Civic education in a multicultural and conflicted society like Israel

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Abstract

Teaching civic education in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic countries presents a basic difficulty concerning the creation of a common national identity. Our study investigated the views of Arab and Jewish teachers concerning issues of national identity and teaching civics identity. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with Arabs and Jewish principals and teachers. Analysis was conducted of compulsory textbooks of civic education and of Circulars of the Director General of the Ministry of Education. Instructions for civic educators and guidelines concerning matriculation exams in civic education where also examined. Analysis of different versions of textbooks published in different times shows that as time passes, the Jewishness of the state is dealt with greater depth than its democratic nature. Interviews with Arab and Jewish civic teachers show that Arab teachers hesitated to voice criticism of civic teaching. All Jewish teachers in our study had comments concerning the curriculum from different points of view. It is important to note that the Jewish teachers voiced critisim about the way that Arab citizens were related to in teaching of civics.

Introduction

One of the important topics of civic education in any society is educating citizens to be productive, law abiding, contributing to society and fulfilling their own needs, ambitions and hopes. Multicultural and conflicted societies require a civic education that will help all parts of society to live together peacefully. Overlooking the differences among sectors of society might promote a general image of citizens loyal to their country. A multicultural country might be viewed as a collection of different identities, sharing a common obligation to adhere to the norms and laws of their country. In Israel, the Declaration of Independence (1948) mentions equality of citizens without considering religion, race or gender:

> "…The State of Israel… will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex;"

The process of education is in the hands of teachers, who form the link between subject matter to be taught and the minds of students. In a conflicted society like Israel, that includes two main groups of citizens – Jews and Palestinian Arabs – the question arises: how do Jewish and Arab teachers interpret the goals of civic education as mandated by the Ministry of Education?

It is important to note that since the establishment of the state of Israel, about 70 years ago, the Jewish and Arab populations live together under a common rule and set of laws. Still, since the time of the British mandate, after the First World War, Israel has separate systems of education for Jews and Arabs under the same Ministry of Education. This separation provides each population with the opportunity to teach in their own language and maintain their own culture.

In order to find out how teachers in both populations understand the nature of civic education, we conducted an analysis of texts relating to civic education, and interviewed Jewish

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and Arab civic education teachers with a set of questions relating to civic education.

Among the different sources that shape the way teachers teach the discipline of citizenship in Israel our paper relates to Hebrew and Arabic versions of civic textbooks, several circulars of the Ministry of Education and the list of themes for the matriculation exam in civics.

Methodology

The study adopted a multiple method approach using content analysis of educator interviews, as well as analysis of government documents and civic and instruction materials.

Research methods and data collection in this study are based on a naturalistic approach that is, seeking answers to questions concerning real-life situations in schools (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with one Arab principal and two Arab teachers, one Jewish deputy principal and teacher, and three Jewish teachers, and analysis of following documents:

1. The compulsory textbook of civic education (*To Be Citizens in Israel*, two versions: 2001 & 2016).
2. Circulars of the Director General of the Ministry of Education on civic education (2008, 2009, 2014).
3. Instructions issued by the supervisor of teaching civics for educators concerning announcements of professional training, as well as distribution of new education material.
4. Instructions concerning the matriculation exams in civic education related to mandatory areas of content.

All books and ministry documents are published in Hebrew and Arabic.

Analysis of these materials was carried out using appropriate strategies according to the practice of content analysis (Meyring, 2014).

Research Population

Since the time of the British Mandate, different ethnic religious sectors in Israel have the right to determine their education system according to their religious beliefs. Therefore, the Arab sector has a Christian as well as a Muslim educational network. The Jewish sector has a religious as well as secular educational network.

Each sector and each network serves a different population of students and has separate schools, supervisors, principals and teachers. The Ministry of Education and its administration constitute a unifying factor in terms of curriculum, textbooks, assessment and final exams.

Accordingly, the teachers interviewed in our study come from the various ethnic and religious sectors in order to obtain as wide a range of opinions as possible about civic education:

1. Principal and two teachers from the Arab sector (Arab Christian school and Arab Muslim school)
2. Deputy director and two teachers of civic education in the Jewish secular sector
3. One civic education teacher from the religious Jewish sector.

The interview questions:

- What are the goals of civic education according to the teachers?
- What differences can be identified between views of Jewish and Arab teachers of civic education?

- Does formal civic education in Israel over time recognize differences between Jews and Arabs?
- What changes mandated by the Ministry of Education characterize civic education in Israel over time?
- What kind of teaching modes and materials are used by civic teachers beyond the official text books?

Results

Textbook analysis

In Israel there are two different versions of textbook concerning citizenship since the year 2000. The first version was published in 2001 and the second in 2016. Analyzing these two versions, the main focus is how these textbooks relate to the Arab minority and Jewish majority in Israel. We will relate to the first version as "version A" and to the second version as "version B". Our analysis will be structured around a series of questions about the textbooks.

The first question is about *the nature of the State of Israel*. This includes two parts: one concerning the nature of Israel as a Jewish state, and the second relates to the nature of Israel as a democratic state.

First part: what is the Jewish State?

Version B devotes a double number of pages to the nature of a Jewish state compared to version A (92 pages versus 42 pages). Version B adds the historical basis for Jewish life in Israel, whereas version A limits itself to facts concerning citizenship in present time. It is interesting to note that version B includes a large sector of history of the return of Jews to the country of Israel before 1948. This sector of history does not mention the Arab population living in this area during those years.

Thus, the beginning of version B shows preference of the Jewish issue.

Second part: What is a Democratic State?

The second part of the first question concerns the nature of Israel as a democratic state. This part concerns the rights of different populations: the majority and minority groups. Version A explains the issue of ethnic differences in general and notes both Hebrew and Arabic as official languages. Version B adds a special part called "group rights in Israel". This part is mostly devoted to a description of the Jewish sector. For instance, the Arab language was an official language as noted in version A. In version B the Arab language is mentioned in content of street signs in mixed cities only.

Third part: Policies and politics in Israel.

A third part in versions A and B is *policies and politics in Israel*. This part of the books relates to major policies that govern the life of citizens in Israel, and shows several differences between the two versions of textbooks.

For instance, version A discusses feelings of Arabs as discriminated against as far as government funds are concerned (p. 482). Moreover, this version emphasizes the widespread poverty in the Arab population and lack of employment opportunities. Contrary, version B does not mention this issue. Both topics are ignored.

The two versions relate differently to one of the important laws of Israel, namely, the Law of Return (1950), which provides every Jew the right to come to Israel and become Israeli citizens upon their entry into the country. A central issue in Israel concerns the absorption of Jewish immigrants into

Israel. The right provided by this law does not exist for Israeli minorities like Arabs. The ethical justification for this inequality is the Holocaust that wiped out about a third of the Jewish nation – the establishment of a strong Jewish state is conceived as the most important response to that horror. Israel is the only Jewish state that can decide freely on an unlimited absorption of Jews. The declaration of independence states: "…The state of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles" (Israeli declaration of independence, 1948).

Whereas, version A includes only a brief paragraph on the Law of Return, version B devotes a much larger portion to this subject. The different between these two versions might be accounted for several reasons. One reason might be that many years have passed and the history of Jewish immigration into Israel is not known to present day students. Another reason might be, that version B tends to emphasize and focus on the Jewish identity of Israel.

The years that passed between the publication of version A and version B of the textbook in civic, saw the development of a strong Jewish state characterized by the growth of different aspects of statehood like economy, food production, industry, science and art.

The most important link between the education bureaucracy and students are teachers, who tend to interpret the guidelines and textbooks in their teaching.

Interviews with educators

The views of teachers expressed in their responses to our questions serve as examples of possible types of views and are not presented as reflecting the views of all Jewish and Arab teachers. The results are organized according to the interview questions.

What are the goals of civic education according to the teachers?

The Ministry of Education decreed that in class discussion teachers have to present a position in accordance with the framework of the state education law:

> *In the framework of the class discussion, if, and when, the teacher takes a position, he must do so in accordance with the framework set forth in the State Education Law, in a manner that will not be construed as obligating the students to a particular perception and considering that it represents the school, the state and sometimes the entire society. (*The Ministry of Education Director-General's circulars in 2008)

Teachers' responses to the question were as follows. According to one of the Arabic sector civic education teachers:

> *I understand the principles in teaching civic education, and it does not matter to me what they dictate to me from above…I educate not by religion or color but by human rights so that the students know how to respect other human beings…*

More than half of the teachers interviewed were close to the opinion of this teacher and therefore were asked whether they also expressed their personal political principles in their lessons.

Another Arab teacher's opinion was:

> *…I will not reveal my personal political convictions to my students, and not only because the law determines this, but because it is my duty to educate the youth and to open to him all the legitimate possibilities and beliefs that exist so that*

he will choose his own path. It would not be fair to expose him to my opinions because then he would follow me without reaching his personal opinion.

On the other hand, another teacher from the religious-Zionist sector argues the opposite referring values:

…I add everything that is possible within the few hours in the classroom to educate to related values to settle in Judea and Samaria, and the students know my positive opinion about the settlements. Otherwise I would have been wrong in my role as an educator.

On one hand, teachers might hesitate to introduce their own political views in a discussion of goals of civic education. On the other hand, some teachers, especially those who teach in an extreme ideological sector, might choose to try to influence students according to their own values.

The next question deals with differences between Jewish and Arab teachers.

What differences can be identified in the views of Jewish and Arab teachers of civic education?

Teachers from the Jewish sector are not afraid to express criticism of the Ministry of Education, although, they are aware of the difficulties. One teacher of civics in the Jewish sector claims:

"..I say civic education now is like entering a minefield ...

Another teacher from the religious-Jewish sector voiced his right to express his opinion in the classroom:

…I am interested in influencing them because I am not ashamed of my opinions. Contrarily, I see it as a duty to shape their opinions in the direction of my opinions.

Minority educators might find it difficult to criticize civic education in their country. An example of such hesitation is shown in the words of a principal of a Christian Arab high school:

"We are committed to the core of the Ministry of Education… You need to show wisely that there is a law and there are courts that come to protect the minorities…

From the point of view of minorities, it is important to make students aware of the means that exist in their country to defend their rights.

Both Jewish and Arab teachers are aware of the difficulties in teaching civics based on ethnic identity. Whereas, the Jewish teachers might feel free to introduce their own ideas, Arabs might voice a more accepting view of the curriculum. On the other hand, as the Arab principal says, one of the goals of civic education in the case of minority students is to show that the law of the country provides opportunities to protect the rights of minority.

Does formal civic education in Israel over time recognize differences between Jews and Arabs?

In order to answer this question we turned to official publication of the Ministry of Education for Jewish and Arab sectors. The August 2008 official Ministry of Education publication marks the difference between the Ministry's approach to Jewish and Arab sectors. The quote from the publication of the Ministry shows that the duality of Israeli citizens, including both Jewish and Arab people, is not mentioned in the directives for studying civics for the matriculation exams. The guidelines refer to the Jewish content only in both sectors, as shown in the table below:

Table of the matriculation exam instructions to the Jewish and Arab sectors

Each sector will study and do a matriculation exam on subjects of one of the clusters only	
For Jewish School	**For Arab and Druze schools**
State of Israel-Jewish State **Nationality and nation-state** **The State of Israel: Different Approaches** **The issue of the identity of Israeli citizens** **The characteristics of the State of Israel as a Jewish state**	**What is a Jewish state** **Nationality and nation-state** **The State of Israel: A Jewish nation-state** **The characteristics of the State of Israel as a Jewish state** **The issue of the identity of Israeli citizens**
1.Views and Approaches to the Character of the State of Israel **2.The State of Israel and the Jewish People in the Diaspora** **3.The status quo** **4.The religious rift**	**1.Local Government in Israel** **2.Elections in Israel** **3.Parties in Israel** **4.Supervision and Auditing of Israeli Government Authorities**

The only place in these guidelines for civic education that provides opportunities for dealing with the citizenship of Arabs in Israel is the nature of local government, elections and parties in Israel.

It is important to note that the guidelines for Jewish students mention the relationship of Israeli citizens with members of their ethnic group outside Israel. Whereas, in Jewish schools the relationship to Jews in the Diaspora is one of the topics of learning, the nature of Arab people outside of Israel is not covered in the non Jewish schools.

We now turn to the views of teachers. The principal of an Arab-Christian high school, concerning the Jewish and democratic issue stated that

> *...there are laws and courts that protect the minority. In this respect there is democracy in Israel. But in everyday life you cannot reach a complete democracy between majority and minority. Arab students know all about this.*

An Arab teacher claimed that it is not always positive when the system relates equally to both sectors, the Jewish and the Arab:

> *"One of our problems is the literal translation of textbook and matriculation exams into Arabic... The culture of reading comprehension is different between Jewish and Muslim students. Literal translation of text is detrimental to the success of Arab students.*

One of the Jewish teachers said that

> *in the past special texts were written for the Arab sector in the matriculation exams. It seems that there is less consideration now of different needs of the Jewish and Arab sectors.*

What changes mandated by the Ministry of Education characterize civic education in Israel over time?

In the background to this question is the decision of the Ministry of Education to double the number of study units of civic education (2008). The goals of civic education at that time were based on the Kremnitzer Report (Ministry of Education Report 1996). The Kremnitzer committee was appointed in 1995 by the Minister of Education. The underlying principles of the Kremnitzer report concern values of good citizenship and involvement in the public life of a democratic Jewish state. According to Kremnitzer, the aim of civic studies is:

> *to develop the capability to analyze complex social and political issues…to analyze issues related to the tension between different human rights […], the capacity to form a founded and reasoned criticism, the capacity to take part in a civil dialogue with others holding different opinions […], and the capacity to understand, appreciate, and respect other cultures*. (Davidovitch & Soen, 2015)

Civic education might focus on technical aspects of forms of government like monarchies, republican or other. Extension of civic education to issues of values and principles of public life were the basis for doubling the number of study units for civic education and caused the publication of textbooks in civics. These versions of civic textbook were analyzed above.

One of the changes in civic education in relation to the Kremnitzer Report concerns the content of teaching. One of the teachers from an Arab Christian school stated that in this content *"… the Jewishness of the state is expressed more than its democracy."*

The transformation of civic education from learning about technical aspects of governments to dialogues between different views raised divered responses among teachers of civics.

Of particular interest is the response of a teacher who belongs to the Zionist-religious sector, who stated:

> *…I am interested in long-term education and to this end I must convince and explain our Jewish-political position. I have to inspire and share with my students developments in Israel. All these cannot happen when teachers are dictated by materials, thus reducing the breadth and depth of my educational work. The Ministry of Education should rely on me and on my ideology*.

We relate to these changes in light of the views of teachers of civics. The different views stem from the ideological background of the school. Thus, we found that Arab-Christian teachers object to the great weight that Jewishness occupies in teaching civics in relation to lesser emphasis on the democratic aspect of the state. On the other hand, Jewish teachers view their role as freedom to express their own views without letting instructional materials dictate their teaching. Teachers might go so far as suggesting that the Ministry of Education should leave the content and process of teaching in the hand of teachers.

The voices of these teachers tend to diminish the impact of formal education guidelines replacing them by teacher ideology. One of the outcomes of such an approach might be contrary to the underlying principle of civic education, namely to educate citizens who are loyal to their state, in general, not only to one sector in this state. This situation might lead to undermining the whole notion of a common state.

Teachers who tend to introduce diverse values into the teaching of civics might tend to use teaching materials beyond the official text books.

What kind of teaching modes and materials are used by civic teachers beyond the official textbooks?

In response to this question, teachers expressed their desire to diversify and enrich their lessons by means of motivational media

> *…we will always have an hour of current events in the system…This week they held a demonstration on the road to support the disabled. We invited a representation of the disabled to speak at the demonstration and was very beautiful…*

In the words of another teacher:

> *…motivational activities about the Jewish-Arab conflict through the regular meetings with their schools ... for example, at the moment with the Muslim ORT school…*

Third teacher:

> *…I encourage them to bring me news material this week ...*

Fourth teacher:

> *... We invite people like the mother of a student who is a former MK Orly Levy Abekasis ... and another human rights fighter for the Eritreans…*

Teachers might ask their students to conduct some studies concerning civic issues and submit the report of their studies as part of their final grade in civics. This teaching mode transforms the reports of the students to study material beyond the official textbook.

Discussion

Civic education in a conflicted society raises deep and meaningful problems and issues. Israel is an example of a country with a majority belonging to one ethnic-religious group and a minority of about 20% of citizens belonging to another ethnic-religious group. These two groups were involved in a series of violent conflicts over many years. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, about 70 years ago, they live together under a common law as equal citizens. Our study sought to define and exemplify how teachers of civic education of both the Israeli Jewish and the Israeli Arab sectors teach citizenship to their respective audiences.

Though these two sectors are fully aware of the long time conflict between them, based on their different ethnicity and religion, the common goal of all teachers in our study is to educate their students to live together. In order to reach this goal, the teachers of civics interviewed focus on the democratic processes that are part of Israeli life, for instance, free elections, a common set of laws and freedom of speech.

A minority of teachers interviewed voiced radical views concerning civic education and emphasized their own religious ethnicity.

Civic education in Israel has a clear agenda of teaching good citizenship and rational involvement in the public life of a democratic Jewish state (Davidovich & Soen, 2015). According to a special committee appointed by the Minister of Education in 1995 (the Kremnitzer committee) one of the major goals of the aim of civic studies is to promote the capability to analyze complex especially issues related to the tension between different human rights and the capacity to understand and respect other cultures.

A mandatory textbook in citizenship education in common use for senior high school, analyzed by us, views the essence of Israel as a Jewish state. The Israeli Declaration of Independence states clearly that it is based on the ancient history of Jewish life in the Middle East geographical area. It is important to note that the declaration of Israeli independence (1948) emphasizes equity among all citizens with no differentiation according to race, religion or gender.

These basic values are reflected in the curriculum of citizenship in Israel. As mentioned above, the present day version of textbook of citizenship is centrally focused on the Jewish narrative of the state. Nevertheless, Israeli citizens of all background are governed by an equal set of laws and enjoy the same rights. There is one exception to this situation, namely, the Law of Return. This law provides every Jew all over the world with the right to become an Israeli citizen by coming to live in Israel. This automatic citizenship is not provided for all other people coming to Israel to live. The moral justification for this difference between Jews and non-Jews is related to the century long historical injustice suffered by Jews. This situation is a basis for ongoing tension between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens.

The historical basis to civic law in Israel has been shaped in the time of Turkish law before World War One, and since this war during the time of the British mandate of Palestine. Family laws were determined by each religion that existed in Palestine in that time providing ethnic and religious autonomy in this matter. This autonomy concerning family law is kept until today in Israel.

In multiethnic countries it is difficult to develop a curriculum in civic education. Indeed, both Arab and some Jewish teachers note that the text in civics has to relate to the different ethnic background of Jewish and Arab students. The present day official Arab textbook in civics is a word by word translation of the Jewish textbook and does not take into consideration the different background of students. Relating to the Arab minority in Israel in teaching citizenship requires a more balanced description of this community and its values in the textbook.

Conclusion

Teaching civic education in multi-national and multi-cultural countries presents difficulties concerning the major message of the teaching process and the creation of national identity.

In Israel the place allocated to the Jewish component of the population as far as civic education is concerned is much greater than the place allocated to the Arab population. This lack of symmetry is noticeable as well in the languages spoken in Israel. Many Arabs speak Hebrew as well as Arabic whereas most Jews do not speak Arabic in spite of the fact that both languages are officials ones.

Both Arab and Jewish teachers who participated in our study are not satisfied with teaching civics. These teachers have different reason for their lack of satisfaction. In some cases this lack of satisfaction is caused by problems in translation from Hebrew to Arabic and sometimes in the nature of teaching the subject matter.

It is important to note that teaching civics in Israel is a dynamic theme. This process of changes is noticeable in the textbooks, as well as, in the teachers words. In spite of the long time conflict between the Jewish and Arab populations, they live together in a common state without violence. As the years of peace accumulate, the integration of Arabs minorities into Israeli society grows. The city of Haifa might serve as an example of this development. Citizens of Haifa of different of ethnic and religious background, feel equal to each other and enjoy a common life. It is hoped

that this development will become the norm all over Israel.

It is difficult to foretell the future. Still there is place for hope that as time passes and Jewish and Arabs states around Israel will sign peace treaties with it, the peace process will strengthen.

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