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INTEGRATION OF ARAB ISRAELIS AND JEWS IN SCHOOLS IN ISRAEL

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Integration of Arab Israelis and Jews in Schools in Israel

Uri Shwed, Yossi Shavit, Maisalon Dellashi,
and Moran Ofek*

Abstract

Israel's citizen population in 2014 is about 75 percent Jewish and 20 percent Arab, but in most areas of life there is a sharp separation between the two groups. An absolute majority of Israelis live in homogenous Jewish or Arab localities, work in separate workplaces and attend separate schools. Nonetheless, the reality of separation is changing, and more integrative spaces are being created in various fields. This chapter focuses on the education system in Israel, examining past and present separation and integration between Jews and Arabs, and the reasons for and challenges posed by such. Part 1 surveys the genesis of the separation between Israel's Arabs and Jews in the school system over the course of the twentieth century. Part 2 presents contemporary data on the slowly accelerating trend of integration over the past decade. Part 3 deals with the motivations of parents when it comes to choosing an integrated school for their children, and the conclusion touches briefly upon the challenges that integration poses to the designers of education policy.

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Introduction

Much has been written about the attempts at integration of pupils from various ethnic backgrounds in Israel (e.g., Shavit, 1984; Mizrahi et al., 2013; Resh and Kfir, 2004), but most of the studies in this field deal with pupils from different ethnic backgrounds within Jewish society. In recent years, a few studies have been published on bilingual schools that integrate Arab¹ and Jewish pupils, with the goal of educating them towards equality and peaceful coexistence (Bekerman, 2008; Bekerman and Horenczyk, 2004). These schools have also garnered some attention in the media but they are very few in number; there are currently five such schools and three such preschools in Israel.

However, a fair number of pupils attend Jewish schools where some of the pupils are Arab, and the number of these schools has grown in the past decade, albeit at a rather slow rate. The aim of this chapter is to describe overall trends in the integration of Jews and Arabs in schools through a historical survey of the separation, an investigation of the trends in the field in recent years, an attempt to understand the considerations of Arab and Jewish parents when it comes to sending their children to these schools, and a brief discussion of the challenges facing Jewish-Arab integration in schools.

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¹ The term Arab in this chapter always refers to Arab Israelis.

1. *Historical Background*

Israel's society is comprised of various ethnic and cultural groups with the most prominent distinction being between Jews and Arabs. Jews account for about 75 percent of the state's citizens and Arabs for about 20 percent. The majority of both Jews and Arabs live in nationally² (Jewish versus Arab) homogeneous localities, although the degree and nature of the separation between the two groups have changed over the course of time. During previous centuries, the small Jewish minority that lived in then-Palestine resided almost entirely alongside the Arab population in mixed towns. Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, and continuing into the twentieth century (both before and during the course of the British Mandate period), the *Yishuv* (the pre-statehood Jewish collective and its institutions) grew significantly. Consequently, many new Jewish localities were established, which intensified the separation between the groups. In the wake of the violent events of 1929, the Jews left some of the mixed towns and started to concentrate in Jewish neighborhoods and localities. These processes further intensified the separation.

In the field of education, the separation was almost complete from the beginning. During the British Mandate period, the schools – even those operating in the mixed towns – were separate for Jews and Arabs, and only a few of them integrated Jewish and Arab pupils. The end of the Mandate and the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel intensified the separation between the two groups. Most of the Arab inhabitants of the areas that were to become Israel left, and Jews – mainly new immigrants – settled in some of these communities, as well as in the towns that had been mixed before the war. Over the subsequent years, hundreds more localities were established for the Jewish population, while the natural increase of the Arab population remained concentrated in the villages that had survived the war, which swelled into large towns. Today, 90 percent of the Arab population resides in Arab

² The Hebrew term "*leom*" is translated here as "national." It distinguishes between Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel.

localities, and most of the rest reside in Arab neighborhoods within predominantly Jewish towns and cities (Smootha, 2012). Most Jews reside in Jewish towns, and only 22 percent reside in mixed localities (Khamaisi, 2009).³

Against this background of almost complete segregation in residential areas, it is no surprise that the separation in the education system is also severe. In order to understand the history of separation and integration in education, it is necessary to examine the development of the education system since Israel's establishment.

In 1949, the Compulsory Education Law was enacted, which was meant to ensure that every Israeli citizen, including Arabs, would receive a primary education (Dror, 2007). Mar'i (1978) and Al Haj (1995) point out that the implementation of this law among the Arab population in Israel was problematic in light of the chaos in 1949, and note that the shortage of classrooms and teachers led to the improvisation of makeshift and partial solutions. In those days, the law was implemented only in part (Al Haj, 1995; Mar'i, 1978). Furthermore, there was a blurring of authority between the Ministry of Education and the military government to which Israel's Arabs were subject until 1966. The military government sometimes interfered in decisions that were the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, such as the physical location of schools and the employment of teachers and principals (Al Haj, 1995).

In 1953, the State Education Law was enacted, which was meant to eliminate the various educational streams and consolidate them under the state's auspices. The political power of the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and national-religious parties ensured the autonomy or independence of their populations' educational streams. The Arab population, with its meager political power, was unable to obtain such educational autonomy. This gave rise to the peculiar situation that the Arab education system, which differs significantly from all streams of Jewish education, remained under

³ For the sake of comparison, in the United States one-third of all African-Americans reside in areas that are populated entirely by African-Americans, and one-half of all whites reside in areas that are populated entirely by whites. The degree of residential separation in Israel is, then, very large relative to the American case.

secular state auspices while functioning as a separate unit within it (Al Haj, 1995).

Al Haj points to three different approaches that were available to decision makers in addressing the relationship between Arabs and Jews in the education system: assimilation, separation and integration. The minority in support of assimilation saw it as a means of promoting the Zionist idea to the Arab minority and bringing this group within the state's embrace, while distancing it from the surrounding Arab world. The proponents of separation argued that without the creation of an encompassing Israeli identity, it would not be possible to integrate the Arab minority into the Jewish majority, and since there was no intention to develop a civil culture that was not Jewish-national, the integration course was doomed. Abu-Asbeh (2007) even argued that the supporters of separation between Jewish and Arab education sought to achieve a twofold goal: to reduce the feeling of discrimination among the Arabs – who in a separate system were granted a certain (albeit restricted) measure of administrative and cultural autonomy – and at the same time strengthen the state's control of education (Al Haj, 1995).

The integration approach received very little support over the years and almost no practical attempts were made to implement it. Opposition to it aligned with the interests of various factors in civil society. Mar'i (1978) writes, for example, that the attempt by the former mayor of Haifa, Aba Hushi, to establish a mixed school in the city met with fierce opposition from Jewish parents. According to him, Jewish parents were afraid of intimate relations between young people, especially Jewish girls and Arab boys. In Arab society, too, separation was usually viewed as desirable, because the Arab education system was supposed to contribute to the preservation of Palestinian national identity among Israel's Arab population (Mar'i, 1978).

Nonetheless, in recent years a change is evident in the trend of separation between Jews and Arabs that has been prevalent in the Israeli education system. The slow process of integration derives in part from the increasing residential mixing between the two sectors in towns and neighborhoods. Another force is the poor state of the Arab education

system, prompting certain Arab parents to prefer Jewish education, which they see as being of higher quality. Lastly, the process should also be attributed to the deliberate efforts of non-profits and parents' groups interested in affording their children a mixed and bilingual education.

This chapter presents an analysis of the Ministry of Education's registration data in order to understand the scope of the phenomenon. It then proceeds to discuss the reasons for the current integration and its implications for mixed schools based on about 30 interviews with principals and other personnel in mixed schools.

2. Integration in the Education System, 2003-2013

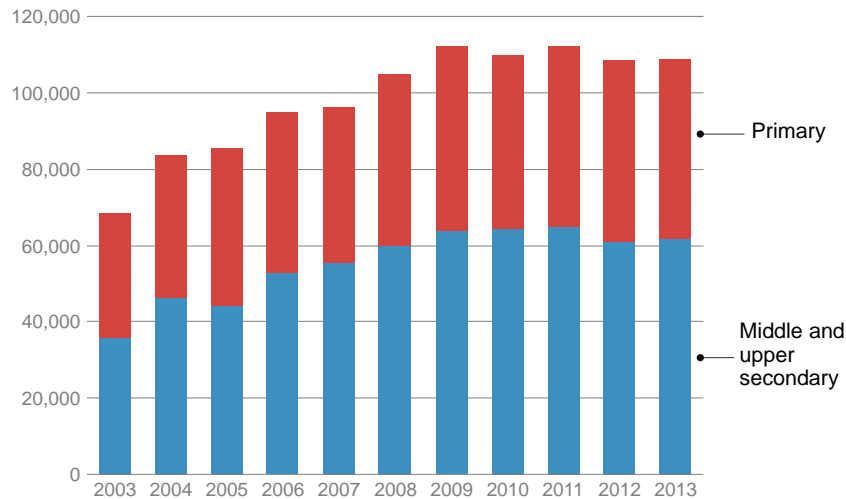
In 2013, about 1.6 million pupils attended primary and secondary schools in Israel. Of that number, 870,000 pupils attended schools without even a single Arab pupil (over half of these pupils attended religious or Haredi schools), and almost 330,000 attended schools without even one Jewish pupil. In contrast, almost 395,000 pupils attended schools with at least one Arab pupil or one Jewish pupil. This figure includes about 5,600 Arab pupils attending Jewish schools and 360 Jewish pupils attending Arab schools. The rest of the 395,000 are either Jews attending a Jewish school that also has an Arab minority, or Arabs attending an Arab school that a few Jews also attend. Since one pupil of a different sector than the majority does not suffice to define a school as "mixed," in this paper the definition of mixed schools is those in which more than 1 percent of the pupils are Jews and more than 1 percent are Arabs. (This, too, is a very liberal definition, and the integration between the two groups in schools where the mixing is more numerically significant will also be examined.)

According to this 1 percent definition, almost 5,000 Arabs attended mixed Jewish schools, while 177 Jews studied in Arab schools – one-third of them in a bilingual school classified as Arab, and the rest in prestigious church-run schools or schools for special education. The share of Arabs in the Jewish mixed schools according to this definition ranged from 1 percent to 81 percent (at the Special Education School for the

Deaf in Jerusalem) of all the pupils in the school, and was on average 7.6 percent. The share of Jews in the Arab mixed schools according to the same definition ranged from 1 percent to 45 percent (at the Bilingual School in Kfar Kara classified as Arab), and was on average 13.3 percent of all the pupils in a school. It is important to bear in mind, of course, that even a small number of pupils of a different nationality could grant all pupils at the school some familiarity with the “Other.”

Figure 1 presents the number of pupils attending mixed schools during the years 2003-2013. It shows a growing phenomenon: the population of those attending mixed schools grew by 59 percent, from 68,000 in 2003 to 109,000 in 2013. During the same period, the population of those attending a school without any Arab students grew by 9 percent, and the population of those attending a school without any Jews grew by 33 percent. Most of the growth in mixed schools occurred until 2008, and then the numbers stabilized. Nonetheless, a somewhat different picture emerges when the growth patterns by age group are examined: middle and upper secondary schools versus primary schools. The share of secondary school pupils out of all the pupils at mixed schools increased from 52 percent in 2003 to 58 percent in 2011. Most of the growth in the population of mixed middle and upper secondary schools occurred between 2004 and 2008, and since then there has been a slight decline in the number of pupils attending them. However, most of the growth in the population of the mixed primary schools occurred between 2006 and 2009.

Figure 1
Number of pupils in mixed schools*
 by education level, 2003-2013



* A school is considered mixed if minority of its pupils (Jewish or Arab) represents more than 1 percent of its pupil population.

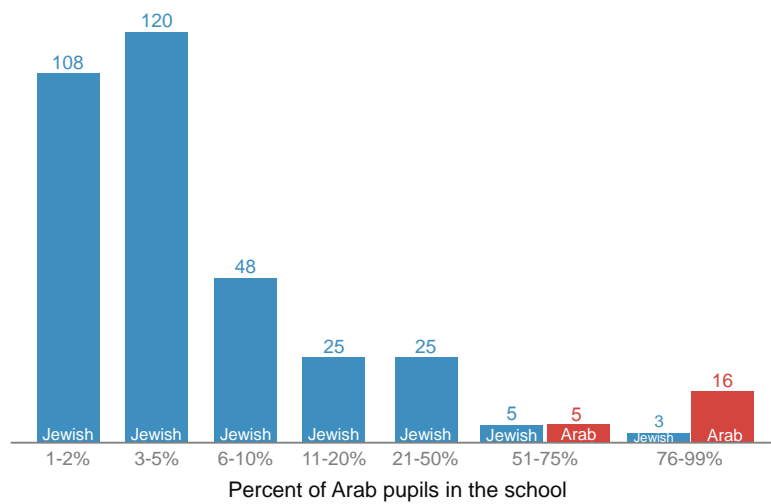
Source: Shwed, Shavit, Dellashi, and Ofek, Taub Center

Data: Ministry of Education

Where do the pupils of mixed schools attend school? Figure 2 presents the distribution of the 355 institutions at which Arabs and Jews learn side by side according to the share of Arab students at the school and according to educational sector (Arab versus Jewish). As the figure shows, 334 (94 percent) of the schools belong to the Jewish sector, and the rest belong to the Arab sector. In most of the mixed schools in Jewish education, the share of Arabs is low: in 228 of them the share of Arabs is no larger than 5 percent, in 48 schools the share ranges between 6 and 10 percent, and in 50 schools the share is 11-50 percent of the pupils. Interestingly, note that in five Jewish schools the share of Arabs is 51-75 percent. These are the bilingual schools in Beer Sheva and Jerusalem, the Weizmann School in Yafo (currently being closed), and two special

education schools in Jerusalem and Lod, respectively. In three of the Jewish schools, the share of Arabs is even greater than 75 percent: the bilingual Galil School located in Kibbutz Ashbal, an external high school in Haifa, and the special education school for the deaf in Jerusalem.

Figure 2
Distribution of mixed schools* by sector
 by percent of Arab** pupils in the school, 2013



* A school is considered mixed if the minority of its pupils (Jewish or Arab) is greater than 1 percent of its pupil population.

** Arab refers to Arab Israelis

Source: Shwed, Shavit, Dellashi, and Ofek, Taub Center

Data: Ministry of Education

Among the Arab mixed schools, in five of them the share of Jews is in the range of 25-50 percent. These are the bilingual school in Kfar Kara⁴,

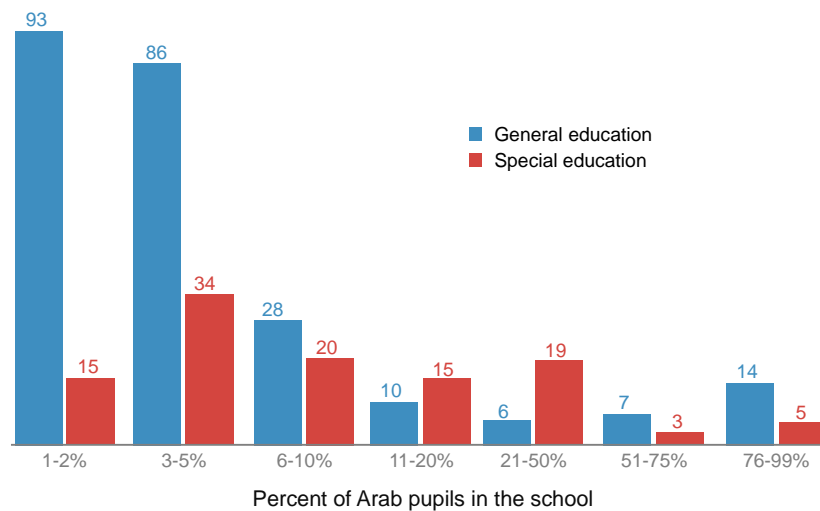
⁴ The Ministry of Education classifies schools by educational sector according to its own considerations. For example, the school in Neve Shalom-Wahat el-Salaam (a mixed community) is defined as a Jewish school while the bilingual Geshar al Havadi School, located in the Arab local council of Kfar Kara, is

an Armenian church school in Jerusalem, a special education school in Haifa, and two international church schools in Yafo, most of whose pupils who are classified as Jews are from the former Soviet Union and attend them in order to acquire a high-quality European education. Of the 16 remaining Arab mixed schools that include a small minority of Jews (more than 1 percent but less than 25 percent), four are special education schools and the rest are most likely schools attended by children of mixed families that reside in an Arab community, but who are classified by the state as Jews.

Special education accounts for a significant portion of the mixed schools. As Figure 3 shows, among mixed schools attended by up to 5 percent Arab pupils (228 schools), 49 are special education institutions and 179 belong to general education. In the next three categories combined (representing 6 to 50 percent Arab), special education schools constitute the majority. Among the Arab Israeli schools with Jewish pupils, about one-quarter are classified as special education.

officially classified as an Arab school. The Yad Beyad primary school in Jerusalem is defined as Jewish, while its high school is defined as Arab.

Figure 3
Number of mixed schools*
 by percent of Arab pupils and school type, 2013



* A school is considered mixed if the minority of its pupils (Jewish or Arab) represents more than 1 percent of its pupil population.

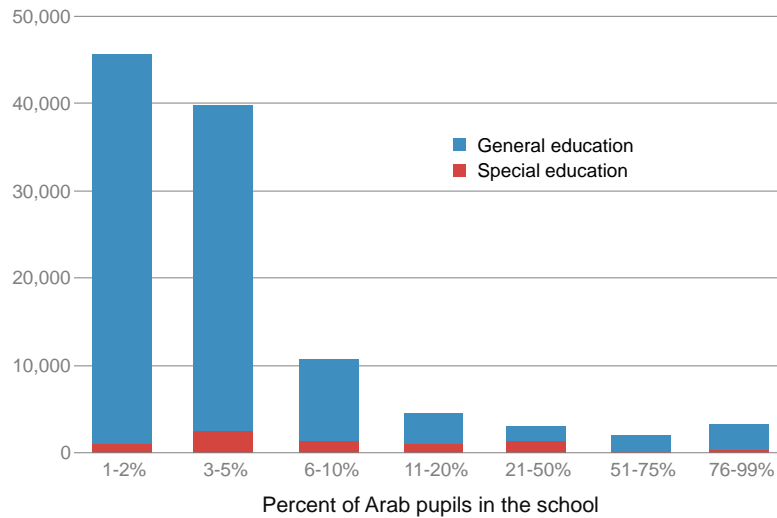
Source: Shwed, Shavit, Dellashi, and Ofek, Taub Center

Data: Ministry of Education

Ostensibly, it would seem that special education pupils constitute a significant portion of all the pupils at schools that integrate Jews and Arabs, but Figure 4 shows that this assumption is false, since the schools in special education are generally very small. The figure presents the distribution of pupils (as opposed to schools) according to the same categories presented in Figure 3. As can be seen, of the 108,872 pupils attending mixed schools only 7,856 – about 7 percent – attend special education schools. The factors that motivate mixing in special education are likely different from those operating in general education. The motivation for mixing in special education is due to the education system's efforts to concentrate pupils according to their special needs,

irrespective of nationality. Since relatively few pupils are concerned, henceforward those attending special education schools will not be included in the calculations (pupils of special education classes in general schools will continue to be included in the figures).

Figure 4
Distribution of pupils in mixed schools*
 by percent of Arab pupils and school type, 2013



* A school is considered mixed if the minority of pupils (Jewish or Arab) represents more than 1 percent of the school's pupil population.

Source: Shwed, Shavit, Dellashi, and Ofek, Taub Center

Data: Ministry of Education

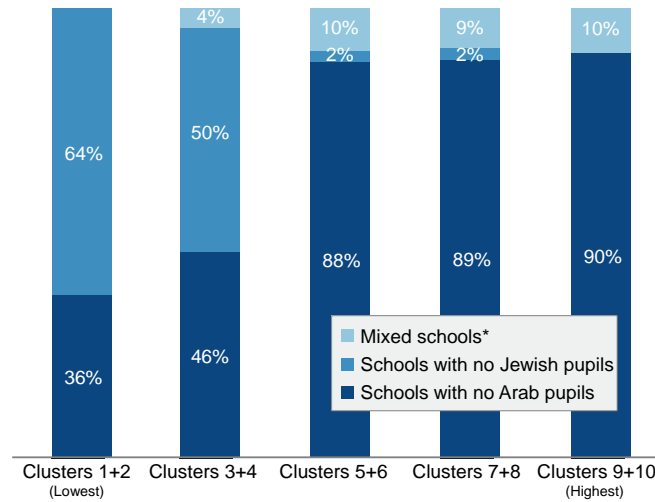
Analyzing the distribution of mixed schools according to the socioeconomic level of the locality in which they are situated (excluding special education schools) shows that they are prevalent in localities populated mainly by members of the middle and upper-middle class. Figure 5 presents the distribution of pupils among the schools by the level of mixing, on the basis of the socioeconomic cluster associated with the

school's locality.⁵ The mixed schools are a minority, of course, in every cluster. But in the lowest clusters – in which most of the localities are predominantly Arab or disproportionately Haredi – there is not a single mixed school. In clusters 3-4, nearly 5 percent of the pupils attend mixed schools, versus almost 10 percent of the pupils in clusters 5-6 and 9 percent of the pupils in clusters 7-8, which belong to the upper-middle class. Clusters 9-10 feature the largest share of pupils in mixed schools – around 11 percent.

The mixed schools, then, are concentrated mainly in localities belonging to socioeconomic clusters 5 and above. Importantly, though, mixing is common mainly in the weakest neighborhoods in the various localities. For example, in the Tel Aviv-Yafo municipality, the mixed schools are situated in Yafo, the weaker of the two municipal partners from a socioeconomic aspect.

⁵ The socioeconomic ranking of localities in Israel is calculated using the socioeconomic measure of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which consists of a combination of aggregate characteristics including: demographics, education and higher education, employment, and standard of living (income, number of cars, residential attributes). All the localities are divided into ten clusters. Cluster 1 denotes the lowest socioeconomic level, while cluster 10 comprises the group of localities with the highest socioeconomic measure.

Figure 5
Distribution of pupils in schools
 by level of mix and socioeconomic cluster of school location, 2013



* A school is considered mixed if the minority of pupils (Jewish or Arab) represents more than 1 percent of the school's pupil population.

Source: Shwed, Shavit, Dellashi, and Ofek, Taub Center

Data: Ministry of Education

To summarize, the analysis of the Ministry of Education's registration figures suggests that the phenomenon of integration between Arabs and Jews in schools is typical of non-religious state-run (*mamlachti*) education, primarily in the Jewish sector. The phenomenon has expanded in the last decade, initially in secondary schools and afterwards in primary schools. It is not exceptionally characteristic of special education, and extends mainly to localities belonging to the middle or higher socioeconomic clusters albeit in schools that are located in less affluent neighborhoods. In State-religious and Haredi education there is no integration of Arab pupils whatsoever.

Jewish Mixed Schools in Mixed Neighborhoods

The remainder of this chapter is based on the interviews that were performed with principals and teachers in mixed schools. As noted previously, the great majority of mixed schools are situated in mixed neighborhoods of a low socioeconomic level. The share of Arab pupils in these schools is relatively small. The population defined as “Jewish” in these schools generally includes a large share of children of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and lately also a few pupils from Peru in South America. In some of these schools, there is no clear majority group, and the school’s population resembles a mosaic of various small ethnic and national groups. Besides the Jewish pupils, the mixed schools are attended by both Muslim and Christian Arabs, as well as a few Druze and Circassian pupils.⁶

In most of the schools studied, the principals noted that a large share of their pupils comes from poor households, and only a few of them have educated parents. This is true of members of all ethnic and national groups in the schools. These schools are generally seen as relatively weak and the average achievement level of their pupils, as measured by the Meitzav tests (Hebrew acronym for Measures of School Efficiency and Growth), is low relative to the nationwide level.

From a cultural and organizational aspect, mixed schools operate as Jewish schools, and from an ideological-pedagogical aspect they are Jewish-Zionist schools in every respect. In all of the schools included in the study, the principals emphasized that the school was Jewish-Zionist in terms of its identity and curriculum. The great majority of teachers are Jewish, and if the school does employ Arab teachers, most of them teach Arabic (although a small number of Arab teachers teach other subjects in Jewish education). Nonetheless, these schools are distinct from each other in their attitude towards their Arab student population. Some of the schools emphasize tolerance, multiculturalism and acceptance of the “Other” – including the Arab other – as a minority in the school, but most

⁶ The Circassian pupils are mainly from one village, Rekhaniya, in the Upper Galilee.

of them have chosen a strategy of color-blindness⁷, that is, they disregard the existence of Arab pupils at the school and treat them just like other pupils. These schools, like most of the schools in *mamlachti* (state-run) Jewish education, emphasize the values of “the Land of Israel for the people of Israel” and celebrate military service, while ignoring the conflict this raises among some of their Arab pupils. Several principals even emphasized the importance they attribute to the fact that some Arab pupils choose to serve in the military or to perform some other type of national service.

In some of the mixed neighborhoods, Arab parents have a variety of alternatives, such as *mamlachti* Arab schools and selective church schools. If so, why do Arab parents send their children to the mixed Jewish schools? The Jewish mixed schools’ principals were asked to assess the reasons for this, and the following is a brief summary of their answers. None of the principals cited a single and distinct reason, and there appears to be a complex combination of factors involved.

The factor cited most often is Arab perceptions regarding the quality of Jewish education. The Jewish schools are perceived by Arab parents as being of higher quality than the *mamlachti* Arab schools. Some Arab parents believe that the quality of the teachers and amount of resources at *mamlachti* Arab schools are insufficient, and they are interested in improving the quality of their children’s education. Beside the aspiration to provide a quality education, a second factor is cultural capital. There are Arab parents who are interested in having their children be educated in Hebrew and study the Israeli (and in effect, Jewish) culture, because it may help them get ahead in a society whose dominant culture is Jewish.

⁷ This is a term borrowed from the strategy of creating interracial equality between whites and African-Americans in the United States, which means a nominal disregard for ethnic or racial origin in the provision of civil services, by eliminating the privileges awarded to whites and the racial discrimination against African-Americans. This approach was considered a fundamental reform in relation to the previous situation, but subsequently came under fire from those arguing that such an approach veils covert and open racism that continues to exist under the cover of “color-blindness” (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Another frequently cited factor relevant only to a limited number of pupils is how the Jewish schools contend with special pupils. Certain Arab parents are not satisfied with the way Arab schools manage their children's learning disabilities and adjustment difficulties, and hope that the Jewish schools, which are perceived as more advanced, will better handle their struggling children.

Another reason for preferring a mixed school is the existence of what might be called liminal populations: children of Palestinian families that collaborated with the Israeli security forces and children of mixed couples. In most of the mixed schools, there is a small Arab minority of children of "collaborator" families (Cohen, 2006). With state assistance, these families have settled in mixed neighborhoods, but are sometimes hesitant to send their children to Arab schools for fear of them being harmed. The Jewish school serves as a relatively safe sanctuary for them. In addition, some of the Arab pupils in the mixed schools are children of mixed families. Such families mostly reside in an Arabic-speaking community, but would like their children to know Hebrew and be familiar with Jewish culture, to which the family of one of the parents (usually the mother) belongs.

While Arab parents believe that these schools are preferable to the state-run Arab schools from a learning perspective, many Jews view these schools' education level as low relative to other schools in Jewish education. Higher-educated families among the Jews in mixed neighborhoods (like all higher-educated families) are looking for higher-quality solutions for their children, and some of them send their children to better schools outside the neighborhood by changing their official residential address in order to circumvent the registration area requirements. Others seek solutions in special or regional schools in the private sector, such as the Teva (nature) school in Yafo. Furthermore, there are Jewish families that remove their children from schools that are attended by Arab pupils. For example, at a primary school in Yafo, the number of Jewish pupils kept dropping as the number of Arab pupils rose (Levy and Shavit, in preparation). In the literature, this phenomenon is termed "white flight," referencing the flight of whites from

neighborhoods and schools which have seen an influx of minority students. Some families have turned to schools in the State-religious or even Haredi education system, because these schools do not accept non-Jews at all.

Understandably, then, the motivations of Jewish parents to send their children to mixed schools are fundamentally different from those of most Arab families. Many of the Jewish pupils who remain in these schools are sons and daughters of parents who are unable to find alternative solutions. These are generally poor families lacking in higher education, or immigrant families that are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the education system and that do not know how to circumvent the registration area requirements. It can be said, then, that the main reason that Jewish pupils attend mixed schools is either a lack of information or an absence of alternatives or initiative.

Bilingual Schools

There are five bilingual schools in Israel today, and these schools are committed to equality and coexistence between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Like many of the Haredi schools, these schools enjoy the formal status of being “recognized but unofficial.” This means that they are subject to supervision by the Ministry of Education and enjoy its budgetary support, albeit at a lower rate (about 70 percent) than official state-run schools. Since the bilingual schools insist on staffing each class with a pair of teachers – Jewish and Arab– their operating costs are very high, and the difference between the Ministry of Education’s allocation and actual expenditures is made up by donations and tuition fees. Three of these schools – Geshet al Havadi in Kfar Kara, Galil in Ashbal near Sakhnin, and the bilingual school in Jerusalem – operate under the umbrella of the non-profit organization Yad Beyad. The remaining two are the pioneering bilingual school in Neve Shalom-Wahat el-Salaam and Deganya which is located in Beer Sheva and operates with the support of the non-profit organization Hagar. There are also three bilingual preschools that aspire to grow into schools, in Yafo, Haifa and Heif. These schools are

characterized by placing an equal emphasis on Jewish and Palestinian-Arab language and culture.

The bilingual schools observe the holidays of the Jewish and Israeli calendar and those of Islam and Christianity (depending on the pupils' religion) as well as the Palestinian national holidays (including Nakba Day). The Arab pupils are not a minority in the school, and among older pupils they even constitute a majority.

The pupils at these bilingual schools generally come from established and higher-educated households. Although their principals are insistent that the schools are not elitist – for example, the school in Neve Shalom is attended by pupils from the lower-class Rakevet neighborhood in Lod, and the bilingual school in Jerusalem by lower-class Arab pupils from East Jerusalem and lower-middle class Jewish pupils from the Pat neighborhood in which it is located – actually such disadvantaged pupils form only a small percentage of their populations.

With regard to the bilingual schools, too, there are noticeable differences between the respective motivations of Arabs and Jews to attend them. According to the principals, the level of study is a more important issue for the Arab parents, while the ideology of integration and coexistence is of greater importance for most of the Jewish parents. This aligns with the findings of the study by Bekerman and Horenczyk (2004), who studied these schools. Of course, the bilingual schools also meet the needs of mixed couples. While putting their children into either Jewish or Arab education entails renouncing certain components of identity, the bilingual schools accommodate both components of a mixed couple's identity.

3. Conclusion

Israel appears to be in the midst of a slow process of reducing the residential, occupational and educational separation between Jews and Arabs. This chapter focuses on integration in the education system. From a situation of almost complete separation between Jews and Arabs that lasted for decades, recent years have seen a slowly developing trend of integration in various schools. Although schools featuring a high rate of integration are still rare, the data show that the integration trend is slowly expanding, and it is important that it is brought to the attention of both scholars and policy makers.

This chapter is a first attempt to examine the scope of the phenomenon and its development in the last decade. The data show that about 109,000 pupils – about 6 percent of all the pupils in Israel, and almost 15 percent of those in state-run Jewish education – attend schools in which some encounter between pupils from the two groups takes place. That share grew slowly during the first years of the previous decade and has since stabilized.

The buds of integration in Israeli education for the most part do not stem from any deliberate policy of the education system. Rather, they have sprouted from below, from the parents themselves and from the initiatives of organizations in civil society. One of the important factors affecting the increase in the prevalence of integration is the proliferation of mixed localities and neighborhoods, as growing numbers of Arabs move into localities whose population was almost exclusively Jewish since the State's establishment (Nazareth Ilit, Beer Sheva, Hazor Haglilit, Karmiel, and others). The mixing of Arabs and Jews in these localities has led to a rise in the number of Arab families that choose to send their children to Jewish schools. The motivations prompting them to do so are, as noted, diverse: some of them believe that the quality of Jewish education is higher. Others want their children to learn proper Hebrew, which will help them integrate into Jewish-Israeli society. Still others see Jewish education as a solution to their children's special needs or as a refuge from hostility and vengeance.

A more modest (from a numerical aspect) but very important role in the mixing process is played by the non-profit organizations Yad Beyad, Neve Shalom-Wahat el-Salaam, and Hagar. These organizations promote bilingual and bicultural education with the aim of advancing equality, understanding and social integration between the two national groups. The considerations of parents who choose these schools are both similar and different from those of parents who send their children to a mixed school in Jewish education; they include a commitment to coexistence and multiculturalism, as well as an attempt to escape from the state-run education system with its various problems.

And what is the role of the Ministry of Education in this mixing process? It is hard to say that the Ministry is enthusiastic about it. By law, the Ministry and the local authorities allow Arab pupils to enroll at Jewish schools in their place of residence. The Ministry also recognizes the bilingual schools, just as it recognizes many other schools established by parents' organizations, and tolerates their existence. However, the Ministry does not encourage mixed Jewish schools to adopt and integrate multicultural elements in the curriculum. Its position seems to be that if Arabs want to attend Jewish schools they are welcome to do so, but on condition that they accept the schools' Jewish-Zionist character and not demand cultural concessions.

The impression gained from visits to the mixed Jewish schools is that the great majority of them are not equipped with a suitable educational toolbox for the supportive and respectful accommodation of cultural differences. This manifests itself mainly during outbreaks of the conflict between Israel and the Arab world and on the national holidays of Israel and the Palestinian people (e.g., Independence Day, Remembrance Day and Nakba Day). The absence of policy and appropriate training on the part of the Ministry of Education leaves many principals and teachers to deal with these difficult dilemmas on their own. Sometimes they manage to find limited solutions to these challenges, but many ignore the challenge as if it does not exist.

The increasing integration in the education system raises many questions. What degree of social integration, in terms of friendships, is achieved between Arab and Jewish pupils who attend mixed classes? Are there differences among these schools in the degree of integration attained? What are the school factors that promote or hinder integration? What are the implications of mixed education for the pupils' attitudes towards the "Other" and towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? What are the implications of Jewish education for the occupational achievements of Arab pupils down the road? How do the pupils' parents regard mixing in the schools? Future researchers in this important field face the challenge of investigating these questions in order to reach a deeper understanding of the integration phenomenon in Israel's education system.

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