

**On the seam: Philosophy with Palestinian girls in an East Jerusalem village
as a pedagogy of searching**

Arie Kizel

Head, Department of Learning, Instruction and Teacher Education

Faculty of Education, University of Haifa, Israel

ak@akizel.net

Marlene Abdallah

Department of Learning, Instruction and Teacher Education

Faculty of Education, University of Haifa, Israel

joliama@yahoo.com

Abstract

The 'Marwa' elementary school (pseudonym) – an Israeli public school on the border between Israel and the Palestinian Authority – is a unique educational institution in that, despite being not religious, it only accepts from Grade 1 through to Grade 6 girls. Several years ago, the principal decided to implement a Philosophy with Children (PwC) programme as an alternative pedagogy. This paper surveys how the educational faculty regarded the introduction of this curriculum and how it contributed towards the development of philosophical discursive skills, a classroom atmosphere of friendship and caring, and critical and creative thinking competence amongst the students.

Key words

Arab-Palestinian education in Israel, pedagogy of searching, philosophical communities of inquiry, Philosophy with Children

Introduction

Although the Arab-Palestinian education system has changed significantly since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, it continues to suffer from institutional discrimination and neglect, lack of participation (Abu-Saad 2006), and conservative learning-instruction views (Al-Haj 1995). Chronically short of funds, it is not only

poorly administrated but also receives less money per teaching hour than allocated to the Israeli-Jewish state education system (Jabareen 2008). Arab-Palestinian local councils invest less heavily in education than established Jewish settlements (Arar & Mustafa 2011); with the matriculation achievement levels, assessment tests and international exams taken in Arab elementary and middle schools also all being lower than their Jewish counterparts (Al-Haj 1995; Amara et al. 2002; Jabareen 2006; Jabareen & Agbaria 2010).

Arab education in Israel is still characterised by a largely frontal instructional system, the teacher serving as the source of knowledge and leading the classroom discussion (Al-Haj 1995). The classroom atmosphere is authoritarian rather than democratic, with teacher-student relations being marked by an expectation of compliance and obedience. When confrontations occur the teacher prevails, and the students having no right to express a different opinion (Al-Haj 1995). In addition to these factors, the Israeli Ministry of Education-determined curriculum promotes a Jewish-Zionist identity which is irrelevant to Arab-Palestinian national culture (Klein 1987; Abu-Nimer 2001; Levy & Massalha 2012).

Traditional patriarchal Arab-Palestinian society in Israel tightly controls the status of minors and women, subordinating feminine personal identity to family, ethnic, communal and national identity (Haj-Yahia 1995; Al-Krenawi 1996; Dwairy 1998; Al-Krenawi & Graham 2000). The self-image of students who study in girls-only elementary Arab state schools is determined on the one hand by their nuclear and extended families and on the other by their ethnic community (Haj-Yahia 2000). Rather than representing themselves, their identity is based on their collective village identity – largely governed by the men in the family and community (Abraham 2000; Haj-Yahia & Sadan 2008). In line with Hall (1992) and hooks (1994), gaining power demands liberation from the male hierarchy and confrontation of reality, with women needing to separate themselves along gender, race and class lines and then work to resolve the differences in order to implement a feminist revolution capable of transforming their world.

Great importance thus attaches to the education girls acquire in school. Determining their personality and future position in society, the only way schooling can empower them is to offer an alternative to the conventional norms imposed on women; traditional religious principles dictating that even if they are educated and have a career they remain housewives and mothers (Gorkin & Othman 1996; Abu-Baker 2003; Haidar 2005). The curriculum offered by girls' schools in the Arab sector

customarily reinforces their low position in society (Abu-Jaber 2012), condemning them to the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

The village of 'Marwa' (a pseudonym) in East Jerusalem is under Israeli jurisdiction and the schools come under the formal Israeli state education system. Marwa is populated by Israeli-Palestinians who define themselves as living in occupied territory. Several years ago, the elementary girls' school therein introduced a unique Philosophy with Children (PwC) programme designed to change the prevalent form of conservative pedagogy and frontal system of instruction and empower the students via a pedagogy of searching characterised by the asking of questions and doubting (Kizel 2017). The first part of this article surveys the village's social and communal ecology. The second part reports on the findings of a study examining the views of the school's educational faculty towards the PwC programme.

Marwa school—On the seam

Marwa lies between Jewish Jerusalem and the poor Palestinian Authority neighbourhoods, its population being around 14,000 (Weiss 2016). The school caters for 1,000 Arab-Palestinian girls from Grades 1 through to 6, many of whom come from a low socioeconomic background, their mothers having little or no formal education and their fathers the only breadwinners. Established as a co-educational Arab-Palestinian institution in 1954, the school became girls-only in 1971, and was subsequently divided into elementary and middle schools in 2003. Over the years, the school principal and staff have devoted themselves to moulding the school's vision on the principles of love, acceptance and giving, seeking to provide the students with the tools and skills necessary for becoming independent learners and well-adjusted in society.

This process was prolonged and organic, during which the educational staff analysed the village's low socioeconomic profile, its religious and nationalist traditions. These traditions have undergone major changes, primarily in the wake of the establishment of the State of Israel and as a result of the arrival of newcomers and the exodus of existing members (i.e. villagers of Marwa), and the students' social conditions. The pedagogic staff decided that the school's vision should reflect the desire to turn the school into what they termed 'an educational institution that will serve as a warm, supportive, and caring home for the students' (school vision statement). They thus searched for an educational programme that would allow a dialogical atmosphere that would encourage trust, the development of high-order thinking skills, and student empowerment.

As part of this exploration, the principal discovered the Israeli Centre for Philosophy for Life. This introduced her to the PwC approach. Having examined all the possibilities, the school decided to incorporate the programme into the curriculum for Grades 3 and 4. The programme was implemented as a result of a joint decision between the principal and the educational staff, rather than as a part of the official Ministry of Education curriculum. Following the programme's success, it was expanded through to Grade 6.

The programme was operated independently of the official curriculum by a member of the Israeli Centre for Philosophy for Life, who came to the school every week for several hours to hold a philosophical community of inquiry with the students. This consisted of meetings in which the participants sat in a circle and read a text together in accordance with the method developed by Lipman (1980). The texts addressed various philosophical issues appropriate to the student age. Afterwards, the students asked questions about the text, democratically choosing which issues to place at the centre of the ensuing discussion.

According to Lipman, children begin to develop philosophically when they start to ask 'why' (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon 1980). Naturally curious, children demand answers to endless questions, and the answers prompt further questions. Building on Charles Sanders Peirce's ideas regarding the scientific community of inquiry, Lipman proposed the concept of a philosophic community of inquiry:

We can now speak of 'converting the classroom into a community of inquiry' in which students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions. (2003, p. 20)

The more the principal delved into the dialogical PwC approach, the more she realised that improving the students' thinking skills as a goal of the programme would also enhance their learning capacities by encouraging them to raise original questions, analyse possible answers in a dialogical circle, and engage in critical and creative thought. Nonetheless, the school decided not to assess the programme within the school beyond the confines of the philosophical communities of inquiry.

The funding of the programme through the school budget was approved by the Ministry of Education. Although many years previously the Israeli Centre for Philosophy for Life had designed a unique curriculum based on PwC in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, this was never implemented as an obligatory part of a state curriculum.

When the programme was introduced into the school, it was decided to involve the parents as well. Details of the initiative, including its goals and methods, were thus shared at the parent-teacher meetings in order to afford the parents the opportunity to ask questions and to continue communicating directly with the school regarding any issues that arose further down the road.

Research questions

The study set out to examine the following major question: What social-environmental, communal, educational and pedagogic benefits did the school staff expect the programme to bring about and what ecological, environmental, social, and pedagogic insights were gained in the wake of its implementation?

Seeking first and foremost to address the administrative, philosophical, pedagogical, educational and gender aspects of the educational team, the study focused on the educational faculty (the principal, the coordinator who directed the programme on behalf of the Centre for Philosophy for Life, and the teachers whose classes were included in the programme) rather than the students. This focus was a function of the fact that, *inter alia*, they served as curricular instructional gatekeepers.

In line with Thornton (1991, 2005), speaking with the educational staff enabled us to analyse their views regarding the introduction of the programme and the benefits accruing from it and collect data relating to the changes they saw in the students. With the educational staff in schools of the type under investigation here constituting a central factor in the running of the programme, the establishment of the pedagogic approach, and the implementation of the school vision, the study can contribute to our understanding of teacher perspectives on what happens to students in the wake of change processes introduced by the principal – in particular those pertaining to pedagogy and teacher-students relations. In the next stage, the researchers will seek to expand the study by exploring the perspectives of the students who participated in the programme, their experiences and insights.

Research instruments

The participants included the school principal (an Master of Education with more than 10 years of experience in educational management), the coordinator from the Centre for Philosophy for Life (a Master of Arts with ten years of experience in guiding philosophic communities of inquiry), and four teachers from the educational staff whose classes took part in the programme (all having Bachelors of Education

with teaching certificates and between six and fifteen years of teaching experience in primary education).

The data were collected from semi-structured interviews conducted at various intervals. Two semi-structured interviews were held with the principal, one at the beginning and one at the end of the study. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with the educational staff of Grades 3 and 4 (ages 8-9) in which the programme was implemented. Finally, a semi-structured interview was held with the coordinator of the PwC programme. The interviews with the principal and community coordinator were conducted in Hebrew by two researchers, those with the teachers were conducted in Arabic by a researcher. All were held either on the school premises or outside. The interviews were analysed qualitatively, first being read through and then searched for principal themes in order to identify the categories into which the knowledge they yielded could be classified. Finally, they were interpreted in order to draw conclusions from the texts.

The background to the programme's introduction

The PwC programme was incorporated into the school curriculum as part of the principal and educational staff's attempt to empower the students, develop their thinking skills, and transform the school into a properly-functioning educational institution. According to the principal, the poor economic situation of the village prevents many students from continuing their academic education, thus some leave school already in Grade 10 or 11 (age 16–17) in order to start working, prior to the usual leaving age of 18:

I have been at the school for over 10 years and see how many of the girls suffer from difficult social circumstances – their parents being divorced or with an unstable family. It causes the girls instability in their daily lives and they feel usually not relaxed and not secure especially around the family's economic condition. It affects their self-confidence and usually drives them to stay at home and not to take part in the village social life.

The principal believes the school's role is to educate girls towards their future:

Girls need to be bold and express themselves, their opinions and feelings, in order to recognise that they have the right to reject decisions taken on their behalf ...When I came to the school, I found there were girls who were already betrothed when they were in Grade 8 or 9 [age 13-14]. I felt there was a need for a programme like PwC that could help them ask questions about this situation. The programme could legitimise freedom

of expression and opinion for women. Usually, women are the last people whose opinions are heard, if at all. They're very rarely asked whether they want to get married, study, or even about ordinary issues in their daily lives.

One of the challenges PwC addresses is enabling the voices of silenced, marginalised and excluded groups to be heard (Kizel 2016a). As Lone and Burroughs (2016, p. 209) note: 'This demands an appreciation for children's philosophical insights and unique perspectives, involving pedagogical and interpersonal strategies that manifest a commitment to making space for all children's voices'. The participants in communities of philosophical inquiry who come from weak socio-economic sectors or from national minorities – such as the girls in Marwa – whose narrative does not accord with the dominant national (Jewish-Zionist) or (male) gender narrative, feel uncomfortable expressing their feelings and experiences, preferring not to raise the questions that interest them because they feel, at the beginning, that they are expected to be subservient to the dominant narrative and to act as if they are part of it. Even if amicable, such communities of inquiry are governed – even if implicitly – by the hegemonic meta-narrative.

As one of the teachers who led the programme in the school observed:

The principal was most apprehensive in the light of the village's traditional nature. We were most afraid of how to bring the freedom of philosophical choice into a place in which people aren't used to choosing. I told her that it's important to create a community of inquiry with the girls. It's not philosophy in the sense of teaching them philosophy but doing philosophy. We started a process – a journey to get to know ourselves.

The programme's benefits

The comments of the educational staff indicate that implementing the PwC programme led to a number of pedagogical and communal benefits:

1. A sense of belonging to the school as a community

The teachers and community coordinator reported that, several months into the programme, the students had begun voicing a feeling of belonging to the school, speaking about it as a community rather than a mere place of learning. As the programme coordinator observed: 'A community began forming in the classes. The girls began feeling more comfortable coming and voicing things they were thinking about'.

The sense of fear and apprehension related to speaking freely instilled in the girls because of the school hierarchy began to dissipate, giving way to a feeling of comfortableness and ease. In the words of one of the teachers: *'There's room for being wrong. Today, the girls know that they feel like they belong in the school, that they can think certain things and bring these thoughts to the philosophical groups and discuss them with their classmates.'*

2. Gender empowerment

The teachers reported that the programme enabled the students to express themselves, in particular in the face of gender issues, and voice their own opinions. This development manifested itself in the fact that they began referring to themselves as 'girls' instead of 'pupils'; i.e. they adopted a feminine identity. This phenomenon was especially striking in light of the school culture, which had traditionally kept them from freely sharing their personal views, with girls customarily being educated to be passive students in preparation for their role in society.

One of the teachers said: *'In my opinion, philosophical discussion leads to personal development amongst the students, in a way changes in personality, even amongst the quietest and most introvert'*. Another added: *'We see the change in the way they express themselves. They've started talking about current affairs ... They try, together with their classmates, to ask questions about the situation and discuss possible answers'*. Another remarked: *'The fear slowly dissolved ... Their ability to ask question about their existence and lives, their social status, their society, is much greater today'*.

The students' mothers were also in regular contact with the teaching staff, both via daily communications and parent/progress-report meetings. They, too, attested to the lessening of the girls' apprehensions regarding self-expression. As one of the teachers remarked: *'One of the mothers told me that her daughter had become an asker of question, a self-expresser, daring to talk'*; said one of the teachers, *'That's very unusual in our culture'*. Another teacher noted: *'One mother told me that now her daughter talks back. Although she found it strange at first, but now she's happy about it'*.

The principal also related that some of the teachers regarded the girls as having become rude and impertinent:

Principal: *It's frightening in a traditional society, in which girls are usually represented as 'incapable', 'not allowed', 'not daring', when they open their mouths. Compliant kids suddenly find a voice'*.

Researcher: *Do you feel as principal that the girls have crossed a line?*

Principal: *No. Teachers have begun making statements like: 'You've given the students too much space. They're answering back'. This is undermining the hierarchy we're used to here, turning monologues into dialogues.*

The principal and teachers' statements indicate that the introduction of the PwC programme created a democratic space within the school characterised by giving students a voice, as both learners and girls. This in turn enhanced their freedom of expression, which up until then had been confined to a privileged group – the principal and teachers. At the same time, however, the democratic space also induced a sense, felt by the teachers in particular, that their exclusive prerogatives – i.e. freedom of expression – were being threatened. However, this quickly gave way, according to the interviews, to wonderment over the girls' ability to express themselves and the questions they raised. The philosophic community coordinator added:

The questions weren't only interesting and diverse, ranging from poverty to their status in society, their existential situation to their status in the family, but their answers also deepened and enriched the discussions, being very original. I'm not sure that questions like these would have come up without the community of inquiry.

3. Village traditions vs. modernity

The interviews evince that the village traditions governing the school and its community frequently clashed with the values of modernism as exemplified in the PwC programme – democracy, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and equality. As the principal observed: *'In the school, we're 55 teachers, of whom only seven don't wear a head covering. 98 percent of the mothers do. The teachers stress religion, honouring one's parents, and even the principle of compliance'.* The programme coordinator also highlighted the pre-modern character of the village ethos: *"Boys can but girls can't" or "Girls are forbidden things others can do". In other words, they're loyal to religious tradition in the school's administration, education, and pedagogy'.* This clash was particularly evident in the religion classes, in which blind obedience to divine dictates is demanded – in stark contrast to the PwC principles of asking questions and critical examination of fundamental issues relating to life – including religion.

As the principal noted: *'In the religion class, the teacher explained about the pangs of the grave [i.e. that people suffer after their death because they have not been observant Muslims].*

The philosophy coordinator said that the children were scared and bewildered. He let them ask questions'.

The latter explained:

In the religion class, there was no opportunity to discuss this question. One student was very troubled and asked: 'Why do we need to pray when we all die anyway?' The answer the religion teacher gave was: 'It's God's grace and we live to serve him'. This answer bothered the student. I tried to give space to her wondering and curiosity. This case illustrates the in-built tension between the educational space that sees the student as an obedient servant of an idea (i.e. the religion and its rules and tradition) and a philosophical space that, by definition, sees the class as an opportunity for an open dialogue between people and their ideas and questions around any subject and above all legitimises this possibility.

4. Trust between the community's leader and students

The teacher-student relations in the school are based primarily on extra-school authority, strict discipline and compliance with the instructions given by the adults in the educational institution. As presented by the principal and community coordinator, the PwC programme focused on developing a basic trust between the students and teachers, the prerequisite for a meaningful dialogue.

The principal stated in this regard: *'The attitude of the community's coordinator, and the teachers, was unique and the closeness between them was quite palpable. The students looked forward to the class and were upset if it was cancelled ... This kind of relationship isn't possible in an ordinary class.'*

The trust that developed in the philosophic community of inquiry was also exemplified in the students' ability to raise sensitive issues because they knew that the space was safe and that doing so would not expose them to any harm. According to the coordinator: *'In some communities, the members address personal, even intimate subjects that would be taboo in a regular class. We place at the centre of our doing the group's ability to develop trust as part of the basis for dialogue.'*

5. Sitting in a circle

The form of sitting in a circle in the philosophic community of inquiry differs intrinsically from the traditional classroom format of rows of desks. At Marwa following the traditional, conservative school approach to learning processes, sitting

in rows reinforces the status of the teacher as the source, determiner, conveyer and assessor of knowledge.

The PwC programme initiated a physical change in the class structure, the circular arrangement granting legitimacy to all the participants and placing the teacher on an all equal footing with them. As one of the teachers observed, in the circle, *'Everyone looks at everyone else in the eye and listens to them. Everyone has the right of speech and expression, to read or write something.'* One of her colleagues added: *'Sitting in a circle brings closeness. The coordinator invites questions and writes them on the board. The process stimulates the students, who feel that it improves their self-expression.'*

The structural change in a school completely unfamiliar with such an approach constituted a radical act, allowing all the members of the community access to unmediated contact between themselves and with the teachers. It thus challenged the principle of inequality in the classroom, assuming a normative as well as formal dimension.

The principal confirmed: *'When they sit in a circle, they're equal in every sense. There aren't any stronger or weaker. In an ordinary class, the teachers frequently let the stronger students speak more. In a circle, they recognise the difference. Then, the introvert students talk. We feel that their self-worth has increased.'*

The community coordinator added: *'A desk between me and the students prevents dialogue. The moment we pushed the desks to the walls, there was an invitation to a journey that liberated all the students'*.

6. Absence of quantitative assessment

Like the majority of Israeli state schools, the Marwa students are constantly assessed via internal, external, national and international exams (Israeli Ministry of Education 2017). The philosophy of inquiry, in contrast, abjures all such evaluative processes. The incorporation of the PwC programme into the school directly challenged the memorisation system of instruction based upon one right answer to a question that must be regurgitated in the exam, testing this knowledge.

As one of the teachers observed, it afforded the students an opportunity to become familiar with another approach that allows and encourages multiple perspectives. They were thus able to express diverse views and positions, each having the right to bring her (or his, in the case of the facilitator) own identity and narrative to the discussion. The traditional uniformity was thus confronted by plurality and diversity. As the principal observed:

It's very important for the girls, they can now test to quality of the answers given in the circle. The coordinator seeks to link all the questions. In this process, the students say to themselves: 'He takes my question seriously because he's written it on the board'.

According to the coordinator: *'In the philosophic circle, they look at one another, listen to one another, see one another, give each other space – rather than using exams and marks'.*

7. Caring within the community of inquiry

The competitive atmosphere of the ordinary classroom, in which the students vie with each other academically and seek the teacher's attention, and where praise tends to be directed towards the apt students, is challenged by the structure of the philosophic community of inquiry. The latter champions attentiveness to every participant rather than the conventional preoccupation with grades or classroom status as determined by the teacher.

The principal noted in this regard: *'The students pass around a doll as a symbol of the right of speech. They listen to one another carefully and sensitively. There's no spirit of competition but encouragement of equality and respect for answers even when they're not what people expect or want to hear'.*

The coordinator remarked: *'The participants are asked to break the group dynamic of power struggle and seek instead a place of "Come and help and listen to one another, learn something new from one another"'. We felt that this is the atmosphere that most of the groups adopted'. One of the teachers added:*

The community wants to be anti-violent and create a tolerant discourse, one of closeness and caring. I felt that the engagement occurs when the concepts a student raises prompt others in another student, these colliding with and complementing one another. You could see the caring attitude in the eyes of the students and in their sensitive body language like smiles, head movements and even sometimes raising a finger with 'like'.

8. Enhanced thinking skills

In contrast to ordinary classes, which revolve around a frontal lecture and the passing of information from the teacher to the student with no room for asking questions, the community of inquiry focuses upon the reading of texts that generate queries and discussion, each of the participants having the right to raise questions and provide answers. This method was not only new to the school but also ran

contrary to its traditional format, the static approach being replaced by active involvement.

As the principal noted, *'That way they reached decisions and judgements independently. It's extremely far-reaching for them. The students are creative and all of sudden show themselves highly capable of expressing this verbally or in writing'*. One of the teachers similarly attested: *'They begin giving answers that go beyond those given in the textbook. It asks them to be imaginative and suggest solutions to various problems'*. Another teacher affirmed this development: *'There's much more imaginative and creative drive than in ordinary classes. We could see it in their answers'*.

The principal concurred:

We see in their written work in class and in homework – and also during the discussions in other classes – how their thinking improves from day to day. They ponder, compare, link and analyse. They often reach very high heights of thinking. It is lovely and exciting for us as teachers.

9. Abstract thinking capacity

In an interview with the educational staff, the teachers expressed their surprise over the students' abstract-thinking capabilities. During routine classroom work, the students generally exhibited little evidence of abstract thinking capacities. In this sense they match with the developmental psychology typically espoused by Israeli primary schools, promoting the view that abstract thinking develops only at an older age. The philosophic community of inquiry, in contrast, champions precisely this kind of thought.

As one teacher said: *'As teachers, we studied philosophy at University. It was a difficult subject even for adults. We're amazed at how Grade 3 students [age 8] cope with it. Today, I understand that it should be an obvious skill at that age'*. The principal added: *'I see how they think outside the box. It moves me to see their capacities and consistent development. The space that's given to them – the question space – is what enables this'*. The coordinator commented:

I find myself faced with questions such as 'Why is it forbidden to lie?', 'Does God love the Jews?', 'Why is there injustice?', 'Is the sun jealous when night falls?', 'Is it envious of the stars?', 'What happens to it at nighttime?' I think that analysis of their questions reveals the depth of their thought and their engagement with all sorts of profound issues.

10. Free spaces that break boundaries and fear

The summarising interviews held with the principal and community coordinator evinced that the introduction of the programme brought the educational staff into free spaces that burst the bounds of several of the areas reviewed above, first and foremost that of the fear they felt as its organisers. In this regard, they experienced the changes that occurred in the school as a 'thawing' and 'dissolving' of fear.

As one of the teachers remarked (and here we also see fear in relation to that felt by students):

Fear is linked to the traditional society in which the girls live, which puts them at the bottom of the pile. In parallel, the school represents an ecological microcosm of the village that enables the students to find a way out – through the philosophic community of inquiry – of silence, fear and paralysis. In other words, in a way the students are liberated from oppression at least at school's community of inquiry.

The principal added:

Sometimes philosophy gives access to sensitive matters – like the destruction of borders. It demands flexibility and coping. Today, I know that we offer a place in which that can happen, because the lesson is free from the constraints of prohibitions and hindrance. This freedom ensures safety and trust.

According to the community coordinator: *'School is a place that teaches them what not to think. We found that the philosophic encounter enables wonderment. The students feel protected. They even manage to assimilate the fact that there's room in the world for being wrong'.*

Philosophy on the seam/ecological border

The statements made by the principal, teaching staff, and philosophic community of inquiry coordinator evince that the Marwa students' school experience was challenging, their reality being greatly impacted by their way of life and developmental stage. Herein, we relate only to the external circumstances (the village setting), the school situation (a girls-only school), and the students' status within the family and the school (girls in a traditional society and poor village on the seam).

Seeking an unusual, non-traditional programme, the principal introduced the PwC project as an alternative class because the Israeli elementary curriculum did not

include philosophy as a mandatory subject. Identifying the students' school reality as a 'seam' or 'ecological border', she hoped that it would 'provide a space for the students to study and get an education that would help them free themselves from a problematic reality'. According to Rosenthal and Dorit (2001), culture wields the greatest influence upon tenets and values in the context of rearing children and their development, reflecting the ecological-cultural setting in which they grow up. It is therefore the central factor impacting education.

The students of the elementary girls' school experience the seam/ecological border in two spheres. The first is social, the Arab-Palestinian population in Israel being traditional and conservative, discriminated against in the allocation of resources and suffering from civic inequality in a State that aspires to be Jewish (Abu-Saad 2006; Jabareen & Agbaria 2010). The second is the patriarchal clan/family structure of the local community in the village that oppresses women (Abu Hussain & Gonen 2013). This is reflected in the fact that women are required to obtain the approval of a male relative (a father, a brother or an uncle) for many issues relating to their lives and such approval is required in the case of marriage. They cannot leave the house freely and do not have equal rights regarding various decisions they seek to take in their private lives. On the traditional, patriarchal clan/family level of the local community that the school is situated, girls occupy for many years the 'bottom rung' of society, as evinced by the principal's statements.

The introduction of the programme can also be understood in some sense as a feminist move, resonating with bell hooks' (1994) ideas regarding the development of a critical pedagogy via solidarity, voice and awareness. The programme's implementation over the course of several years has led to the adoption of a progressive cultural-educational direction designed to bring the participants into contact with a transformative form of knowledge that encourages them to rethink their cultural reality, thereby freeing them from oppression or creating the conditions thereof. From this perspective, the introduction of the programme constituted a way to counter the 'pedagogy of fear' (Kizel 2016b).

In this sense, as indicated by the interviewees' statements, the fear gave way to a feeling of belonging based on trust. The expansion of the democratic space similarly gave a voice to the students, both as learners and as girls traditionally expected to accept the 'voice' of society. The programme gave them an opportunity, on a daily basis, to confront the conservative conventions and norms imposed upon them by encouraging them to think and express themselves freely and by promoting egalitarianism. These conditions formed the basis for dialogue, which in turn

fostered 'critical students'. The teachers' statements reveal that the following stage may well be that of creating 'critical' or 'thinking teachers' rather than those who simply pass on knowledge/information.

The inauguration of the PwC programme into a school staffed primarily by religious women and located within a very traditional religious village challenges the quotidian 'self-evident space'. The programme offers the students an opportunity to ask questions about their rights and to challenge their low peripheral status, giving them access to a life of value determined by something other than tradition and adult males. It thus confronts the traditional notion of childhood as serving as a preparation for adulthood without any significance in its own right (Ammar 1954; Barakat 1985). While adults often regard childhood as a bothersome period that must be got through, PwC posits that children possess an awareness, understanding, question-asking capability, wonderment and capacity to cope with reality. The statements made by the educational staff as a whole demonstrate that the programme prompted the school to start recognising, relating attentively to, and valuing its students.

The philosophical educational space not only breaks the traditional classroom seating arrangement but also changes the status of the knowledge as transmitted exclusively by the teacher (via books) according to the memorisation system. This offers additional possibilities: (a) dialogue between teachers and students while ensuring the latter's security and trust; (b) the unrestricted asking of questions, free of any constrictions based on gender and/or religious traditions (c) the legitimisation of multiple answers and a democratic choice between them in an atmosphere of respect and dignity, allowing each student to decide what seems best to her; and (d) the possibility of unmediated contact with one's peers within an egalitarian society that both respects and esteems the students' originality of thought. According to the interviewees, it also enabled the students to return home and challenge their family environments by asking questions, an activity frowned upon in traditional Arab-Palestinian society.

The teachers' reports indicate the existence of narrative processes within the school, including that of narrative as a foundation for the construction of personal identity. As McAdams (1985) notes, people use narrative to organise their life experience and to give it meaning. Narrative operates on two levels. The first level is internal to an individual's construction of 'reciprocal relations' between aspects of the self and the choices one makes about self-identity. Here, the focus lies on identifying and investigating multiple internal voices rather than striving for narrative coherence.

On the second level, individuals mould their life experience in reciprocal relation to their community, making self-directed choices that situate them within it.

Like others, the students and staff at Marwa thematise the events they experience in line with their intrinsic self-image. Addressing others allows individuals to reveal the meaning of their personal identity, also providing the opportunity to explore overt and covert contextual meanings within the narratives told. In the Israeli context, where the public discourse is dominated by competing narratives, non-normative narratives that counter the 'official' national narrative are usually repressed. This is especially true of the educational system, wherein a gap exists between the personal organisation of life experience and its public narration, with the latter not always reflecting the inner truth. People frequently conceal parts of their lives in order to be accepted, reflecting the Foucauldian power-play embedded in the regime of knowledge that represents the 'proper' order: 'It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power ... but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time' (Foucault 1980, p. 133).

The guiding tenets and practices of the philosophic community of inquiry dissipate this tension by providing a physical and metaphorical space that legitimises difference. Within this safe environment, the members can express themselves and be heard without fear of *a priori* judgement and share anecdotes and personal experience that, while positioning the speaker squarely in the public arena, do not make him or her the subject of the inquiry. In this pluralistic atmosphere, participants can own their narrative internally and externally, without censoring the self in order to make it conform to the national meta-narrative. Hereby, speaking from the self to the community becomes an act of (self) legitimisation.

Narrative also serves to construct interpersonal interaction, constituting an event in social discourse influenced by both personal-psychological and interpersonal-situational constructs (Gergen & Gergen 1988). While the exclusive product of the person narrating it, narrative becomes a joint entity, the listener helping to fashion it either overtly (e.g. by asking follow-up questions to draw out more details) or covertly (e.g. responding with a grimace, smile, spontaneous laughter, shock). Even when listeners seek to limit the direct influence wielded by the speaker, the face-to-face encounter between them creates a dialogical, intersubjective process (Corradi 1991). When questions are first elicited after reading a text, a conscious attempt may be made to record everyone's interests equally rather than evaluate the questions raised. While the participants may be primarily motivated at this stage to present

their own ideas and views, previous questions may prompt them to ask different ones. The narrator's influence may also be consciously limited by the listener in the ensuing enquiry – for example, if the former offers a counter-example or critique and the listener resists or is too impatient to wait for a full explanation.

In Marwa, these two processes are made possible by the fact that the principal made a caring pedagogical decision in regard to her students. In administrative terms, this move resembles the paradigm described by Shakeshaft (1989), according to which school heads tend to empower their educational staff, focus on curricula, pay attention to the staff and students' emotional needs, and stress the students' development within the educational process. In this case, the principal's democratic style (Fuchs & Hertz-Lazarowitz 1996) and collaboration with the faculty greatly contributed to the staff's acceptance of the programme and diminishment of their resistance to it.

The decision to introduce the programme enabled a move designed to promote critical, caring and democratic thinking and conceptual pluralism (exemplified in the ability to question norms and conventions), shifting the focus from the educational staff to the students. This represents a change in school power relations, transferring the authority that traditionally lies in the hands of the teachers (adults) into the hands of the students. Although the teachers initially resisted the programme, as it progressed they began to see the students through new educational/pedagogical – and human – lenses. This development also altered the seam/pedagogical boundary line by allowing the exclamation mark (signifying certainty) to be replaced by a question mark (representing questioning this [imagined] certainty).

According to the principal, the goal of education is not simply to teach reading and writing skills but also to develop critical thinking that leads to creative thinking (Lipman 1980, 1988), thereby helping students to understand life as dynamic and vigorous (Lipman 2003). Such critical and creative thinking, according to her interpretation of Lipman, enables us to change our views and opinions if circumstances demand it; take responsibility for ourselves and our development and understand that no one else can do so, avoid dependence on others, strive to develop as individuals, believe in ourselves, be honest with ourselves, and to be unafraid of failing or making mistakes. In this sense, the PwC programme constitutes the antithesis of traditional Arab education and society.

The staff's statements primarily evince amazement. They were also frequently surprised by the diversity of the students' abilities, reflecting the new possibilities the programme and community presented to the girls as thinking and competent

subjects standing before the teachers as part of the change in the teacher-student relations in the school. This study thus contributes to the understanding that the implementation of a programme such as this in vulnerable peripheral and excluded populations can not only lead to educational gains, but to personal empowerment, especially with respect to girls. The programme's dynamic nature enabled the philosophical challenge within the school that was necessary in order to implement an alternative education journey that questioned the patriarchal notion that girls cannot think independently, while concurrently generating a sense of female solidarity that served as a positive force in the face of the surrounding society.

As the community coordinator stated:

'The members of the community accept ideas from their peers, discover that they can listen to others without being threatened by or engaging in competition with them, discover the ability to pay attention, change their views when faced by convincing arguments, and recognise the beauty in sharing views and changing ideas. They take other ideas seriously, construct new theories out of them, develop notions without fear of being belittled or mocked, and expose themselves and be exposed to multiple perspectives.'

According to Sharp (1988), the discovery of sensitivity develops into an ethical conduct that enables the formation of internal criteria for shared living. One of the most important factors behind this process is the interaction between the members of the philosophic community of inquiry (Sprod 2001). In this respect, the educational staff confirmed Lipman's (1989) contention that students in ordinary classes remain confined within the borders of specific disciplines.

References

- Abraham, M (2000) *Speaking the unspeakable*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick.
- Abu-Baker, K (2003) Marital problems among Arab families: Between cultural and family therapy intervention. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 25(4), pp. 53-74.
- Abu Hassain, J & Gonen, S (2013) *Responsibility for education and education for responsibility*. Mofet, Tel Aviv. Available from <http://www.mofet.macam.ac.il/ktiva/publish/catalog/Documents/635007389687848845.pdf> (Hebrew)

- Abu-Jaber, S (2012) The status of women in Israeli society. *Bein ratzui la-matzui*, 4, pp. 35-36 (Hebrew).
- Abu-Nimer, M (2001) Education for coexistence in Israel: Potential and challenges. In M Abu-Nimer (ed), *Reconciliation, justice, and coexistence: Theory and practice*. Lexington, Oxford, pp. 235-253.
- Abu-Saad, I (2006) Palestinian education in Israel: The legacy of the military government. *Holy Land Studies*, 5(1), pp. 21-56.
- Al-Haj, M (1995) *Education, empowerment and control: The case of the Arabs in Israel*. SUNY Press, Albany, NY.
- Al-Krenawi, A (1996) Group work with Bedouin widows of the Negev in a medical clinic. *Affilia*, 11, pp. 303-318.
- Al-Krenawi, A & Graham, JR (2000) Culturally sensitive social work practice with Arab clients in mental health settings. *Health & Social Work*, 25(1), pp. 9-22.
- Ammar, H (1954) *Growing up in an Egyptian village*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Amara, M & Mar'i, AAR (2002) *Language education policy: The Arab minority in Israel*. Kluwer Academic Publishing, Dordrecht.
- Arar, K & Mustafa, M (2011) Access to higher education for Palestinians in Israel. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 4(3), pp. 207-228.
- Barakat, H (1985) The Arab family and the challenge of social transformation. In F Elizabeth (ed), *Women and family in the Middle East*. University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, pp. 27-48.
- Corradi, C (1991) Text, context and individual meaning: Rethinking life stories in a hermeneutic frame. *Discourse and Society*, 2(1), pp. 105-111.
- Dwairy, MA (1998) *Cross-cultural counseling: The Arab-Palestinian case*. Haworth, New York, NY.
- Foucault, M (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. Harvester, Brighton, UK.
- Fuchs, I & Hertz-Lazarowitz, R (1996) Being an Israeli high-school principal. *Women Writing their Lives*, 37(3), pp. 292-331 (Hebrew).

- Gergen, KJ & Gergen, MM (1998) Narrative and the self and self as relationship. In L Berkowitz (ed), *Advances in experimental social psychology*. Academic Press, San Diego, CA, pp. 309-320.
- Gorkin, M & Othman, R (1996) *Three mothers, three daughters*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Haidar, A (ed) (2005) *Arab society in Israel (1): Population, society, economy*. Van Leer Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Jerusalem/Tel Aviv. (Hebrew).
- Haj-Yahia, MM (1995) Toward culturally-sensitive intervention with Arab families in Israel. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 17, pp. 429-447.
- Haj-Yahia, MM (2000) Wife abuse and battering in the sociocultural context of Arab society. *Family Process*, 39, pp. 237-255.
- Haj-Yahia, MM & Sadan, E (2008) Issues in intervention with battered women in collectivist societies. *Journal of Marital Family Therapy*, 34(1), pp. 1-13.
- Hall, S (1992) The question of cultural identity. In S Hall, D Held & A McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its futures*. Polity Press in association with the Open University, Cambridge, UK, pp. 274-316.
- hooks, b (1994) *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge, New York, NY.
- Israeli Ministry of Education (2017) *National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education*. Available from <http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/UNITS/Rama>
- Jabareen, YT (2006) Law and education: Critical perspectives on Arab education in Israel. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49(8), pp. 1052-1074.
- Jabareen, YT (2008) Constitution building and equality in deeply-divided societies: The case of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, 26(2), 345-401.
- Jabareen, YT & Agbaria, A (2010) *Education on hold: Israeli government policy and civil society initiatives to improve Arab education in Israel*. Available from <http://www.iataskforce.org/resources/view/223>
- Kizel, A (2016a) Enabling identity: The challenge of presenting the silenced voices of repressed groups in philosophic communities of inquiry. *Journal of Philosophy in Schools*, 3(1), pp. 16-39.

- Kizel, A (2016b) Pedagogy out of fear of philosophy as a way of pathologizing children. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning*, 10(20), pp. 28-47.
- Kizel, A (2017). Philosophic communities of inquiry: The search for and finding of meaning as the basis for developing a sense of responsibility. *Childhood and Philosophy*, 13(26), pp. 87-103.
- Klein, C (1987) *Israel as a nation-state and the problem of the Arab minority: In search of a status*. International Center for Peace in the Middle East, Tel Aviv.
- Levy, G & Massalha, M (2102) Within and beyond citizenship: Alternative educational initiatives in Arab Society in Israel. *Citizenship Studies*, 16(7), pp. 905-917.
- Lipman, M (1980) *Philosophy in the classroom*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Lipman, M (1988) *Philosophy goes to school*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Lipman M (1989) *Misconceptions in teaching for critical thinking*. Resource Publication Series 2, No. 3. Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, NJ.
- Lipman, M (2003) *Thinking in education*. Cambridge University Press, UK.
- Lipman, M, Sharp, AM & Oscanyan, FS (1980) *Philosophy in the classroom*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Lone, JM & Burroughs, M (2016) *Philosophy in education: Questioning and dialogue in schools*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD.
- McAdams, D (1985) *Power, intimacy and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity*. Dorsey, Homewood, IL.
- Rosenthal, MK & Dorit, RS (2001) Cultural differences in mothers' developmental goals and ethnotheories. *International Journal of Psychology*, 36(1), pp. 20-31.
- Shakeshaft, K (1989) *Women in educational administration*. Corwin, Newbury Park, CA.
- Sharp, A (1988) What is a community of inquiry? In J Portelli & W Hare (eds), *Philosophy and education*. Detselig Enterprise, Calgary, pp. 207-225.
- Sprod, T (2001) Philosophical discussion in moral education: The community of ethical inquiry. Doctoral dissertation, University of Tasmania.

- Thornton, S (1991) Teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper in social studies. In J Shaver (ed), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning*. Macmillan, New York, NY, pp. 237-248.
- Thornton, S (2005). *Teaching social studies that matters: Curriculum for active learning*. Teachers College Press, New York, NY.
- Weiss, Y (2016) Performance of Israeli sovereignty before 1967. *Haaretz*, 30 November. Available from <http://www.haaretz.co.il/1.3136297> (Hebrew)