’. They were, however, significantly below the international mean in their evaluation that they ‘learned in school to understand people with different ideas’.\textsuperscript{42}
CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND THE TEXTURE OF SCHOOLING: CHALLENGES AND PROMISES

The New Civics Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools

Until 1994 there was no common civics curriculum for Arab and Hebrew state schools and only partial overlap existed. The Ministry of Education was determined to formulate a common core curriculum for all state high schools: Arab, regular state schools, and religious state schools.43 The supreme goal of the unified curriculum is:

To inculcate a common Israeli civic identity, together with the development of distinct national identities, and to impart to students the values of pluralism and tolerance, educate students to accept the diversity that exists within Israeli society, and to respect those who are different from oneself, and to help students become autonomous and conscious citizens, capable of critical thinking, of analyzing, evaluating, and forming an independent opinion, playing by the rules of democracy, and being ‘immune’ to demagogical influences.44

The core curriculum should thus provide Arab and Jewish students alike with an opportunity for:

A thorough examination of the values on which Israel and its government are founded, given that Israel is simultaneously a Jewish and democratic state. The analysis should reveal, on the one hand, how the Jewish and democratic components are connected, and on the other, the fact that tensions may arise between them. Examination of the social reality in Israel should be related to these two sets of values.45

A textbook was developed over the years in collaboration with Arab and Jewish educators, and the new curriculum was initially implemented on an experimental basis in some schools, and was nationally implemented in 2001. Civics teachers participated in training programmes that were specially designed to familiarize them with the new curriculum, textbook and form of the civics matriculation examination. The new curriculum clearly addresses the dual nature of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and enables students to familiarize themselves with how ‘others’ perceive this duality and are affected by it.

Civics as a School Subject

It is doubtful that the ambitious undertaking of achieving a shared civic identity via civic instruction can be realized given the time allocated to the teaching of civics, and the marginal status of civics in the Israeli curriculum. The recommendation of the Kremnizer Committee to offer civics classes throughout the entire process of schooling has not been implemented. At the elementary school level (grades 1 to 6) civics is not
taught. However, some aspects of citizenship are studied in grades 2 to 4 through a school subject entitled ‘Homeland and Society’. For the junior high school level (grades 7 to 9) a civics curriculum together with instructional materials have been prepared. Yet, civics is not an obligatory part of the curriculum, and the decision concerning civic instruction is left to school principals. It is estimated that civics is taught in only about one-third of the junior high schools, at the seventh or eighth grades, one hour per week. Consequently, many students reach high school without previously studying it. Civics is a compulsory school subject at the high school level, and a matriculation examination is obligatory for all students at either the eleventh or twelfth grade, Three hours per week are dedicated to the teaching of civics and that is usually increased during the year in which students take the matriculation examination, but more so in regular state schools than in Arab and religious state schools. A recent study revealed the marginality of civics as a school subject, especially within Arab schools.\(^46\)

The neglect of civics as a school subject is manifested in the results of the matriculation examinations. The scores achieved in this area have been in recent years the lowest of all other school subjects in the humanities and social sciences. A recent study revealed that overall students in Hebrew schools did better on a knowledge test about democracy than students in Arab schools, and Hebrew state school students did slightly better than both religious state school and Arab school students.\(^47\) An international comparison of knowledge of democracy scores in 14 countries revealed no statistically significant differences between the mean score of Israeli eleventh graders and the international mean.\(^48\) Thus, on average, Israeli youth did no worse then their counterparts in other countries.

**Inequality and Citizenship Education**

The idea that citizens *qua* citizens are equal, without any achieved or ascribed qualifications is echoed again and again in modern political thought.\(^49\) Whatever the social or group differences among citizens, whatever their qualities of wealth, status and power in the everyday activities of civil society, citizenship gives everyone the same status as peers in the political public. The first moral obligation of schools in democracy is, therefore, ‘to give all children an education adequate to take advantage of their political status as citizens’.\(^50\) Dewey considers ‘equal opportunity to receive and to take from others … [and the exposure to] shared undertakings and experiences’ a hallmark of democratic education. ‘Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves.’\(^51\) Do Israeli schools meet these societal expectations and equally prepare all students to become citizens?

As was mentioned earlier, citizenship education is related to educational attainment in general, as well as to educational activities specifically
designed to inculcate citizenship orientations. The great inequality on both these dimensions within the Israeli school system is one of the greatest obstacles for fostering Israeli democracy and for educating future citizens. Schools stratify both students and knowledge, and high prestige knowledge is available almost exclusively to students in the high level programmes and tracks.\textsuperscript{52} Indeed, civic virtues such as critical thinking, problem solving, drawing conclusions, making generalizations, evaluating or synthesizing knowledge and acting deliberatively in a pluralistic world are intimately related to high level knowledge, notably to literacy, and access to such knowledge is unevenly allocated in schools. Literacy, for example, has long been recognized as a basic skill that is vital for democracy.\textsuperscript{53} Reading in particular has been recognized as the ‘new civil right’.\textsuperscript{54}

A recent report on reading revealed great inequality within Israeli society concerning the acquisition of reading skills.\textsuperscript{55} About half of the fourth grade students showed relatively poor reading comprehension, a finding that was further supported by an international study of eighth graders. The development of a differentiated civics curriculum for academic and vocational high schools represents another dimension of educational inequality. Until 1990 civics did not exist as a distinct school subject in vocational schools. It only formed a section within the study of history of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, a school subject that was not universally taught. Civics textbooks for vocational schools were non-existent, as were training programmes for civics teachers. Consequently, only few vocational school students had a chance to taste the subject. It is hardly surprising that programme placement – academic or vocational – had a differential effect on students’ expressed interest in politics, media use, willingness to become actively involved, discussion of politics with others, support of freedom of speech and sense of political efficacy. Overall, the positive effect of academic programmes, reinforcing a variety of civic orientations, was greater than that of vocational programmes where zero or negative effects more often prevailed.\textsuperscript{56}

These results may be partially attributed to the way teachers observe, classify and react to socio-economic and cultural differences in children, which affects the implementation of the curriculum in classrooms, and evidently results in differential learning experiences and opportunities.\textsuperscript{57}

Ichilov reports that high school teachers in academic programmes and in schools that cater to better-off students are more open to discussing controversial issues and conflict situations, and to exposing students to criticism and pluralism as compared with teachers in schools with a majority of disadvantaged students.\textsuperscript{58}

The Ministry of Education was alarmed by studies that revealed great intolerance and ignorance among vocational school students, and concluded: ‘education for citizenship and democracy in the technological tracks must be invigorated’.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, the 1990 civics curriculum represents...
the first (and so far the only) attempt to establish civics as an independent school subject in vocational schools. As was reported earlier, in 1994 the Ministry of Education decided to implement a unified civics curriculum in all academic schools. However, vocational schools were excluded. Consequently, a differentiated curriculum is implemented in academic and vocational high schools. Analysis of curricular materials designed for the teaching of civics in academic and vocational schools reveals that students in vocational and academic tracks are guided into dissimilar citizenship roles.  

Academic school students are expected to acquire the capacity to perceive citizenship issues through a broad, interdisciplinary and multi-faceted prism. Students in vocational schools, in contrast, are initiated into an unsophisticated uncritical and submissive pattern of citizenship, fostering what Whitty calls ‘quietism’ and ‘domestication’.

Recent educational policies that were adopted by the Ministry of Education (notably, school choice) may increase inequality. A policy that allows parents to establish democratic magnet schools is especially peculiar given that it is the responsibility of the government to secure democratic schools for all children. Democratic magnet schools, (about 30 of which are already in existence), offer better-off parents an escape from integrated public schools, establishing quasi-private schools that are publicly funded with parents covering only fringe financial costs. These schools often admit students selectively, but are nevertheless operated through democratic institutions and procedures. Officially, they are run by the Ministry of Education and the municipality, but parents play a decisive role in the selection of the school principal and educational staff. The inevitable conclusion is that such schools provide democratic playgrounds for children of better educated and more affluent parents.

**Extracurricular Programmes for Citizenship Education**

Formal education and instruction in civics are not the only activities related to citizenship education, and attempts to bridge existing gaps and rivalries. There is a wealth of activities, programmes and instructional materials offered through the Youth and Society Division and the Unit for Democracy of the Ministry of Education. In addition, non-profit organizations, such as the Adam Institute, the Israeli Civil Rights Society, the Van Leer Institute, the Jewish-Zionist Institute and the Rabin Centre for Peace, to mention only few of them, since the list contains about 72 different organizations. Most of these organizations produce instructional materials and operate programmes within schools, such as encounters between Jewish and Arab youngsters, and religious and non-religious Jewish students.

High schools offer a service-learning programme entitled: ‘personal commitment – community service’. The programme is implemented in
the tenth grade, in schools that choose to participate, and all students are required to be engaged. Participation in the programme is noted in students’ certificates of high school graduation. The Ministry of Education estimates that about 70,000 students in about 300 schools take part in the programme. Preliminary findings reveal that although participation is compulsory, students expressed the view that involvement in the programme is a worthwhile experience that benefits both themselves and the community. Many students declared that they would be willing to continue their community work on a voluntary basis.

Civic Education in Arab Schools

Citizenship education in a Jewish-democratic state is a highly sensitive issue in Arab schools. The Jewish and the democratic dimensions of citizenship are both problematic.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel, a term that appears to express the self-definition of Israeli Arabs signifies change in their collective identity. There is a wide agreement among scholars that since 1967 Israeli Palestinians have undergone a radicalization process that involves the strengthening of the Palestinian national identity and a concomitant weakening of the Israeli civic identity. The 1987 first Palestinian uprising greatly fostered the Palestinian identity of Israeli Arabs. Arabs of Israel were in full sympathy with the Palestinian insurgents, sent food and drugs into the territories, held protest rallies, contributed to special emergency funds and donated blood. Islamic fundamentalism also gained a strong hold among some segments of the Israeli Arab population, as a form of collective identity.

The collective narratives of the Israelis and Palestinians are to a large extent mutually exclusive, based on vastly differing historical interpretations. Thus, it is not surprising that the national symbols of the State of Israel that represent Jewish themes are not an acceptable form of Israeli identity for the Palestinian Arab. They do not participate in the celebration of national holidays and memorial days, and Israel’s Independence is commemorated by them as the day of the ‘Nakba’, i.e. what they consider to be their national catastrophe. The absence of a more general, more diffused Israeli identity makes it difficult to create a shared ideology between Arab and Jewish Israeli citizens.

The civic-democratic dimension of Israeli citizenship is also problematic. Multidimensional inequality is of special significance. Despite the fact that the Israeli Arab population has undergone an intensive process of modernization over the years, their poverty rate is almost double the rate among Jewish families. There are other visible discrepancies between the populations, for example in the levels of educational attainment, position on the employment ladder, occupational opportunities and housing.
conditions. Allocation of land and water rations for agriculture also reflect great inequality between Arab and Jewish settlements.  

Arab educators and scholars argue that Israel has used the educational system as a means of controlling Palestinian Arab citizens. The state-mandated curriculum is characterized by ‘the absence of any reference to Palestinian identity in history, literature, and social studies. Instead the curriculum offers a detailed Zionist narrative of history’. However, the present state curriculum, compared to earlier versions, reflects some movement towards the inclusion of Arab identity and Arabs’ relationship to the Palestinian people. A recent study revealed that in Hebrew schools more time is dedicated to the study of history than in Arab schools, while the social sciences are taught more intensively in Arab schools. This could mean that Arab schools prefer to teach the more ‘neutral’ social sciences, and avoid as much as possible the contesting historical narratives of Jews and Arabs. A similar strategy was taken in post-World War II Germany: the study of history was replaced by the social sciences that were considered more neutral, and offered a break from the Nazi past. Arab schools are more conservative than Hebrew non-religious state schools concerning school climate and teaching practices. Student-teacher relationships tend to be more hierarchical and authoritarian. Thus, the school climate is not conducive to education for democracy.

CONCLUSION

Our discussion of the major milestones and characteristics of citizenship education reveals what may be called a process of maturation. Citizenship education progressed from a highly emotional nationalistic focus, centring on civic obligations, to a more cognitive, discipline-oriented civic education with greater awareness of civil liberties and human rights. However, although there exist a great variety of programmes and projects, in addition to the teaching of civics and other relevant school subjects, turning Israeli schools into islands of peace and democracy is not a simple undertaking. A central problem is that the Ministry of Education seems reluctant to implement its explicitly adopted policies. Civics remains a marginal school subject, and citizenship education continues to be an eclectic and fragmented endeavour.

Citizenship and multiculturalism could be forces that are pulling in diverse directions: unity v. division. Israeli society is characterized by great heterogeneity and wide rifts among segments of the population that hold contesting views concerning the very foundations of the State of Israel. This context makes the emergence of a shared civic identity a mission that is hard to accomplish. Research evidence suggests that existing societal rifts invade the schools. Growing up in a divided society, where political issues are salient, Israeli youngsters appear to be more politicized than their
counterparts in a variety of other countries. The major rifts between Jews and Arabs are clearly visible in students’ perceptions of the parochial dimensions of citizenship, such as support for Israel and pride in its achievements, history and national symbols, and support for the rights of Jewish immigrants. Religious education at both the high school level and in higher education religious institutions (‘Yeshivot Leumiot’) produce the next generations of religiously and politically radicalized individuals. Ultra-orthodox schools do not abide by the national curriculum and do not provide citizenship education. Textbooks used in ultra-orthodox schools often include expressions of prejudice against and disrespect for Arabs.

Our conclusion is that although important strides were made over the years to promote citizenship and democratic education, it is naive to expect that citizenship education in its present form, and under current circumstances, could foster the emergence of a shared civic identity that would bridge national, cultural, ethnic and social divides within Israeli society.

NOTES


18. Ibid.


26. Ibid., p.5.

27. Ibid.


34. Ibid., p.179.

35. Ibid.


39. Ibid., p.2.


46. Ichilov, Citizenship Orientations of 11th Grade Students and Teachers.

47. Ibid.

48. Amadeo et al., Civic Knowledge and Engagement, p.57.


71. Ichilov, ‘Differentiated Civics Curriculum and Patterns of Citizenship Education’.

72. Parekh, ‘Discourses on National Identity’.


74. Amadeo et al., *Civic Knowledge and Engagement*.

75. Ichilov, *Citizenship Orientations of 11th Grade Students and Teachers*.
