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## **The Graduate(s): The harvests of Israel's integrated multicultural bilingual education**

### Abstract

Advocates of integration and cross cultural contact believe schools have a seminal role to play in perpetuating or breaking the cycle of violence and division in conflicted societies. Historically, segregated schools are the norm in such societies. An alternative educational model is provided through integrated schools—schools where children from different national, ethnic, or religious groups are deliberately educated together. Integrated schools are believed to be essential in contributing to the healing of the wounds that afflict conflicted societies, easing the path toward peace, reconciliation, and integration. The present study reports on interviews conducted with the three first cohorts of students which graduated from the only integrated school in Israel running through K12. The interviewees are shown to have been able to successfully negotiate present reigning societal beliefs in all that regards to the ethos of the conflict and adopt perspectives which help them overcome hatred, fear, and anger while recognizing present sociopolitical complexities and difficulties. All in all the schools' environment and educational practices seem to help counter the socio-psychological infrastructures which evolve in the context of intractable conflicts.

Keywords: [Integrated education](#), [biligual education](#), [socio-psychological structures](#), [Israel](#), [palestinians](#), [peace education](#)

### **Introduction**

Advocates of integration and cross cultural contact believe schools have a seminal role to play in perpetuating or breaking the cycle of violence and division in conflicted societies (Davies 2004, Author 2016b). Historically, segregated schools are the norm in such societies.

An alternative educational model is provided through *integrated schools*—schools where children from different national, ethnic, or religious groups are deliberately educated together. Integrated schools are believed to be essential in contributing to the healing of the wounds that afflict conflicted societies, easing the path towards peace, reconciliation, and integration (Ben-Nun 2013, McGlynn and London 2013, Author 2009b).

Six integrated, bilingual, and multicultural Jewish-Palestinian/Arab<sup>1</sup> schools operate today in Israel serving about twelve hundred students. Though few in number their experience is worth researching for they challenge the basic national religious segregationist premises which dominates and controls the Israeli educational system (Resh and Dar 2012). A system which, under the dictates of the 1953 State Educational law, is divided into two main branches: the Arab sector and the Hebrew sector-- with the latter being divided into secular and religious sectors. The ultra-orthodox Jews, the Druze, and the kibbutzim have autonomous enclaves. It can be said that the socio-political conflicts are reflected in the Israeli educational system (Sprinzak et al. 2001). The integrated schools offer an outstanding opportunity for testing the potential of education to help sooth tensions in societies involve in intractable conflicts.

Since 1998 I have been conducting an ethnographic research project at these schools. The long standing research effort produced multiple academic publications (Author 2004, 2005, 2009c, Author 2016a); among them two articles which reported on

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<sup>1</sup> This study deals only with Palestinians citizens of Israel and not with those in the Palestinian Authority, and the terms “Palestinian-Arab” and “Palestinian” are used interchangeably. When the word Arab/s appears, it reflects the rhetoric of the interviewees or the Israeli bureaucracy. The Palestinians in Israel are a unique national indigenous minority which endures discriminatory government policies resulting in deprivation in almost all domains (Jamal 2007).

interviews in which we tried to understand the potential influence of integrated bilingual multicultural education on national and/or ethnic identities and perceptions of intergroup relations and conflict. The interviews were conducted with students studying in the primary and middle school levels including, for comparative purposes, children of similar age studying at state monolingual schools (Author et al 2003, Author et al 2011).

The present study reports on interviews conducted with the three first cohorts of students which graduated from the only integrated school running through K12. The study cannot be considered a longitudinal one for multiple situational factors did not allow us to interview the same students throughout the years.

The first study with students in the fourth grade demonstrated the complex perceptions students, in the integrated schools, hold on ethnic, religious, and/or national identities as these are shaped through school interactions and within larger communal contexts, and provided insight into how these children envision the conflict and their present and future relations with the 'other'. The interviews in the second study, conducted with students in the seventh grade, offered more complex perspectives than the earlier ones in all that relates to their sense of identity, their perception of alterity and the Arab-Israeli conflict, perhaps due to the children's relative maturity and their more developed literacy. Children in both groups underlined the importance of having an integrated school which offered an option of co-existence different to traditional monolingual education in Israel. What seemed to overshadow their excitement related to the fact that during informal activities there was not much Palestinian Jewish mixing. Yet, they felt that intergroup relations had improved as they had grown up and matured, and been encouraged by their teachers and that at this point some found their best friends

in the other group. Regarding the main problems affecting Israel, the children's perspectives were similar they identified the Israeli Palestinian conflict as central. Nevertheless, there were some marked differences regarding some of the specific issues involved in the conflict. For most of the Jewish children, the central problem was the politicians on both sides who have not been willing or able to seriously look for solutions mostly a political compromise. They also seemed to understand the Palestinian (Jewish)-Israeli conflict as one which takes place between Palestinians outside the borders of Israel (the present Palestinian Authority) in which the Palestinians in Israel do not take part. Thus, they absented the Palestinian Israeli presence. Palestinians, though at times acknowledging that the Palestinians themselves bear some responsibility for the situation, clearly indicated that the Jewish side bears more responsibility. Moreover when readily agreeing with their Jewish peers that there is a need to attain peace with the Palestinian Authority, focused more on the problems of the Palestinian population in Israel and in contrast to their Jewish peers, who identify politicians as the bearers of responsibility for the conflict, the Palestinian students blame 'all' for taking part in Palestinian discrimination.

Jewish children in the bilingual school hold complex views on the composition of their identity. They not only allow for Palestinians to be included in the category of Israeli, but they also add to this their Diaspora roots. On the Palestinian side, children at the bilingual school play with hyphenated definitions Arab/Palestinian-Israeli though they are very aware that, at present, this definition is not accepted by all. The common use of Israeli among Palestinians in the bilingual school is difficult to explain. It could be understood as a partial step towards re-categorisation but, even then, such re-

categorisation is not taking place within the Jewish group. It is probable that the Palestinian children in the bilingual school find it easier to identify themselves through hyphenated categories which include Israeli, as their schools have successfully created a sphere where the traditional power asymmetry which characterizes the Israeli scene is somewhat mitigated. It could also be understood as an adaptive step to perceived expectations; as if acknowledging their Israeliness in a context which partially recognizes their Palestinian-ness. Categories traditionally considered religious were almost nonexistent in any of the children's narratives. All the children in the integrated school described it as being a welcoming environment in which they felt at ease and enjoyed their learning.

All in all the findings in the first two rounds of interviews offered a strong support for theoretical perspectives which see in integrated educational frameworks through which to better intergroup relations.

### **Theoretical Background**

Stephan and Stephan (Stephan and Stephan 1996) suggest four types of threats as the main causes of prejudice - realistic, symbolic, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes – which separately or together may cause prejudice depending on the existing relations between the groups involved. All four could be involved in open conflict situations while at lower levels of conflict negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety might be the main causes underlying conflict.

Berger and colleagues (Berger et al. 2016) suggest three main theoretical models through which to approach educational frameworks which's goals are the bettering of

intergroup relations. Each relate to well established theoretical frameworks. The contact hypothesis, the socialization and social learning theories, and the social-cognitive developmental theory.

The ‘contact hypothesis’ (Allport 1954) is the basis of most educational efforts towards integration. According to the contact hypothesis, promoting contact between members of different racial and/or ethnic groups will reduce tension, resulting in more tolerant and positive attitudes. The contact hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact—when it occurs under conditions of equality and interdependence that permit sustained interaction between participants as well as friendships in situations legitimized through institutional support — might help alleviate conflict among groups and improve negative intergroup attitudes (Allport 1954, Amir 1976, Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Social learning theories propose that attitudes towards outgroups are shaped by information and knowledge gathered from immediate social contexts as well as from multiple media channels. Both intercultural training (Stier 2003) and anti-bias information (Bigler and Liben 2006) are seen as capable of breaking down negative generalizations.

Social cognitive developmental theory establishes that children’s attitudes are based on the developmental stage of their cognitive skills (Aboud, Mendelson, and Purdy 2003); moreover research in this field has argued against a unidirectional understanding of prejudice development anchoring it in complex variables as these relate to social contexts and relationships with others that make particular conflictual relationships between groups and group identities highly salient or place an emphasis on the universal

application of moral principles of fairness and equality (Killen, Elenbaas, and Rutland 2016).

Furthermore, Bar-Tal (Bar-Tal 2013) points at the socio-psychological repertoire (i.e., collective memories and an ethos of conflict, and collective fear, hatred and anger orientations) which make intractable conflicts especially difficult to resolve while emphasizing their societal or collective character and the role that a shared political culture plays in their genesis and reproduction. These socio-psychological structures paradoxically work both to enable better adaptation to the conflict conditions, and also to help maintain and prolong the conflict. Thus, even when the parties to the conflict find a peaceful resolution to the existing conflict the socio-psychological repertoire does not change overnight. For it to change, Bar-Tal states, what is needed is a long process of peace building, which requires thoughtful planning and active efforts to overcome the narrow vision which have evolved and which exclude incongruent information and alternative approaches to the conflict.

Psychological theories provide some answers to prejudice development by suggesting their socio-contextual and socio-cognitive dependence while suggesting that reducing prejudice can be accomplished through the promotion of intergroup contact, inclusive common identities and social norms, social-cognitive skills training, moral reasoning, and tolerance (Aboud and Levy 2000, Cameron and Rutland 2008, Crystal, Killen, and Ruck 2008).

Integrated schools do not plan their activities based on these theoretical perspectives yet all, in one way or another, serve as perspectives through which to approach the analysis of data gathered in them. A recent analytical review (Aboud et al.

2012) of thirty two studies of the effects of educational interventions, aimed at reducing ethnic prejudice and discrimination in children, based on the above mentioned approaches showed a wide variety and not conclusive spectrum of designs and outcomes.

### **The School Context**

The integrated bilingual school under study opened its doors in 1998. The school is recognized as a nonreligious school supported by the Israeli Ministry of Education and uses the standard curriculum of the Jewish non-religious school system, which is supplemented to reflect the schools' ideological commitment to equality and coexistence.

Both Hebrew and Arabic are used as languages of instruction (Amara et al. 2009, Author 2005, 2009d, Author 2016b) and a team of in-house teachers, aided by professionals, has drawn up additional programs for bicultural issues such as historical narratives and religious/cultural studies. Most of each group's religious festivals are recognized, together with the groups' respective national narratives. The school has had to seek out creative solutions such as instituting extracurricular activities for the school community in cases where there is concern about the possible reaction of the Ministry of Education.

One of the central features of the bilingual schools, co-teaching (i.e. classes taught simultaneously in two languages by teachers representing each group), is subject to a variety of contextual factors. The schools' decision to implement co-teaching stemmed from the goal of promoting bilingualism, and the presence of two teachers - one Jewish, one Palestinian - in each class, was expected to further this goal. However, in recent years the high cost of employing two teachers for every disciplinary subject, resulted in the



decision to limit co-teaching to the homeroom teachers, while subjects such as science and art are taught by teachers of one or the other ethnic group. The school is directed by two co-principals a Palestinian and a Jew and a well-balanced parents' committee.

Parents and teachers in both groups, though committed to integrated education, express an over-riding concern that the school might in some way threaten their children's cultural identities and affiliations; in all curricular aspects that touch upon the cross-cultural agenda (i.e. national and cultural ceremonies and events) (Author 2009a, Author et al 2012). Given these concerns the school has adopted a perspective which puts great emphasis on national or ethnic-group identity, and little emphasis on individual identity (Author 2009c). An earlier study showed that younger students, not yet fully socialized into the historical realities that gave birth to the conflict, though knowing well to which group they belong, seem not to understand identity as a boundary marker, especially not one that entirely delimits their spheres of social contact (Author 2009c).

### **Methodology and some difficulties in implementation**

As in previous studies we conducted in depth interviews according to qualitative ethnographic principles (Seidman 1991, Spradley 2016). Twelve of the thirteen students in the graduating class of 2011 were interviewed (all Palestinian-Arab students), along with seven of sixteen from the graduating class of 2012 (including five Jewish students), and seventeen of twenty-one from the graduating class of 2013 (including one Jewish student). The numerical asymmetry in the participation of Jewish and Palestinian students is explained by the fact that in the move from primary to middle school Jewish parents removed their children from school because of their fears regarding what the integrated

schools have to offer their children moving now into a period of studies which needs to be taken much more seriously when considering their future academic educational expectations. The Jewish majority in Israel counts with multiple and outstanding options with regard to middle school choices. Palestinian Arab parents have no such options given the weakened Arab school system product of many years of discriminatory policies by the central Israeli government (Al-Haj 2004).

Interviewees were offered the opportunity of being interviewed in the language of their choice (Hebrew, Arabic, or English). But for one, who was interviewed in English, all chose to be interviewed in Hebrew. Thus the interviews were conducted by the author who had, for many years conducted research at the school and gained the trust of the interviewees many of whom he has known since they entered first grade. The school premises were the site where the interviews were conducted and they extended from fifty-five to ninety minutes. The interviews were semi-structured and included two main parts: the first, more open, dealt with the interviewee's individual story, and a second part posed questions about the topics addressed in the study. None the less, both parts included open components as well as more focused ones (Kvale 1996, Berg and Lune 2012). The focused questions directed the interviewee to retrospectively recount his/hers experiences at the school and his/hers expectations in all that related to future contact with the graduates and to the future of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, other than these few guiding questions interviewers encouraged interviewees to develop the themes they raised while allowing subjects to tell their stories without limiting the interview to a fixed agenda.

All interviews were audio-recorded subsequent to receiving authorization from the Ministry of Education and verbal informed consent from each participant prior to the interview and after informing participants that they were entitled to discontinue the interview and/or recording at any time. All interviews were fully transcribed for analysis.

The analysis of the data was conducted based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which emphasizes the generation of theories and concepts based on data derived from the research conducted (Strauss and Corbin 1994). In line with this theory, several stages of analysis were undertaken (Berg and Lune 2012). The first phase included a thematic analysis of each interview separately. The initial analysis revealed numerous thematic categories emerging from each interview. After rereading a given interview, the number of categories was reduced by combining similar categories and focusing on those seen emerging as most relevant. Next the various interviews were integrated via categories they had in common. These categories were scrutinized again for centrality (repeated appearances across interviews), for the connections between them, and for their relevance to theory, to the subject of the study and to the questions it addresses (Berg and Lune 2012, Patton 2005). The analysis process revealed major thematic categories that emerge from the interviews.

Rendering the materials and perspectives gathered into a coherent object of thought and judgment is hardly possible. As Primo Levi has argued, “without a profound effort for simplification the world around us would be an infinite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and decide upon our actions” (Levi 1988, p. 35). We are compelled, he believes, to reduce experience to a schema, a summary, using “tools which are the specific property of the human species—language and conceptual

thought” (ibid). Every new observation complicates our understanding of what is going on; thus, using Levi’s “tools,” we swing between trying to render justice to particulars and trying to restore coherence to the wider picture.

~~When analyzing the interviews of the students of the bilingual schools from which few Jews and many Palestinians graduated, we have to be particularly careful. Researchers and readers encounter each other via two paths, one comprised of efforts to make sense of what people say, and one stemming from suspicion of what people say. Both readers and researchers make assumptions about what the information imparted during the interviews actually represents instead of remembering that it is simply what people—the graduates, in this case—said to other people—the researchers—within a particular, and a particularly narrow, context. Whatever the constraints of context and interpretation, interviews do provide an opportunity for those who are not often heard to voice their opinions. Ideally, each interview should be analysed individually, as attempts to find and describe patterns among the group betray the complexity and richness of each speaker’s narrative. Nonetheless, even a rough compilation will allow readers to trace a story without having to focus solely on those events from which patterns can be found.~~

In general, the students’ responses iterate previous rounds of interviews. They express rather complex perspectives on all that relates to their experiences at the integrated schools on issues of identity, group relations, curriculum and the conflict. In the following we focus on those aspects which shed some new light and or expand previous findings on issues related to identity and alterity and on the conflict and its possible solutions.

### **The students' responses**

~~Given space constraints this section presents a small selection of excerpts from interviews conducted with minimal interpretations (for a full description see Author in press). In general we focus on those aspects, for the most part individual reactions, which shed some new light and or expand previous findings, for in general the findings replicate the results of previous studies. In the final section I suggest more in-depth interpretations, relating the findings to relevant research issues that can shed light on the phenomena that emerge from the interviews.~~

### **Reflections on identity and alterity**

Students remind us that identity, though a central category in educational research, was not necessarily present as a boundary marker from the start, especially not one that entirely delimits their spheres of social contact.

One student commented “Only in third or fourth grade did I understand I was in a different school.” The answer reminds us that young children, though knowledgeable of their group belonging, are not always as attentive to the peculiarities of the integrated school as adults are.

When discussing the way they perceive themselves students identified according to age, hobby, and so forth. Students chose to mention ethnic, national or religious identities only when directly questioned about them in the interview. The identities most

often mentioned were, as in previous studies, hyphenated: Palestinian-Israeli, Arab-Israeli citizen, Jewish-Israeli. One student mentioned “Armenian” but immediately added, “not a Palestinian,” and one other student replied, “Israeli and Holland—I do not know; religion does not need to define.”

Is this last student suggesting that “Israeli” can stand as its own category? Does she assume that Israeli is homologous to Jewish? Or is she merely defining herself according to her parents’ respective nationalities? These puzzles cannot be solved by asking more questions because the student’s answers might then be the response to that specific interlocutor’s positioning within the political realities of this area.

A student who identified himself as “Arab-Christian-Mishtaknez” (meaning becoming Ashkenazi, as the Jews from European descent are called in Israel), illustrated this point, saying: “The truth is, I do not define myself; neither I nor my family relate too much to religion. Because you asked me, I said I was Christian, but being Christian is marginal for me.” The student leaves no margin for mistake: He is Christian because the researcher asked him. The ‘mishtaknez’, which was conveyed with a jesting tone, could indicate the student’s deep understanding of the Israeli Jewish society ethnic and racial stratification where Sephardic Jews (Jews from Eastern and Arab descent) so as to achieve an unmarked hegemonic social position need to conceal their identity (Kennedy 2001, Sasson-Levy and Shoshana 2013). As a Palestinian in Israel he seems to be aware he needs to ‘act ashkenazi’ if he hopes to be accepted into mainstream society.

The profound understanding of Israel’s social schisms also becomes apparent in the following excerpt. “The school teaches equality. It does not matter who you are. We now have an Ethiopian child in school. Nobody will tell a child, ‘you are Ethiopian, you

are this, you are that,' like in other schools.” The Ethiopian (Jew) who had joined the school is noted as a marginalized figure in Israel; the Palestinian student who mentions him is aware that these figures are treated differently at this school when compared to other places: It is not only Palestinians but other marginalized groups who find acceptance here.

A Palestinian-Arab student explained:

In the meantime, in my class we have a Jewish student, only one who is 100% Jewish, and then we have -- it is complicated, but we have halves and bits. But only one is really Jewish.

This student's ease of categorization is remarkable; in all that regards to who is a Jew this Palestinian student 'is' Jewish Orthodox (the student he is referring to is the only one with a Jewish mother, both her parents are Jewish in fact). The coexistence this student envisions does not require any radical change in the conceptualization of categories: A Jew is full when it is 100%, after which you get "halves and bits" of complex, unidentified others.

The same student added insights as to the emotional issues Jewish students may confront at the school:

Maybe someone Jewish feels that when he goes into situations, like political ones [i.e. political discussions], he gets in such storm of emotions that everybody says things that are a bit difficult. They can be very extreme at times. Maybe someone who is Jewish feels a bit threatened, less comfortable, because there are not many who feel like he does, and thus he prefers not to speak. I also think that one Jew does not represent all, and that we can hear more views because also in our case,

we Arabs do not hold the same views. Each one of us has his own view, and you get to hear many [Palestinian-Arab] views. But if there is only one Jew, you get only one view and it contributes less to the conversation.

This complex statement illustrates how the smaller number of Jewish students poses problems for the Jewish students who remain. Having lost the power of numbers, they may feel intimidated in class. They speak less, a consequence that results in an additional loss for the Palestinian-Arab students who are now unable to hear multiple Jewish perspectives. The statement is also important for its emphasis on multiple Palestinian-Arab voices. A Jewish student cited this phenomenon as well, saying,

I feel like a minority. I'm the one asked about my festivals. I get upset, not because of anything racist but because I'm always stuck with Arabs who do not understand. Now for the graduation party, all the [Palestinian] girls want to wear fancy dresses, and I have no strength for that type of fashion. Ooof, why are there no Jews here? People [parents] are afraid; all is well with coexistence until it comes to the academic success or your daughter dates an Arab male or starts thinking about not enlisting in the Israeli army. People are terrified, justifiably so. I thank my parents every day for sending me here. My mother has guts, sending me to a school no one knows. I do not know if I would be ready to do the same with my daughter. It is difficult.

The student's reaction partially mirrors the one offered previously by the Palestinian student, and also hints at the adults main perceived threats to national and ethnic identity – army enrolment and mixed marriages. Yet she is still thankful to her mother for having her send to the school. Among this student's complaints is the irony of a lone Jew



confronted with a Palestinian majority who do not know or need to know the minority's festivals—the typical case for Palestinian-Arabs encountering Jews in Israel.

Jews who worry that a bilingual school education results in a weakened identity may find reassurance in this Jewish student's statements:

I'm 18, and like all other humans, my identity gets focused and changes according to circumstances. It is not because of the school that at times I did not know my identity. It is not that I ever questioned myself about my Jewishness because when I went back home, there was Kiddush and we fast on Yom Kippur, and also secular Jews light Shabbat candles. From a religious and historical perspective, I know where I come from. So other than becoming more interested in the Jewish people, I lost nothing. Maybe the opposite is true here: Because you are raised with people who are different than you, you feel the need to sharpen your understanding of your identity.

There seems to be no need to fear that any of the students have lost their identity, not even the Jewish students, by now a minority in the schools. In fact, the Jewish students' minority status arguably makes them more attentive to identity.

In general students responses remind us to focus not only on the students as products of an integrated Palestinian-Arab/Jewish education but as adolescents studying in a school. One Palestinian-Arab student said, "The school taught me a lot. I met unbelievable people—smart, intelligent people, and this helps. It creates connections. Moreover, I met Jews who are great." We might ask whom this student includes among the smart and intelligent people. Is he referring to the adults in the school? If so, does he include Jews or only Palestinian-Arabs, because he goes on to mention Jews specifically

in the next clause? Perhaps the student's approach is that Jews and Palestinians are not relevant categories when referring to smart and intelligent people in the first clause; hence the need to add this information (which he might have thought was required within the context of the interview) relating to ethnicity. This student is certainly aware that outsiders are typically impressed by the fact that Jews and Palestinian-Arabs learn together at the school, and thus he may feel a need to emphasize that although he is a Palestinian-Arab, he is pleased (perhaps he was surprised at first) to have had the opportunity to meet Jews who are great.

However, another student expressed a different view:

There is not really coexistence here. There are Arab students who hate Arab students. What is good in this school is that there are few students, and they take good care of you. Also, when there is a war, we have discussions and we try to understand the other side. This is one of the problems in our society that most people do not care about the other side.

Such remarks are confusing and surprising. Within the context of the school, a lack of coexistence is usually presumed to refer to Jews and Palestinians; however, this student refers specifically to Arabs hating Arabs. Even more perplexing is the student's claim that although there is no coexistence, during times of war, people at the school try to understand the other side. Young people frequently contradict themselves; they are not necessarily practiced in presenting coherent arguments. Yet, what is not clear to the researcher or reader may be very clear to the students. This was not the first time a student expressed a sense of safety in the school or mentioned learning about both sides. For example, one student said, "You will not see violence here," and another remarked,

“We hear the other side, but what is more important is that we learn history from both perspectives, the Arab and the Jewish sides.”

Our question regarding future contact among the graduates received answers at opposite ends of the spectrum. For example, one response was:

They are my brothers. I would not like to lose the connection. It's been 12 years with the same people. I have a very strong connection with the people in the school, and I hope we will keep in contact.

The second reaction was:

Not really, except for one person whom I was with since kindergarten. Except for him there is no real connection. I think that because the connection is around the school, it cannot really be strong, unfortunately.

Varying interpretations of these statements are possible. First, knowing that the context is an integrated school, readers could consider the possibility that Jews and Palestinians have different perspectives, one strongly committed to friendship and the other not. They could wonder which group is represented by each statement: Do the Jews or the Palestinians suggest that friendship is here to stay? The framework of the integrated school primes our expectations regarding how the schools might help overcome ethnic conflict. However, readers should remember that the graduating cohorts have a low representation of Jews; the statements were from two Palestinian students graduating in 2013 when there was only one Jew in the class. Though the school is integrated, it is also a place in which ethnicity is not the only issue and in which children may have different expectations for friendship.

All students also mentioned the differences they perceive between them and their friends who attended monolingual schools. They mentioned their own openness to the “other”, their ability to understand complex issues, and their reluctance to judge difficult realities by identifying a clear ‘only enemy’.

***Reflecting on the conflict and conflicts***

A few of the Palestinian students mentioned occasions when anti-Arab graffiti appeared in the school courtyard. As one student recalled:

In this neighborhood are many Beitaristim [fans of the Beitar football club, known for their right-wing ideology] and La Familia [a more extremist group within the group just mentioned]. We had problems with them. Once they wrote on the courtyard, “Death to the Arabs”. What can I tell you? It did not feel good. But we had with whom to talk about this.

Other students spoke of events related to the outbreak of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians such as the war in Gaza:

There was a lot of tension among us, lots of shouting. We could not agree, but we had the possibility to talk together. True, we shouted at times and we upset each other, and we went home angry. But in the end, it was good to have someone to talk to. Someone stands before you and pays attention to what you have to say, even when it is difficult. We study together but there is always your side. It comes out—your relation to your nationality, your people—and it is difficult to leave it aside. I also tried to understand the other side. They suffer too, their people get killed.

Students are rather critical of what can and cannot be aired in formal school activities. A Jewish student approached a similar issue from a different perspective. The monolingual Hebrew State schools hold national ceremonies, the most important of which are the Holocaust Day and Memorial Day ceremonies. These are central in constructing a national collective sense among Jews in Israel (Lomsky-Feder 2004). The student remarked:

I can divide my life between before and after the trip to Poland [as part of Holocaust Studies and supported by the Israeli Ministry of Education]. When I returned, I had the sense that I was losing the class because no matter how much you read about it [the Holocaust], or are interested in it, or study it, it will never have the same power. After the trip, I sensed a gap, a difference [from the Palestinians] that I did not sense before. The same happens with Memorial Day. The school does not reach my level [on these subjects]. When we were young, it was okay to put us all in a sandbox, but as you grow, you ask questions, questions I felt were not being answered. This school makes you grow older fast. The biggest question I ask myself is if I should join the army or not. This question doesn't exist in the school. It is problematic to create a school for Jews and Arabs, and keep the Jews, and be good academically. It is problematic not to have enough room for the serious questions I ask myself.

Another student referred to the tension in the classroom during the war in Gaza: “We had fights, and the teachers came and we shut up, but when they left we continued fighting. Here at the school it is not acceptable to fight over politics.”

Interpretations do not come easily to these students' comments. On one level, this last student's remark can be seen as reflecting a conflicted society; yet, in the context of the school, the society's conflicts are somewhat ameliorated. It might be expected that in an integrated school in which the number of Jewish students declined so precipitously in the upper grades, such disagreements as the students describe would also decline. Yet, the same arguments occur even among students of the same ethnic group.

The Jewish student quoted above criticizes the school for not offering her enough on the Holocaust and Memorial Day ceremonies, and she expresses doubts about joining the army. Such sentiments appear to justify those who believe integrated education cannot adequately sustain each group's national identity. More seriously, the Jewish student indicates that the school does not offer "room" for her to ask certain questions, and a Palestinian student mentions that they "shut up" in the presence of their teachers. School silencing does not necessarily mean that the participants accept the identities imposed on them by the majority or try to distance themselves from the stereotypes associated with their subordinate group (Pyke 2010). Rather, silencing refers to the formal and informal ways schools (and societies) control who can speak, what can and cannot be spoken, and whose discourse must be controlled (Castagno 2008). The students, it appears, are ready to tackle issues without much fear that such discussions will upset the connections they maintain among themselves; indeed, they share stories about explosive moments during talks that were followed by back-to-business class or break activities. Their sense is, rather, that the adults have, somehow, failed them - adults who may find these issues threatening and project their fears onto the students and or disallow discussions for they lack answers to these difficult issues.

The students expressed a wide range of views on topics in which identity and conflict issues intersect; as always, the context of the interviews may be delineating their responses. The following statements may contain an element of judgment in terms of the student's sense of belonging. Is it a negative appreciation? Those who search the data for evidence of a weakening of national identity in any direction will surely find it, but even if such a weakening exists, how ought it to be assessed and is there any method to calculate the impact of the direction? For example, one Palestinian-Arab student replied,

I had my own ideas before I came to the school. I built them a long time ago. I think they changed because of the people in the school. So I think in one way or another I chose those ideas. I think that if I had been in some other school, my relationship to the Palestinian nation would have been much stronger. But I think that would have made me blind. It would have closed me up; I would have been settled in only one idea [on the conflict], one perspective. But I'm here at the school, I know all that they know there, I'm as attached as they are. Maybe they are a little bit more. But I think that I can look at this objectively.

Another student evoked the idea of the school as a protected environment:

In the school you don't really live the conflict. It is a regular school it's not really a life of conflict, so it didn't really change my views. The way I look at the conflict comes from the way I see things happening, what I see in the street-- the violence, Jews kicking an Arab in a train station or the opposite. What the school changes is helping me understand that not all Jews are the same.

A more complex view of the school's role in viewing the conflict was expressed as follows:

Everybody seems to believe that because it's a conflict you have to take one side. And at the school we were told yes, we have to choose a side. And yes, I chose a side, and when I looked at it from one perspective, they told me there is another side. So when I looked at the conflict, I first saw one side, and then we took a step backwards and looked from a wider perspective and realized that there are other people, other ways of looking.

Other students seem to have gained a similar appreciation for the poignancy and complexity of the situation. A Palestinian-Arab student said,

When I looked at the news on television, I saw that they bombed buses and cities and small children and mothers, and I was angry, like "Why are you doing all this? ... I'm tremendously sorry for the people, but I understand it's not only the fault of the Jews but also the fault of the Arab people. I'm not speaking about myself, I'm speaking about the politicians, the leaders, those that fight. I think the conflict is complex... What changed is that now I don't just blame, I understand better.

Students seem to have come to realize that belonging to one's group does not necessarily imply the denial of the other group and that acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives does not necessarily need to be interpreted as renouncing to one's own but might enrich one's repertoire and open a path to dialogue.

All students expressed views in support of peaceful solutions. Some favored having a two states solution; others supported the idea of having one state. They mentioned the need to find a peaceful solution soon, though at the same time expressing skepticism that this was a viable option. Some identified the problem as existing not with



the people but with the leadership, e.g. “Two states for two people, but not with today's leadership, no.” Another student said:

Solution? Look, declarations and deeds do not go together here. What I will tell you now is I'm sure it will not happen. Maybe in the future . . . I think that one country where the two peoples will live together will not work because each people carries reminders of many years of conflict and issues that cannot be forgotten. I think each one has to live in a land of its own. Let us say the Arabs in Israel will have to make up their minds where they want to live, and we will have two states for two people that is what needs to happen...When you see how people think, you lose all hope.

What is most interesting about this student's answer is his position as Palestinian-Arab. He does not appear satisfied with the two-state solution. He suggests that the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel must decide in which state they want to live, in a sense allowing for the possibility of having one state for two peoples and the other for only one. Again, the argument's incoherence may reflect the student's lack of experience; students of this age often seem confused when they borrow the social-political language from the outside, a language not known for internal consistency, even in a bilingual integrated school.

We must remind ourselves again that interviews, like all talk, are framed according to the perceived requirements of their particular context. They are not necessarily logical or coherent. Indeed, other students were cautious:

I do not really know. I tried to think if there is a solution, one or two states for two people, but it's as if there are new questions. Things get more complex and I do not know how to answer.

This answer contains a sense of innocence but there is also something sad, if poetic, about a world in which this answer is offered. One of the Jewish students remarked,

[A solution is] more schools. I believe in education. I see myself doing education in the future. I thank all stars that even if I do nothing like going to fight for social justice or if I did not join the guerrillas to fight Israeli fascism, I already got my reward because. I feel connected to the land, I walk in the Old City, I am friendly with the store owners, I keep contact with Arab friends, and I know that having two states for two peoples does not make a difference. It seems natural for people to think I support a two-state solution. I do not think a binational single state solution will ever happen. I do not want this to happen. Let us say that my main concern these days is understanding what Zionism is, what being a Zionist these days is. But you asked me about the solutions. On this issue, I want an Israeli [Jewish] state to exist and I feel good with this and the way Israel is. I do not want Arabs to leave and be in a state on the side. I'm not being pessimistic. I believe the day will come when we will find a solution to the conflict. I know there will be peace, I just do not know how it will look. We are going to live together--I cannot imagine anything else.

This student's response shows a willingness to admit multiple, oppositional factors that is difficult to find in non-integrated schools. Like many adults, this student imposes on education the task to achieve a solution, and uses the Zionist terms prevalent

in Israeli society where Zionism is assumed, not critically approached. Her use of the phrase “different than me,” however, is interesting within this context. It is unclear whether she means “Arab” or some other kind of “different” made relevant by her setting.

Although it can be argued that the school might have treated positions regarding the solutions to the conflict with more seriousness, it is more probable that the main problem lies in the mistaken assumption that education can and should bear the responsibility for peace efforts, an assumption that is also reflected in the statements of many students who indicated they would support the creation of more integrated schools in order to further a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The students all appear to struggle with the relevant political discourses surrounding them in this conflicted area. They relate to these discourses both when justifying positions not in keeping with customary views and when aligning with them. One Palestinian student, for example, remarked;

From my perspective, I'm Israeli. I'm not Jewish, I am Arab but Israeli. "What am I?" is the real question I ask all people who say Israeli-Arabs. If a Palestinian state were created now, would I be ready to move there? Would I abandon the nice life? We are Arab-Israelis. Look at the Arabs around us in Syria, in Egypt. We live well—yes, of course there is racism, but relative to others we live well. So what can I tell you? I am Israeli, but on the other side I do not serve in the army because Arabs are also my people. Not the Palestinian people, but the Arab people. Let us say the following: If the Israeli wars were not against the Arabs, I would join the army.

These statements would never find universal agreement; there is no way the interlocutor would be found innocent by all parties involved. He would be blamed for differentiating Arab-Israelis from Palestinians, for even considering joining the Israeli army, for putting down other Arabs in other Arab countries, and by calling Israel a state in which there is racism. Yet other students, who do consider themselves Palestinians, express similar views:

I do think that people stay attached to their identities, their family, their roots. It does not really matter who. For Palestinians, it is even more important because they do not have a land of their own, and if people do not stay attached it will disappear. But if a Palestinian state is created--I do not want you to

misunderstand--I will not go there. It would be like living in Egypt or Syria: One is up and one is down, one has lots of money and one lacks money for bread. I will stay here, it is better.

Despite this student's willingness to identify with Palestinians, she shares the arguments of the previous student, who identified as an Israeli, as to why she would choose to stay in Israel. Given the higher percentage of Palestinian participants in the upper grades, we need to keep in mind that ethnic inequality shapes the ways in which the minority thinks of itself and of other members in its group. By accepting and internalizing mainstream racist values and rationales, subordinates, often without a conscious awareness of doing so, justify the oppression of their group with a belief in their own inferiority (Fanon 1965, Pyke and Dang 2003). This could also be true for our Palestinian student as an oppressed group in Jewish Israeli society (not the school), although they vigorously deny it.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The integrated school under study has not evolved guided by theoretical models concerned with the reduction of prejudice and the bettering of intergroup relations.

Questions about the "success" of the school rest on the assumptions those asking the questions hold about what "success" means. At times, those who ask these questions are not interested in an analytical approach but prefer that their assumptions about what can be achieved through integrated initiative be justified. Parents have one set of goals for the schools, donors another, government representatives have another, and so do

researchers depending on their foundational theoretical perspectives. Sadly, few of the interrogators have in mind the interests of the children as children.

Typically, questions about the schools' success reduce students to nationality, ethnicity, religion, and the adult's appraisal of these. Earlier research has shown that the school curricula, educators, parents, and teachers foreground issues of ethnic/national/religious identity (Bekerman 2009c, Bekerman and Zembylas 2016). The graduates seem to have survived all these pressures and their reports present a much more complex picture. Though hammered down by identity and culture, they adhered to complex views while reflecting on their paths and being attentive to their contexts. They seem to fully recognize the empowering benefits of evolving in complex relations of exclusion, inclusion, translation, and imitation, all while negotiating a new becoming (Shoshana 2011). Although they might not agree with the characterization of "hybridization," their discourses challenge the fetishism of boundaries and point toward more fluid constructs.

In lines with recent research conducted at bilingual and integrated educational initiatives (Wright and Tropp 2005, Cameron and Rutland 2008) the Palestinian and Jewish graduates of the integrated bilingual school show decreased ingroup favoritism and higher perceived similarities between the groups. Exposed as they are to high levels of intercultural education and interethnic contact within the school setting they show, if at all, low levels of stereotyping and discrimination supporting previous findings in multicultural and anti-bias research (Banks 2006, Stephan and Vogt 2004). The graduates, for the most part, have little romantic expectations from education, they realize its limitations and yet profoundly appreciate what the integrated school has afforded them.

Palestinians value the pragmatic benefits of what an integrated school has to offered them relative to the benefits of participating in the regular Arab educational track in Israel and Jews though complaining at times about the difficulties of participating in a setting which in a paradoxical sense (at least at the high school level) reverses the asymmetry which benefits them in the wider Israeli context stay assured that their parents' choice has profited them significantly. All seem to have come to realize that belonging (to one's group) does not necessarily imply the denial (of the other group) and that acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives does not necessarily need to be interpreted as renouncing to one's own but might enrich one's repertoire and open a path to dialogue.

At this point, the integrated bilingual school represents an outstanding example of contact implementation, and its emphasis on equality, mutuality, and cooperative interdependence may foster conditions that promote coexistence. Yet, these conditions do not seem to fully support Pettigrew's sequential model (Pettigrew 1998, Eller and Abrams 2003): though intergroup contact affects intergroup relations and positively relate to interpersonal closeness, behavior, and knowledge, while negatively relating to intergroup anxiety and social distance, no strong evidence of either de-categorization or recategorization was found among the students.

Moreover the schools' environment and educational practices seem to help counter the socio-psychological infrastructures (Bar-Tal 2013) which evolve in the context of intractable conflicts. Our interviewees seem to have been able to successfully negotiate present reigning societal believes in all that regards to the ethos of the conflict and adopt perspectives which help them overcome hatred, fear, and anger while recognizing the present complexities and difficulties as well as those that rest ahead. At

the integrated school the graduates have gained knowledges; they have learned to recognize different historical narratives, they have acquired some intercultural skills and these have made them capable of breaking down negative generalizations (Stier 2003, Bigler and Liben 2006) and reduce intergroup anxiety (Stephan and Stephan 2001).

Currently, the integrated bilingual initiative opens up spaces where some of the “unsaid” of Israeli society can be openly stated in a sphere of trust. This fact alone makes the school a worthwhile educational project. Through the school curricula, Jewish students are encouraged to uncover the complexities of the Jewish Israeli narrative, and even when they are not overtly encouraged to do so, they revise their own positions regarding its meaning. Palestinian-Arabs, on the other hand, find solace in the school’s being a place for expression of what are, for them, known truths, i.e. that Palestinians in Israel are in many ways second-class citizens. Although the full picture of the bilingual school is complex and rests on future contextual developments (e.g. the obligatory enlistment of the Jewish children in the army, the failure of peace efforts), its value as a dynamic manifestation of an ideology of coexistence and tolerance is indisputable. The Palestinian-Arab and Jewish children who attend the bilingual school are immersed in an environment that fosters an appreciation of other cultures, multiple points of view, and validation of competing national narratives. Whatever the limitations regarding the lasting effects of this environment, it is clear that the children’s current situation—which for some students has lasted through their primary and secondary education—is authentic and positive. Indeed, stopping at this point may be a great betrayal. The integrated initiative must help these students move forward by consistently, explicitly, and critically interrogating the junctions where race, ethnicity, religion, and class meet, while



encouraging a self-reflexive engagement with difference (Asher 2007). Though difficult to establish, dialogic approaches that are committed to a pedagogy of articulation and risk (Grossberg 1994) are the only ones that uncover new options. However, in conflict ridden areas, these options must be implemented with care. The groups involved have many reasons to prefer patterns that are recognizable, if painful, to new paths whose transformative potential is unknown. There is no doubt that the children are ready to such challenges; there is considerable doubt whether the adults are.

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