WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO LEARN TO READ?

A PORTRAIT OF A SCHOOL WITH LOVE

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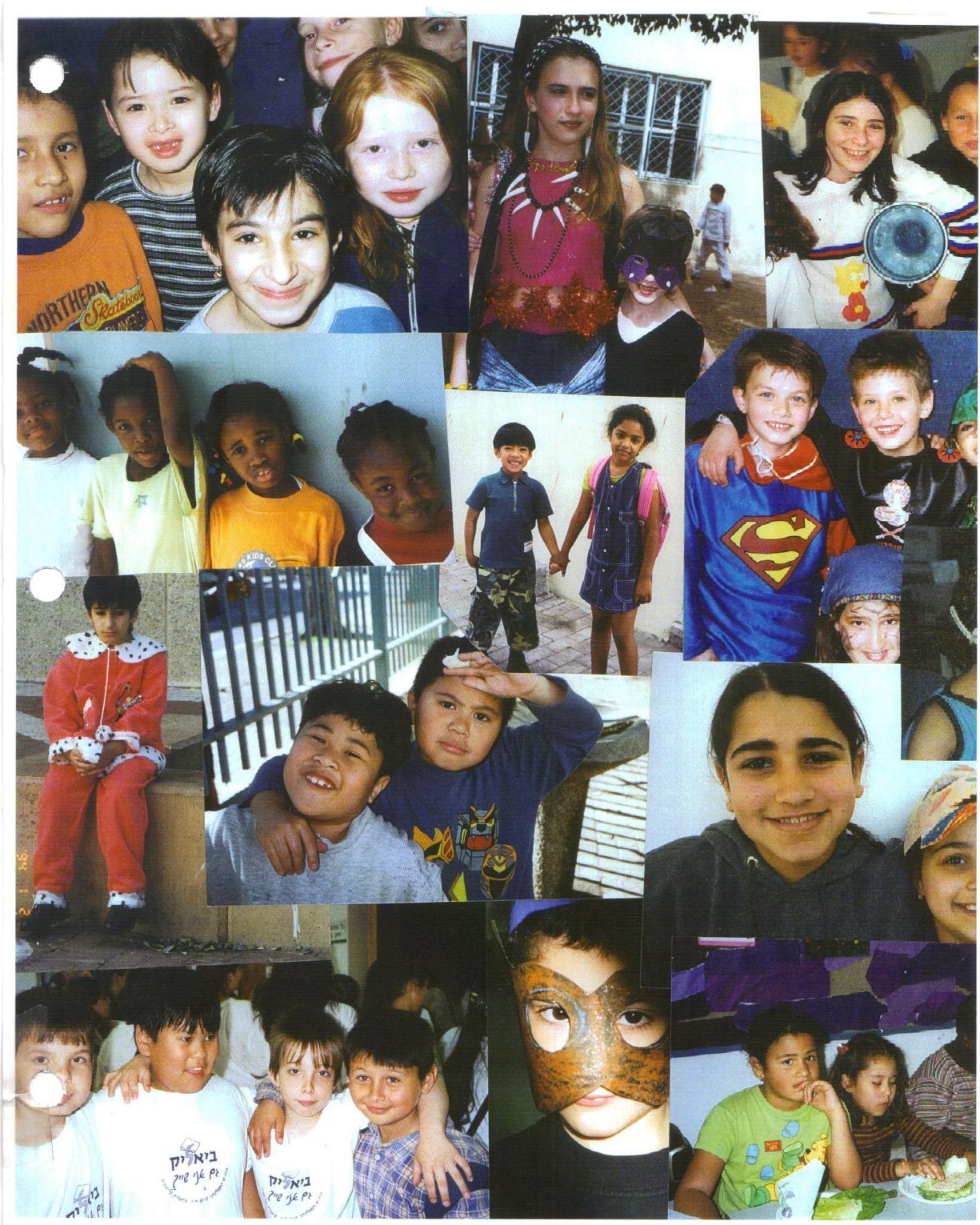
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Abstract

This is a study about access to literacy and one school's ongoing struggle to afford this right to all of its students. The Tel-Aviv School in Israel has reinvented itself over the past 12 years, ascending from an educational quagmire to achieving national recognition for excellence in teaching. The present day school serves a highly diverse and fluid student body originating from about 30 different countries, speakers of many languages, students who enter and leave the school throughout the year, come from vastly different educational backgrounds and are on different educational and literacy levels. In general, it serves a population of poverty living in high levels of distress.

The faculty of the school have initiated and developed a rethinking of their school, its goals and organization in order to meet the literacy and educational needs of their student body and based on genuine care and respect for the children and their families. They have negotiated the concept of schooling and reconceptualized it to suit their population's specific circumstances and have adapted their pedagogy in response to the real and direct needs – social, emotional and academic - of the children. Within these educational dynamics, they have created a safe space of coexistence in which multiplicity is cherished and celebrated as it is held together by a pedagogy of fusion, providing all children with access to literacy and allowing them to grow, with possibilities for flourishing.

The process of rethinking and re-imagining schooling, teaching and education at the Tel-Aviv School was based on several non-negotiable principles: the equity of human worth and the diversity of human needs, the right of every child to succeed in school and the responsibility of the faculty to afford her this right. Bringing the children to a position where they are "available for learning" socially and emotionally, love school, come happily and enjoy their experiences there are of the highest priority at Tel-Aviv. The following study will shine a light on the dynamics of these processes.

This study is dedicated

To the children of the Tel-Aviv School

To their devoted and courageous teachers, and

To Amira, the heart, mind and soul, initiator and leader of the process,

with love and admiration.

1. Prologue

"Deen prootah kedeen me'ah" [1]
The Sages

When its external conditions changed along its 68 years of existence and it gradually ceased to be responsive to the population it was serving, the Tel-Aviv School went into a downward spiral and in the late 80s hit rock bottom. This trajectory turned into an ascent when the school's operation and the ideology upon which it reinvented itself were changed over the past 12 years to more closely fit its populations' specific needs. The Tel-Aviv school of the present is a niche school – a school occupying a unique social niche to which it has adapted well. The school and its students are thriving and it has become a national example in Israel of good schooling.

The school's present social niche consists of a highly diverse and fluid student body originating from about 30 different countries, speakers of many languages, students who enter and leave the school throughout the year, come from vastly different educational backgrounds and are on different educational and literacy levels. In general, it serves a population in a very low socio-economic status and in high levels of distress. It is a public school within the Israeli education system and currently occupies a relatively large, overhauled, well maintained and adequately supplied physical facility.

The faculty of the Tel-Aviv School have initiated, developed and led a rethinking of their school, its goals and organization in order to meet the needs of their highly diverse student body. They have negotiated the concept of schooling and reconceptualized it to suit their population's specific circumstances and have adapted their pedagogy in response to the real and direct needs – social, emotional and academic - of the children. Within these educational dynamics, they have created a safe space of coexistence in which multiplicity is cherished and celebrated as it is held together by a pedagogy of fusion, allowing all the children to grow with possibilities for flourishing.

The following work will provide the reader access to the people of the Tel-Aviv School, their activities and processes, pedagogy, curriculums, organization and ideologies, bringing to

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[1] "The respect for a penny is the same as for a hundred", the literal meaning of this expression is that even the comparatively worthless penny shall be treated as if it was worth a hundred times that. The symbolic interpretation refers to the equality of human worth, a foundation of pedagogy at the Tel-Aviv School.

light their everyday work and their journey of rethinking and reconceptualizing the school. I am inviting the reader to join me on this journey to and through the school and for those who decide to come for the ride, I promise an intriguing experience and a safe landing back home, hopefully however, in a state of mind open to and ready for looking outside of the box and rethinking our own educational Discourse in the context of the changing world around us.

1.1. "What if?" - On the way (literally)

"Failing in school is a tragedy that never ends"[2], was something I had learned very quickly in my educational career. After years of teaching special education and watching my students caught in a vicious cycle of failure and hopelessness out of which, to the best of my knowledge, few would ever emerge. I saw children being victimized in schools as they were blamed for their own failure to learn, a failure that was very often the fault of the system itself rather than their own[3]. I was in despair[4]. Failing in school as children often leads adults to a life on the margins of society, handicapping those who failed in their attempts to build futures. Many adults I know, who had learning problems in school, still carried with them bad memories of negative school experiences and feelings of failure, unable to overcome the sense of defeat and worthlessness originating from their earliest negative educational experiences.

Being a teacher and a mother of a child in the special education system, I couldn't accept the status quo of exclusionary practices and prevalent failure (for some groups significantly more than for others) as the final answer. I felt a compelling need building up in my mind and in my heart to embark on a search for possibilities and hope for the many students who were being victimized, marginalized, ignored, failed, dropped-out and denied their right to a significant education for reasons that were many times no more than their being, in some aspect, "different".

At first I set into academia looking for pointers and, indeed, academia didn't disappoint. Great thinkers, wonderful theories, excellent plans of action were revealed in texts, both written and oral. But the situation in the real world didn't seem to be meaningfully open to change, largely due to the enormity of the educational system in the U.S. (numbers of students, numbers of states and lawmakers, text-book publishing economics and politics, the

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[2] Vang & Flores, 1999, p. 13.

[3] Kate Witkin (1977, p. .ix) describes her special students as "children for whom learning was difficult, if not downright discouraging".

[4] Pamela Mueller calls these children "Lifers" as is the name of her book (2002, Heinemann) about "students who have spent all of their lives in remedial programs".

politics of testing, etc.) and the political atmosphere with its strong emphasis on increasing standardization and a concomitant shrinking interest in the individual child. Even if all advocates of social justice in education would take to the classrooms and the podiums around the country, we would be up against a formidable mountain of fossilized institutions and hardened attitudes.

So I took my search on the road, looking for an actual educational practice, discourse or pedagogy in which all children are valued and respected as knowing and creative beings. I sought a working educational system that recognized and shouldered its responsibility to teach all children, every single one of them. And to complete the wish list, this pedagogy needed to be practical, easily implemented and universal in a way that would be appropriate for teaching children wherever they were (physically as well as conceptually), without the need for major revolutions, reforms or monetary investments.

What if, I thought (I dreamt), there actually was a working pedagogy somewhere out there that was based on the consensus that *all* children are smart, willing and able to learn, that *all* children are entitled to achieve success in school (Down with the bell-curve!)?

What if, there were others out there who believed that every child is as worthy as all others and has an equal right of receiving an education of quality and that it was our responsibility, as the adults of the society, to work with them (not fight them) to afford them this right; that it is the responsibility of the teachers and the education system to reach and teach *every* child?

What if this hypothetical group of people were actually carrying out this dream.

Luckily, the dream found me.

After returning to the United States from a vacation in Israel I had to turn straight back and go there again to help my mother who had been hurt in an accident. Suffering from jet lag, I was up, uncharacteristically, very early one morning watching the news on TV through a daze, when a short segment aired about the Tel-Aviv Elementary School, a school that serves several economically depressed neighborhoods in the south of Tel-Aviv. Mrs. Yahalom, the soft spoken, smiling principal of the school, talked about the diversity of the student population in her school (children from over 30 countries, speakers of 18 languages), about the school's efforts to reach every child through her own language and culture, their pedagogy of assessing students progress individually and their goal of creating a community of learners inclusive of every student in the school. The language Mrs. Yahalom was using – words and expressions such as "*love*",

"*warmth*", "*together*", "*creating a second home for the children*", "*allowing all children an experience of capability*" - sounded like music to my jaded ears not used to hearing this kind of discourse in relation to education, especially not under trying circumstances such as those I later found at the Tel-Aviv School.

I was totally awake by the time the two-minute segment was over, and I was intrigued. Having heard so many wonderful slogans about children and education in the past that ultimately turned out to be a façade, I was painfully aware of "…the tremendous chasms that exist between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of oppression" (Nieto, 1999, p. xx). But, what if that which I had just seen and heard was actually happening? What if all children at the Tel-Aviv School were in reality accepted and included? What if love of children was somehow part of the school pedagogy? Then, I thought, I may have stumbled upon a path of pebbles to lead me out of the dark forest of educational inequality in which I thought I was lost.

What I ultimately found at the Tel-Aviv School was a humanistic, child-centered and individually-focused pedagogy aiming at the inclusion of all children in the learning process. I found a school that has been dynamically adapting itself to its population and that population's circumstances and specific needs (groups in high levels of distress - new immigrants in a new culture and language environment, illegal migrants living in fear and uncertainty, poor children whose families are marginalized in Israeli society, children who would normally be considered 'problematic', 'difficult', 'unable'), continually rethinking its mission and adjusting its pedagogy to provide each of its students equitable access to a meaningful education. By developing a pedagogy of fusion within which every child is accepted "as is", acknowledged, supported and cared for holistically, and within which families and community are incorporated into the vision as part and parcel of the child's education, the school has managed to create an atmosphere of universal inclusion without sacrificing achievement[5].

Throughout this process, the faculty has developed a new Discourse regarding schooling and education. The language isn't new, but it is used in a new way: its metaphors, foci, the social capital associated with educational concepts are different than what one is used to in other schools. In a process of proactive and conscious selection of values they sidestepped practices they found to be exclusionary and detrimental to their students' development while exhuming

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[5] They take exception to children who come to school from a foreign country too soon before graduation (which is at the end of 6th grade) and are unable to complete a, more or less, regular course of study.

ideas and understandings that in many cases have been long buried for lack of use or futility of pursuit and have created a unique pedagogy beneficial to their students.

For a confluence of reasons, not least of which are the marginal social status of the school population and the very limited parental involvement (due to economic as well as political reasons and the cultural environment the school is in), the principal and teachers *"are allowed to dream"*, said a visitor to the school, and they are given the opportunities to realize these dreams, their actions propelled by a shared belief in the worthiness of every child and her right - regardless of nationality, color, disposition, home background, learning style or motivation - to a meaningful education.

1.2. An involved observer-On the way (conceptually)

> *"We can only direct our efforts to bringing research and social action together in such a way that the tension between the two will have the most advantageous yield for both"*
>
> Sylvia Scribner

"Reading" writes Manguel in *A history of reading,* "is not an automatic process of capturing a text in the way photosensitive paper captures light, but a bewildering, labyrinthine, common and yet personal process of reconstruction" (Manguel, 1996, p. 39). The following text will reflect my reading of the Tel-Aviv School, and will be (of necessity) a personal reconstruction and interpretation of events I saw, heard and participated in. The picture I shall paint will be filtered through specific relationships that evolved between myself and the people, the place and the ideologies associated with both, through my own subjectivity and objectives and through the range of emotions associated with these events. My practices in pursuit of my personal goal (of doing research, finding a story, observing, questioning, shadowing) as they met, interacted, meshed and clashed with the practices of the members of the Tel-Aviv school who went about their own agendas, created another filter and another context for subjective interpretations, understandings and misunderstandings too, at times.

"*Who we are and what we see is dependent upon where we've been*", says Peter Fries[6]. We understand today that the subject of research is part of the object; that the interpreter does not stand objectively outside the act of interpretation. One's ethos has a great impact upon what one

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[6] In class, March 2002.

sees and how this is interpreted. This can be taken a step farther with the ideas of John Wheeler[7] who, when looking into quantum physics, found that it is the nature of the observation that determines the outcome of the measurement creating a certain actuality from what had until then had been only a potentiality, but what could have been a different actuality if the nature of the observation was different. "The universe and the observer exist as a pair. You can say that the universe is there only when there is an observer who can say, Yes, I see the universe there" (Linde quoted in Folger, 2002, p.48). What is "out there" and what is in our minds is dialectically interactive. There can be no one without the other. So it is on the basis of this premise that I am plunging into the writing process with the understanding that it will reflect my *informed*, *data-based,* yet *subjective* story, a story of my particular interaction with the universe/text that is the Tel-Aviv School.

If truth be told, I set out on this research project expecting to follow all the rules of a "good" scientist/ethnographer, to make use of everything I had read about correct observation practices, participation ethics, objectivity, etc. But what I didn't know as I set out (among many other things) was that "we are always partially subject, partially researcher, partially participant, partially observer, partially self, partially other – never exclusively one or the other, never wholly one or the other" (Brueggemann, 1996, p.33). Without noticing exactly how it happened, I came to school one morning and the kids were calling me "*Hamorah* (teacher)", and when I sat in classes taking notes children would come to me for help, I was asked to substitute for teachers, helped with testing and one day Mrs. Yahalom, the principal, called me to her office. She said the school had a visitor – a reporter from *The Los Angeles Times* – and she didn't have the time or the language to deal with him. Might I be willing to substitute for her, too, by showing him around and explaining the school to him? The observer-participant was transformed into an involved participant-observer and I felt unsure of this positionality.

An emotional involvement with some of the children and their families, an involvement that began very naively as a researcher/observer relationship, developed along time. I talked to children and parents to get information about themselves and the school and found myself involved in their lives well beyond the school itself. I got swept up in the whirlwind that was the school. And I wasn't the only one.

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[7] "One of the last towering figures of 20th century physics", Folger, 2002, p.44.

> Ilan was a photography student doing his final thesis and preparing for a photography contest. He was given permission to work at Tel-Aviv and decided to concentrate on one 1st grade class. As it happened, that class had a group of African children in it. Ilan had originally come to Israel from Rhodesia and at first was uncertain about the viability of his project because he was unsure of his ability to relate to the African children.
>
> From his second visit to the class he was captive. *"As the time passed I felt closer and closer to the children. I dreamt about them at night, sometimes in color, sometimes in black-and-white, sometimes in a 35mm. format, sometimes in a 6x6. Every night before the day of my visit at school I had trouble falling asleep from the excitement of the next morning",* he wrote in his journal (Sapira, 2001, p.2-3).
>
> Ilan's diary documents his journey through the school (at times hilarious, at times agonizing over the harsh realities of the children's lives) and details the development of his emotional involvement with the children. When his photography project was finished, he felt he couldn't leave and continued coming in on a weekly basis to be with his special friends. On weekends he took them on picture-taking trips.
>
> Today Ilan is in school as an in-house artist. He was given a small room, which the kids helped him set up as a photography lab. He documents the life of the school (with the children's help) and hangs the pictures along the hallways, turning the school into a gallery of art and allowing all the school children to learn about photography as well as what it means to be a "real" artist.

How, then, could I write my story? Coldly and detached, *as if* I were not emotionally involved? I knew I couldn't lie, but do I dare include my emotions and feelings for the school and its people and risk compromising the "scientific" nature of the work, nevertheless truly exposing *my* experience of being and taking part in the Tel-Aviv School? "Go to thy bosom, knock there. Ask your heart what it doth know", wrote Shakespeare in *Measure for Measure*. Is the heart not a source of understanding just as well as the mind?

Actually, my internal debate was short. There was no way the Tel-Aviv School could be fully described without the emotional element. It is part and parcel of its being and a significant component of anything that happens within its walls, for better and for worse. It would be wrong to tell the story of Tel-Aviv devoid of the heart because it occupies a prominent place in their pedagogy, as they have come to the understanding that education is first and foremost about people, about reaching out and touching/teaching *children*, about children's learning and not

necessarily about curriculums or standards or systems. Noga, a former counselor at school, highlighted this when describing her work at Tel-Aviv:*"All of our energies were directed at the child as a human being and not at curriculums"*

I turned to Ruth Behar for guidance since she dealt with a similar problem in her research in Mexico. "Emotion has only recently gotten a foot inside the academy and we still don't know whether we want to give it a seminar room, a lecture hall, or just a closet we can air out now and then", she writes, and adds that if one writes vulnerably, others respond vulnerably (Behar, 1996, p.16). And then: "Taking a cue from liberation theologians in Latin America, critical multiculturalists often begin their analysis of an institution by listening to those who have suffered most as a result of its existence", writes Kincheloe (1997, p. 43)*,* adding "These 'different ways of seeing' allow critical multiculturalists to tap into the cognitive power of empathy", a power I believe allows the researcher a window into a totally different and yet complimentary aspect of the social phenomenon she is studying.

I found an ally in Joseph Featherstone who wrote about the purposes and values of portraiture, drawing a continuum between "analysis and solidarity". He writes that the power of portraiture is embedded in its explicitly humanistic impulse as it embraces both analytic rigor (a distant, discerning and skeptical perspective) and community building (acts of intimacy and connection). "What are the implications of a kind of scholarship in education that combines the distancing power of analysis with another kind of power, the deep gesture of solidarity….Surely analysis and solidarity could stand as two poles of scholarship" (Featherstone, 1989, cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1996, p.10). And I also found support in Banks' writing about "involved observers" who "combine the powerful insights of social scientists with the caring of committed individuals whose projects are to create a better and more humane world" (Valdés, 2001, p. xi)[8]. A researcher can achieve "strong objectivity" by making her valuations conscious and explicit, allowing the readers to understand the work specifically within the context of these experiences and goals, he writes.

So it was upon these ideas that I found my personal ideology and my research methodology falling into place. My personal paradigm includes the belief that it is the responsibility of educators to make education more just, equitable, humane and caring for all children, especially for those children suffering most within the system. I believe this can only be

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[8] In his foreword to *Learning and Not-Learning English* by Valdés (2001).

done if we understand that "one size fits few"[9], that we cannot measure all children by the same yardstick and must adapt our pedagogies and practices to the circumstances at hand. I came to the Tel-Aviv school to study a school that was both deeply committed to the children (through the heart) and actively pursuing educational inclusivity practices (through the mind). So it is my honor to position myself in this study as an involved observer who will try to open windows into the Tel-Aviv School through my heart as well as my mind, taking heed of Scribner's idea that research and social action combined, should benefit both[10].

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I will be as precise as possible in all of my descriptions and in the necessary translations from the Hebrew texts (interviews, field notes and all dialogues were conducted in Hebrew), putting them into English yet trying to let them represent both the unique nature of the Hebrew language and Israeli culture. Some Hebrew words have no precise translation into English and others can be translated in several ways. I will note those instances and explain my choice.

Note: in Hebrew, general speech always relates to males, except if one is talking to a population known to be females only (i.e., "the girl", "all girls over the age of 6"). Hence, in all quotes from Hebrew speaking sources, when referring to "a child", the language will point to a male. When I write about children in my own words, I will address "a child" as female.

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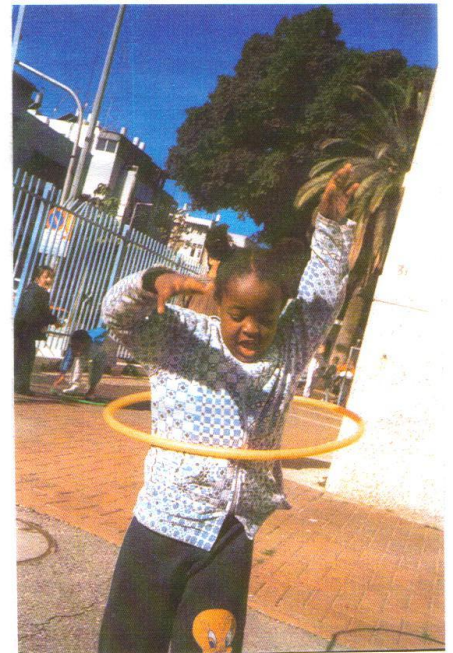
[9] As Ohanian aptly named her book about "the folly of educational standards".
[10] Quoted at the top of this section, pg. 6.

2. Introduction

"There is nothing remarkable about it. All one has to do is hit the right keys at the right time and the instrument plays itself"

Johann Sebastian Bach

In the early 90's I began graduate school for special education. The drive behind my choice was my young son, unusually bright and creative, who was found to have learning disabilities at age 4 and whose whole future was immediately cast into shadow and doubt. I went to school expecting to learn how to address (correct?) his shortcomings and to apply my newly acquired knowledge to help other children in similar situations.

School felt right. We were taught a great deal about different kinds of disabilities and were given recipes and formulas for "treating" them. We learned statistics and all about testing, were provided with an impressive tool kit and empowered to go into schools and begin helping the kids shape up to the standards. But when I got to the real world of special education I realized that a) the tools I had weren't appropriate for what I was trying to achieve, and b) the children I was assigned to work with weren't "broken" or "sick", nor were they in need of "fixing", according to my own understanding of knowledge and learning. Like my own son, they were clever, able, thinking children, who just happened to have literacies and intellectual strengths incongruent with the mainstream, and thus, not accepted nor appreciated by the system. Like my son, they were diagnosed by specialists to be deficient in some way considered to negatively impact their school performance and achievements, and concomitantly, their future possibilities of getting into a "good" college and succeeding as adults.

With time, work became increasingly frustrating because I realized that the children were going nowhere, the system was rigid and locked in its understandings and procedures and we were all treading water [11]. And I realized also that it was us – the teachers, the adults, the systems of standards we had put together for educating our children – who needed help and fixing. The children were just fine.

I moved into academia and the field of Literacy where I found conceptual enlightenment: the multiple, local and temporal nature of literacy, difference as fact rather than judgment, the

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[11] I ended up throwing in the keys when a severely abused 3rd grader I had been working with for 2 years was asked to leave the private school we were in after she had just began to feel safe (safe enough to report her abuser/father) and make friends, because the principal and teachers didn't have the time and patience to deal with her needs.

right of every individual to a personal understanding of the world and a voice of one's own, the role of language in creating ourselves and our worlds, its restricting and empowering characteristics, the oppressive nature of standards, averages, statistics and bell-curves, teaching and learning as interactive and dialectical processes contingent on the individual learner and her history and couched in social/cultural/economic power relations[12].

It wasn't children or people in need of fixing, these theorists were saying, but the ideologies, Discourses and practices upon which we construct our worlds. They wrote against the rigid, "scientific/ technical" ("autonomous" – Street) ideologies and practices of the traditional education/literacy/cognitive psychology systems, exposing them as tools of domination and oppression of the weak, the poor and the different and as mechanisms for preserving existing political structures. They showed how language and choice of concepts (success/failure, for example) are implicated in creating the very problems the systems are trying to deal with and in the marginalization of various groups in schools. They addressed the injustice and inequity inherent in schools and in formal education systems and called for emancipating schooling, democratizing curriculums to include everyone in the educational discourse, listening to voices outside the center, recognizing the multiple nature of literacy, understanding, accepting and respecting difference as building blocks of a better and richer world, providing equitable quality education to all children and making transparent the workings of political ideologies within the education system. Above all, they were calling for the recognition of equitable worth of every human being, no matter how different she seems from the mainstream and the dominant culture.

Strong, necessary and timely ideas, but how does one apply them to the "real" world. What does a teacher do on Monday morning facing a large class of children with multiple literacies, multiple ways of understanding the world, multiple personalities, behaviors and issues and, probably, a principal (or superintendent) looking for higher scores on state tests? How can she apply her belief in all children's right to an equitable education when she has at her service a mechanical tool kit that includes mostly averages, testing, numeric/comparative assessment, achievement goals, teacher-manuals and a ticking clock? How can a teacher/principal/school

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[12] My ideas were informed by the works of: Bakhtin, 1981; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Comer, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Dewey, 1964; Dyson, 1993; Fairclough, 1989; Friere, 1970; Friere & Macedo, 1987; Gardner, 1983; Gee, 1987,1990; Green, 1993 Jan-Feb, Winter; Goodman, 1996; Heath, 1983; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 1999: Lake, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991: Lima, 1995; McLaren, 1998; Moll, 1990; Nieto, 1997; Ohanian, 1999; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Rorty, 1989; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sarup, 1996; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Shor, 1992; Street, 1995; Taylor, 1983, 1993, 1997; Taylor & Dorsey-Gains, 1998; Valanzuela, 1999; Valdéz, 1996, 2001; Varenne & McDermott, 1999; Vygotsky, 1986; Wallon, 1984a,b; Young, 1990.

prioritize the children and incorporate multiplicity and difference into its curriculums, yet remain faithful to the overall system to which they belong and which often overpowers them?

The people at the Tel-Aviv School have been addressing these problems for the past 11 years and have reached some impressive achievements in the area of equitable education and inclusionary pedagogy. The teaching tool kit they have put together is an outcome of a special ideology and a reformulation of traditional educational tools to fit this ideology and their students' specific circumstances. These solutions are neither clear nor simple; they are complex, tentative and often somewhat hazy products of processes of trial and error and more trial and more error within an atmosphere of continuous dialogue, rethinking, reimagining, restructuring. All is fluid and flexible, nothing is fixed (there are no recipes, no formulas, no textbooks) *except* for a few principles around which it all revolves: the belief in the equitable worth of all human beings, having the child's real needs lead the way, every child's right to success in school and ceaselessly continuing the dialogue, the rethinking and the restructuring to keep up the struggle for these values. It is a dynamic, collective effort, each participant in their own capacity and timing, pulling in the same general direction and dealing with the many hurdles, as they appear behind every turn in the meandering course[13].

Plurality and diversity were the challenge that has become the essence of the Tel-Aviv School: multiple countries of origin, multiple cultures and value systems, multiple languages, multiple educational backgrounds, multiple literacies, multiple home and family issues, multiple needs and multiple approaches to dealing with these needs. Yet despite the enormous diversity among the students and their greater than usual needs from the school, the faculty have found ways to address their students' individual educational and personal needs with a holistic and inclusionary approach that maintains the diversity, addresses disparity and celebrates the cultural multiplicity within a least-oppressive, unified educational framework. They have cast aside the melting-pot approach that sees differences as stumbling blocks on the road to literacy and appropriated a pedagogy of fusion that brings together the diversity and polyvocality of the students in a jazz-like composition of variation and unity, directing and enriching the learning process. They have developed a pedagogy that is essentially creative, daring, critical and reflexive, aiming to be a pedagogy for transforming education, a pedagogy "…that considers

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[13] If it isn't the children… during my last visit it was a short day and everything had gone well all morning until the janitor came into the office pale and breathless – he had found a huge snake in the storeroom adjacent to the 4th grade classroom.

humans to be creative beings, the subjects of history, who are transformed as they transform the world" (Gadotti, 1996, p. xvii).

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The school deals with issues of multiplicity in three main trajectories:

a) An "ideology of amendment";

b) Teacher training;

c) Inclusionary practices.

a) An "ideology of amendment" is a spiritual concept taken from Judaic philosophy. It is the belief that every person and every situation can be amended - brought to a better place, if one is willing to take action for this purpose; a belief that transforming our world and improving it is entirely up to us, its human inhabitants. This ideology underlies the pedagogy at Tel-Aviv.

b) Teacher training is the major domain of efforts to deal with the pluralities of the school and is achieved through education (internal and external classes, workshops, seminars and lectures), modeling behavior and dialogue.

c) By accepting all their students as equally worthy of quality education, the school faculty are constantly rethinking and restructuring their practices so as to include more children in the educational discourse.

3. The Conceptual Framework

3.1. "Teacher, who are you?" *("Hamorah, mee aht?")*: Positioning the study and myself

> *"That description is an inexact, loving art, and a reflexive one; when we describe the world we come closer to saying what we are"*
>
> Mark Doty (*Still life with oysters and lemon*)

In the opening scene of the movie *White Oleander*, we see Astrid standing in front of an art project illustrating stations in her life journey. She refers to it saying, *"People asked me why I started at the end and worked my way back to the beginning. It's simple. It's because I didn't understand the beginning until I reached the end"*. These words felt so appropriate to my own process of coming to know and understand the Tel-Aviv School, although I was documenting a different kind of journey in a different media. I began this journey from a position of being strongly rooted "here", in my own confined world of understandings, perspectives, ideas and ways of being, with tunnel vision (by-product of my being a white, middle class, special education teacher, coming from a nice, comfortable and clearly delineated life) that I needed to shed in order to even begin understanding the world of the school (difficult, multifarious, stressful, dynamic and in constant flux, its population dominated, powerless and silenced within the larger society). I needed to be able to step out of my immediate existence into "there", a larger and wider domain of historical, social and political dynamics within which the Tel-Aviv School is situated and by which its existence is impacted. Just as every one of us is a unique composite of personal, historical and social experiences, the school is a product of multiple dynamics, many of which can only be identified at a distance of both time and space. There were many things I did not understand until I reached the end…

The Tel-Aviv School lies at a significant intersection of history and major global issues that echo in its halls: globalization and migration, economic as well as political; economic hardships which bring about, among other ills, child labor and child prostitution; homelessness, loss of connections to a homeland, loss of roots, all impacting peoples' identity, sense of worth, and day-to-day meaning making;
displacement due to wars or failing crops causing educational displacement for the children; hunger, living illegally and in constant fear of the law, political invisibility, lack of social and

health services, disrupted family life, social injustice, discrimination and the indigenous fear of "others" who have come so threateningly close as to cause the formation of new kinds of exclusionary territorial practices. We have been getting glimpses into these issues in the past few years through the media, raising awareness and concern that marginalization in education is a huge problem exacerbated by its bordering on situations in which children lack the right to any kind of official education and often basic human rights as well.

From the media:

1) According to *The New York Times*, 40% of primary age children in Sub- Saharan Africa have no access to any kind of schooling and as of the present, there are 125 million school-age children in the world who have never been to school [14].

2) From an article in *Biography Magazine* about FilmAid (a voluntary project of bringing movies – and joy - to refugee camps around the world) one learns that there are currently 33 million people living in refugee camps or that have been displaced within their own countries[15]. A UNHCR officer describes: "Refugee camps are horrible places –people never know how long they are going to be there, so their lives are in suspension. It is particularly hard on the children who have lost their school and their friends and don't know what is going to happen" (pg. 54).

3) The Children's Defense Fund (an American public advocacy group for children's rights) researched the issue of children excluded from school in the United States in the early 70's. Its published report called *Children out of school in America* claimed that there were nearly 2 million 7-17 year olds not enrolled in school.
"If a child is not white, or is white but not middle class, does not speak English, is poor, needs special help with seeing, hearing, walking, reading, learning, adjusting, growing up, is pregnant or married at age 15, is not smart enough or is too smart, then in many places school officials decide school is not the place for that child" (reported and quoted in Featherstone, 1976, p. 138-145).

4) In an article titled "Eradicating child labour long way off" in the *China Daily*, statistics from the International Labor Organization were quoted to the effect that 246 million children in the world ("nearly as large as the total population of the United States") - one in six children between the ages of 5 and 17 - are involved in child labor, with Africa leading the list with 80 million working children[16]. The article talks about child trafficking that often goes hand in hand with child labor. In central and western Africa, about 200,000 children are trafficked every year, most becoming involved with sex services, mining, wholesale and retail trade, construction and manufacturing, restaurants, hotels and domestic services. The Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation blames these conditions on poverty, graduate unemployment, lack of parental care and low education standards.[17]

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[14] The New York Times, Op-Ed, May 27, 2002, p. A13
[15] *Biography Magazine*, August, 2002, pg. 52-55.
[16] *China Daily*, June 17, 2002, p.4.
[17] Ronald Segal recently published a book about the Islamic slave trade in Africa, a historical as well as current localized process that, in contrast to the slave trade to the U.S., encompasses mostly women and children *Islam's black slaves: The other black diaspora*. 2002, Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Today, more than ever before, we are all connected, all peons in processes of much larger than ourselves (as 9/11 so painfully drove home). These global dynamics, which are eroding traditional values as well as national and social boundaries, also affect the whole concept of education ethically, substantively and procedurally, making "it less certain who governs and who is served by educational systems and practices" (Torres, 2002, p. 374). The changing concept of education is evident mainly on the margins of national education systems and in urban schools like Tel-Aviv that serve large populations of poor economic migrants (internal or international), schools that are becoming common phenomena around the world.

Like an island of calm and safety in the eye of the storm, the Tel-Aviv School stands serenely on the corner of two streets in the south of Tel-Aviv, surrounded by whirlwinds of tremendous forces and dynamics that effect its very nature and being while totally oblivious to its existence. It is part of the processes of globalization, economic and political migrations, wars and hardship, the spread and commercialization of telematic and information technologies, and is a product of these processes at one and the same time. The school is subject to rapidly changing and evolving circumstances to the tune of which it is being continually transformed. Hunger and hardship in Thailand coupled with the spread of information in real time to the most remote corner of the globe – the essence of the global village – brings Thai kids living under very stressful economic and social conditions to the Tel-Aviv school in the middle of the school year, with no knowledge of the local language or culture and with a culture and identity of their own that they don't know whether to uphold, shed or hide, becoming even more marginalized in the process. And the same happens to children from Ghana, Bolivia and Uzbekistan, to name just a few of the groups making up the mosaic that is the school. Tel-Aviv is facing the ultimate challenge to a school attempting to uphold an inclusionary pedagogy in our time. Rather than having to address "only" issues of educating children born "on the wrong side of the local tracks", the school has to deal with inclusion and education of children from all over the world, representing difference on every possible level: cultural, political, social, economic, educational, linguistic, religious, familial and valuative, and this according to a time table, forces and shifting circumstances totally outside of its control.

If our overall pragmatic goal is to make life better for more people, based on this picture of large-scale dynamics it would be wrong and irresponsible to limit our understanding of the

world to ideas of autonomous events and linear development[18]. Relationships in reality are complex, intertwined and based on non-linear dynamics such that, for example (according to the theory of Chaos), a butterfly fanning its wings in East Africa can cause momentary disturbances that send stronger currents across the Atlantic creating a hurricane in the Caribbean…[19]. The effects of human actions upon the world and upon other human beings are, potentially, just as complex, far-reaching and significant.

> David is an American who organizes pilgrimage tours to the Holy Land from the Americas. Several months ago he was awakened by the phone in the middle of the night. It was Israel calling, notifying him that the people in the group he had sent from the Dominican Republic fit the profile of people who come in the guise of pilgrims and stay in Israel as illegal workers. The airport authorities were denying them entry to the country and were going to put them on the next plane back home.
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> After much argument and discussion, the group was let into the country on condition they deposit their passports and return tickets with the pastor who was the group leader, and if any one of them was absent from the plenum when their trip was up, the pastor would be denied any future entry to Israel.
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> The ending of this story leads almost to the front door of the Tel-Aviv School. Within the first three days in Israel, all but one of the people in the group had vanished, leaving their passports and tickets behind, seeking employment and an alternative to their past lives. Their children (who will be born in Israel or smuggled into the country) will, most probably, become students at Tel-Aviv[20].

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Getting "there" (into the mind of the school and the greater picture) from "here" (my biased starting position), necessitated taking a much larger step into a much more complex

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[18] Such as believing that the United States could continue to exist and develop, dictating its own trajectories while disregarding the rumblings in the streets of Kabul or Jeddah, or in a different domain, thinking that we can make educational decisions based on statistics and dominant literacies alone, while disregarding the growing percentages of children left behind.

[19] This type of complex dynamics is called "The butterfly effect". A recent article in Newsweek "Breading grounds" (July 8, 2002, p. 48-49) described the butterfly effect of the AIDS epidemic that started off with a few people eating infected monkeys, has killed 20 million people over the past two decades and could claim 60 million more lives in the next two decades.

[20] It is August 2002 and I just heard on the news that a child smuggling ring was caught in New York City. For $5000 these people would smuggle in children of foreigners living illegally in the U.S.

And a glimpse from the other side: *"Narduccio", my mother is saying, "come away from the window. Your father is gone now. We must wait. We must be patient until he calls for us and we can go to him in America"*. This is a quote from *The heart is the teacher*, by Leonard Covello (p.3) who ended up in America serving 45 years as teacher and high school principal in NYC.

situation than I had imagined. Rather than finding a school dealing with the education of a group of poor children from many different countries (as I had expected), I found a relentless enterprise, bustling with energy, zealously looking after and caring for three hundred individual children's social, emotional and educational needs while also caring for their health, clothing and nutritional needs as well as the needs of their families. All this was done on the local community level while efforts and energies were being invested on the municipal and national levels, through the media and through lobbying and involvement in political struggles and decision-making, focusing not only on the local children's welfare, but also on the general, legal, long term concept of all children's rights to an education and to basic health care despite the origins and deeds or misdeeds of their parents. The struggles were constant, ongoing and involved almost every aspect of the endeavor (from opening the school at 6:30 every morning, making sure children were not left alone on the streets, to lobbying the Israeli parliament for human rights for the children of the foreign workers) and every adult in the system – if you worked in/with the school, you found yourself enlisted in the struggles[21].

So without really realizing it, from my first outsider's step into the confines of the turquoise fence surrounding the school, I began a process of morphing into an insider as the current slowly engulfed me. With time I felt both happy and guilty about my changing positionality – very happy with the human relationships I was part of, guilty of eating of the forbidden fruit of closeness and subjectivity in the field. But all along I was acutely aware of the *a priori* biases with which I entered the study and which affected my day-to-day experiences, perspective and understandings.

Hebrew being my first and strongest language, made me an almost instant insider, and coming from America, as well as the cameras I walked around with, gave me additional social capital and a power position (*"You really came all the way from the big America to learn from us!" "Are we that interesting?"* were comments I heard more than once). To add to these positional issues, the principal of the school, Mrs. Yahalom, accepted me unconditionally from day one and allowed me complete freedom to any information I thought necessary for my study,

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[21] The school brought in a Turkish-speaking teacher to help them set up a program for the Turkish speaking kids. She was expected to work for 6 hours with the children, write reports and attend meetings. When the matter of payment was brought up after her first session she said, *"Its OK. I'll volunteer. You don't have to pay me, I really enjoy working with the children".*

including videotaping, access to all school files and sitting in on any meeting in the school[22]. She invited me to accompany her to meetings outside the school and introduced me to visitors that came to her on school business. Ultimately, after leaving the school and returning to the States, a strong personal friendship evolved between Amira[23], myself and our families.

All of these wonderful openings also positioned me as a potential threat to some of the teachers who were duly suspicious and would have nothing formal to do with me throughout my visit[24]. Everyone was polite and helpful when I asked, but some teachers kept me at a safe distance, refused formal interviews (although everyone I approached talked with me and shared stories informally) and didn't invite me into their classrooms, possibly uncertain about my loyalties, concerned that I was misrepresenting myself when I said that I came to learn from them, intimidated by my power or having a negative attitude towards educational research, not having walked that path themselves. Regardless of these issues, I was welcome in most classrooms, teachers who "took me in" were more open and helpful than I could have expected and some friendly relationships have continued to this day.

Emotionally I was in a delicate position as a researcher. To begin with, I was passionate about my topic of study – looking at possibilities of bringing equity into the educational lives of traditionally marginalized kids[25]. Then came my natural enthusiasm for working with struggling youngsters and finding ways of reaching and teaching them, opportunities which presented themselves daily throughout my study because no matter which class I observed in, children would come to me for help when the line in front of the teacher was too long or when the teacher sent them to me to free herself up to do something else, or to "show off" their literacy abilities. I

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[22] During some of which I had to make myself very small in reaction to "looks" I got from some of the teachers who were not of the same mind about my presence as Mrs. Yahalom.

[23] Throughout this paper I will use mostly first names since this is the cultural practice in Israel. The following is an anecdote to illustrate this point. During her drive home, Amira's private cell phone rang. "*This is Yossi speaking*", said the caller. "*You are not*", answered Amira, whose youngest son's name is Yossi, but this was not his voice. "*Yes I am*", insisted the caller, but Amira herself was insistent "*I know my son's voice and you are not he!*" "*Of course I am not your son*", replied the caller, "*I am Yossi Sarid, the Minister of Education*".

[24] I tried to arrange a meeting with a woman I learned was doing research similar to mine in a high school. I was told that she is extremely knowledgeable in the field of literacy and could be of help in my work. I also learned that she is a "tough lady" and doesn't like to share her information (a behavior that is quite unusual in Israel). Nevertheless, I persisted in roundabout efforts to schedule a meeting, and she persisted in avoiding me, until she caved in and we finally scheduled a meeting – "for 15 minutes" as she warned – on the day before I left the country. When we finally met we realized that we knew each other and had worked together 20 years previously, that I am a close friend of her family here in the U.S. and all the walls came tumbling down. It ended up being a very long and fruitful meeting.

[25] I have been at this since I was 16 years old…a long time.

became an involved observer and I loved it. They asked me to look after their jackets as they played outside, asked me to read to them during recess and they came to tell me their stories.

> *"I tell you my story because it is very difficult to me"*, said Isabelle, a 4th grader from South America, whose Hebrew was bumpy but she was uninhibited, talking rapidly, almost without stopping to breathe[26]. *"When I was in the another country my father began hitting my mother and it was very horrible so we left and came to here but I miss to him very much every day and when we came to here my mother had a boyfriend but she left him because she didn't could love him anymore and now she find a new boyfriend but he also left her and I'm really sad because after everything that happened to me… I can't this way… it's so difficult for me that my mother finds boyfriends and they leave her all the time and I can't keep parting from everybody in all of my life!"* she ended with a big sigh[27].

I hugged Isabelle, thanked her for sharing her story but after that I tried to keep a subtle distance from her, not wanting to create a relationship that would have to be broken when I leave, adding to the list of her painful partings. But with every incident and with every story I became more attached to the children, more a part of the school community, more emotionally involved. The closer I got the more I began recognizing what I was seeing in the children's eyes and body language – joy, sadness, pain, reaching out, and a deep connection to the school and its people congealed in my heart.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) writes about the centrality of creating relationships to the process of ethnography and portraiture. Relationships are fundamental to self-understanding, to mutuality and validity and to the development of knowledge. It is important, she stresses, that they be based on a search for goodness, empathic regard and reciprocity. In the field I found myself in a myriad of relationships, some of which I initiated, some that sought me out, all of which were based, from my end, on a search for goodness, on empathic regard, acceptance and gratitude. These relationships created for me an even sharper "double persona" (Sunstein, 1996) of insider and outsider simultaneously, probably painting my experience at Tel-Aviv to some degree, but also giving me a most important insider's perspective. I no longer needed to look over shoulders because I had a ringside seat to the events. When the children and adults felt that I accepted them, that I cared and that I shared their values and ideologies, they were more willing

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[26] Video 4 – 0:00:00-0:02:55.

[27] In a recent phone conversation with Amira (15 months after leaving the school) I heard that Isabelle's mother's longtime boyfriend was arrested and is in jail awaiting deportation.

to accept me and share their experiences; they were more open, less hesitant. We reached out and touched each other on a much deeper level than if I had stayed on the dry edge, reluctant to jump into the turbulent, emotional waters

3.2. A Patchwork Ethnographic Portrait: Methodology

> *"Neither totalizing structures that repress differences nor oppositional differences that exclude commonality are adequate in the plurality of worlds that constitute the postmodern condition".*
>
> Mark Taylor (*The moment of complexity*)

Doing ethnography means carrying out a methodological study in order to learn from others, to "illuminate patterns of culture through long-term immersion in the field, collecting data by participant-observation and interviewing, [and analyzing] this data focusing on descriptions and interpretations of what people say or do" (Glesne, 1998, p.9). The ethnographer tries to learn about the meanings and practices, the dilemmas and uncertainties, the ways in which people live their lives and address their problems as they interact with other group members. This methodology is oriented towards a deep understanding of a group by making meaning of their symbolic interactions, their own perspectives and interpretations of processes and events, their attempts to influence, accommodate and resist others, the development and cultivation of human relationships and the processes, encounters, exchanges and events that participants experience over time (Prus, 1996).

I went into the field as an ethnographer of schooling, to study one small school on the margins of a small country, yet with a big purpose of provoking thought about the educational potential inherent in schools, about alternative ways of thinking, seeing and knowing, and about possibilities for equity and social justice in education. My task was to describe literacies-in-use - the educational pedagogy and practices at the Tel-Aviv school - based upon my observations and the participants' own understandings of education, schooling and literacy acquisition processes, experiences and activities, with the goal of figuring out how the school was dealing with the diversity of its student body and what was being done to promote the social and academic inclusion of this population. In a larger perspective, this study falls into a category of studies within socioliteracy that look into the daily curricular, pedagogic, behavioral and evaluative activities of schools to provide information that could "enhance our conceptual and theoretical

understanding of literacy as sociocultural practice and encourage educational practices which build on these understandings pedagogically, ethically and politically" (Lankshear, 1999/2002, p. 29)

3.2.1. Weaving a form

In order to comprehend our world we use and consider multiple sources of information simultaneously. Thus, in order to do justice to the description of the Tel-Aviv School, I have created a work that is heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981), amalgamating multiple voices from multiple sources - from the field, from the literature, from history and cultural traditions and my own voice (itself a distillation of multiple other voices…), within a "double vision" analytic perspective that,

> …Oscillates between the viewpoint of the social analyst and that of his or her subjects of study. Each viewpoint is arguably incomplete – a mix of insight and blindness, reach and limitations, impartiality and bias – and taken together they achieve neither omniscience nor a unified master narrative but complex understandings of ever-changing, multifaceted social realities (Rosaldo, 1989/1993, p.127-8).

This double vision and polyvocal exposition of understandings, from "here" and from "there", will render depth to the description. By shining light on the school from several different perspectives I will attempt to show its many different facets and illuminate the complexity of the situation as a whole, trying to overcome some of the blind spots, limitations and biases inherent in using more limited sources of information.

The heteroglossic nature of this work will be accentuated visually by use of diverse fonts, texts placed in frames, incorporating photographs, poems, traditional texts and song lyrics, all pointing to different sources of data and creating a "patchwork" through which I wish to make a double statement:

a) That this work as a whole will be reflective of the complexity and multiplicity of all aspects of our lives and our cognitive processes;

b) That this work will bring forth (as much as possible) unadulterated, primary data and texts that will be woven into the general study, data upon which I have and the reader may construct meanings.

The form of the work will be part of the message itself in my attempt to convey the diversity of data sources and voices that informed it. Appendix 1 depicts contemporary patchwork quilts representing the idea of fusing different shapes and colors (voices) into a work of art, in a way similar to which, conceptually, I would like to construct this portrait. The

contrast between fonts in my work will accentuate the seams between the different texts (voices), making them visible (even pronounced) in order to emphasize the assemblage, the fusion, the compilatory nature of the paper. I will use different forms and spacing to indicate the "patches" of texts:

- *Italics will be used to indicate direct speech;*

- This font will indicate quoting from a printed text.

> - Anecdotal stories that I tell or that I was told will be placed in boxes.

- From the media will feature information from media sources in an effort to contextualize and anchor events described.

> - From the Sages will bring quotes from traditional Jewish texts in order to shed light on the ethos of the country within which all this takes place and to show the cultural process of legitimization through reference to traditional texts. [28]

- *This font will indicate transliteration from Hebrew*

3.2.2. Portraiture

I will present my study as a portrait of the Tel-Aviv school, based upon the methodology of portraiture (from the work of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis *The art and science of portraiture*, 1997) that uses data gathered in the field to give voice to a group's experience. Ethnography is a system that works very well for the collection of data and observing detail, while I find portraiture more helpful in portraying the picture and tying everything together into an (incomplete) depiction of the institution as it lies within the larger local and global dynamics.

> In the methodology of portraiture the aesthetic aspects of production that can contribute to the expressive content include the use of keen descriptors that delineate, like line; dissonant refrains that provide nuance, like shadow; and complex details that evoke the impact of color and the intricacy of texture. The forms that are delineated convene into emergent themes and the interrelationship of these themes is woven through the connections of their content against the backdrop of their shared context (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.29).

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[28] According to Judaism, education is the second highest cultural value (after the sacredness of human life). It is a topic that features prominently in traditional texts and ideologies, which are widely studied and suffuse daily life in Israel. Quoting from the traditional texts is, and has historically been, part of both oral and written discourse in Hebrew, bestowing both legitimacy and power to the user of the quote. Thus, throughout this text I will bring snippets of the traditional texts and expressions to explicate and contextualized some of the events, ideas and processes that occur at Tel-Aviv and to shed light upon some of the more profound layers of meaning underlying both practice and ideology at the school.

Being an artist and photographer in another facet of my life, I found a conceptual connection between portraiture and the way I normally view, understand and portray the world using line, shape and color. This methodological approach allowed me to mold and weave a written text into a work of art, so to speak, by bringing together multiple information sources in a non-traditional yet academic format. In lieu of "real" color and texture I worked with different fonts, sizes and spacing to emphasize the different voices that make up the different patches pieced together to form the portrait.

Portraiture also advocates for the portraitist to sketch herself into the picture, giving me the possibility of making my presence explicit and transparent while allowing me to be part of the story – "a visible partner in dialogue", as Glesne writes and as I actually was. And this method of portraying my data also allows me to be more true to my participants' voices, writing "as a preserver of story as opposed to being a dispenser of information" (Sunstein, 1996, p.180).

When Doty writes that "Portraits often seem pregnant with speech, or as if their subjects have just finished saying something, or will soon speak the thoughts that inform their faces" (2001, p.18), he is referring to a painted portrait one finds hanging on a wall in a home or a museum. An ethnographic portrait, in contrast, actually speaks. It has voice and has the ability to give voice to those partaking in the study – a major factor in the decision to choose this methodology. This study will attempt to compile a portrait of the Tel-Aviv School out of a collection of texts originating from multiple sources and expressed in a variety of formats collected from the field and from the literature, giving voice to as many players as possible. The portrait will be constructed of stories I was told by children and adults, stories I tell and from the children's stories and poems found in print; texts from the school files and those found in classrooms; texts from the media and from academia, Israeli as well as other, quotes from traditional texts; transcripts of conversations (face to face as well as phone) and of interviews; my photographs and videotapes, photographs the children took[29], and, of course, from my own observations and field notes. The portrait will be enhanced by a multitude of footnotes that didn't make the cut for the body of the work itself yet shed light on other small corners of relevant information - "…a

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[29] Ilan, the visiting photographer, gave the 1st graders a bunch of disposable cameras one day and sent them out to take pictures. He gave me a few that came out well, photographers unknown.

seamy web in which what comes together is held apart and what is held apart comes together" (Taylor, M., 2001, p.12).

3.2.3. Spatial considerations

Such a compilation of texts and data is, by nature non-linear and such will be the portrait of the school that I will patch together here, trying to create a multi-dimensional and multi-vocal exposition, not of any kind of "truth", but of my own experience of reality[30]. Anthropologist Loring Danforth discussed issues of distance and meaning in ethnographical studies when writing about the anthropologist's encounter with the Other. "The gap between a familiar "we" and an exotic "they" is a major obstacle to a meaningful understanding of the Other, an obstacle that can only be overcome by some kind of participation in the world of the Other" (From *The death rituals of rural Greece*, quoted in Geertz, 1988, p.14). In my writing here I will try to compress the distance between the field, the Other and the reader so that she can take part as directly as possible in the actual experience of the school.

Additionally, by bringing the direct voices of the school to the text and foregrounding them, I wish to narrow the mental, emotional and informational gap that naturally exists between us - the reader, the researcher and the object of study; to abridge the distance between the "Being There" authorially, on the page, and "being there" in person" (Geertz, 1988, p.23). At the same time, I would like the story I provide here to serve both the participants' and the readers' interests. "As our research experience crawls onto our written pages we must discover and attempt to maintain liminal tensions, all the while recognizing that our informants and our readers may make conflicting demands" (Sunstein, 1996, p.189). And taking to heart hook's warning that "Re-writing [the Other] I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject" (hooks, 1990, pg. 152), rather than usurping the voices from the field and telling their story in my words, I shall bring the participants' voices directly to these written pages, giving them space and a right to life and allowing the reader to compose a portrait of the school in her own imagination, based on her own experiences and understandings.

This will not be a "complete" or closed picture of the school since such an accomplishment is, theoretically, not possible. "We will never be able to represent fully or

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[30] Hall writes that we in the West value one system of thought over all others – "logic", a linear system that has been with us since Socrates. "Western man sees this system of logic as synonymous with the truth" (1976, p. 9).

accurately" because all knowledge is situated, leaving each of us with "the privilege of partial perspective" (Breuggemann, 1996, p. 33). Besides, there are surely other ways of composing such a portrait, my decisions and selections leading to only one of them. Anthropologist Margery Wolf deals with this matter as it applies to all ethnographers:

> The anthropologist listens to as many voices as she can and then chooses among them as she passes their opinions on to members of another culture. The choice is not arbitrary, but then neither is the testimony. However, no matter what the format the anthropologist/ reporter/ writer uses, she eventually takes the responsibility for putting down the words, for converting their possibly fleeting opinions into text. I see no way to avoid this exercise of power and at least some of the stylistic requirements used to legitimate that text if the practice of ethnography is to continue (Wolf, 1992, quoted in Sunstein, 1996, p.198).

I will necessarily exercise my power of choice selecting the issues I find to be pertinent to the topic, a process influenced as much by my own subjectivity as by events on the ground, as is typical of any ethnographic work. Leibniz wrote about the choices one makes in any kind of space-time construct (of which ethnographic research is an example):

> And as one and the same town viewed from different sides look altogether different, and is, as it were, perceptively multiplied. It similarly happens that through the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which however, are only the perspectives of a single one according to the different points of view of each monad (Leibniz 1991, quoted in Harvey, 1996, p.251).

After the author makes all these decisions and finally puts down her pen (or shuts off the computer), the next step is then up to the reader or interpreter of the text.

> The author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee, a work to be completed. He does not know the exact fashion in which his work will be concluded… It will not be a different work and, at the end of the interpretive dialogue, a form which is *his* form will have been organized, even though it may have been organized by an outside party in a particular way that he could not have foreseen. The author is the one who proposed a number of possibilities… (Eco, 1984, p.62).

Since texts are open-ended when it comes to personal interpretation, the reader, upon deciding to continue reading, is taking upon herself a responsibility of reconstructing or finalizing the construction of a meaningful experience through a mental process of picking up on some of the possibilities the author has suggested and organizing them into a personal understanding of the experience. In this kind of work where the raw voices (albeit, voices that were chosen by the author) are presented, there is more space provided and respect given for the reader's own capacity of interpretation and meaning making.

"Everything in our field of vision is passing. And some of these things will be here just the briefest while" (Doty, 2001, p. 21). This premise is at the heart of any kind of research. From the moment of perception, through the time of comprehension and until the appearance of printed text describing the event, so many things may have and probably did change that all one can do is be cognizant of the dynamic nature and fleetingness of reality. Consequently this portrait will be a snapshot in time of the Tel-Aviv School as I saw it when I was there, and as I understood it through the data I collected. What the teachers and children told me probably would be said differently to someone else at another time and in response to questions posed differently; the composition of the student body, the social, political and economic environments within which it exists, are all dynamic processes that change on a daily basis; the stories that the children of next year write will be different than those written by the children of past years; the teachers will be at a different place; there will be new teachers with new sensibilities. But in order to put the information in an academic format and in order to be able to describe what one has learned, it is necessary to freeze the situation into a depictable moment. Thus, this patchwork portrait, in contrast to an heirloom patchwork quilt, will only be in sharp focus and true in its detail for the time of its construction. Like Oscar Wilde's picture of Dorian Gray, it will become blurry and lose some of its characteristic features with the passing of time, although its underlying structure should prevail.

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There is a part of the real life Tel-Aviv School experience that will be lost in this work. Things necessarily have to be put into categories to be explained, to be written into chapters and paragraphs and sentences with a period at their end in order to become an essay. Things that may be more messy, blurred and ambiguous on the ground must be sharpened and shaped to fit into a form that can mediate between the actual experience and the reader. And as with any description, we may see things others don't or miss things others see – as the quote from *Quidam*[31] asks, *"What is left? What is right? What is wrong?"* – who can tell with certainty? Yet, acknowledging the loss of some issues, we can move forward to appreciating the gains, the most important of which will be the exposition of the story of the Tel-Aviv School.

3.3. Data collection

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[31] From Cirque le Soleil.

"Information may not be just what we learn about the world,
it may be what makes the world"
John Wheeler

Somewhat like a squirrel hoarding for the winter, I went about gathering data from multiple sources in school and out, met with people, observed, talked about the school incessantly with whomever was willing to provide a perspective, conducted interviews, attended seminars, visited families and read whatever I could get my hands on. And, again like a squirrel, after the flurry of activity, I sat down in the comfort of my home and revisited the data, analyzed it and recreate a picture of the school from the voices, from the written texts, from the pictures and from my memories of all these activities.

The data in this study was gathered in Israel during four months of intensive, daily interactions at different locations and using diverse collection methods. I worked at the Tel-Aviv school between 5 to 6 days a week during school hours (8AM to 2:45PM, 12PM on Fridays), sometimes coming in at 7AM for meetings with teachers or staying after school to observe at the *Mo'adoneet*, (the after-school program which ran 4 days a week until 6PM). At other times I conducted formal and informal interviews and focused conversations with teachers (some of which were videotaped) and parents and other people either, a) connected directly to the Tel-Aviv School (Mrs. Sara Lotan, the school superintendent, Mr. Eitan Paldi, the organizational consultant to the school, Mrs. Noga Rosenberg, former advisor who worked with Mrs. Yahalom in the initial reorganization of the school), or b) people who could help me paint the wider picture of the Israeli educational system, its general ideology and pedagogies, its literacy orientation and programs and approaches of dealing with marginalized children and Hebrew-as-a-second-language speakers (Mrs. Neta Cohen, head of Special Education Services in the Central District, Ms. Margalit Yosefun, head of *Hora'ah Mootemet* (Adjustable Teaching) at The Department of Educational Technology, Mrs. Zvia Fein, head of the Geography Team at The Department of Educational Technology, in charge of writing, publishing and marketing geography text books and conducting teacher training in association with their program, for middle and high schools, Prof. Shosh Brosh-Weitz, whose field of expertise is writing. She teaches literacy in the School for High Command of the Israeli army and at Tel-Aviv University. She has also written several books and teachers' guides on literacy and writing, and c) teachers who introduced me to teaching practices and everyday lives in other schools around the country

and to their personal perspective on education in Israel in general, and the Tel-Aviv School within it.

Data was collected from direct observations, interviews, photography (still and video) and from documentation – children's work, school files and published texts. Published texts include books, academic articles and television presentations on the school itself and on the foreign workers in Israel (I was also given copies of previous television shows on these topics). Other than at the school location, I accompanied the children on outings (to the choir meet, the community center and the meets at the Arts School), I went on two tours of the neighborhood with groups of government delegates and superintendents, looking at the child-care establishments the foreign workers had organized and participated in lectures given by the Mesilah Center (a municipal center created to reach out to the foreign workers and help them negotiate life in Israel). I also participated in several seminars given at the Tel-Aviv School and at *Seminar Hakibbutzim*, a teachers' college in the north of Tel-Aviv. All of the data, except for the interview with the Habo family, was collected in Hebrew.

Since leaving Tel-Aviv and returning to The States I have been in constant contact (over the phone and when visiting), with Amira who keeps me updated about the school, the children and the political issues surrounding them. In June 2002 I went back to visit the school for several hours, meeting with Amira and some of the teachers, catching up on personal as well as school news and taking pictures of the design changes that were made in classrooms and in the halls. During this visit I recorded Amira telling about major curriculum changes that were implemented in the past year and gathered relevant documents. I also met many of my young friends, all of whom grew so nicely and treated me to wonderful smiles full of good memories.

Additionally, I did much peripheral reading, collecting information and references from multiple sources such as a recent trip to China (e.g. where I read the local morning paper and found the piece about child trafficking), books and magazines that I read, movies that I saw (e.g. *Foreign Sister* in the Israeli Film Festival in NYC this summer) - many which have been referenced in the study. It was amazing to see how conceptually connected to each other human texts are!

3.4. Data analysis

Every evening during the months of fieldwork, I would sit down at the kitchen table and transcribe my notes from that day onto the computer. This was a twofold process of translation and recording for my notes were in Hebrew and I put them into the computer in English. I also had a daily routine of going over videotapes done on any given day and logging the segments. On the weekends (Saturday only, in Israel) I transcribed the interviews and the videotapes.

I received permission from the (then) head of the Tel-Aviv district in the Department of Education, Dr. Y. Levy, to photograph and videotape the school and the children as part of my research (as long as I wouldn't identify individual children, was the stipulation), so I came away with 7, 2-hour tapes of the school, children, events, meetings, interviews, etc., and one tape of the first meeting of the Turkish children with Josette, the mediator (a recording the staff had asked me to make and I gave them a copy when we were done). All the films have been cataloged (or logged, in "professional" jargon) as to the topic and length of each segment and I refer back to them as needed, transcribing, creating still photographs to be included in my work and, hopefully, a short video presentation to accompany the written study.

The large quantity of documents I collected (from school files, school publications, children's work, curriculum and materials, teachers folders and newspaper articles) was filed under the following categories: structure and organization issues, assessment, children's work, curriculum and teaching plans, letters to the school, letters to parents, ideological issues, misc.

The media documents (mostly newspapers and journals) were divided into 4 categories: education in Israel – general, the Tel-Aviv school, the area and issues of the foreign workers, new immigrants and bilingual issues.

The second stage of data analysis consisted of categorizing the written information I had collected in my notes and interviews. I chose three general categories (or major codes, as per Glesne) of Practice, Ideology and Space/time, each of which had subcategories.
Practice – general, organization, personal relationships, assessment, educational practice regarding the children, educational practices of the teachers;
Ideology – personal, formal/system, educational, adjusted teaching;
Space/time – physical, personal (empowerment), power/space, cultural space, ideological space, educational space, time.

In the Practice category I collected all data from notes and interviews that had to do with actual practices at Tel-Aviv. Some of these practices I witnessed, others were described by interviewees in and outside of school.

The ideology category is a collection of data regarding beliefs that participants understood to be underlying their actions and practices.

The third category of time and space dealt with these issues on several levels – physical as well as conceptual.

I also opened and used 3 files that I filled along the way: an introduction to the study and a conclusion of it and a file with contextual data such as newspaper clippings, notes on movies or radio programs, and sayings and expressions from the ethos of Israeli experience that I found pertinent.

My data analysis was an evolving and ongoing process. After going over the material once and deciding on a structure and issues to be prioritized in my writing, I kept revisiting the data repeatedly. As my writing grew, going over the tapes and notes several times, always landed me treasures of information to add, things that I hadn't noticed before, issues that became relevant with the development of the study, gems that I had missed the first, second and even the third time of plowing through the material. And I talked about the issues continually with my husband who was, alternatively, a sounding board, a devil's advocate, a constructive critic, a source of information from other fields and a creative advisor in the analysis process. Ultimately, from all the reading, talking, discussing, rehashing, revisiting, revaluing, thinking I got it, changing my mind, writing and rewriting… the following study took shape.

Understanding the larger picture and the significance of everything I had written came only after I had been writing for over a year and was struggling to come up with a summation of the experience, "…*because I didn't understand the beginning until I reached the end"*.

3.5. Ethics and reciprocity

"What is left? What is right? What is wrong?"
From *Quidam*
(Cirque le Soliel)

Issues of ethics come up around every bend in qualitative research. To begin with, one can ask what right does the researcher have to barge into other people's lives and ask, push,

juggle and wiggle herself to get information about them? What right did I have to make other people into "objects" or "subjects" of research? What right did I have to their time, their thoughts, their stories? And after assuming a position within a study, questions arise as to whether I behaved well, conducted myself with utmost integrity in every situation, respected the people I worked with, did what was "right"? Doing qualitative research on social issues may be the most socially-ethical way to study a situation (as opposed to quantitative research in such cases), but it raises difficult and tricky issues in terms of personal ethics and behavior.

Sunstein (1996) raises the problem the ethnographer has of negotiating the writing of the research when on the one hand we need to be artisans and storytellers in order to preserve the informants' voices and narratives while, on the other hand, we must follow academic convention and professionalism. She finds the ethnographer existing in a liminal space between "our informants, their texts, ourselves, our texts and our readers", and within a dialogical relationship between self and other, process and product, representation and reflexivity. During my fieldwork and when I was sitting at my desk writing, I often found myself in such a liminal space – not knowing exactly who I am, where I belong, to whom I should be loyal, whose voice is coming out of me, who am I writing for? I felt unsure and very guilty, as if I was caught trespassing on someone else's yard… Sunstein (1996, p.177) also writes about her own "ethnographer's guilt" to which I can easily relate:

> I write of these people but not necessarily for these people, use some of their words but not all of their words, understand a slice of their surroundings and histories but not the whole… As I give them life on the page, I freeze them into time and space, depositing black words on a white paper backdrop for a reader none of us knows".

Yet she continues that the other side of the issue is her delight in writing what she learned from her informants and she hopes both her readers and the informants learn something from the work that was done through this cooperation. She also quotes anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff saying that guilt has a bright side to it - being an expression of a sense of responsibility for another's well-being. This way of putting things appeals to me as I truly feel a social responsibility as an adult, an educator and someone who has the ability and the opportunity to do research in the field of literacy. "As educators and researchers, it seems important for us to consider our visions for the future of reading education in schools, and to articulate that to others" (Edmondson, 2002, p.117). Despite its complexity and occasional uncomfortable situations I see my work not

as an end in and of itself but as originating from care for others, concern for social injustice and a drive to, possibly, reduce pain and suffering in one small corner of the world.

And then the question arises regarding the outcomes of the study. What if nothing happens/changes following this research? What if the world stays exactly the same as it was before? What if the research dissipates after a small splash and the lives of children on the margins of classrooms don't improve?

> From the Sages
> "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for in the fullness of days you shall find it" (*Book of Ecclesiastes*, 9).

My answer is that we are living in troubled times and now, more than ever, I believe it is imperative that we not lose hope, because where there is hope there are possibilities, and where there are possibilities the human spirit will rise to reach them, sooner or later. Ethnographers of critical issues must do what we think needs to be done to alert others to obstacles in the way of justice and equity in our societies and give voice to those who don't have it, regardless of whether there are immediate reactions or results to the work in our respective fields. As long as nobody suffers from the process, if the researcher exposes "the problem", believes in the justness of the cause and is willing to invest the time and labor necessary in the study, and if those involved in "the problem" - the participants – acknowledge the same issues as problematic and are willing to give their time and stories voluntarily, the outcome can potentially be a cooperative push towards alleviating a specific cause of suffering for these participants and others in similar situations elsewhere. If not today, then in the fullness of days…

> From the media:
> Ian Stuart was interviewed about ethical issues in his work as a war correspondent[32]. He was asked whether he didn't feel terrible when seeing horrible things happening and rather than actually helping he would stand on the side and document the atrocities (he had mentioned seeing children starving to death, children whose hands were chopped off, people dying for lack of the most basic medicines, etc.) His answer was that he may have been able to help a few children momentarily, but by documenting the events and bringing them to the attention of the whole world, he feels he had given voice and power to the many millions suffering and affected by the war. As proof of this he mentioned that within the following year of his published account the UN sent in a contingent of peacekeeping forces that brought some peace to the country.

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[32] He was interviewed on WNYC AM820, 11/4/02, relating to the publication of his book *Ambush*, about his experiences as a war correspondent in Sierra Leone.

Another serious ethical question in ethnographic research regards dealing with negative or subversive information one comes across. How should criticism be dealt with, both others' and my own? One of the teachers at Tel-Aviv was very loud and aggressive in his criticism of the principal and school policies. At another time I happened to be sitting in a meeting when one group of teachers began criticizing some of the others regarding the efforts they were willing or unwilling to make for the school and the kids. A mother told me she doesn't like the school because "*the children hit each other too much*" and another mother mentioned instances of humiliating name calling of her and her son by the children. Some teachers criticized the look of the school, others had ideas about what should be changed or added. Two brothers (6th and 4th grades) I talked to were very critical of the education they were getting at Tel-Aviv. Their criticism reflected their parents ideas, which in turn, reflected the Russian cultural and social norms of schooling that were in conflict with the way schooling was practiced in Israel and in Tel-Aviv in particular. The parents thought the children could not be getting an education in such a lax atmosphere with no testing and "no discipline", they said. In another instance I wanted to quote dialogue that I thought very pertinent to a point I was trying to make but I feared it would make the teacher look bad, and that if asked permission, she wouldn't want me to talk about "that aspect" of her class.

The stand I took in my work was to include all criticism that was relevant to the topics addressed and to the functioning of the school in general. I excluded personal issues and personal criticism that were not relevant to school pedagogy. For example, I didn't include the criticism of excessive hitting because the school as a whole is considered to be less violent than other schools in the country (I heard this from the school's superintendent) and violence wasn't an issue I looked into or dealt with. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't place the mother's complaint in the right light because I didn't have information on the topic. In case of the dialogue, I included it without naming the teacher or her class (information that was not necessary to the reader) and I framed the quoted dialogue positively, so as not to needlessly hurt the teacher.

Regarding material reciprocity, I was very thankful to the teachers for accepting me, taking my work seriously, giving me generously of their time, sharing with me the drinks in the teachers' lounge (that they pay for with their own money but would not allow me to contribute), so when their toaster broke, I bought them a new one and at the end of the visit I joined the principal who used her special fund and we bought new curtains for the lounge. During my stay I

collected shoes and winter clothes for the school children (as did others in the school) and upon returning to the U.S. I sent over dozens of Hebrew tape cassettes and easy reading English books that I had at home and were in short supply there.

I received a lot and I hope that in the final balance, I'd have given back, in some measure, as well as I'd received. Ultimately, however, I know that I shall be the one who had gained the most from this encounter, which has opened my eyes and mind and greatly enriched my understanding of the meanings of literacy, learning and education.

4. Theoretical Circles

"Education, literacy – for whom, for what purpose, toward what end?"
Lisa Delpit

4.1. Paradigmatic approach

Based on my personal and professional experiences and on extensive literature exploration of the topic, I have come to realize that children who are different-than-mainstream (socially, culturally, economically, ideologically, physically and psychologically) often find themselves relegated to the margins of the education system both in terms of the quality of education afforded them and their access to academic success. Facing this diverse and inequitable performance of the education system for different groups of the population, I was interested in trying to understand these variations in access to literacy, to look at their underlying causes and search for alternative visions that "liberate literacy from the narrow definition of reading the word and embrace a more emancipatory approach that includes thinking critically about and participating in the transformation of our societies" (Laughlin et al., 2001, p. 89).

The main question driving this research is "*What does it take to learn to read?*" – how do students come to learn/acquire new knowledge or make new interpretations of the word and the world in some situations better than in others? Why is it that some children learn effortlessly while others (and we can usually determine in advance who these "others" will be) must struggle to different degrees throughout their educational experience? [33] Why is the educational experience positive and productive for some students while for others, whom, again, we can usually recognize *a priori*, the same experience is negative, possibly ineffectual, many times humiliating? Why do some children learn to read while others do not, although all may be part of the same education system driven by a singular ideology? Is there a way for teaching to accommodate diversity among learners? Are there alternative ways and means to open up equal possibilities for all children in schools?

On another level, this study will inquire into what counts as learning and knowledge, because becoming successful readers also depends on both the definition of "reading" and on the yardstick used to measure it. The understanding of the nature and function of literacy is a

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[33] Aronowitz (1997) quotes a CUNY study (1995) finding that most children *graduating* from "at risk" high schools, are from middle-class and stable working-class families. Furthermore, more than 75% of these graduates go on to undergraduate schools, a proportion parallel to that in suburban high schools.

contextualized social construct and the question arises as to what counts as literacy or "reading" in different social contexts, how is its acquisition measured and how do these different understandings of education and literacy impact on the success of children learning to read.

At the inner city Tel-Aviv School all the children belong to the "others" groups, yet all are making progress and are in the process of learning school literacies and learning "to read", according to the school's own measures and accounts[34]. The school is part of the national public school system with normal resources - curricular, monetary and human, and teachers who were not specifically chosen for the job (the opposite often being the case), yet the children's educational experiences seem to be positive and productive. Why are these children who, according to my own experience and understanding of education systems, should belong to the groups who don't necessarily learn to read in schools, why are most of them successfully learning to read and enjoying the process as well? Do the people at Tel-Aviv know something that we don't about how to deal with diversity and multiplicity among learners, how to promote student learning and what it takes for a child to learn to read? Do they, possibly, have a different understanding of literacy and success?

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Schools are at once cultural, political, and economic institutions, acculturating the young generations into society and serving "the state to prepare labor for participation in its economy and to prepare citizens to participate in the polity" (Torres, 2002, p. 363). Apple and Weis (1983) find schools to have three major roles: to assist in the accumulation of capital (social as well as monetary), to assist in production and to assist in the legitimization of some groups and some ideologies. Education through schools is a process based on the concepts of transference of knowledge and the formation of personal identity, activities I refer to as "learning to read". The question arises as to whose knowledge and identity and which perspective of the world does a school attempt to teach its students.

As agents of a culture, political powers and economies, schools control the knowledge that enters into the curriculum, directly influencing cultural continuity and change. "What counts as school knowledge tends to embody the interests and culture of the group or groups who have the power to distribute and legitimate their world view through educational institutions" (Apple & Weis, 1983,

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[34] *"All of our students are in a normative learning process"*, said Tel-Aviv's principal in response to an inquiry from the Department of Education.

p.28). Educational leaders often assume that *their* values, beliefs and actions are the norm, that they are culturally neutral and that their ideas about what constitutes desirable knowledge and how to teach it are based on "general principals of good pedagogy" suitable for all children, whatever their culture may be (Gay, 1994), and "that knowledge is pure and unrelated to the knowledge seeker" (Ohanian, 1999, p. 3). In daily reality, schools have become powerful gatekeepers of opportunity as the selective knowledge validated by them creates cultural capital that works towards perpetuation of the dominant social structure, leaving many minority groups out on the margins (Apple & Weis, 1983; Kincheloe et al., 1997; Gay, 1994; Roth, 1984; Hargreaves, 1997b; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Kohl, 1967; Chamoiseau, 1997).

Yet schools and the people associated with them are not passive mirrors of economies or political groups (nor are they puppets, argues Gitlin, 1983). They are, or have the potential of being, "active agents in the processes of reproduction and contestation of dominant social relations", and as such, their day-to-day struggles at the level of curriculum, teaching and pedagogy can be linked to "other action for a more progressive society" (Apple & Weis, 1983, p. 21-22). Investigating this role of the school in its active contestation of and resistance to hegemonic relationships and looking at proactive ideology and pedagogy for promoting a more just and equitable educational experience for all children, is a major goal of this study. One of the ideas underlying this research is that the inequality and social injustice found in our schools are based on neither purposeful, premeditated overt political ideology nor on hidden agendas[35]. I believe that these policies and pedagogies mostly result from two routine modes of behavior. The first is our habitual and unquestioning "following of the rules":

> Unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life… They are embedded in unquestioned, norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following these rules (Young, 1990, p.41).

The second is a form of laziness. "Habit is a labor-saving device" (Tyack & Tobin, 1994, p.476), or: "Prejudice is a great time-saver. You can form opinions without having to get the facts" (E.B. White quoted in Jackson, 1999, p.15). It seems so much safer, easier and quicker to form an opinion based on what others had done in the past, based on tradition, habit or cultural norms,

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[35] I deal with this issue at greater depth in section 4.2.1.

than actually taking the time and making the effort of looking outside the box, outside one's own paradigm and position of comfort. "For those in a privileged position, making decisions on deeply structured, firmly ingrained, culturally supported internalized notions about the 'other', makes one comfortable in one's own position in the social hierarchy" (Jackson, 1999, p. 15). It is safer, easier and quicker not to ask and not to change but to continue living with this uncritical habit of mind, termed "dysconscious racism", that admits no fundamentally alternative vision of society (Jackson, 1999).

If the unquestioned, facile and painless (to the system, that is) norm of schools is to base assessment on a success/failure dichotomy, to use symbolic scales and bell curves to measure achievements and sort students into qualitative categories, if some of the basic assumptions of educational bureaucrats are that time rather than learning is of the essence, that emotions and cognition are separate fields, that literacy is monolithic and situated on a "one-way" path, and that one of school's functions is as a gatekeeper… then the situation we find in schools in terms of exclusion and marginalization of some groups and individuals is understandable.

But it isn't acceptable. Not to the members of the repressed groups themselves and not to those of us who *do* question the accepted norms, habits and symbols that we assume are at the basis of the unjust oppression in our schools; those of us who *are* willing to make the effort of looking beyond our norms and habits to find more just ways of going about our everyday lives. And it is within this paradigm that my study is situated. By describing the pedagogy and practices at the Tel Aviv School and presenting an alternative discourse within which non-mainstream students *are* valued and considered equal members of school and learning communities, I will attempt to loosen "the unrecognized symbolic constraints that restrict our perception, interpretation, discourse and action" (Thomas, 1993), to shine light into the dark corners of our well-intended language, norms, habits, symbols and assumptions and to suggest that there are other ways of being and educating school children.

We live and act within an educational discourse that views schooling as a race for limited resources (high scores, "good" colleges). We try to help those students who are variously handicapped in this race to keep up with the mainstream runners (special education classes, ESL, new and improved reading programs, school lunch programs and the like), but basically, the guiding motto seems to be "Let the best person win".

But, appropriating Wittgenstein's premise that "The limits of my language are the limits of my world", it would be quite difficult to understand education in a new way using the same discourse from which our traditional and historic understanding has been constructed. In order for us to challenge the existing educational discourse, its ideology and metaphors and to construct a revised understanding of schooling and education that would allow for the inclusion of a greater number of students in a meaningful educational experience, we need to shift paradigms and enter a discourse that would allow us to see things from a different perspective.

The new discourse would have to let us realize that we are all products of specific cultures, histories, value and symbol systems. That our ways of knowing are a component of our personal identities and that standardization and generic teaching based on the dominant cultural experience is a form of tunnel vision that inadvertently (or purposefully, on a grand scale) excludes those students whose cultural backgrounds are most unlike the school norms, from unrestricted access to dominant literacies. This discourse will have to include the idea that subject and object, such as for example the child and the text she confronts at school, are not separate, autonomous entities, but rather are part of a single, unique process contextualized in time and space, a process which is not necessarily repeated anywhere else or at any other time in the exact same way and that strict rules and regulations cannot precisely, universally or fairly cover.

In a general sense, we need to move on from the traditional, positivist, linear, "one-truth", "one-color" epistemologies and from the current discourse, which, at times, serves to confuse rather than enlighten and to prevent issues from being identified and articulated (Harvey, 1996). We need to seek new ways of knowing and reading the world that are not based on totalizing structures that look for averages and repress differences or on systems that emphasize difference and exclude commonality as ends in and of themselves (Taylor, 2001). We need to use postmodern perspectives that acknowledge multiple versions of reality and attempt to deconstruct social norms, metaphors and "received" understandings. (Harvey, 1996; Kincheloe, 1997), yet at one and the same time we need to be looking for "a nontotalizing structure that nonetheless acts as a whole" (Taylor, 2001, p.11) in order to make the disparate events coherent.

We must look for a multicultural and critical paradigm from which to appropriate new metaphors for dealing with educational issues (i.e. the student as source of knowledge rather than

an empty basket that needs to be filled[36], the classroom as construction site rather than a race track, the school as a sapling nursery rather than a factory or production line), and for providing the potential for acting upon the new understandings with the promise of transformation and change for those things that are not working well for so many children in our education system.

I set out to do this research for the practical objective of giving voice to the children marginalized and discriminated against in education systems and to the people who are grinding daily through the difficult and often exhausting tasks of reaching and teaching all children. "It is the voices of the children that we want to hear – but not in an echo of our own dried-up abstractions" (Taylor, 1993, p.49). And it is the voices of their dedicated teachers that need to be heard as well, those teachers who have refused to sit back and accept the status quo, believing that every child deserves and is worthy of their effort. This study will show that there is another way, that dealing with diversity in school without hegemony and marginalization is possible, that there is hope for the children on the margins. I would like to dedicate this study to all those educators for whom color blindness isn't an acceptable solution to problems of diversity and to those who have had the courage to take up the challenge of abolishing the margins by acknowledging difference and the equity of human worth[37].

4.2. Conceptual positions

4.2.1. Social justice

My point of embarkation is a paradigm that conceptualizes literacy as a sociocultural practice, "focuses attention on the arbitrariness and injustice inherent in historically produced hierarchies of Discourses and … in the processes whereby schooling privileges certain literacies over others" (Lankshear, 1999/2002,p. 35). The concept of social justice is, therefore, central to this study. The point I will try to make is that it isn't that the world is divided into given groups of those who can and others who can't acquire school literacy and that the education system is only doing its best to cope with "reality". I will try to show that all children *can* "do school" if given a just chance and that a just chance may mean giving different things to different people, not necessarily equally dividing resources. I will try to show that reality is what one makes of it is

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[36] Robert Lake (Medicine Grizzlybear). (1990, September). An Indian father's plea. *Teacher Magazine*, p.48-53.
[37] Courage is needed in these situations because, quoting Figueroa, "Paradigm changes, like any change in belief systems, are neither painless nor orderly" (Figueroa, 1994, p.27).

based on specific world view and use of language and Discourse and that it can be changed, if and where there is a will to do so, to include more children under the umbrella of quality education.

Justice is a relativistic set of beliefs, discourses and institutions that are socially constructed and expressive of social relations and power hierarchies in a specific time and place. Thus, there is no agreed upon universal meaning of social justice, but rather a "family" of meanings which can be understood only within the discourse in which it is embedded (Harvey, 1996). In our particular space and time, the traditional view of justice is based on the concept of impartiality, while equity is traditionally understood as equally distributed material goods (Young, 1990). Both these views deny difference and "…feed cultural imperialism by allowing the particular experience of privileged groups to parade as universal". Both views lead to oppression because they "identify equality with sameness and difference with deviation and devaluation" (Young, 1990, p.10).

When looking at the provision of educational opportunity, one may see the distribution and allocation of material resources (buildings, books, teachers, etc.) as the core of a linear equation: the more such resources kids have, the better their opportunities are, and thus, the higher their achievements. This leads to the idea that the more money and resources a school has, the better educational achievements it's students can reach, which in turn, leads to the conclusions that poor students cannot achieve in their current situation of poverty and that money can solve educational achievement issues (i.e. President Bush's Early Reading Initiative that "pledges at least $900 million a year to improve reading scores in high poverty schools"[38]).

From the media:
"It is important for people to know that if you're poor, it doesn't mean that your mind is poor"[39].

Those at the helm of our system may be simplifying an extremely complex problem as they try to take an easy way out by deciding that we are in a race for reading scores rather then in a process of educating our children. The questions we need to be asking all those "politicians, corporate leaders, media pundits and education entrepreneurs" who are prescribing our curriculums, are: "Where is the test for compassion? For honesty? For curiosity? For moral commitment?" (Ohanian, 1999, p.27).

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[38] *The New York Times*, 2002, January 19, pp. A14.
[39] Dr. Ruth Simmons, President of Brown University said this in a radio interview upon her appointment, becoming the first African American woman to head an Ivy League university (WNYC, AM820, 11/12/00).

The "material wealth = achievement" equation leaves out the basic and most important element in any educational equation, an element without which there can be no education of any kind, and that is - the human being. Yes, material resources are important, but so are the biological/ psychological aspects of education as well as the social, cultural, ideological and historical aspects that are both environment and essence of every education system, every classroom, every child. When looking only at material elements, we see that despite possible equity of distributed material resources, male children and female children, working-class children and middle-class children, white children and children of color, children who know through language and math and children who know differently, children who may share the same school, classroom and teachers, *do not* have equal opportunities of education and are not achieving on the same levels. Additionally, "by pitting all against all in a race for measurable academic achievement on arbitrary tasks, school has become a primary site for the reproduction of inequality in access to resources" (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 338).

The concept of social justice assumes equal moral worth of all people, allowing for, 1) "Developing and exercising one's capacities and expressing one's experience", and 2) "Participating in determining one's action and the conditions of one's action". These values correspond to two social conditions that define injustice: "oppression, the institutional constraint on self development, and domination, the institutional constraint on self-determination" (Young, 1990, p. 37). Two forms of oppression are particularly evident in education systems: marginalization and cultural imperialism. Marginalization ("perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression") happens when a category of people are excluded from useful participation in the social life of an institution, potentially subjecting them to future deprivation, material as well as social[40] (Young, 1990). Such exclusion manifests itself in our schools in regard to children who are "different" than mainstream, children who digress from the expected "sameness" in the dominant culture, behavior or ways of knowing, resulting in labels of deviation and devaluation. Cultural imperialism has to do with domination and hegemony as a dominant group's experience and culture are established as the norm, giving some groups better access to interpretation, communication and power in society (Young, 1990). We can see this as the context within which the Tel-Aviv school is functioning as well as in our monocultural curriculums and text books (even those that include tokens of other cultures), in state testing and national standards, in "not

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[40] Young (1990) notes that in the United States today, racial oppression increasingly occurs as marginalization rather than exploitation.

seeing color" or the impartiality of treating all students "equally", and in the process of defining others from the outside by a system of dominant meanings external to themselves, creating stereotyped and inferiorized images of these *differands*.

> From the media:
> "The unfairness of uniformity" is an article written by Prof. of literacy Dale Johnson and Prof. Of elementary education Bonnie Johnson (Dowling College, Long Island)[41] after a year of teaching elementary school in rural Louisiana. They describe with pain and concern the disadvantaged position their (mostly minority, 98% free meals) students were put in when regardless of their family poverty (many living in mobile homes, some without electricity or running water) and the school's poverty (no library, no playground equipment, no counselor, no maps, too few textbooks, dictionaries from 1952…), they were obliged to take and pass the standardized state tests in grades 4 and 8 in order to pass the grade. More than 50% failed and the school has been labeled "Academically below average". At the same time, schools in the state's wealthier areas are labeled "Schools of Academic Excellence" because of (predictable) higher test scores and they receive cash awards for "their" success… The moral of the story, write the authors, is that it is unfair and unjust to hold all children to the same standards when their lives, experiences and educational opportunities are so disparate and so incongruent.

If we would like to achieve educational equity where every child is included, is allowed to participate fully in the opportunities and in the discourse of education, is supported in developing and exercising her capacities and in realizing her choices, we must reexamine our everyday, unconscious oppressive habits and norms in the context of which we traditionally consider difference as threatening and disturbing and the ways we choose to address diversity in educational settings. If we could appropriate a cultural politics of difference, which stands for "living with incommensurability through new ethical and democratic frameworks, within a culture that both recognizes difference and is committed to resolving its antagonisms" (Rutherford, 1990:26); if we allowed for differential treatment of diverse persons as a way to achieve equity of opportunities for success; if we could approach difference positively, accepting it as a source of possibility and enrichment, as leverage rather than obstacle on the way to academic literacy, we would probably find ourselves much closer to the goal of equitable and meaningful education for all of us colorful and diverse people.

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[41] *Reading Today*, August/September 2002, p.18.

4.2.2. Language and discourse

"Literacy has two beginnings: one, in the world, the other,
in each person who learns to read and write"
Margaret Meek (*On being literate*)

Literacy is always in a language, and language is context-dependant and multiple rather than universal and hierarchical. Language and reality are dynamically intertwined in a reflexive relationship in which language constructs our cultural heritage by giving meaning to the world around us and is, simultaneously, constituted by this same heritage and environment. "Language is not just a transparent reflection of the social, but rather refracts the social" (McLaren, in Gadotti, 1996, p.xii). It mediates our survival in the world allowing us to think, express ideas and react, yet at the same time it restricts our paradigms and understandings. Discourse, which is language-in-use, is always and everywhere political, reflecting each group's ideas about the distribution of power, status and worth. Social institutions contain diverse language ideologies (or ideological discourse formations), one of which is clearly dominant dictating and naturalizing the norms of an institution (Bakhtin, 1981; Bloome, 1994; Fairclough, 1989,1995; Friere, 1987; Gee, 1987, 1990; Kress,1997; Vygotsky,1986).

Language use is intricately connected to a person's identity, shaping it as it is shaped by it, expressing, constituting and reproducing social identities and relationships (Fairclough, 1989, Ogulnick, 2000). All uses of language situate the speaker and the hearer within the social fields of status and solidarity, which according to Gee (1990) are the ultimate goods all people strive to as they actively use language. Language use also positions one within the hierarchy of power relations and reflects these positions of the user (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1990; Edwards, 1985; Street, 1995; Dyson, 1992). One of the roles of learning language at school is providing the learner the potential for changing her positionality.

> [S]o far as educational institutions equip learners with a critical language awareness, they equip them with a resource for intervention in and reshaping of discursive practices and the power relations that ground them, both in other domains and in education itself (Fairclough, 1995, p. 217).

Language ideologies are implicit or explicit representations "...that construe the intersection between language and human beings in a social world" (Woolard, 1998, p.3). They mediate meanings for social purposes, meanings rooted not only in language but in its ties to identity, aesthetics, morality and epistemology and its underpinning of social institutions (i.e. schooling). A school pedagogy would be an example of such an ideology representing the relationship

between the people within the milieu and the language/ discourse they use. Woolard (1993) describes different theoretical understandings of the term ideology. In this paper it will be used in several of its guises as they relate to issues of education and schooling - as reflective or responsive to the experiences or interests of a particular social position (i.e. teacher), as the ideas, discourse or signifying practices in the service of politics and power relationships (i.e. standardized tests, the success/ failure dichotomy), and as distortion, illusion, mystification or rationalization (i.e. raising standards will improve the education all children receive).

Discourse is language (oral, written, acted) used in specific social contexts and based on a specific ideology so that certain perspectives and states of affairs come to be taken as "natural" or "normal" and others as "deviant", "wrong", etc, and since they are contingent on context, discourses proliferate. A discourse is used by a discourse community - a group of people who have an ideology of common values and/or interests and/or purposes, and like language, it is reflexive - it "always takes on specific meaning from the actual context in which it is used, while, simultaneously, helping to construct what we take that context to mean and be in the first place" (Gee and Green, 1998, p.127). Gee (1990) describes Discourse as a socially accepted way of knowing and being that identifies a person as a member of a meaningful social/cultural group (language is one dimension of a Discourse and Gee signifies it by using the term discourse – uncapitalized). Every person has a primary Discourse – a way of being and knowing learned from family, at home, within a cultural group - one is usually strong at. One also has many secondary Discourses that are assumed in different domains outside of the home (school, work, marriage, sports, etc.), with different degrees of success. What is important for this study is the concept of distance between Discourses and the consequences of such distances. Lankshear (1999/2002, p. 32) explains how misfits between Discourses in a classroom bring to the farther marginalization of those who cannot reach fluent performance in the dominant Discourse:

> The farther away a secondary Discourse is from our primary Discourse and our other secondary Discourses, as in the case of children from marginal social groups who struggle to get a handle on the culture of school classrooms, the more we have to 'stretch' our discursive resources to 'perform' within that Discourse. Often in such cases, we simply are unable to operate the Discourse at the level of fluent performance.

Language/discourse is a cultural and cognitive mediator of learning in social contexts. One of the ways to understand the relationships between discourse, learning and education is to look at the values underpinning our educational discourse. What are the fetishes we worship?

(Hicks, 1996).

> The power of objects and things over us, the fact that they seem to have a life of their own and to posses value on their own account, depends entirely on the way discourses of value envelop them and invest them with symbolic value (Harvey, 1996, p. 221).

Varenne and McDermott refer to a major value upon which American education has traditionally been based despite it's being a significant source of exclusion and marginalization: the dichotomous concepts of success and failure, which define each other "and together they frame everyone". In a system based upon this concept, put into practice by standardized testing and the hard set tradition of describing students by quantifiable measurements that can be placed on a bell curve, "no particular person need fail, and failure need not be confined to the children of any particular groups, but half the children must fall below average" (Varenne & McDermott, 1999, p. 209). The concept of success/failure within educational discourse has taken on a life and value of its own and while we may think that we have established it and are using it to control our system and serve our goals, it in fact, has taken control of the system as an internalization of political and economic relations in our society preventing us from seeking alternatives within the discourse. Just think for a moment - where is it written that there has to be failure in education? Is there a law, rule, directive or any other moral principle we must abide by that prevents us from imagining a situation where *every child* experiences success in school?

Hence, to understand language and discourse within institutions of education, one must look at the complexity of the environment within which the institution operates. Historical, political, economic, cultural and social contingencies will impact the language ideologies, the Discourse and the values that develop in specific locales. In a society in which power is in the hands of mostly male, white, Christian, conservatives, we find the language, discourse and values associated with education to be those of the power holders[42] and, as such, it is often dismissive of the less powerful groups (i.e. minorities, the poor, ESL students, children who are not interested in or are not succeeding in mainstream academia). And in a capitalist meritocracy one may find education to be conceptualized as a competition or race towards scarce resources, such as high paying. Since this is a tough competition for few prized places based on an underlying ideology of "best person wins", the comparative measures of success and failure used are "scientific", rigid and unforgiving (bell-curves, grades, state tests, SATs). In the name of fairness, one measure is applied to every "contestant" (not unlike the Olympics).

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[42] See E.D. Hirsch, *Cultural literacy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

If we accept the interpretation above in which language and environment are co-determinators of our lives, there is a danger of falling into the trap of feeling stuck and helpless. The use of a particular language signals a historical-specific way of knowing the world (i.e. the negative vocabulary used to describe children who are different than mainstream in the education system – *dis*abled, *under*-achievers, *poor* students, attention-*deficient*, and so on and on - reflecting a paradigm in which difference= bad= unwanted) and can be used to restrict access to social resources for those who don't share the same language. "Such a process frequently involves, marginalization, even elimination of vernacular languages and dialects along with the cultures which they support" (Barton, 1997, p. 77).

However, Rorty (1997) believes there is no reason to be stuck in an artificially constructed pit and he provides an escape route and an incentive for taking action. There is nothing in the world that tells us what vocabularies to use, he says, only other human beings can do that. So when we find that a certain vocabulary or discourse is no longer appropriate for dealing with issues in a manner that suites *our* (whoever is finding difficulties negotiating life using the traditional vocabulary) understandings and sensibilities, we must look for a new one. Freeing ourselves from a bad place may entail no more than contesting the language that put us there to begin with, and the new vocabulary that we seek should be one that allows us to deal more easily, or better, with the segment of the world that we are troubled by and would like to change.

By changing the metaphors and vocabulary we use, our ideologies and discourses change and we are able to adjust our perspective and focus our sight differently than before[43]. For example, if there is nothing in the world to suggest that children-different-than-mainstream in schools are not good enough, are unable or doomed to failure, it is up to us to decide that difference can be a source of social and cultural enrichment, that there are things to be learned and gained from valuing difference. Thus, from this new perspective, we can revalue struggling learners, credit them for their individual abilities and knowledge and include them in the educational discourse as deserving members. As simple as that.

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[43] An example of the necessity for a new vocabulary when the old one wasn't serving all participants was the situation after 9/11. The institutions giving out money to spouses of victims had to deal with issues of same sex unions by either changing the vocabulary to include these as spouses or excluding a group of people from receiving compensation.

4.2.3. Knowledge and learning

"Every man is a valuable member of society, who by his observations, researches and experiments procures knowledge for men…It is in his knowledge that man has found his greatness and his happiness".

James Smithson[44]

During a meeting of 1st and 2nd grade teachers with the principal, Tsipi (school counselor) and Eitan (organizational advisor) regarding attempts to better teach more students through new grouping arrangements, Amira said she would take care of the 4 most disruptive 1st and 2nd graders when the others have their important classes so they wouldn't bother the rest of the kids as they had been doing in the past several months. She'll send them out to play in the yard, she said.

Neta (head teacher of the 1st and 2nd grade levels): "*I don't agree, Amira*"

Tsipi: "*Maybe Peter* (a 1st grader among the disruptive students) *needs more breaks between classes*".

Eitan: "*Maybe we should separate them from the rest throughout the whole day*".

Tsipi: "*The teachers will not agree to part from them on a regular basis*".

Amira: "*Learning can be many things. Maybe what I consider learning isn't what you think learning to be*"

What is learning, and how is knowledge related to learning? How does one learn? Where do we look for knowledge and how can we assess learning? Can learning be many things, as Amira noted?

To begin with, we must stress that we will be dealing with learning and developing cognitive skills of children in school situations. Although learning processes are similar across situations, cognitive skill development differs. In cross-cultural studies by Bruner and others, it was found that when exploring the impact of national/ethnic culture, living environment (urban vs. rural) and schooling on cognition, schooling was found to be by far the most influential in affecting the development of cognitive skills (Scribner, 1968).

Looking at learning from a social-constructivist perspective allows us to understand Vygotsky's claim that it isn't the drive for survival, but a drive for learning and creation that has forever pushed mankind forward, and that the basis of human learning isn't the accumulation of

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[44] 1765-1829. Founder of the Smithsonian Institution.

information, but the humanization of it - relating it to one's own life and history, constructing knowledge through making it meaningful.

Learning, knowing and their specific environmental circumstances are related, intertwined:

> A theory of social practice emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing…This view also claims that learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world (Lave & Wenger 1990, p. 50-51).

Dewey writes about the process of information becoming knowledge as it is comprehended. When the learner interacts and engages with her physical, social, cultural and historical milieu, with both guidance and participation in socially valued activities, she actively transforms the knowledge she already has. By changing patterns of participation in the social practices of a group through a reflexive process of experience and conscious alteration, a learner will initially connect meanings with prior experiences, evoking past knowledge to build new, meaningful knowledge upon. (Dewey, 1964; Figueroa, 1994; Gardner, 1982; Gee and Green, 1998; Moll & Gonzales, 1994; Rogoff, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1978; Vygotsky, 1997).

Learning is mediated by language. Just as we learn to speak by imitating others' words, "we also take over their ideas and values by trying them on and transforming them to suit our own needs and purposes" (Wells, 1999, p.104). Thus, learning and knowledge construction are contingent upon discourse, located in experience and are processes that involve transformation - change from one state of knowing to a new one in which new knowledge is assimilated and made our own through understanding (in contrast to the wide-spread pedagogy of what Friere termed "banking education").

> From the Sages:
> "Just as the faces of human beings are not similar to one another, their knowledge is dissimilar. Each and every one has knowledge in and of his own" (*Sefer ha'agada*, 1960, p.452).

Knowledge itself can be a problematic concept if we don't characterize it *a priori*, as being similar to literacy in that it is relative, social and context bound, multiple and diversely valued[45]. Within ideological systems, "true" knowledge tends to be that which is ratified and

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[45] To emphasize the situated nature of the concept of knowledge, the following is a quote from Chuang Tse, a Chinese philosopher, who wrote in *Voices from the earth*, "He who knows does not speak and he who speaks knows not".

delineated by dominant local groups, while knowledge valued by marginal groups tends to be neglected and devalued in the larger society. In our schools, the accepted version of knowledge is white, patriarchal and class-specific, with a major emphasis on science (see Kaufman, 1994). But there is other knowledge out there and Giroux proposes opening up our discourse using new language to bring in knowledge from the borders and the peripheries, deterritorializing visions of the world and allowing for more relationships, identities and experiences of difference to be included in our curriculums (Giroux, 1997).

"Rather than with knowledge, our main concern should be with 'knowing' and 'coming to know" writes Wells (2000, p.67). Understanding should be made the primary goal of education because it is the basis of knowing, transformation and progress along time. Rather than regarding a person's intellectual development by measuring the store of receptive and memorized information she has accumulated and comparing it to others (which is basically what is done in traditional testing), Wells proposes we look at the *activity of knowing* which takes place through discourse as participants attempt to achieve better understanding of some aspect of the activity with which they are engaged (Wells, 2000).

St. Julien agrees that it is quality rather than quantity we should be focusing on and uses the term "competence" to refer to Wells' "knowing". Education's fundamental goal is to bring about competence – the ability to act on the basis of understanding. "From the viewpoint of situated cognition, competent action is not grounded in individual accumulations of knowledge, but is instead generated in the web of social relations and human artifacts that define the context of our action" (St. Julien, 1997, p.261). Taking this idea into school teaching and learning situations directs us to abandon theories of knowledge transfer and banking education as methods for teaching since they are conducive to memorization rather than to knowing and achieving competence.

> We in education- and in the culture as a whole – have believed that competence in a field was built on classical knowledge, on facts and rules and essential features. But this is quite simply wrong. Taxonomic features are not the building blocs of competence; they are a discursive product of such competence (St. Julien, 1997, p. 270).

Thus, aiming to construct a pedagogy that will enhance our students' learning and competence, we must look beyond facts, rules and literacy lists and focus on the webs of relationships and artifacts within which our teaching and our students' learning activities take place. Furthermore, we must base our teaching on the understanding that knowledge is subjective rather than universal because one of its components is personal meaning making that is based on

the individual learner's history and life circumstances. "Effective literacy education requires acceptance of diversity of aim and interest", writes Scribner. She describes "literacy in three metaphors" (none of which are mutually exclusive): literacy as adaptation for meeting society's present and future performance needs, literacy as power for advancing an individual, group or community, and literacy as a state of grace referring to a tendency in many societies to endow the literate person with special virtues. Each metaphor "organize[s] different and often opposing views about the nature and function of literacy in our society" (1984, p.6), and within each, the concept and form of teaching and learning do and should differ.

> I attended a Bar-Mitzvah recently[46]. At the end of the ceremony the rabbi's sermon dealt with *da'at* – knowledge, and he presented the understanding of the concept based on the traditional Jewish texts. There are people who study for many years and amass great amounts of knowledge in their minds, but this isn't the kind of knowledge valued in Judaism, he said. According to the ancient texts and their interpretation, only knowledge in the mind that is connected to commitment of the heart is the *da'at* that all should strive for. Of consequence is not the quantity, but the quality of knowledge that is humane, connected, worldly. Only if one knows with heart as well as with mind, has he reached real knowledge.

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Understanding is not "something one has", but "it comes into existence through participation in a particular activity, and as that changes, so it develops – or fades" (Wells, 2000, p.108). In contrast to the traditionally held idea that some groups in the population have a monopoly on knowledge and understanding while other groups are just not capable (based on statistics, averages or the literate/illiterate dichotomy), we can pick up on the idea that reality is created through discourse (Rorty) and use Wells' concept of understanding as well as the concepts of situated cognition and guided participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1996) to direct us in the pursuit of educational inclusion. Based on these ideas, we may assume that learning and understanding are not predetermined or monolithic entities; that individuals make their own meaning and construct knowledge based on their individual prior experiences and on the social and cultural contexts of their actions, such that meaning as well as learning becomes individualized, contingent and situated; it becomes multiple and differentiated (Street, 1995). Using the same vocabulary, we may assume that everyone *can* learn, that every child can understand, make their own meaning

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[46] A Bar-Mitzvzh is a coming-of-age ceremony for Jewish boys of 13. Interestingly, the "test" each child has to pass in order to become a recognized adult in the community is a reading test – the boy reads from the ancient Hebrew Biblical texts proving that he is now capable of reading these texts on his own, understanding them (he delivers an interpretation of the text he has read) and thus is able to take upon himself the fulfillment of the commandments written therein affiliating him with his people.

and come to know through participation in educational activities and that every child is capable of success in learning, except not necessarily in the same way, manner and pace.

How is learning best achieved? From many years of research on how toddlers learn to speak their mother tongue, Brian Camborne came up with a theory of learning that argued that there need to be several conditions present and interacting in a teaching-learning environment in order for meaningful learning to take place for all children. When teachers create an environment of immersion, demonstration, expectations, responsibility, approximation, practice, response and engagement - learning seems to take place for all students (Camborne, 2000/1995).
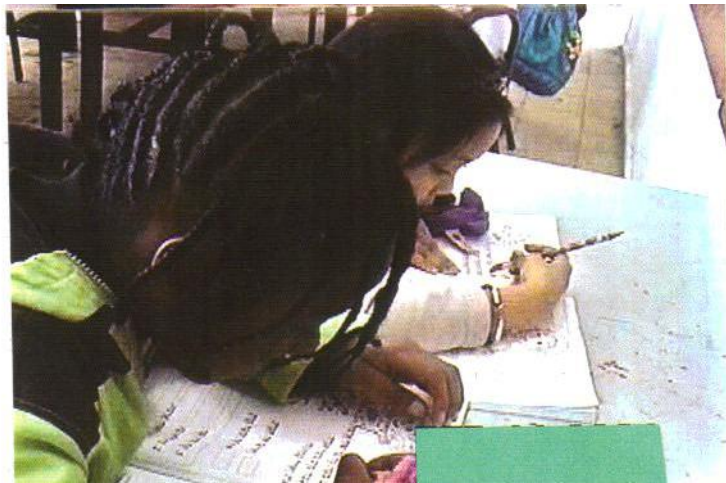
How Does the Child Learn / Fredric Moffet

This is how the child learns:
By the skills between the fingers of his
hands and feet
and their absorption into himself,
In appropriating habits and approaches
from those around him,
By pulling and hauling his own world.
This is how the child learns:
More through experiment and less through
error,
More through pleasure than through pain,
More through experience than through
descriptions,
And with advice more than with commands.
This is how a child learns:
By means of fondness,
Patience,
Understanding,
Belonging,
Doing,
Being.

Every day the child learns some of what you
know
And some of what you think and understand.
He will become what you dream of and
believe in.
Your way of understanding,
Vaguely or clearly,
Your way of thinking,
Dimly or sharply,
Your way of believing,
Foolishly or cleverly,
Your dream,
Grayish, or –
This I like – golden,
Your word,
A lie or the truth –
The child learns all of this.

4.3. In theory

My field of inquiry is education and my discipline is literacy studies. As a sub-discipline I will appropriate a critical, multicultural approach to literacy studies. As means of interpreting, constructing meaning and gaining insight from my data, for bringing into focus my understanding of what otherwise might be "a blurred stream of perception" (Ely et al., 1997, p.228), I will use several theoretical approaches that shall be put together in a *bricoulage* [47] of somewhat concentric circles, from the most general – Hegelian, American Pragmatism and Critical social science, to the more focused – teaching, learning and child development.

4.3.1. Pragmatics

Underlying my paradigm is a Hegelian framework - social, historical and developmentally oriented - based on the idea of the dialectical nature of being and concerned with non-discrete, relative, temporal and changeable particulars, which are dependent upon human action. According to this theoretical approach, the nature of mind is social, it takes an active part in the acquisition of knowledge, an activity that occurs in a dialectical process, and the criterion for knowledge is internal (Figueroa, 1994). All human action is context and language contingent and the individual and her social world "are mutually involved to the extent that precludes regarding them as independently definable" (Rogoff, 1990, p.28).

As an overarching approach to social research and inquiry in general I turn to the Neo-pragmatists and their American leader, Richard Rorty who teaches that philosophy is meaningful only when it is pragmatic, when it helps us get to the other side of the street safely or enjoy more pleasure and less pain.

> From the Sages:
> "A person whose actions exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures, and he whose wisdom exceeds his actions, his wisdom is void" (*Sefer ha'agada*, 1960, p. 368)

Pragmatists believe that the aim of inquiry is not truth but utility, and seeking knowledge, rather than being an attempt to represent reality, is a way of using reality. Rorty believes we should strive to attain a better future and to that end would like to see

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[47] A term used by Claude Levi-Strauss to describe the fragments of ideas, information, stories etc. that a people put together to construct a myth in preliterate societies. (A bricoleur is a handyman).

theory aid practice "…with the task of replacing an unsatisfactory present with a more satisfactory future, thus replacing certainty with hope" (Rorty, 1999, p.32). He cites Dewey, one of the fathers of Pragmatism, saying that the present is only a transitional stage to something which might be unimaginably better, and describes the pragmatists' belief in humanity's capacity for self-creation and its ability to become what it once merely imagined (Rorty, 1999)[48]. The idea that our theories and philosophies must serve us in a practical way by cracking the certainty upon which we habitually function and by creating the potential for social change and hope for a better future is a major idea upon which this work is based. On a moral basis, I believe that studying education should not be an end in itself but a means to an improved future for all the children in the system for whom we currently provide a far from perfect experience.

Pragmatists also maintain that the philosophical questions and problems that traditional philosophers *found* in the world, were actually *made*, or created by the social, historical and cultural environments in which they appeared. "The pragmatist tradition has insisted that [the problems] are made – are artificial rather than natural – and can be unmade by using a different vocabulary than that which the philosophical tradition has used" (Rorty, 1999, p. xxii). Or as Rorty wrote elsewhere, "The world does not speak. Only we do", (Rorty, 1989, p. 6). Building upon this concept, another basic idea in this work is that traditional education systems are prisoners of the language and discourse they are embedded in (i.e. standards, state testing, the success/failure dichotomy, concepts of time, monocultural curriculums, uniform expectations, etc.). This discourse, in and of itself *creates* many of the problems schools have to contend with and which, in turn, are the source of much of the educational inequity found in schools (i.e. if schools didn't try to fit all kids into artificially created and labeled boxes, such as "knows math well", "reads books", they wouldn't have problems with children who don't fit into these categories and wouldn't need to create so many expensive extra programs for the "unfittables").

> Interestingly, philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis. Usually it is explicitly or implicitly a contest between an entrenched vocabulary, which has become a nuisance, and a half- formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises new things (Rorty, 1989, p. 7).

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[48] Dewey understands the purpose of all human activity (including education) to be making life better for the individual as well as the community (Glassman, 2001).

Language, as both process and product, simultaneously confines and structures our life yet is available as a tool at our disposal to facilitate the negotiation of it. Endowing it with the power to make and unmake our understandings of the world, gives rise to both the possibility and the hope that by changing the entrenched language (and, thus, the paradigm) of institutionalized educational discourse, by changing the concepts and metaphors we are bound to, we may be set free and empowered to find new ways of thinking about education, about the purpose of schooling and about the significance of processes of learning and child development. These new understandings may make some of the street crossings we have to face, easier.

4.3.2. Critical studies

Critical social science will be used as a theoretical framework for this study, as it builds upon and incorporates the ideas of pragmatism, seeking alternatives to accepted realities and sociocultural influences (overt and covert) on meaning making.

> Critical social science recognizes the influence of both free will and determinism. It acknowledges that people often act in ways caused by conditions beyond their control. Attempting to reveal the social systems, which determine these actions and their consequences, Critical social science sets into motion newly considered action based on the newly acquired knowledge. This rationality takes an explicitly stated position regarding the relation of theory to practice, one that conceives of knowledge as directly connected to practical needs…. A Critical social science provides an alternative that acknowledges a continuous interplay of micro and macro factors as fundamental (Roth, 1984, p. 300).

A critical perspective reveals and considers the strong sociocultural influences on both consciousness and action (including language and Discourse) and looks at ways in which individuals *within* the ideology and the system can work toward social change (Roth, 1984). Connecting a critical perspective with pragmatism and discourse ideologies is the concept of critical literacy that, very much in the spirit of Pragmatism, is described by Shor to be "language use that questions the social construction of the self". Using "words to rethink worlds" in an attempt to remake ourselves and society in a more socially just image. "Critical literacy involves questioning received knowledge and immediate experience with the goal of challenging inequality and developing an activist citizenry" (Shor, 1999, p. 8). This can be done by: developing a critical perspective on literacy through the use of meta level understandings of language and discourse, critiquing texts to show how they work

to produce effects as part of larger social practices, and critically reading Discourses from a resistance or a transformative perspective (Lankshear, 1999). Critical literacy is political in its use of discourse analysis to illuminate the underlying forces at work in language, forces that bring people to accept certain meanings, values and relationships as normative (Lankshear, 1999). It is a theoretical approach that involves both reflection and action, inviting practitioners to consider alternatives to the way things are, to deeply entrenched ideologies and practices. (Shor, 1999).

4.3.3. Literacy

My approach to literacy is based upon the ideas of the New Literacy Studies group and the work of Barton & Hamilton (1998), Gee (1987,1990), Hicks (1995), Lankshear (1989, 1999), Street (1995) and Taylor (1983, 1993, 1997), among others. In contrast to the traditional understanding of literacy as the technical skills of reading and writing, literacy is "newly" conceptualized as a sociocultural practice. Literacy isn't "autonomous", individualistic or a psychological process, but an ideological concept, social/cultural/historical and multiple in nature, and it is located in interactions between people (Street, 1995). Literacy is knowledge in which all meanings are situated, products of a certain social and cultural environment, differing from knowledge and meaning produced and valued in other contexts. Literacy is locally and socially constituted and intricately woven into the fabric of a culture and a place, such that a child who comes to school from any family and any cultural group, has her own conscious construct of literacy and a history of using oral and written language in culturally validated ways. Lankshear calls this Socioliteracy (1999).

In this study I will assume Gee's idea that literacy is a "socially contested term" based on the moral choices one makes regarding acceptable theories and social practices both for the present and the future. This literate Discourse or cultural "tool kit" that participants in any community share, embodies their ideologies and identities (Gee, 1990). It mediates and partially constitutes a child's learning both in and out of school and school children use it to inform the choices they make as they learn to read and write and as they construct their identities. A concomitant understanding is that literacy isn't a universal construct, rather it is multiple and takes on different shapes, forms and values across time and space, societies, cultures and political configurations (Barton &

Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Hecht, 1998; Fishman, 1988; Lankshear, 1989, 1999; Street, 1995; Taylor, 1983, 1988, 1997; Taylor & Dorsey-Gains, 1993).

Literacy is a double-edged sword, according to Gramsci, which "could be wielded for the purpose of self and social empowerment, or for the perpetuation of relations of repression and domination" (quoted in Friere and Macedo, 1987, p. 2). This is a major issue that needs to be addressed in educational settings where, in theory, schools function to disseminate academic literacy for "self and social improvement", yet in practice, are often used by groups in power to perpetuate "relations of repression and domination", as these groups endorse only a limited number and forms of literacy and deny open access of some groups in society to some forms of literacy - a source of much of the educational inequality found in our schools.

In order to take up the challenge of assessing the social systems that determine people's actions in the critical study of the Tel-Aviv School, I will appropriate in the next circle of theory the conceptual framework of multicultural literacies (and within it, multicultural education), which emphasizes "the manner in which elements of difference – race or ethnicity, gender, class, language, sexual preference – create dynamic tensions that influence literacy access, acquisition, instruction, performance or assessment" (Garcia & Willis, 2001, p. 4). Investigating what it takes for a child to learn to read, I will look at how instruction is organized and implemented at Tel-Aviv, the ideology and values that underlie it, languages used and their place in instruction, attitudes and emotions involved in teacher-student interactions and the messages sent to students regarding their present and future abilities and possibilities. I will situate meaning making in sociocultural, historical and psychological/ biological contingencies, focusing on how the richness and complexity of the environment, the people engaged, ideologies, discourses, practices and materials involved, all interact to produce the specific outcomes that seem to be conducive to the acquisition of school literacies in this one small place at one point in time.

Multicultural education, which means different things to different people, is always about transformation (Nieto, 1999), is rooted in diverse disciplines and encompasses many areas of focus and inquiry. In this study - focusing mainly on

curriculum reform and equity pedagogy - I would like to single out two of multicultural education's major aspects[49]:

a) The critical aspect, which is a dynamic educational reform process, intended to change the structure of educational institutions and the outcomes of their educational goals. These transformation processes are based upon empowerment of teachers and students, allowing them to explore different ways of reading the world and resisting oppression. The ultimate goal is bringing more equity into education and giving more students a chance of achieving academic success (Gay, 1994; Kincheloe, 1997).

b) Multicultural education as a conceptual approach to developing greater self-understanding, positive self-concepts and pride in one's ethnic (or other) identity, based on the understanding that "a better sense of self contributes to the overall intellectual, academic and social achievement of students" (Gay, 1994, p. 12).

Nieto (1997) conceptualizes multicultural education as broad based school reform and sees it as a three-step process (very similar to Roth's description of Critical social science). 1) focusing on factors that might be contributing to the underachievement of students; 2) exploring alternatives to systemic problems that lead to academic failure for many students; and 3) designing and implementing productive learning environments, diverse instructional strategies and pedagogies that offer a deeper awareness of how language and cultural differences influence learning.

Focusing my lens ever closer, I will add to this theoretical *bricoulage,* inner circles of theories regarding teaching and learning and children's cognitive development.

4.3.4. Teaching and professional training

Vygotsky emphasized the inseparability of the individual from the social and of mind from society: "Man is a social creature, and social cultural conditions profoundly change him, developing a whole series of new forms and techniques in his behavior" (Vygotsky & Luria, 1991, p.207). In contrast to Piaget who described psychological/ biological stages of development in children as natural and universal processes of maturation and growth, Vygotsky describes these as cognitive/cultural stages the child goes through,

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[49] See Bennett, 2001.

differentiated by the ways in which the child adapts himself to the outside world, uses objects, the forms of invention and the cultural techniques he appropriates - all of which are tools mediating the process of cognitive development (Vygotsky & Luria, 1991).

The environment constitutes the potential reservoir for the child's specifically human/cultural traits and is the source of her cognitive development (Dewey, 1964/1974; Vygotsky, 1994; Wallon, 1984b). The rudimental forms of human behavior that exists within the child interact with the final forms that exist in the environment and, if there is no disruption of this process, the child has the potential of developing these final forms of human/cultural behavior. The relationship between the child and her environment is dynamic and dialectical, both constantly changing in relationship to each other. "Nature and environment do not simply make separate contributions which are then combined; [rather] each one serves to bring out the other's potentialities" in the developing child (Wallon, 1984b, p. 217). Child development has to do with making progress in skill, understanding and perspectives regarding culturally appropriate problem solving in a dynamic process of change and transformation through increasing participation in situated communities of practice. Thus, in order to understand the development of higher mental processes in children, one must consider "the social roots of both the tools for thinking that children are learning to use and the social interactions that guide children in their use" (Rogoff, 1990, p.35; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, 1990).

Child development isn't universal since environments and contexts are not universal. Assessing a child's cognitive development necessitates a very localized and personal perspective:

> Development involves progress toward local goals and valued skills. The issue is to open our view to multiple value systems and appropriate goals, and to define the purpose of development in a fashion that is sensitive to "local" circumstances and aspirations (Rogoff, 1990, p.57).

"All theories of learning are based on fundamental assumptions about the person, the world and their relations" (Lave, 1991, p.47). Understanding the situated nature of a child's cognitive development (within her social/ cultural/ historical contexts), means not only seeing her and her environment as co-dependents in a generalized process, but the specifics of both are of the essence since the "ideal endpoints of development" change across time and space. Depending upon the circumstances and the individual child's

characteristics, appropriate cognitive development may take diverse courses. For example, the endpoints of development in learning the household economic system, a trade or school literacies are very different from each other, as are the expectations from the learner and the appropriate courses of action to be taken in each case. Thus, the idea of "a single universal goal of development" will not be accepted in this paper, but rather an understanding of the need to examine the internal coherence of the developmental process of any event or person according to both the local and species nature of goals and processes (Rogoff, 1990; Scribner, 1984).

A fundamental attribute of human beings, according to Vygotsky, is the ability to teach and to benefit from instruction in a process of education, one trajectory of which is the transference of knowledge to the child in preparing her to become a competent adult. Educative instruction is socially organized and historically contingent, but at its core it necessitates a unique form of cooperation and interdependence between the child and the teaching adult. Moreover, the intellectual skills that children ultimately acquire in the education process are contingent upon their relationships and interactions with others in problem solving environments such as schools. Dewey posits that activity and thought in a spirit of free inquiry are the engines moving education and learning in which the process itself is the goal. The teacher acts as facilitator in the learning process, keeping the children on a stable course as they carry out their inquiries into projects of interest to themselves. (Dewey, 1938; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Glassman, 2001; Moll, 1990; Rogoff, 1990).

Dewey argues for a bottom-up/indeterminate approach to education emanating from the child and her individual interest. Traditional school methods fail to acknowledge the diversity of abilities and needs their students have as they provide a uniform curriculum for all. Conformity becomes the criterion a student is judged by, leading to unwillingness to learn and failure for those students whose needs are not addressed by the system[50]. A pivotal concept in pedagogy should be respect for the individual child, her abilities, needs and interests and working with these to create the motivation necessary for the child to learn (Dewey, 1964/1974). Dewey calls for a dynamic and imaginative

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[50] Dewey uses the metaphor of information being inscribed on a phonographic disc and given back when a button is pressed during a recitation or examination, similar to Friere's "banking education".

interaction in educational settings where the means (free inquiry) are the end, propelled forward by "a state of disturbed equilibrium that represents need" (Glassman, 2001).

Vygotsky, on the other hand, sees a top-down/determinate process where society, history and culture, by channeling student inquiry to culturally significant and appropriate domains, determine the learning process. Basic to Vygotsky's philosophy of learning is the concept of the zone of proximal development, which is the metaphorical "place" at the bottom of which lies that child's potential of development and at the top of which are the teacher's attempts to teach by arousing this potential and allowing it to grow[51]. Good teaching, says Vygotsky, will awaken in the child and bring forth functions that are budding in her zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1956). Teachers in such an educational process become coaches and mentors, using the children's potential as they assist their learning, allowing the individual child to achieve more than she is capable of doing alone.

In their work on teaching and teachers, Gallimore & Tharp appropriate Vygotsky's ideas. They understand teaching to be a process of assisting performance that can be founded on some or all of six activities: modeling (offering behavior for modeling), contingency managing (rewards and punishments are arranged to follow behavior), feeding back (feedback information on performance), instructing, questioning and cognitive structuring (providing a structure for thinking and acting). But, although teaching is the sole formal purpose for the existence of schools, most schools "accept highly limited responsibility for assisting the performance of their personnel" (Gallimore & Tharp 1990, pg. 188). Very little actual teaching occurs in schools, they argue, because all the way up and down the educational ladder, from children through teachers to supervision, rather than assisting performance, "teaching" in schools means "the practice of directing and assessing" (Gallimore & Tharp 1990).

In contrast to this traditional way of organization, Gallimore & Tharp suggest a model of teaching in which "the duties of each individual in the school system should be to assist the performance of the person next down the line: the superintendent assists the principal, the principal assists the teachers, the teachers assist the pupil" (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p.

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[51] I found a very similar idea in Dewey's "The need for a philosophy of education" when he talks about the children's abilities as the raw material that the teacher must work with to extract their possibilities (Dewey, 1964/1974).

188), in an interactive process based on dialogue in which influences are reciprocal on both teacher and learner. These teaching/literacy events must occur in activity settings that incorporate cognition and activity with external, environmental, objective features of the occasion (setting)[52].

Vygotsky advocates for learning to take place in situations of interaction among partners. The partners can be peers or persons of different generations who differ in their development of skills and understanding, with one of them being "more capable". Cognitive development can take place between people when one of them is more skilled and knows more about the use of the specific intellectual tools of the society in which the interaction is taking place, leading and coaching the learning process (Rogoff, 1990). This educational interaction must be a process in which meanings are exchanged through dialogue (Roth, 1984). Freire relates to the dialogic nature of education: the essence of dialogue is the word, and the word has two dimensions: reflection and action. When we name the world by using true words, we transform our world through dialogue, thus achieving significance as human beings. Dialogue is an act of creation and re-creation, which is not possible if it isn't infused with love, he says, but not sentimental love, rather love which is courage and commitment to others and their liberation. "Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human" (Freire,1970, p. 71). Dialogue is the underlying structure upon which teaching/learning processes occur and upon which knowledge is created and recreated between people engaged in shared activities. "To most truly teach, one must converse; to truly converse is to teach" (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p. 196). The educational dialogue, or "instructional conversation", should be based on careful listening and mutual respect, reminiscent of the communicative styles of caregivers (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

Teacher training is a major focus of The Houston Annenberg Challenge for public school reform, a Houston, TX based research/action project. It focuses primarily on underserved children and those living in urban areas, with the objectives of improving public schools and improving student achievements based "on a belief in America's

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[52] Examples of activity setting for students are whole class activities, small group cooperative learning, choir rehearsals, trips. Activity settings for teachers can be faculty committees, workshops, grade-level meetings, individual coaching.

democratic obligation to educate all children well". One of its basic concepts is to encourage local planning and ownership in reform efforts, believing that such an approach "leads to more successful and enduring change", because those closest to the schools know best about the school's specific problems and are the ones most effected by

the reform outcomes (*Transforming public schools, 2000).*

> Annenberg assumes that school change occurs and strong professional communities develop as educators engage in reviewing their own practices to strengthen student learning... That school reform can be sustained by building caring learning environments for students... [And] that reducing isolation between teachers, parents and the larger community leads to coherent support for school reform (*Transforming Public Schools*, 2000:11) [53].

Consequently, the Houston Annenberg Challenge for public school reform invests heavily in teacher training, based on the belief that in strong professional communities one finds better teachers "because they have clear consensus on learning goals for their schools, and they share information, collaborate and take collective responsibility for achieving school goals" (*Transforming Public Schools*, 2000, p. 11) [54]. Additionally, targeting transformation of students' learning environments into smaller structures in which the teacher can get to know the student better is a major goal. The theory here is that the more knowledge the teacher has of the child and her family, the more effective she will be at providing opportunities for the child to succeed (*Transforming Public Schools*, 2000).

4.3.5. Emotions and cognition

Moving deeper into the domain of teaching and learning, one must consider the emotional basis of these activities[55] and the central role it plays in both, since we know that learning and teaching are embedded in personal interactions with cause and effect on both the personal and the interactive levels (Beane, 1990). Vygotsky was critical of psychology's tendency to separate thinking from affect, as if thoughts could think themselves "segregated from the fullness of life, from the personal needs and interests, the

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[53] Independent evaluators of the project have found that the Annenberg funded schools made significant progress in school reform and that students increased scores in reading and math throughout the participating schools between 1999 and 2000 (*Transforming Public Schools*, 2000).
[54] More than 40% of all direct funding goes to teacher training (Transforming Public Schools, 2000:11).
[55] About which the literature is lacking, possibly due to the psychological tradition of understanding cognition as an autonomous "scientific" process and affect as emotional reaction absent reason.

inclinations and impulses, of the thinker" (Vygotsky, 1986, p.10). Meaning making is a dynamic system in which the intellectual and the affective unite and where "every idea contains a transmuted affective attitude toward the bit of reality to which it refers", permitting the social researcher "to trace a path from the person's needs and impulses to the specific direction taken by his thoughts and the reverse path from his thoughts to his behavior and activity" (Vygotsky, 1986, p.10-11). And when studying humans, "a true and full understanding of another's thought is possible only when we understand its affective-volitional basis" (ibid. p.252).

On another level, both Vygotsky and Wallon understood the emotional experiences of children to be indivisible unities of personal and environmental characteristics, such that the context in which the experience takes place is as important as the child's given nature in eliciting a specific emotional experience (Vygotsky, 1994, Wallon, 1984). Thus, I can imagine a tree-way dynamic being created, with each element effecting and reflecting the other in a dialogic relationship:
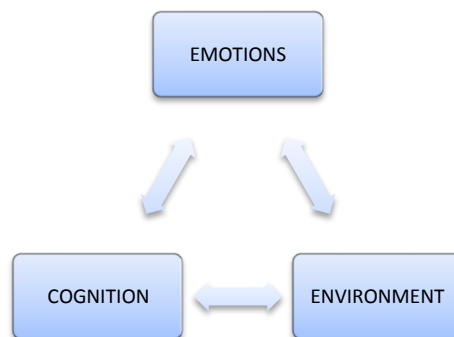
Beane (1990) argues that there can be no education without the affective element, of which emotions are part. "Affect enters the curriculum in any experience that influences (or attempts to influence) how young people see themselves, the world around them, and their place in the world" (p. 10). He defines affect as an aspect of human thought and behavior including emotions, preferences, choices and feelings, which are based on beliefs attitudes, aspirations and appreciation of what a person sees as desirable for her own personal development and social relationships. These individual goals are cognition contingent, informed by previous learning and past experiences and they, in turn, influence one's purposeful action in terms of values, morals, ethics, aesthetics. "Affect is one dimension of humanness and functions simultaneously with other dimensions in learning

experiences. Therefore education must be affective and cannot be otherwise, just as it must be cognitive and cannot be noncognitive" (Beane, 1990, p. 10).

The issue isn't whether emotions should be part of learning to read, because they are. The debate should be about how and which emotions are and should be connected to teaching, learning and thinking (Coles, 1998, Brooks, 1999). Studies have shown an inverse connection between anxiety and academic performance; how poor learning can produce negative emotions, and these can, inversely, impair learning; how positive emotions can contribute to school achievement and vice versa (Coles, 1998). Cohen cites research showing that effective social and emotional learning programs result in students displaying enhanced self control, improved behavior and better skills handling interpersonal problems, all of which positively affect the kids' ability to learn. While academic scores have been shown to be "extraordinarily *nonpredictive*" of satisfaction and productivity throughout life, emotional well-being is "dramatically and positively predictive" of academic achievement and post-school productivity (Cohen, 1999).

Emotions are about connections to people and places write Oakley & Nundy (1996, p. 268):

> They connect what happens in the external world (events) to elements of the mind (goals and beliefs). They are the means by which people become ready for particular kinds of action, and shift attention from one goal or plan to another. Moreover, emotions are the primary means by which people relate to each other. Happiness is the emotion of cooperation, anger the emotion of conflict, fear (or anxiety) the emotion of preoccupation with safety and danger.

They too believe cognitive and affective processes "cannot be disentangled" and that "the acquisition of cultural skills cannot be divorced from emotions and attitudes towards these skills, or towards the adults and institutions that transmit them" (Oakley & Nundy, 1996, p. 259). It is as much the milieu as it is the child's emotions - both in a dialectical relationship - that either open or close the gates of cognition.

Emotions relate differently to learning and to teaching. In her article "The Wedge Between Cognition and Emotion" Kaufman deals with the relationship between emotions and learning beginning with a critique of the traditional division in western society between cognition and emotion, which is especially felt and damaging in schools where the major role emotions play in learning and knowledge construction is insufficiently

acknowledged (if at all). She outlines the history of the idea that knowledge and cognition are associated with science, objectivity, maleness, the rational and the general, while emotion and feeling – considered the opposite of "mind" - are associated with the female, the subjective, the non-scientific. The function of this "myth of aboriginal knowledge" (the "wedge"), she claims, is to perpetuate the unequal balance of power in our society along race, class and gender lines.

> If the only legitimate knowledge is supposedly 'discovered' through rational and impersonal means, and if women, the lower class and people of color are viewed as dominated by their emotions, then power over knowledge is restricted to those members of the social order who can control their emotions and of course who control the definition of legitimate knowledge (Kaufman, 1994, p.45).

In many schools (where we "teach content not children", as she writes) children's emotions become important only when they interfere with their learning. Teachers (mostly female) are considered the affective component in education while those responsible for curricula, school structure and ideology (mostly male) are considered the cognitive component, functioning (again) "to concentrate power in the hands of those who provide "intellect", so that knowledge construction is viewed as something that does not occur in the classroom" (Kaufman, 1994, p.45). Kaufman argues for the necessity of understanding the emotional/cognitive unity of knowledge as a way of validating the individual learner as meaning maker and as capable of knowing the world. Introducing this idea into the classroom, she assumes, will bring about a change of focus from memorization of content to facilitating knowledge construction, based upon the idea (Vygotsky's) that words devoid of the emotions we import to them, are meaningless.

Hargreaves tackles issues of emotions associated with teaching. "Good teaching is not just a matter of being efficient, developing competence, mastering technique and possessing the right kind of knowledge. Good teaching also involves emotional work" (1997, p.12). Effective teaching depends upon building emotional understanding with colleagues, parents and students, possible only through deep, long term, sustained emotional relationships. In our current educational scheme there is little time for developing such relationships so we substitute for them fleeting, episodial, small bursts of "designed" emotions, "Disneyfing" our emotions (his metaphor is of pre-printed Hallmark cards to

describe the emotional content of much teaching today) instead of constructing meaningful emotional understanding of others (Hargreaves, 2001).

All teaching involves emotional labor, which can be a labor of love conducive to the process, or when conditions aren't supportive, plain toil labor that produces burn- out. Teaching based on emotional labor of love is most effective when it is based on emotional understanding that can be generated from several sources: vicariously through arts and literature, as when we read about other people or other cultures and learn to understand them better; through emotional infection, when we "catch" other people's emotions and begin emulating them; and from deep, long term, sustained relationships, which are vital for learning to read each other in situations where considerable differences of class, race, ethnicity, etc. are present. "Not seeing color", treating all minority kids the same or treating all honors kids the same in tracking groups, is an example of emotional misunderstanding, says Hargreaves (2001).

5. Introducing the Tel-Aviv School

5.1. General background and history

5.1.1. The physical environment

The houses in the neighborhood are worn and crumbling from the humid ocean air, from age and from the constant rumbling of endless buses going up and down the streets and through the narrow winding alleys at all hours. Dirty beiges and peeling grays dominate the color palette, with strands of colorful washing hanging to dry punctuating the drab scene like decorative jewelry. Fumes from the buses and taxis innumerable thicken the air and the sound of their motors and horns combined with the blaring music and calls of the merchants at the open-air markets assault the ears. Sex shops, phone shops, real-estate establishments dot the streets. People from the world over – many of them in national costumes – crowd the sidewalks. A whirlwind of movement and activity, sounds, colors and smells engulf the passer-by.

And then there is the school. Located at the center of all of this mayhem, sitting big, bright and proud, an island of serenity and cleanliness, surrounded and separated from the world outside by a metaphoric ocean – a tall turquoise metal fence. And it is as if these painted metal rods have some kind of magical power (in the Middle East, the color turquoise is believed to keep the bad spirits away), an ability to keep that which is enclosed by them separated both physically and conceptually from the world outside.

The
neighborhoods in the
south of Tel-Aviv where
the school is located,
were among the very
first to be built more
than 100 years ago on
the sand dunes by the
Mediterranean ocean,
the site of what would become Israel's largest city. With time, the area became more
commercial and industry moved in, pushing residential areas to the north of the city.
Those who could, left. When the first central bus station was built in the area the
government compensated people who were willing to relocate and the same happened
when the new bus station was built half a mile down the road (The Tel-Aviv School is
situated between the two), yet there were people who stayed, mostly the elderly and the
very poor, and the area deteriorated even farther due to neglect and the salty sea air,
becoming a locus of shady activity and prostitution. (Map, Appendix 2).

The mid 80's saw a comeback of the area as a result of huge waves of
immigration to Israel, mostly from the former Soviet Union. The available apartments,
low rents and proximity to public transportation lured many newcomers. The
neighborhoods began to flourish in terms of the new life that was coming in, yet they are
to this day considered among the 8 "most needy of development" areas in Israel.

The school was built by the British[56] in 1934. It deteriorated slowly together
with the surrounding neighborhoods, to the point where it was totally run down
and decrepit. Five principals came and went within 4 years at the end of the 80's and the
school was given the dubious distinction of "the most violent school in Tel-Aviv". In
1991, Mrs. Amira Yahalom was asked to head the school and she agreed on condition
that the building be physically overhauled. Windows were double glazed to keep out the
noise, bathrooms were built, air-conditioning was put in every classroom, a spacious

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[56] Who were governing the area at that time.

room ("*the nicest room in the building*") was dedicated as a teachers' lounge, a library-cum-retreat was built on the top floor and a top of the line computer center was brought in. Everything was freshly painted and a big yard was paved all around the building allowing for ample, clean play space.

The school building is a three story, three-sided rectangle, its two side "arms" perpendicular to the front gate and L. Street, which is a main thoroughfare. The classrooms are all in the side sections while the center of the building houses a gym on the first floor, office and teachers' lounge on the second floor and library and conference room on the top floor. The yard surrounding the school is paved, several large trees are planted in front and the science teacher has a garden growing out back. On the left of the building is a paved basketball/ soccer court and an air raid shelter, on the right – a small parking lot for the teachers' cars, serving as playground during recess as well.

The teachers' lounge

5.1.1. The human element

At the time of the writing of this paper there were about 300 children attending Tel-Aviv, but the numbers change constantly with about 40 entries and exits throughout the year. This year 2 kindergarten classes were added, raising the number of students by 70. Other than the kindergartens (that were not there when I was), there are 12 classes, 2 each in grades 1-6 (down from 3 classes per grade in past years). The faculty numbers about 30 (full and part time), 12 homeroom teachers, each one responsible for one class (they are called "educator/mentor" – *mechanechet*), 10 professional teachers (2 math, 2 English, science, sports, computers, music, art and technology), and about 6 support staff. Two janitors work for the school and an armed guard watches the front gate. To these are added teaching help, a social worker and a psychologist, all part time.

Despite the huge changes, essential as well as physical, the school's reputation continues to be poor among some people. I talked to a woman who had just registered her son for the upcoming year in 1st grade. She was apologetic:

> "*I heard a lot of bad things about this school so I wanted to register my son at the Science School, but tomorrow I'm starting a new job and the Science School will be inconvenient for me, so I registered him here*".[57]
> "*What did you hear about the school?*" I asked.
> "*That there are a lot of Arabs here*".
> "*Who told you bad things about the school?*"
> "*A lot of parents…*"

But as she was speaking, she considered her statement and said that she had heard the criticism from parents who don't have children in this school. Actually, she said, parents that have children in the school say good things about it.

Haviva, the mother of Hana who joined the school in January, also heard negative things about the school before they moved to the area.

> "*We moved here from a beautiful neighborhood in the North where Hana had a good school, but my sister is sick and I have to take care of her so I had no choice. I was very concerned about this school because I had heard so many bad opinions about it before we came. But when I saw how happy my sister's children are at Tel-Aviv, we decided Hana would try and see how she felt, and I have to*

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[57] The Science School is a magnet school nearby. It is considered to have higher standards than Tel-Aviv and a "better" population of students.

say she is very happy here. From my experience with other schools I can say that this is a good school, the level of studies is high and the support and help everyone gets is outstanding. We're very happy, and when my little daughter grows up, I'll send her to the school wholeheartedly".

Later she added,

"When you look at the outside of the school, located between the old Central Bus Station and the new one, and you look around and see the people from all over: the Philippinos, the Ethiopians, the Blacks, the Russians, the Romanians, the Israelis, it's frightening because you think 'What can be taught in a school with children from so many places?' Zeh machneess lelachatz *(*it's upsetting*) because you think 'How is it possible to teach a Jewish child who knows Hebrew together with a Romanian or Ethiopian child who just arrived and don't know the language or the culture?'"*

School demographics changed with the changing face of the area. From serving a population of veteran Israeli families originating mostly from North Africa and the Middle East, it went to a mix of veteran Israelis and newly immigrated Russians, with some Arabs adding flavor to the "salad", and in the past few years there was an explosion of diversity on the scene as economic migrants from all over the world settled in the area, their children slowly trickling into the school. Explained Sara Lotan, the school superintendent: "*The population of the school is mobile, temporary and heterogeneous. This demographic uniqueness dictates the school's activities*".

The changing demographics/languages At the Tel-Aviv School 1996-2000

Blue – children whose mother tongue is Hebrew.

Yellow – children whose mother tongue is other.
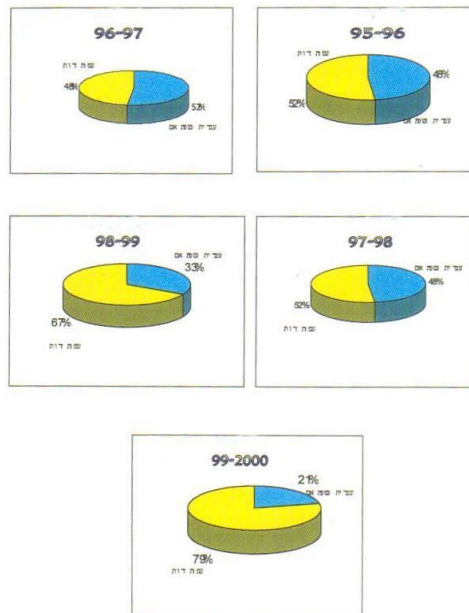
The children in school today come from veteran Israeli families, Arab families, families of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and families of economic migrants. The children come from 25-32 countries and speak about 18 different languages and dialects[58]. The teachers all speak a second and many times a third and fourth language. It is interesting to note that many of the teachers are, themselves, new immigrants from Russia, Uzbekistan, Bulgaria and, this year, Syria, thus are familiar with the trails and tribulations of migration and adjustment to new environments as well as with the languages and dialects the kids speak and with the different cultural issues that arise. Bar-Shalom (2000, p.70) writes about a teacher at Tel-Aviv who had immigrated to Israel from Russia some years ago:

> She said that her daughter had a hard time with the Hebrew language tests at school, and today, when she (the teacher) translates and helps these [Russian children who don't know Hebrew well yet], she is very moved and she cries. She feels as if this is 'closing a circle'.

In addition, about half of the teachers are Israeli-born and belong to the ethnic groups that make up the veteran Israeli school population (Ashkenazi and Sepharadi), creating an overall snug fit between the teachers and the students.

The children at Tel-Aviv come from the poorest groups in Israeli society, largely lacking social voice and power. They are children of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who, for different reasons, did not manage to rise in spite of government aid or those who were refused help because they were not Jewish and were unwilling or unable to return to their countries of origin[59]; children of economic migrants to the country,

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[58] Document I details the countries of origin of the children of one 1st grade class in 1998.
[59] According to the Law of Return, since Israel is a country that was established as a homeland for the Jewish people following the Holocaust, any Jew in the world who wants it, is entitled to Israeli citizenship and government aid (in housing, employment, loans, etc.) for settling in Israel. With the huge waves of immigration from Russia, however, came many non-Jews who tried to jump the bandwagon of economic

some residing there legally, but most not. The school also includes a group of Arab children who are living in a Jewish state at war with their own countries and the whole school is situated within an ongoing war of terror - some days more frightening than others – that intensifies the fears, stress, worries, nightmares and pain all around.

The principal is Mrs. Amira Yahalom, a petite woman in her early sixties, short black hair, large gray eyes, always adorned with earrings and a necklace to match and dressed in "calm-colored outfits", as she says. Mrs. Yahalom has been the principal of Tel-Aviv for the past 10 years and is the main architect of its overhaul. The superintendent responsible for Tel-Aviv is Mrs. Sara Lotan, who oversees Tel-Aviv together with 18 other schools in the district, reporting directly to the head of the Central District of the Department of Education. There is a relationship of mutual respect and admiration between Sara and Amira, so much so that Amira went out of her way to please Sara whom she knew was impartial to aesthetics. Since the Tel-Aviv School is very sparsely decorated most of the time (except when holidays are approaching), she brought from home two large potted plants and placed them in the bare hallway[60]. Sara was very pleased. Since then, however, these plants have dried up and withered (although they are still standing in their original places in the central hallway). Nobody thought of watering them.

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incentives. Some succeeded, others were intercepted and of these, many live in the neighborhoods near the Tel-Aviv School.

[60] In principle, Amira believes the teachers' time is best devoted to the children and the school's limited resources to useful, rather than beautifying objects. She explained: *"I had a small sum of money left over one year. Another principal would have bought a nice sculpture to decorate the front yard with, but I used the money to buy software in the different languages we need for communicating with the parents of our kids in their native languages"*.

5.2. "And anyway, we're all human beings"

("Vehbeechlal, koolanoo bnei adam"): A quilt of many faces

5.2.1 Diversity

"They're all equal because they're all different
(Koolam shaveem key koolam shoneem)
Aviva, Tel-Aviv T.A.

The children at Tel-Aviv are varied as any other group of youngsters in the country's schools, and then some. As of this school year, their ages range from 3 to 13 due to the last minute addition of two multi-aged kindergarten classes. They all live in the neighborhoods surrounding the school and are those children whose families chose not to send them to the other neighborhood school - a public Jewish religious school, a science magnet school or the Christian mission school in a neighboring town.

With the changing demographics of Israel (about one million new immigrants from the former Soviet Union have settled in the country in the past 15 years. This number reflects about 20% of the Jewish population of the State of Israel) and of the specific area (an influx of economic migrants have settled here – the estimates are of between 50,000 to 100), the school population has changed from being predominantly lower SES Israeli born children, to being a mix of Israelis, Arabs, new immigrants from the different Soviet republics, mostly the Muslim ones, and children from a plethora of other countries. This year about one third of the student body came from each of these groups (Israeli, Russian, other). All in all, the 300 children come from about 3o countries[61] and speak about 18 different languages and dialects, making the Tel-Aviv School by far the most diverse school in Israel in terms of countries of origin and languages spoken by its students. Document II shows the demographic changes of the student population over 7 years 1995-2002.

On top of these overt distinctions, children also differ in their native language and Hebrew language proficiency and some of them are at a point where they are not fluent in any language and have generally low literacy skills. The children also have very different

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[61] Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, Turkey, Rumania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Caucasus, Kazakhstan, Bukhara, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Poland, Turkey, Spain, England, Columbia, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Philippines, Thailand

histories of "literate immersion" (Lankshear, 1999) and learning abilities or challenges – from those who are older yet cannot read or write in any language, to others who have never had the experience of formal education or have had their education interrupted, to those who are on age level academically but have non-academic problems that create obstacles to their learning, and some are at a high academic level and consider the school not academically challenging enough. In addition, many of the children are not Jewish, a major handicap in the Israeli public school system whose basic ideology, curriculums and pedagogies are Judeo-centric.

And there are the run-of-the-mill differences, such as differences of pace, as Olga, the English teacher, told me:"*I learned that there are some children who just sit for long periods of time and do nothing… play around. Then, suddenly they wake up and begin learning*".

> From the Sages:
>
> "Teach the child according to his ways" (*Proverbs*, 22:6).

Rachel talked about recognizing the different learning styles and comfort zones of her students[62]:

> "*Every person has their own learning style. Every person concentrates in a different manner. That's why I let the children do whatever's comfortable for them in my classes, as long as they're learning and not bothering others. They can eat if they want to or suck candy; they can sit wherever they feel like sitting – I had a child who liked to read sitting in the closet at the back of the room – if sitting alone helps them or sitting by the window, by all means; one of my students this year sprawls across the desk… These are all extrinsic differences that have nothing to do with the learning going on in the class*".

> From the Sages:
>
> "Rabbi Me'ir used to say: every man differs from another by three things: by his voice, by his appearance and by his knowledge" (*Sefer ha'agada*, 1960, p. 452).

What do 5th graders David and Ohz think about the great diversity at school?

> David: *"It doesn't bother us. They're all like us. We treat them as if they were Israeli children"*.

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[62] Kate Witkin (1977) has a photograph in her book called "read relaxed" showing several of her students sprawled, slouching, positioned upside down on their chairs, reading books…

Ohz: *"They have the same hearts, the same lungs. Everything, everything is the same. The only thing is maybe a different skin color…*
David: *And we don't consider that".*

And how do they treat the foreign kids that come to school?

I can tell you for example about the [British] *girl who came here*[63]. *I speak English to her from time to time and I play with her a lot, even though I have a girlfriend, it doesn't bother me. I play with her because she's alone and she plays with the 1st graders and I want her to have some companionship so she won't be lonely. This is what is called* geeboosh[64], Ohz said.

David gave his own example:

"This kid came to our class [from Georgia] *and he didn't know Hebrew so we simply played soccer and included him all the time and slowly when everybody was talking he started understanding our language and now he speaks ok".*

Daniella, a 5th grader who came from Rumania 5 years ago, enjoys the diversity,

*"B*ecause *it's possible to learn from* [children from other countries] *a lot of things that we don't know. And it doesn't matter the color or the face or a different religion. It's not at all important. And anyway, we're all human beings".*

Continuing this theme of learning from others, I asked Ohz to give me one reason he likes being at Tel-Aviv (a feeling to which he professed earlier). He said:

"That there are children here [speaking different] *languages".*
"Why is this good for you?" I asked.
"Because we help each other with the different languages. For example [Hiram] *is Spanish* [65], *if I want to know a little Spanish and he wants to know Hebrew, we teach each other".*

He learned some Arabic from his friends, but he'd like to learn more because,

*"For example, if I'll go somewhere and see an Arab who is stuck (*takooaa*)*[66], *how will I be able to ask him what happened and what's going on, because I'd want to help him".*

"Common denominators are more important than differences here", says Osnat, a first year, 3rd grade teacher. Yet the diversity of the children is proactively used as an asset by the teachers, a *manof* (a crane, lever), was the metaphor Anat M. used: *"We use*

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[63] She's in 5th grade.
[64] Bonding of a group. A term widely used in Hebrew referring to the social practice of creating a coherent group out of individuals, creating relationships that bond them to the group and its causes.
[65] He is actually Columbian.
[66] Referring to someone whose car breaks down and finds himself "stuck" on the side of the road.

the children's differences as a manof, to enrich our curriculum and the children's experiences here".

Amira delineates two possible scenarios that can be envisioned in circumstances such as the school's: one can remain static in the comfort of "no expectations" (the system from the school, the school from its students) or the dire situation can promote action and development since the only way out is up.

> When you hit a sandbar, you have to decide upon action. You can drown, but this can also be a *manof*. Coming from such poverty and having so many cultures… the disadvantage can be turned into an advantage. There's a lot that can be done and progress can be made (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.80).

Hana's mother was happy with the diversity at school[67]:

> *"There are children here from many countries, something that increases the knowledge and widens the horizons of our children. Like for example this year during Hannuka. I know only about Hannuka but my daughter came home having learned about Christmas and Ramadan also. These are things that I myself don't know about and I think it gives the children a great deal (torem hamon). I know there are other parents who are not pleased with all the foreign children and have a lot of complaints, but I am happy with it. I think it's superb (me'ooleh)".*

Kincheloe talks about the power of acknowledging difference to expand peoples' horizons and social understanding and the use of subjugated knowledge to produce new levels of insight. "As such a powerful force, difference must not simply be tolerated but cultivated as a spark for human creativity". Understanding difference nurtures a critical sense of empathy (Kincheloe, 1997, p.43).

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The Israeli children sometimes have difficulties with and need time to get used to this diversity. Batia spoke out on the issue. She came to 6th grade at Tel-Aviv from another town at the beginning of the year. Her former school had no foreign students and she found it hard to deal with the situation here (although her father is Portuguese and her mother Israeli). She became very angry, she admitted:

> *"When I first came here everybody seemed weird, each in his own way. I was afraid to talk to the children. I was afraid to approach them. I didn't like all the kids who didn't speak Hebrew and weren't Jewish and I said bad things to them*

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[67] Video 3 – 0:55:02-0:58:09

and hurt their feelings all the time. So on Hanukah I brought a fir tree to class. It was also chag hamolad, *Christmas. Because I had hurt their feelings I wanted to apologize".*

"Why did you choose to bring a fir tree, of all things?" asked the teacher.

 "Like, since I was , like, always telling them that I was, like, different from them because, like, I was Jewish and they weren't, that they're, like, different from me, that's why I decided to bring a fir tree because it isn't something Jewish.

I asked Batia why she changed her mind about the children.

"Suddenly I'm seeing the children in a different light because I see their inside not their outside, and I understand that it doesn't matter what he looks like, if he's black or, I don't know what, white. There's no difference".

And the newcomers to Israel don't have it easy either. Gloria (4th grade from Venezuela) told me that the children in class laugh when she makes a mistake and it's very embarrassing. Tim (4th grade from Uzbekistan) asked me to come with him to the library where he wanted to share his favorite book "*Tom the Blue Cat*" with me. He began reading aloud but continued by following the pictures and telling the story orally The story tells about Tom the cat who was born blue and different from all the other gray cats. He was ridiculed and excluded from their company and as consolation he began playing the guitar alone in his room. The day he was old enough, Tom left home and ended up being the best guitarist and most famous cat-star who all the other cats applauded and tried to imitate by painting themselves blue.
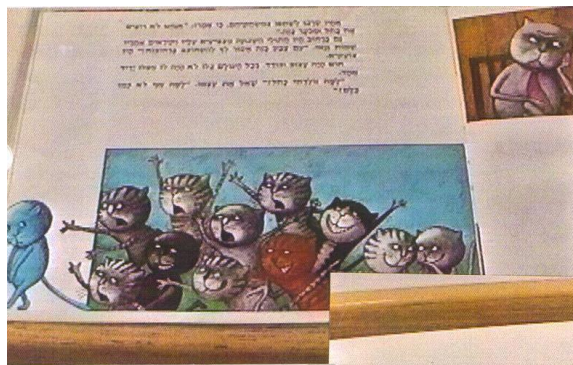
Dad is concerned.
The cats ostracize Tom.

The cats paint themselves blue
At Tom's concert

FEB 27 2001
3:02:57 AM

I asked Tim why he liked this book so much.

"It's a very excellent book", he said. *"It's wonderful…because at the beginning he had bad feelings but later he had very good feelings when everyone painted their fur blue and they cheered for him and wanted to be his friends".* Later he added*, "When I came to Israel* (from Uzbekistan) *I was like Tom. Nobody wanted to play with me and the children hit me because I didn't know Hebrew. But now everybody wants to play with me and they all are my friends"*.

Teachers too had to adjust to the multicultural reality. Neta remembers:

"*Seven years ago, when the tides began turning and foreign and Arab children started showing up in school, there was much resentment among the teachers. 'How will we teach them?' 'Will we have to give up our Jewish teaching?' We were afraid of new and unfamiliar values flooding our school"*.

And the present isn't perfect. Anat K.:

"There were many difficulties along the years. Words were thrown into the air, hard feelings. It's not as if we woke up one morning loving all children, committed to this pedagogy. It was a difficult process and even today we sometimes have trouble dealing with diversity, when it conflicts with personal ideology, for example".

All of this pours into issues of the school's overall identity – is it a Jewish school? A multicultural school, as its name implies? The faculty has reached a certain compromise on this issue but some think it has gone much too far in its acceptance of and respect for difference. The principal has received several phone threats from prominent Rabbis regarding the openness of the school curriculum. And Amos, a veteran teacher who is teaching for his last year before retirement, was very outspokenly disgruntled about the school multicultural policies. He was loud and angry as he spoke his mind in the teachers' lounge during the morning break:

"How come we don't sing the national anthem in our school ceremonies? [68] *Yes, every child has a right to an education and to an identity of his own. But we must remember that this is a Jewish state and we can't forget whom WE are when we stand in front of the children. We allow the children to develop their own identities while forgetting ours!"*

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[68] At the end of the *Tu Be'Svat* (Arbor Day) ceremony at which I was present, the national anthem *was* sung by all.

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Has the school crossed the line of loyalty to national ideology? Does the faculty of the school have a right, within the larger scheme of things, to decide what is good and what works best for their students and carry it out regardless of national policy? Who decides what is "right"?

5.2.1.1. Political contingencies

The continuing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians and ongoing terror activities against Israeli civilians, have created an atmosphere of heightened tensions and anxiety in everyday life. There is a fear of, mistrust and antagonism against Arabs in the population at large and a general avoidance of public events and spaces. Using public transportation or going out in public (shopping at a market or mall, attending a show, going to the beach or sitting in a café[69]), have dwindled to a trickle. Everybody, including young children if they have to leave the house, walks around with cell phones. Listening to news broadcasts every hour for the latest disasters, names, instructions - is a national occupation.

Within all of this is the school with its unusual mix of Israelis and Arabs, Jews and non-Jews, locals and foreigners, children whose families belong to the place and its problems and others who are there by chance, probably in the right place at the wrong time. The question arises as to how the outside situation affects the school and its diverse populations in terms of human relationships, pedagogy, organization and special problems to be dealt with. The answers I found were different than I had anticipated.

Talking one morning to Aviva and Shiva, the two teacher-aids for the lower grades, I asked about relationships between the Arab and Israeli children in light of the social tensions outside of school. Shiva said:

> *"The general problems we have with the Arabs in the country don't have any effect here. Look at that group of children playing with Hameed. Nobody discriminates against him or teases him for being an Arab. They all play together. The outside tensions have no effect".*

Aviva added: *"They don't feel different because here everyone is different. They're all equal because they're all different".*

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[69] Life in Israel is traditionally conducted outdoors to a large degree and public transportation is (was) a very popular means of getting about.

Ohz was telling me how their class made friends with the children from the Arts School with whom they visited. "*So you made new Israeli friends*", I commented. He reacted immediately:

> "*It doesn't matter that they are Israeli. It can even be an Arab. An Arab with a kind heart is a good human being, just like there can be a bad Israeli or from any other country. It's not only Arabs who are bad*".

One day a television crew came to film in the school and it happened to be a day after a terrible suicide bombing attack in which several children were killed on a bus on their way to school. Amira told me that the reporter asked a 6th grader if it doesn't bother her to study in the same class and be friends with an Arab child. The girl was said to have answered: *I don't see the Arab in him, I see the human being in him.*

The teachers talk to the children about the situation trying to calm any fears they might have, but it turns out that the teachers, being adults, are often more vulnerable under the circumstances. Amira described what happened several months ago when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a pedestrian mall behind the school. Windows broke, police and ambulances were all over with the sirens blowing and loudspeakers blasting. Nobody was allowed to leave school and go home until late that afternoon. The next day Amira had several psychologists come to school to talk to the kids, but it turned out that the teachers were in a much worse state - anxious, not able to climb the stairs to their classrooms, distracted. So the whole school was brought down to the yard and while the children played outside all day, the psychologists worked with the teachers to help them deal with the situation.

The *Mesila* center for foreign workers called a meeting of the (informal) leaders of the diverse national groups to talk about the difficult situation, see what they needed to help them deal, to try and find out if they are aware of ways of keeping safe (all information constantly provided on Israeli TV and radio, but many of them didn't know Hebrew). The meeting, however, opened and almost ended with the first question when the foreigners were asked if they were aware of what was going on and if they were afraid. Amira told me that most of them answered in amusement that they knew what was going on but the situation in every one of their own countries of origin was worse, so they

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had little problem with the situation in Israel and planned to stay for as long as they could. They didn't understand what the fuss (and the meeting) was all about.

As I am writing this paper, another terrorist attack took place in the pedestrian mall behind the school. It is summer vacation and the attack happened in the evening so the school itself wasn't affected. However, two suicide bombers detonated their charges that were filled with nails among a group of foreign workers. Five were killed, 30 were physically injured, scores suffered traumatic effects. A little kindergarten girl from Tel-Aviv suffered shrapnel wounds to her arm and was hospitalized. Sima (5th grader from Bolivia) and her younger sister were traumatized. The bizarre political situation of the foreign workers was accentuated when the Israeli press reported that the wounded are lying all alone in the hospitals without visitors or outside support because family members and friends fear arrest if they show any relationship to the wounded.

The school's diverse population also introduces unique problems. In a phone conversation with Amira in October of 2001, when all of our lives were going through upheavals, she told me that she is not sleeping at night trying to think of a solution to one of these problems. The population in Israel had been issued gas masks for the event of a chemical attack by Iraq, but since their parents were undocumented, about 200 of her students and their family members did not have this protection, nor did they have access to sealed rooms that every home in Israel is mandated to have for the same type of emergency. She was trying to find a source of free masks since she had heard that the families were not willing to buy the gas masks available at supermarkets.

The 2002 school year opened today in Israel and when I called to wish everybody a good year, I heard the following story: Due to all the recent bombings in the area, the police were on high alert and posted a heavy presence all around the school since early in the morning. Four new mixed-age kindergarten-1st grades were opening at school this year and they were expecting 120 new students ages 4-6. Amira was worried that some of the foreign families would keep the kids away when they saw the police force surrounding the school. Although she was, herself, afraid of a terrorist attack, she tried to get the police as far away from the area as possible.

"I argued with them and we shouted at each other but at the end I just had to stand there all morning with the policemen so the parents could see me and not be afraid to approach. The rest of the day was calm and wonderful", she said.

5.2.2. "Transparent children": Identities

"The beginning of understanding between cultures
surely lies in knowing, deeply knowing, that we are all
some insider's outsiders".

Timothy J. Reiss (*Against autonomy*)

On a very general level, Torres (2002) points out that the processes of globalization, which are creating strong tensions between local and global dynamics, are blurring the boundaries of the nation-state and deeply affecting the constitution of national and interest group identities. He surmises that it will be the markets, rather than local polities, that will determine "who belongs to and who has fallen out of the realm of citizenship" (p. 369), and that human rights will become a world-level organizing principle, giving priority to "universal personhood" over "national status".

For the present, in theory, the societal perspective of identity is largely political, always interested in institutionalizing group identity and representing the group as a unity (Sarup, 1996). This is reflected in Tel-Aviv's reputation as "the school of the kids of the foreign workers" ("*beit hasefer shel yaldei ha'ovdeem hazareem*"), which places it politically far out on the margins of social and political acceptance (more so than it would have been if it had "only" served a poor Israeli population).

Personal identity is a process invented and constructed throughout an individual's journey of life, changing metaphorically like the patterns of a kaleidoscope. It is to be found at the crossroads of the past, from which people draw the recollections with which they represent themselves to themselves (the "I am" perspective), and the present in which society determines one's identity (the "It is" perspective), (Sarup, 1996; Hall, 1976). According to Gee (2001), a person's identity can be divided into two major parts – a "core" identity which holds more or less uniformly for ourselves and others across contexts, and many different identities that become fore grounded at different times, places and situations throughout a person life. Some of our identities emanate from our natures, some from our social positions, others from our achievements and/or our experiences within affinity groups. Rutherford finds the "multiplicity of subject positions

and potential identities holding prospects for unparalleled human development", yet on the other hand, "terrifying in their lack of personal, collective and moral boundaries". Furthermore, "[i]n this post-modern, 'wide-open' world, our bodies are bereft of those spatial and temporal co-ordinates essential for historicity, for a consciousness of our own collective and personal past" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 24).

> From the Sages:
> "Man is called by three names: one that he is called by his father and mother and one that others call him and one that he acquires for himself" (*Shlosha shemot neekre'oo la'adam: echad shehkaroo loh aviv ve'eemo ve'echad shehkaroo loh achereem ve'echad shehkoneh hoo le'atzmo*, *Sefer Ha'agadah*, 1960, p. 693).

At Tel-Aviv, a pivotal and problematic issue is the children's social/cultural identity that positions them in the educational space and in their access to literacy. On the one hand identity "…shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it, including their experiences with texts." And on the other hand, "…identities shape people's textual and literate practices [and] their literate practices play a role in identifications and positionings" (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p.228, 229). Knowing and accepting who you are becomes an important stepping stone into learning and literacy, and dealing openly with issues of personal identity enhances students' self concept and empowers them (Kincheloe, 1997). Conversely, being unsure of one's social/cultural identity or being left out of school curriculums and educational discourse can negatively impact a child's education and make literacy acquisition much more difficult and, at times, a struggle that is too great to overcome.

Most of the students at Tel-Aviv, consciously or not, are dealing with double social identities, problems of loyalty and confusion regarding who they "really" are and where they belong. Many of them are migrants who are somewhere in the midst of a process of shedding one identity and finding another, some aren't sure about belonging to mainstream Israeli society, some are dealing with two culturally contrasting identities (the Arab children). They are children from families who have recently arrived in Israel from other countries and cultures, or families that have moved "down" to the area from better places in Israel itself, others belong to the less valued groups in Israeli society – the "Orientals", who also have to deal with the ambivalence of being Israeli but "not quite" in the right way. Amira talks about the many children at Tel-Aviv who "*have no*

identity", who are in a state of anomie, not belonging to any country, or having begun a long process of shedding one identity (that of their former homeland) while not yet having acquired a new one (that of being Israeli).

> From the media:
> The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* describes the situation of 5 year-old Eavon who was born in Israel to Columbian parents living in Jerusalem[70]. For political and economic reasons she was born in the French hospital in Bethlehem which is located in the area of the Palestinian Authority (outside Israeli jurisdiction). The only record of her existence is a birth registration form (written in Arabic and Hebrew - both languages the parents cannot read). She has no birth certificate and has no citizenship (Columbian children born outside of Columbia are not eligible for automatic citizenship in that country). "She cannot be a Columbian citizen because she wasn't born there, and she cannot be an Israeli citizen despite having been born here. 'She can be a citizen of the ocean', says her father Julio in despair".

Issues of identity are multifaceted. "Immigration, exile, being uprooted and made a pariah may be the most effective way yet devised to impress on an individual the arbitrary nature of his or her own existence" wrote Simic (1999, p.123), when describing his own experience of having to leave his homeland and begin anew in another country and culture. Hall writes about the multiple separations we all experience in life, many of which are painful. "Paradoxically, each separation forms a foundation for new stages of integration, identity and psychic growth" (Hall. 1976, p. 223). Understanding the profundity and complexity of identity issues and their serious impact on children's lives (more so, possibly, after they leave elementary school) impresses itself on Tel-Aviv's pedagogy. Prior to teaching, they take it upon themselves to attend to what they consider the children's basic need - a sense of belonging and the accompanying sense of an acceptable identity that may help create a sense of stability, says Sara Lotan, the school superintendent. She describes the anomalous situation at Tel-Aviv's:

> "*Many of the kids don't feel they belong anywhere but here. These are migrants and immigrants who were uprooted lost their connections in their countries of origin and haven't made new connections in this country either because they don't know the language, haven't been in the army*[71]*, have limited education, are in social and economic distress… The kids sometimes don't even have strong connections to their parents and families and the only place they really feel they belong is here in school*".

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[70] www.haaretz.co.il, Wed., July 17, 2002.
[71] A cultural "melting pot" in Israeli life.

There are many instances of confusion regarding identity among the children. I videotaped children in costume during the Purim celebrations, among them a group of 1st graders who were dressed as queens. Several African girls and one from the Philippines told me they had dressed up as Queen Esther, the Biblical character around whom the story of the Holiday of Purim revolves. The Israeli girl, however, said she was *"stam malka (a simple queen)"*.
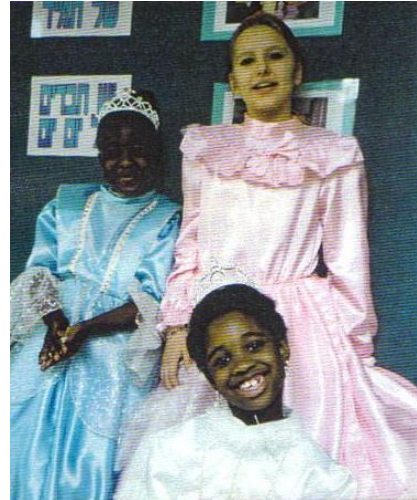
> From the media:
> Elinore, a 19 year old from South America, tells about a high-school experience[72]:
> "We were learning the history of the Jewish people and there were so many stories about how they were expelled and persecuted, it would always anger me. Once I said 'Why did they do these things to us?' and the teacher reminded me that they did this to the Jews, not to us. I wasn't part of it"

Cruz-Jensen (1999) brings the perspective of bi-ethnic and biracial children in American schools who were confused about their identity and haunted throughout their school years by incessant questions about their identity ("What are you asking? Am I a boy? Am I a girl? Am I an animal?" one biracial girl lashed out) and by feeling that they fit nowhere, not among "Americans" ("You're blond, blue eyed. That's American. But if you're other than that you're just trying"), not among the groups that considered themselves "pure" ethnics, and not in school curriculums (Cruz-Jensen, 1999, p. 5).

Similarly, a substantial identity problem arises for the Arab students at Tel-Aviv. These are children of families who were given asylum in Israel and Amira explained that the Dept. of Education has no educational policy regarding them, nor are they addressing their identity issues. At Tel-Aviv they improvise as well as they can but a key piece is missing. Amira talked about this with the supervisor in charge of the education of

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[72] www.haaretz.co.il, Wed., July 24, 2002.

the Arab children. She was very blunt describing the struggle:

> *"We* [the school] *create for* [the Arab children] *an illusion of identity within a artificial environment here at Tel-Aviv, but the truth is that they belong nowhere. The Arabs don't want them and they don't want to belong to us. What will happen down the road when they are in high school, when all the other children will be talking about going into the army? They are uprooted, detached, but they are ours and we need to address their identity issues from birth until the end of 12th grade. Children cannot develop normally without an identity*".

And the problem encompasses many of the other foreign children who grow up thinking of themselves Israeli, only to be confronted with a rude and painful awakening when they reach ages 16 (when Israeli kids get identity papers of their own) or 18 (when Israeli children join the army).

> From the media:
> A newspaper article titled "At age 18 the country starts showing an interest in them. They now qualify for deportation", deals with children of foreign workers who have reached age 18 when the issue of identity becomes paramount[73]. Having grown up in Israel among Israeli children, whether they were born in Israel or came there at an early age, all of them say they considered themselves Israelis. Carolina Martinez (19) saw her mother and brothers off at the airport and her mother suggested it wasn't too late to board with them and return to Colombia. Carolina answered: "Maybe you are Colombian, but I'm not anymore. I'm Israeli".
> Reality hit her when she understood that although she had finished high school, passed the matriculation exams and was accepted to a college to study tourism, she was told that she would not be able to get any formal work in the country because she has no papers, no formal identity. The only option available to her was housework, so she left her studies and cleans houses like her mother had done for many years.
> Elinore (19) tried going back to her country when she was 16, after 9 years of living in Israel. "When I understood that they're not accepting me here and will not give me identity papers, it hurt me very much and I thought that if they don't want me here, maybe it will be better for me to return to the country in which I was born, Venezuela" .But that didn't work out and several months after getting there, she begged her parents to bring her back to Israel. She felt she didn't belong in her own country:
> "Even though I knew the language, the mentality and the customs there were completely different from what I'm used to", she acknowledged.

Several months ago Amira was asked to join an ongoing parliamentary committee dealing with the plight of the foreign workers in Israel. She was brought in to advocate for the children and has made some headway, especially in what she sees as formal

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[73] www.haaretzdaily.com, Wed. July 10, 2002.

acknowledgement of the problems (to which the government had been turning a blind eye for years) and a greater openness to addressing them. Progress is slowly being made. In a recent phone conversation she told me that one of her prayers was answered for the current school year when they got 10 weekly hours with a new teacher recently immigrated from Syria. Excitement could be detected in her voice:

> *"I delegated her to work with our Arab children on the preservation of their language and culture. It is working so well! You really should see them when they come out of their sessions with her. They have huge smiles on their faces and their eyes are shining*!"

Much creative effort is put into the struggle for children's identity at Tel-Aviv. An example is the solution found for some of the children who were born in Israel to families residing in the country illegally and consequently have no identification documents, no identifying number [74](i.e. a passport number). For all formal purposes, they really don't exist anywhere "except" in real life. In a newspaper article they were called "transparent children". How, then, could they be registered in school and in the central computer of the Department of Education where every child attending school must be registered by an identification number? The solution Tel-Aviv came up with is practical (the computer accepts it), but symbolically painful: they register the children under an imaginary identification number consisting of a chain of zeroes (0000000)[75].

Belonging is a hot and bubbling topic, constantly on the front burner at Tel-Aviv because of its major impact on learning and educational achievements. "As we step out of our understandings of everyday life, our familiarity in categorizing the world, and the rhythms we are accustomed to, our perspectives all of a sudden change", creating ambiguities, contradictions and ambivalences that are grounds for stress and confusion (Ogulnick,

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[74] Every Israeli has an identification card that is supposed to be carried at all times.
[75] Quoted in Bar-Shalom, pg. 72.

2000, p.3). Igoa illustrates other problems facing immigrant children (her research was done in American schools):

> When immigrant children leave the country that was their home – a familiar language, culture, community and social system – they experience a variety of emotional and cognitive adjustments to the reality of life in the new country. How dry and clinical that sentence sounds! It doesn't even begin to convey the paralyzing fear in a little boy from Afghanistan that he will never fully understand English, that he will always be on the outside looking in. It doesn't explain why an achievement-oriented girl from Vietnam will intentionally fail tests… And it certainly doesn't tell all you need to know about the intense loneliness of a South American girl, who, caught between two cultures…cannot communicate easily in any language (Igoa, 1995, p. xi).

"Constructing identity, *knowing* identity (one's own or others'), at least partially require notions of "home" and "elsewhere", whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences" (Reiss, 2002, p.35). Anzaldúa (1999, p.35) writes about the female Mexican illegal migrant,

> As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe home-ground to venture into
> unknown and, possibly, dangerous terrain.
> This is her home
> this thin edge of
> barbwire.

Cruz-Jensen quotes Enid who is tri-racial: Latino, Indian and African American,

> Until the curriculum changes from the Kindergarten level, children of color are never going to have an identity…Why aren't our children graduating? …Schools don't give them an identity as part of the history…You learn that you don't have a place in this America. You feel cheated in this America (1999, p. 8).

In a book of Tel-Aviv children's writing I found the following (unsigned) poem:

> Russia My Russia
> I love you so much.
> Maybe I will come back tomorrow or today.
> You are mine forever.

And another child said the following in a conversation about thoughts and feelings associated with coming to Israel[76]:

> My father says he would like to stay here as long as God will allow him to, if God will give 5 years, that will be ok. But I sometimes stay awake at night and think whether I would like to stay or not.

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[76] Published in a book of children's writing at Tel-Aviv.

Ronny, the school's art teacher, talks about issues of domination as they relate to the children's identity:

> It's a matter of a diversity of cultures up against a strong and dominant Western culture. In their efforts to cope with this Western world, it hurts me to see [the children at Tel-Aviv] going through the same experiences that I went through as a child – repression and embarrassment. They misunderstand how much they have and know from their own cultures and they develop an inferiority complex (*reegshei necheetoot*) in spite of their rich cultures (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.63).

Anzaldúa (1999, p.83) described a scene from her childhood as a Mexican migrant in Chicago:

> I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and agringado Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music.

The discontinuity of the protective native culture and its supportive institutions as a result of immigration projects the immigrants into a state of anomie, which affects normal socialization processes so important for children trying to learn (Comer, 1994). At Tel-Aviv they take this issue very seriously. Since they don't use textbooks (due to language and literacy diversity in every class) it is part of the teachers' job to find material suitable for both the age and language levels of their students. But they don't stop there[77]. They put extra effort into finding texts with which their specific students can identify, trying to create safe spaces for them to grow in the texts they are required to confront. Consequently, many of the texts the older children read deal with identity issues. In a visit to the 5th grade one day, I found them working on 3 different texts dealing with people who are different from each other and the misunderstandings that can result in such situations: *The story about the green man* by Yonatan Gefen, *Deaf Donald* by Shel Silverstein and *Once when I was a dot* by Nurit Zarchi.

The story about the green man/ Y. Gefen

Once, in a green town there lived a man, a green man. The green man lived in a green house with a green door and a green window. He had a green wife and two green children. At night…his dreams were very green…

One day the green man saw a blue man standing on the side of the road.

"Hey, blue man, what are you doing here?"

"Me?" said the blue man, "I'm from a different story". (Partial translation)

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[77] Although this itself becomes a daunting mission in the higher grades where material with age appropriate content in simple language is limited.

DEAF DONALD

Deaf Donald met Talkie Sue

But was all he could do.

And Sue said, "Donald, I sure do like you."

But was all he could do.

And Sue asked Donald, "Do you like me too?"

But was all he could do.

"Good-bye then, Donald, I'm leaving you."

But was all he did do.

And she left forever so she never knew

That means I love you.

פַּעַם כְּשֶׁהָיִיתִי נְקֻדָּה · נוּרִית זַרְחִי

פַּעַם כְּשֶׁהָיִיתִי נְקֻדָּה
קוּדָה קוּדָה
(כָּכָה הַיְלָדִים לִי קָרְאוּ)
אָמַרְתִּי, אֲנִי רוֹצָה לִהְיוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ הַמְנֻקָּדִים
כִּי פֹּה רַע לִי
וְזֶה קָרָה לִי.

שָׁם הַבְּגָדִים, הַכְּבִישִׁים,
הַגֶּשֶׁם, וְהָאֲנָשִׁים
אֲפִלּוּ הַיְלָדִים,
הָיוּ מְנֻקָּדִים,
בְּכָל הַכִּוּוּנִים
כְּמוֹ אֶצְלִי בַּפָּנִים.
רָצִיתִי לַחֲזֹר
כִּי זֶה הָיָה רַע לִי
וְכָךְ קָרָה לִי —
וְשׁוּב הָיִיתִי קוּדָה קוּדָה
(כָּךְ הַיְלָדִים לִי קָרְאוּ),
אֲבָל שׁוּב לֹא בָּכִיתִי כְּשֶׁלֹּא רָאוּ
קוּדָה קוּדָה
כִּי הָיוּ בָּתִּים וַאֲנָשִׁים
בְּכָל מִינֵי צוּרוֹת, קִשְׁקוּשִׁים וְקַוִּים
וַאֲנִי, מְנֻקָּדָה.

מתוך: אלף מרכבות, ספריית פועלים.

Once when I was a dot
by Nurit Zarchi

Once when I was a dot
Ot ot
(That's how the children
called me)
I said I want to be in the
Land of the dotted
Because here I feel bad.
And it happened to me.

There the clothes, the roads,
The rain and the people
Even the children,
Were dotted,
In all directions
Like on my face.
I wanted to go back
Because it wasn't good for me
And that's what happened to me –
And again I was ot ot
(That's how the children
called me)
But I no longer cried
When nobody was looking
Ot ot
Because there were
houses and people
In many different shapes,
Squiggles and lines
And I am a dot.

Identity develops in a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices, and is limited by boundaries (physical, ideological, social or cultural), which are the demarcations of the behavior of those within and without the group. Within every boundary, the norm has jurisdiction so there are clear (yet invisi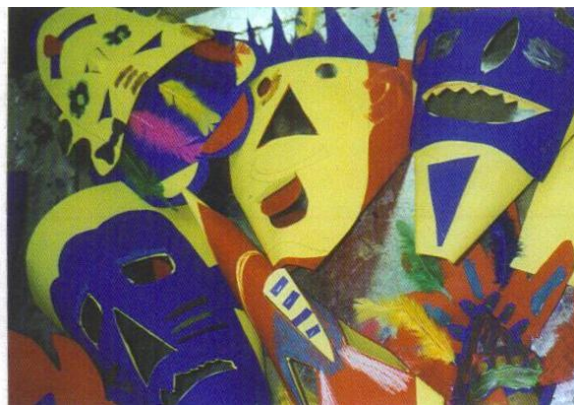ble) barriers between the "insiders" and any "others" that find their way in. With time, however, some boundaries between the native and the migrant erode, although others are strengthened to heighten exclusion of the "other" (Sarup, 1996). At the Tel-Aviv School, battles for/of identity are fought across boundaries on two fronts, one is against the forces building up walls of exclusion (mostly in the out-of-school domain) and the second is a strengthening of the processes of inclusion and personal identity construction in school.

The principal of the most prestigious and most beautiful art school in the city of Tel-Aviv (to which gaining entry is extremely competitive and being a student of which carries great social capital), phoned Amira at the beginning of the school year. Her 5th grade students wanted to "do a good deed", some kind of community service, and they decided that they'd like to donate or give something to the students of the Tel-Aviv school who they knew were needy... Amira rejected the premise of hegemony underlying the offer, but accepted the idea of "giving" as long as it was to be reciprocal. She told me that she had answered the principal of the School for the Arts thus: *The only thing our children need from yours is friendship. I am willing to allow a joint project in which both of our schools give to each other, but without patronage.*

This developed into a project of 6 meets during which the 5th graders of both schools came together and jointly made art and friends.

| Teaching each other songs | Masks made at the joint project |

Bar-Shalom (2000) sees the Tel-Aviv school as a meeting ground for a group of people who identify ideologically with the country on a basis of Judaism or Zionism and are in a hegemonious social and cultural position (the teachers), and another dominated group of people who identify functionally with the country in the sense that their relationship with the place is practical – they give work in return for economic and quality-of-life compensation (the children and their families). Bar-Shalom notes that within the ideology of openness and acceptance at Tel-Aviv there are no attempts nor even presumptions of replacing the functional identification of the children with an ideological one (or of "laundering" identities, as Amira puts it).

One of the domains where this is evident at Tel-Aviv is their pedagogical approach to languages. Understanding the relationship between language and identity and the social status, solidarity and power positions associated with the use of certain languages, has brought the faculty to the recognition of the importance of giving the children the freedom to use their native languages (orally and in writing) whenever they feel more comfortable to do so (Rachel said: *"If they write in their own language I get better papers so why should I make them write in Hebrew?"*)[78]. A native language is recognized as a comfort zone for the child.

> *A child's native language is the language he dreams in, it's the language of his imagination, the language of his emotions. We must let the children express themselves in their native languages in order for them to build their self-concept. We also provide them the space for the Escolita*[79] *in which they learn about their culture. It is very important for the development of their identity and their pride in it*, Amira says.

In a new initiative this year, elective language lessons in Spanish, English and Arabic were added to the curriculum (the Russians have independent evening schools for teaching the children Russian language and culture). Yet, a strong emphasis is also placed on teaching and learning Hebrew in order to expedite the children's integration into the community and the country, strengthen their sense of belonging and identification and to motivate them to participate in the academic activities in school (Reiss, 2002). Lave &

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[78] Document III is a copy of a South American child's work in Spanish and in Hebrew. Document IV shows an English work sheet with printed explanations in Hebrew and Arabic and the child's own writing in Spanish.

[79] An afternoon Spanish language and culture school that convenes every Friday afternoon on school grounds.

Wenger write about the learner moving from the periphery to the center and becoming a member of a community of practice, a process that implies a transformation of identity since identities are based upon relationships between people and their place in communities of practice. "Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another", (Lave & Wenger, 1990, p. 53). Belonging to a Hebrew speaking community of practice at Tel-Aviv has the effect of constructing another facet of identity for the foreign children and allowing them access to a degree of social membership. Taking with them I learned that, usually, the better they know Hebrew, the more comfortable they are with abandoning their former identity and considering themselves Israeli (although, sometimes there are other factors at play such as family ideologies or whether the child feels she is in Israel permanently or temporarily).

Salim, a 4th grade Muslim child from Turkey, considers himself - *"Turkish… eh…Israeli"*. Why? *"Because there I lived only a little and here I've lived more, and also here I have more friends"*.

He came to Israel with his family 4 years ago and speaks Hebrew well, but he misses Turkey because of the family he still has there. His parents know only some Hebrew. He says they consider themselves Turkish because they lived there more years and they know more people in Turkey, but he's been noticing that they are beginning to become a little Israeli too. How does he know? "*Because when they watch TV and see the bombings that are going on, they sigh. It saddens them"*.

Yamit came from Turkey several years ago but her Hebrew is still very poor. At home she speaks Turkish with her parents. I asked Sonny to ask her if she feels Turkish or Israeli. "*Israeli*" was her answer.

Don (4th grade) came from Russia almost 3 years ago. He speaks Hebrew well and is a strong, well-behaved student. At home they talk only Russian and his parents don't like being in Israel. Don says he feels himself Russian.

Betty (1st grade) was born in Israel to Ghanaian parents. She feels Ghanaian.

I asked Tim (from Uzbekistan)"*Do you feel yourself Israeli or Russian?"* It was a tough decision: "*I feel the most (hachee harbeh) Russian but half   Israeli. And mom and dad, how do they feel? Russian, because they don't know Hebrew"*.

Mira (6th grade from the Dominican Republic) is one of the star students at school (as well as being a track champion for the whole city of Tel-Aviv). Does she feel Israeli or Dominican? "*I don't feel different, like, I live here, like, so I'm equal to* [the Israeli kids]. *What difference does it make*?"

Gloria came from Venezuela. Her father is a preacher. I asked whether she feels herself Israeli or… and before I could finish asking, she answered:

"*Gam vegam (both)*".
"*Both what?*" I thought I knew what she would say but wanted to hear it from her. I was in for a surprise.
"*Israeli and Christian. When we celebrate Passover or other Holidays here in school, I feel like an Israeli. But when we celebrate Christian Holidays at our home, I feel Christian*".

From the media:
In the film "*Children in a Strange City*" Gregory, who came from Russia, is seen standing with his arm around Paolo whose parents are from Ecuador, and he gives a rundown (in Hebrew) of the common wisdom on the subject[80]: "If you live in Israel for 3 years, you become an Israeli, like me. Paolo has only been here a year and a half so he isn't an Israeli yet, but he will be in another year and a half".

Anat K., the V.P. of Tel-Aviv, has just finished writing her thesis for a Masters degree in education administration. Her study looked at the differences between social and cultural integration of children of new immigrants[81] and children of work migrants at the Tel-Aviv School. Across all the parameters she checked. Anat found that at school, children of work migrants are more successful than those of new immigrants.

Her findings went against common logic - that the new immigrants would have an easier time because they willfully migrate to be among their own people, because their economic, political, social and legal situation is better, because the education system is tuned to their needs. On the other hand, work migrants are very poor, work hard and have little time for taking care of their children, don't know the language and don't get any

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[80] The film is a project of Israeli television and deals with the lives of the children of foreign workers, many of them students at Tel-Aviv.
[81] New immigrants (*oleem chadasheem*) are Jews who migrate to Israel either from their own free will (usually from the West) or as a result of persecution in their countries of origin (from the former Soviet Union, from Ethiopia, etc.). They receive automatic citizenship and government help to settle in the country.

help from the government. The authorities continuously publicize efforts to deport the illegal migrants and they live in constant fear.

Questioning this discrepancy, Anat came to some conclusions, the most important of which had to do with identity. New immigrants, she realized, left their past lives and came to start anew in Israel. Many times the choice of immigrating to Israel was one of default – they couldn't go on living in their homeland and even if they wished to migrate to other western countries, quotas and immigration laws in those countries made this very difficult. Israel was the lesser of all evils, so the "choice" to come here was sometimes contrived. And when they came, the open arms with which they were received in the new country, hugged a little too tight with the expectation of a swift and complete shedding of their former identity and language for an assumption of the local culture, language and identity. Hebrew was considered a necessary "first language" for them, based on a melting-pot ideology. (The Israeli public doesn't like to hear Russian spoken "everywhere" and is offended by the Russian language public notices and advertising. There is a general feeling that the country and the people are doing a lot for the new immigrants who are expected to be grateful and learn Hebrew quickly, but the hegemonious stance is unmistakable). There is no way back and many of the new immigrants were/are traumatized. There is now a formal realization that the process of forced migration is similar to processes of loss and grieving and necessitates over 2 years to overcome.

Work migrants chose Israel with care and consideration. They migrated to better their families' lives and life chances but they burnt no bridges. Most came for a temporary stay (however long they needed) and could at any time go back to their homelands. Consequently, there was no need for them to negate or change their former identity, only to adopt the new language and customs selectively and at will. Hebrew would always be a second language. In addition, the work migrants have organized supportive communities that also provide for their cultural needs. They are not looking for acceptance and understanding from the outside community.

The overall conclusion in Anat's work is that a stronger sense of identity and mission the family has, the better the child does in school, and she has shown it to be true at Tel-Aviv.

5.2.2.1. The stories

> "Everybody belongs when they have a story to tell"
>
> J.Henson

It is possible that the children are able to develop a feeling of belonging as they are constructing and reconstructing their identities in Tel-Aviv, partially because they can tell their stories to others willing to listen. Moje writes how we live our identities in a narrative, how people search for ways to construct or represent identities and stories that allow them to belong. McCartney mentions Anzaldúa's notion of identities as clusters of stories, stories that we tell about ourselves and those that others tell about us[82] (McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Bringing family stories into the classrooms rewards the group with building community, positively impacting children's literacy development and strengthening participants' sense of familial and cultural heritage (Winston, 1995), and Maxine Green writes that attending to a range of human stories brings with it the possibility of building bridges between people, of healing and transformation (Green, 1993b).

"When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess" (hooks, 1994, p. 21). At Tel-Aviv one finds willingness to open up and reveal the "essential self" (Valanzuela, 1999) in their exchange of life stories: the teachers, the principal and the students are forthcoming with stories of their lives[83], apparently feeling safe telling even about painful experiences.. There seems to be an openness and a certain intimacy among the people at the school. They tell each other about their lives, their families, their feelings and thoughts. They talk in Hebrew or in their native language and a peer translates. They do research projects on their native countries, on heroes from their country's history. *"Happiness has no end, but sadness surely does"* is a book of the children's stories that is kept on the counter of the library. The following are 2 of the many stories in the book[84].

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[82] From a presentation at the Conference of Territories and Boundaries, University of Illinois, Oct. 1999.
[83] Being at Tel-Aviv for a few months was enough for me to hear the life stories of almost every teacher and many times we had long conversations about our children and our spouses, our plans and dreams.
[84] All of which were written in Hebrew and translated into Spanish (or vise versa) and then published in both languages. Document V is a copy of a page in the book.

A Story

I was little and my sisters also.

My father went to Argentina and left us all alone. And during the whole year that he was there, he never wrote us and despite everything I continue to love him.

Then he came back to Chile without a penny. My mother was angry at him and he apologized. Afterwards, time passed and my sister was 18 already and she left for Israel.

Afterwards, time passed and she asked for my mother and my mother said she wants to come with me and that's how we came to Israel.

Now my mother works cleaning houses and I go to school.

Longings

When I grow up I want to be like my dad. My dad is a nurse and he also paints signs.

There my dad would take me to his work and I would help him. I would draw the letters with the help of forms and he would paint them from the inside.

I was then 5 years old.

At this time my dad didn't want to come to Israel yet because then we didn't have enough money for 3 tickets, so we came alone, me and my mom, but I remember everything I did with him.

And if they don't tell their stories to the whole class, they talk to a teacher, a counselor, a friend.

Lusha is a fragile looking little girl, very pale, short light hair. She can usually be found sitting at her desk all bundled up in her jacket with her hood on. One morning Annie came into class and found Lusha crying quietly. She sat by her and tried to understand what had upset her so, but Lusha had recently come from Russia and her Hebrew was insufficient, especially at such an emotional moment. So a peer translator/ language broker was asked to help and with about 10 children standing around (quietly and respectful), Lusha began talking in a whisper. She had dreamt of her mother again that night, that she was trying to get onto the train to leave Russia and join the rest of the family in Israel but she had no money and she fell under the train and was run over[85]. Annie hugged Lusha and held her close while she sent someone to get Tsipi the Russian-speaking counselor who could better communicate with her and consol her. The mood in the first part of the following lesson was grim.

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[85] Lara's mother had died a year previously.

Tim is a 4th grader from Uzbekistan. Everything about him seems to be round and soft – his light brown face, his big eyes, his lips and his smile, his plump body. Only his hair stands on edge in spikes going in all directions, as if it wants to make a contrastive statement. Tim told me about life before coming to Israel.

> *I came from Samarkand two years ago. We left on Tuesday and we went to Crimea and we left there on Tuesday too. In Samarkand I had a big house, I think it was two centimeters…, no. It was as big as this school, but here we have a house that is a little bit small. There I had many* [friends] *and lots of money and a car, but I broke the car by mistake because the car was moving and I turned the engine and it hit a tree. It was very scary*", his eyes grew large with the memory of the event.

Bar-Shalom (2000) describes a scene he observed in one of the classes:

> The teacher gives out a work sheet in geography and explains the work to be done. One child, who has been in the country for only two months, doesn't understand and the teacher asks a girl who speaks Spanish to help him. After a while, when the boy understood the project he began talking very excitedly about his homeland. He described the country, the girl translated and the teacher conveyed the information to the rest of the class. The boy seemed a little uncomfortable, apparently because of the sudden attention he was receiving, but remained smiling till the end of the period. After class he told me that he was surprised that the other children and the teacher were interested in his story even though he and his mother are in the country illegally (p. 68).

5.2.3. "We can do it in any language" (*"Anachnoo yecholeem la'asot et zeh bekol safa"*): Language and Culture Brokers

The students at Tel-Aviv have social/cultural roles that other school children usually don't. Above concentrating on being regular elementary school students, many have been put in the position of (or have taken upon themselves the role) being language and/or cultural brokers. A language broker is the bilingual child who serves as a mediator between her non-Hebrew speaking parents and the school, or between newly arrived children who do not yet know Hebrew, and the teacher or other children. Language brokering involves translation, interpretation, negotiated meaning, decision-making, problem solving and use of ideology. When a child mediates between an adult and another child, her translation of the dialogue will most often be an interpretation of the utterance based upon personal decisions of what is important to translate and what the

teacher is expecting to hear and what should or shouldn't be said in certain situations (McQuillan & Tse, 1995; Garcia & Willis, 2001).

Lave and Wenger (1991) give a structural analysis of this phenomenon when they talk about cycles of apprenticeship: a community of learners in which there are young masters (of language and culture) - who are relative old-timers for the newer-comers, and their newcomer apprentices - who begin by being peripheral participants but, with time, become masters themselves, all together creating a peer circulation of knowledge skills and development. Rogoff (1990) talks about novices and experts among peers in learning situations where the active learner participates in culturally organized activity with a more skilled partner and both develop their skills and understandings in this learning process of guided participation.

The 6th grade class was talking about this kind of translation/interpretation. Nechama, the teacher, asked the children to speak on the topic of having to help each other out in class when there were language barriers.

> Asif: "*When Omer just arrived* [from the Ukraine] *he was my best friend and sat next to me in class. He would ask me 'What is this question?' 'What is that question?' and I would tell him and that's how he learned*".
> Carla: "*When Marta came, Karin and I helped her and Mira did too. But sometimes when* [the teacher] *told us to tell her things it was a little difficult*".
> Genya: "*It doesn't bother us to help someone in class. We usually work in a group and I explain whatever I know, but when* [the teacher asks] *us to translate. ... like in geography, for example, the Greenwich meridian…That is difficult. Sometimes I feel I know Hebrew better than Russian and I can't find the right words in Russian anymore*".
> Nechama: "*Alina, you are the newest one in our class. You came in September* (Alina smiles, understands). *Can you tell us how you deal with language problems?*" (Alina moves her head side to side signaling a 'no'). "*If Hebrew is difficult you can tell us in Russian. Genya, Alvira, ask her how she gets along in the different classes*".
> Alvira conveys the question in Russian and in a low voice to Alina who is sitting next to her in the circle. Alina answers at length, talking directly to Alvira, also in a very low voice. Genya bends over towards the conversation, says something and Alvira talks again. Alina answers and sits back signaling an end to the dialogue. Both Alvira and Genya turn to the teacher and summarize Alina's lengthy response in 4 words:
> "*They translate for her*", they say in unison.

"*Who translates for her?*" asks Nechama.
"*The teachers*", answer the girls.

Another instance of language brokering captured on tape was in Mazal's 4th grade class when they were talking about the Holiday of Purim and comparing it to similar occasions in other countries and cultures. The newest student in class was Merveh who had recently arrived from Turkey and spoke no Hebrew (at least not in public). Mazal had Salim ask Merveh about her experiences of dressing up in Turkey after he had told about a certain Turkish Holiday in which children dress up, but from her answers it was understood that she had never engaged in such activities. Later Mazal had Salim come up to Merveh and explain to her in his own words what the class had been talking about, while the rest of the children began a writing assignment. Mazal then asked Don's help in explaining the assignment to Simon, a newcomer from Russia. I tried talking to Simon myself to ask him about his drawing (he drew about the holiday since he couldn't yet write in Hebrew), but needed the services of Sasha, a peer Russian language broker:

"*What's your name?*" I asked in Hebrew.
"*Simon*".
"*Where did you come to Israel from?*"
"*Ma (what)?*"
Sasha translates my question and suggests the Ukraine (Ookryna – a word I understood).
"*No. From Russian…Russia*", Simon answered.
"*How long have you been in Israel?*" was my next question.
"*Ma (what)?*"
Sasha translated the question and Simon answered him in Russian. Then Sasha answered for Simon*: "After…eh, before 4 months".*

Sima tried to explain how this works:

Let's say that someone doesn't understand in Hebrew after the teacher explains five times and they still don't understand so they say it in the child's language. But the teachers don't know these languages so well, so if the child speaks Spanish, whoever already understands, they can explain it to the other in Spanish. And we can do it in any language, in Russian and Turkish, any language.

Gloria (4th grade) gave an example of being on the receiving end of language brokering. How did she feel coming to Tel-Aviv from Venezuela knowing no Hebrew? "*Sometimes they treated me like a queen and sometimes as if I didn't exist*". She explained that when the teacher was angry and punished the whole class including her although she didn't know what was going on, she felt invisible and powerless to do good.

But "*when I didn't understand and everyone who knew Spanish was at my side and I could understand, then I felt like a queen*".

Language minority children who engage in language brokering seem to learn the dominant language more rapidly than others and increase their native language competency through these activities[86]. But although language brokers seem to gain linguistic competency, serving in these roles results in increased stress and frustration for the students, stress that is often difficult to detect because they do not openly admit it (McQuillan & Tse, 1995). I asked several students who were translating for others in class whether this activity interfered with their own learning or whether it bothered them. They all answered in the negative, although Mira, a 6th grader who brokers for Spanish speaking children, admitted that she does have problems translating when she herself doesn't understand the text or issue well.

Children also take on roles of cultural brokers. The following is a conversation I had with two 3rd grade girls in the school library. Iris was born in Turkey and Evette was born in Israel to Turkish parents. They both sat with their hands placed on the table, fingers entwined and very serious expressions. We were discussing the children who come from different countries and don't know Hebrew. How do these children fare in class?

> Evette: *"The teacher explains to them"*.
> Iris: "*But if they still don't understand then she tells us and we explain it. We explain to them how to come to school, we help them to read and stuff…*
> Evette: *"We tell them how to bring food and we tell them not to bring sweets because it's not good for you. And we tell them not to hit other children…"*
> Iris: *"Yes, and not to break things… and not to mess up the school".*

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[86] This fits in well with the idea of authentic purpose for better literacy acquisition.

6. An Ideology of Amendment *(Ideologia shel teekoon)*: Rethinking school priorities

> "I kiss these children with a look, with a thought, with the question: who are you, wonderful secret? What do you bring with you? How can I help you?"
>
> Janusch Korchak [87]

Danny

Coming into school one morning I found Danny, a 3rd grader, sitting in the office, his face drawn, his eyes dull. He wandered around aimlessly, alternating seats between the principal's room and the secretary's desk, receiving an occasional caress and caring words from whoever walked into the office. When I asked the principal why Danny wasn't in class, she answered: *"He is unavailable for learning today. He is very agitated, very anxious. Things are going on in his life that are difficult for him to handle, so we let him be where he feels comfortable. He can't learn in this condition anyway"*.

Danny wasn't speaking to anyone except for repeating a strange sentence now and then in a low voice: *"Tomorrow we are going"*. At one point, the principal reacted to this "chant": *"You're moving to the new apartment tomorrow, I know"*, she said on her way out. *"We're going on a plane"* he replied quietly, but she was out of earshot.

Seeing that he was sad and sensing he could benefit from a diversion, I asked Danny to help me with the photocopying I was doing, expecting that he could press the buttons at my request. He came over hesitantly since we had never met before, but within a few minutes he took charge of the whole process – reducing, enlarging, double-sided copying, etc.- instructing me how to hand him the papers and how he thinks the best way to copy something would be…. When the 9:30 bell rang for the breakfast break we were good friends already and Danny was his jolly self again. He gently asked if I could get along without him because he wanted to go back to his class and his friends. I took a picture of him smiling and waving to me in the hall.

The next day Danny was gone.

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[87] Janusch Korchak was an exemplary educator in Poland whose writings are studied by educators in Israel to this day. During WWII, when the Nazis came to take his Jewish students to the death camps, he asked them to leave and said he would bring the kids himself. He didn't want them to be afraid because of the soldiers so he told the children they were going on a trip and they must all sing loudly and be happy. Korchak went at the head of the group, singing with them. He refused to leave them to their destiny although he was not Jewish himself and accompanied them on the cattle train and into Auschwitz where he was murdered alongside his students.

And he was gone for many days. In fact, I never saw him again because he was smuggled out of the country by a relative fighting the state for custody over him and his two brothers after the death of their mother. When the three brothers were brought back to Israel by authorities many weeks later, they were scrawny, filthy, their heads shaved. They were placed in a secret safe-haven, where by orders of the police only Amira could visit them. As I was leaving the country, the boys were being placed in a boarding school.

Although I had known Danny for just over an hour, his story continues to haunt me and is a metaphor of all that is both good and bad in the fusion of forces, processes and trajectories that are the Tel-Aviv school.

Most of the children at the Tel-Aviv School come from a background of poverty and deprivation, mostly economic, sometimes emotional or cultural. Very many have gone through traumas of being uprooted and relocated in a new town or foreign land and culture that they are still having trouble negotiating. Many are also dealing with troubled family life[88], abuse, fears of living outside the law, of deportation, of having absentee parents or parents that work long and unconventional hours and aren't available to care for them during the days. When a family is strong enough and doing well, it moves away[89].

Serving a state of immigrants[90], the Israeli education system in its curriculums normally acknowledges, deals with and supports learners from diverse backgrounds and speakers of native languages other than Hebrew[91]. But the curriculums that were tried and working for children of immigrant Jewish families (mostly from Russia or western countries) fell short when having to accommodate children of non-Jewish economic

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[88] An article in the Israeli paper Yediot Achronot, 6/7/01 began thus: *"A quarter of all the new AIDS carriers (200-300 people) are foreign workers. As opposed to Israeli carriers who get the drug cocktail from the government, their chances of survival are slim. Whoever does not succeed in getting the medicines on his own is sentenced to death. Whoever goes back to his country where they haven't even heard about the treatment, is sentenced to death. If word of one's disease becomes known in the community, he is sentenced to ostracism, a fate similar to death. If word of one's disease becomes known to his employer, he is sentenced to deportation."*

[89] Daniella's family had come to Israel from Romania. Her mother worked as a house cleaner and the father found intermittent work among the local shopkeepers (he was an engineer and a musician, she told me). Daniella and her sister attended Tel-Aviv and Daniella was one of their best students. Around the time I arrived at school, Daniella's father got a permanent job as an engineer in a neighboring town and they moved to *"a pretty house with a garden"* in which Daniella said there were enough rooms for her and her sister to each have a room of their own.

[90] About 20% of the population in Israel today are immigrants who came in the past 15 years, mostly from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia.

[91] The Department of Education has recently formally accepted that it takes 5-10 years for an immigrant child's Hebrew to change from being a second to a first language, says Amira.

migrants from the Far East, Africa and South America. A conceptual conduit was missing and conditions were not helped by the Department of Education not counting the "illegal" foreign students when allotting financing and teaching hours for the school. There were times when up to a third of the students were not covered by any funding and the school had to stretch whatever it received to address the needs of all of the children. Social, emotional and academic problems at Tel-Aviv were overwhelming, the regular pedagogical approaches were not working and the students were not making the expected progress. The teachers were distraught but these adverse conditions became a catalyst for change as Anat M. explained,

> *We felt that we're working much harder than other schools and getting results that were much lower. We realized that we are in trouble and decided that there was no other choice but to look for other ways, because if we're already investing so much energy, at least it should lead us in the right direction.*

Rather than blame the children for the social and academic difficulties of the school (Friere 1970[92]; Valdés, 2001; Neisser, 1986), they were accepted "as is", their circumstances, as given. One cannot and need not change the children or the circumstances of their lives, was the realization. It was the pedagogy that required change to fit the school's circumstances. טעוני טיפוח *Teoonei tepuach* [93] *isn't an incurable disease",* said Amira. "*We accepted what we had and decided to succeed with it rather than accept failure because of what we didn't have*".

> From the Sages:
> A tale of one foreigner who came before Shamai[94]. He said to him: "Convert me and teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one leg"[95]. [Shamai] pushed him away [in disgust]. He came before Hillel[96]. [Hillel] converted him and said to him: "What is hateful to you, do not do unto others. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and study it" (*Sefer Ha'agada*, 1960, p. 157-158).

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[92] Freire maintains that the oppressors are interested in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the oppressive circumstances (Freire, 1970/1997), just as we see in many schools where rather than changing oppressive and exclusionary curriculums, failing students are forced to accept the blame for their own failures.

[93] **B**eing in a situation of social and economic distress. The literal meaning is "in need of nurturing". This is a concept describing the groups of children in Israeli schools that need extra help (somewhat like Title I schools in the US).

[94] One of the Sages known for being very strict.

[95] The foreigner wanted to convert to Judaism but was a busy person so he asked the Rabbi to teach him Judaism and the writings of the Bible in a short, condensed course (metaphorically – during the time he could stand on one leg without falling…).

[96] A Sage contemporary to Shamai, who was known for leniency and compassion.

Gadotti (1996) argues that schools in the contemporary world have critical potential. And it is in marginalized situations that one can usually find "hope and vision for alternative arrangements and the cultural and intellectual resources on which to build an alternative" (Laughlin et al., 2001). Accepting as a given its population and their circumstances, the faculty at Tel-Aviv began a process of rethinking its ideology, goals, function and practices within its particular milieu. They decided to relate the school's pedagogy to the social and cultural struggles it confronts daily, choosing customization rather than standardization[97] as they set their sights more closely on benefiting the individual child rather than the school or society at large.

Having ideologically resolved the conflict inherent in schooling between the needs of the students and those of the institution by prioritizing the students' needs, the Tel-Aviv faculty studied the theoretical and practical aspects of transforming the system and creating alternative arrangements within which they could provide better education for *their* students within *their* given circumstances. The idea was to look at the "whole child" (Dewey), her needs and circumstances, socially, emotionally and academically, because these "domains are part of the same fabric and are inextricably interwoven. If any part of the fabric is weakened, the entire fabric may unravel; if all the fibers are strong, the total fabric will be resilient" (Brooks, 1999, p. 72).

To achieve their goal, the team appropriated an Ideology of Amendment איזאולוגיה *של תיקון* that directed all of their future actions. This is an ideology of transformation originating in the writing of the Jewish Sages, postulating that the world can be made into a better place if man wills this and acts accordingly.

> From the Sages:
> The Rabbi of Kotsk said: "A man is a man and an angel is an angel, and man, if he wills it, can become an angel. 'In the beginning God created…' – God created the beginning and the rest He has left for man *(Adam hoo adam oomalaach hoo malaach, veadam, eem yeertseh, youchal lee'heeyot malaach. 'Beresheet bara eloheem…' – Eloheem bara et haresheet vehashar heeshear la'adam)*"[98].

Amira describes the tenets of this ideology, which happen to be the ideas on which her personal life is based:

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[97] Larry Cuban coined the phrase in an interview with Scott Willis, 2002.
[98] The Rabbi of Kotsk lived and taught in Poland in the 17th century.

I believe that all people were created equally worthy, that there is room for every human being in this world – nobody is superfluous, and I believe that every person has the right to succeed[99].

She describes this graphically as 3 vertices of a triangle:

The equity of human worth

There is room in the world   **Every person has the right to succeed**
for every human being
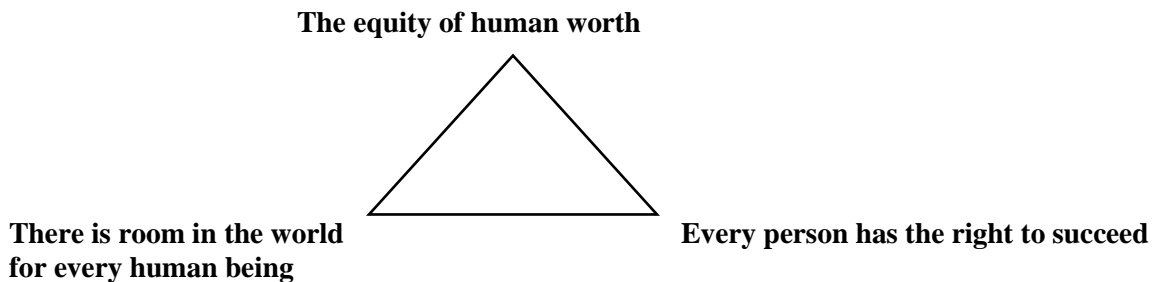
The Ideology of Amendment holds as its central idea the equity of human worth.

A whole team [of teachers] *believes that human beings were born equal and is in search for any cultural way of aligning their pedagogy with this idea. The whole unique environment* [at Tel-Aviv] *of inclusion and accepting difference, practices of individualized teaching, focusing on each child's needs, giving space to his language and voice… all are constructed upon this ideology"*, explains Amira.

Bar-Shalom took this farther and suggested that the school ideology is as an "Ideology of Amendment through love":

Confronted with an ocean of conflicts and the difficulties and complexities inherent in meeting the other in the guise of the foreign children, the school team delays judgment and reiterates the love mantras, while searching for the common and the universal in the human experience (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.84).

Amira explains that an Ideology of Amendment is the spiritual counterpart of the more prevalent material practice of Preferential Amendment. When and where the Department of Education decides that the students are achieving poorly or that their circumstances are handicapping, they provide more money, more teachers, a longer school day, extra programs, new reading programs, etc., attempting to amend a poor educational situation by way of material changes[100]. Preferential Amendment cannot succeed absent an Ideology of Amendment, Amira argues, but she believes that developing a "*new trajectory"* based upon an Ideology of Amendment is totally independent of any material aspect and has the potential of succeeding on its own.

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[99] Appendix 4 is a section of the UN Treaty of Human Rights given to all Tel-Aviv teachers.
[100] Somewhat like the American process. See President Bush's early Reading Initiative.

"*It came from the teachers*", Amira said. She herself reorganized the teaching arrangements in order to ease the teachers' load and when they began feeling more comfortable, they, in turn, were able to direct their newly freed energies to searching for ways of making things better for the children[101]. They took upon themselves the responsibility for finding solutions, approaching the discordant state of affairs by problematizing their established practices and rethinking their traditional priorities, in a sense, rocking the boat upon their own initiative, "uncoupling from the familiar… reaching toward the unpredictable, reaching toward possibility" (Green, 2001, p. 68).

Anat M. described the process: splitting up into groups, they created three think tanks, each of which was to reflect on either the academic, social/cultural or psychological/ emotional issues that the school and the student body were facing. When all groups had presented their findings to the plenum it was decided that the school as a whole would have to redefine its priorities and transform its pedagogy so as to be able to best deal with the "real needs" of every child. The decision was that social and emotional issues would take precedent to academic literacy goals based on the understanding that no matter how good the teacher or how smart the child, hunger, fear, depression, confusion, feelings of alienation, all block venues of learning and cognition, leading to students who are 'unavailable for learning'[102].

> *Not all the teachers were happy with our decision, but the majority agreed that if the children are fulfilled on an emotional and social level, we will be able to get more out of them academically"*, said Anat M.

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[101] See chap. 8.2.1.

[102] Based on her extensive work with immigrant children in American schools, Christina Igoa developed an interdisciplinary intervention approach that evaluates every child's cultural, academic and psychological needs, dealing with each as necessary. The cultural and psychological aspects are recognized as the foundations of the intervention, pointing to and clearing the way for academic intervention and academic achievement (Igoa, 1995).

Orly, a school counselor adds,

This is a very unique school. There is an openness, a kind of familial understanding - priorities that are different than in other schools. Here they first ask how the child's time at home was last night and whether he has food for the day, not how much of his homework he did".

Coles writes about the "continuous and interwoven fugue" between cognition and emotions, especially in connection to learning to read and write. He quotes studies that proved inverse correlation between anxiety and academic performance. "It is not the brain but the totality of the person that is the unified whole of thinking" (Coles, 1998, pg. 83). Comer, a medical doctor, writes that children need to be socialized before they can be taught academics. "Interest in, some of the capacity for and all of the motivation for learning academic material is a function of social relationships and overall development". These relationships, he continues, must be with emotionally meaningful adults whom they can trust to guide them as they try to find their way (Comer, 1994, p. 25). Taylor described how Nicola's teacher's understanding of the way she used print enabled her to understand and support the coping strategies the child was constructing, while showing how the child's relationship with print developed as her emotional and social issues were acknowledged and addressed (Taylor, 1993). In a sense, the faculty of Tel-Aviv decided that being social/emotional readers, problem solvers and learners themselves (Cohen, 2001) would take precedent over their traditional roles of dealing with academic literacy. This way of prioritizing values in school doesn't, however, come at the expense of school literacy, but rather as a precursor to it in a process of foundation building.

The pedagogy at Tel-Aviv stands in stark contrast to what Haberman calls "the pedagogy of poverty", a pedagogy pervasive in urban schools serving a population of minorities and children of poverty, in which a pivotal concern is with finding ways to "make" students learn and forcing them "to work hard enough to vindicate the methodology" (Haberman, 1991, p. 292). Although Tel-Aviv's general description and its population fit Haberman's description of an urban school, the thinking here is totally different - that one can't force learning on a child. Amira explains: "*Children must physically come to school because early education is compulsory. The problem begins within schools since you can't compel the child to learn/study"*.

Consequently, the faculty prioritizes taking care of emotional and social issues the child might have to free up her cognitive abilities and help her shift into an "available for learning" mode where she will have self-motivation to learn. The overarching priority is creating a safe place/space to which the children come willingly and in which they have positive experiences - "*experiences of capability*" that will motivate them to work, study and achieve more success. Anat M. who has been teaching in the school for the past 15 years and has been part of the despair as well as of the processes of change:

> *We emphasize the social and emotional domains, sometimes even more than the academic domain, because we realized that the children are confronted with so many social, cultural and emotional problems, that if we take care of these first we'll be creating a better basis for learning. Many of our children live in constant fear that their parents will be arrested and deported. Others come from shaky family situations. They have fears that other Israeli school children don't have. They don't have the sense of security in their lives that can release their minds for learning and they become what we call 'unavailable for learning'. A*ll of our work here is about finding the golden path upon which we can tread as we teach the children amid all the chaos in their lives*".

There is an ongoing search at Tel-Aviv for pedagogical venues that could positively affect the children's own motivation to learn, allowing the teacher to take up the role of facilitator and coach alongside the child. One of these venues is giving the child more control over her own learning through meaningful dialogues[103], personal (rather than comparative) assessment[104], personal schedules and ability grouping[105]. Another venue is an inclusive curriculum that addresses and includes all children, regardless of where they come from and what point they are at. Putting all these ideologies and practices together have given rise to a unique pedagogy at Tel-Aviv - a pedagogy of fusion – in which all the children's cultures, needs, strengths and problems are brought together, combining with the strengths, abilities and weaknesses of the teachers and the outside system, and within an open and flexible approach to education based upon an ideology of amendment, where anything better is always a possibility.

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[103] Chapter 8.1.3.
[104] Chapter 3.8.
[105] Chapter 8.2.

Danny was roaming around the office, unavailable for learning when I met him. He had come to Israel from Russia two years earlier with his mother, an alcoholic, 2 brothers and an older sister who was slightly retarded. When social services checked up on the family they found them penniless and hungry, the mother suffering from cancer. Medical care was arranged and a day before the mother was to undergo surgery, the family disappeared without a trace. The police searched for them unsuccessfully. Several months later, in the middle of the night, Amira received a call from a hospital in the north of the country, telling her of the death of Danny's mother. *"What about the children?"* she asked the caller. They didn't know the woman had children, came the answer. The search for them resumed and they were found a few days later living in an underground bomb shelter where they had been hiding for all those months, being fed by kind neighbors. The story gets more complex as a half-brother appears, decides to care for the kids in return for their government subsidies, gambles away the money and brings them to the verge of starvation again. The State stepped in and took the brother to trial, promising all of them an apartment in return for his giving up custody of the children. But the brother decided that rather than give them up he would smuggle the kids out of the country (there was a court order prohibiting them from leaving) to live with a half-sister back in Russia[106].

I met Danny the day before they were to leave on their secret, illegal journey. *"Tomorrow we are going"*, he was repeating. He was holding a terrible secret that he wanted to tell but was sworn not to. If he told, he'd be in big trouble at home; if he didn't tell, he would be taken away again from a place in which he had found love, care, warmth, to another unknown[107]. No wonder he was unavailable for learning that morning, walking around the office, changing seats, chanting.

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[106] The story of Danny's family was widely covered in the Israeli media.
[107] Unfortunately, the situation they found themselves in Russia was very difficult. They suffered neglect, hunger and cold.

6.1. In search for the Golden Path ("*Mehchapseem et shveel hazahav*": Creating different learning environments

<div align="right">
To a higher place
Step by step
Climbing higher
Not rushing
Not dawdling either.
Always remind oneself,
Open the eyes wide at
Such a high place.

Chang Ti[108]
</div>

"Tel-Aviv – the city that never sleeps" is a slogan used by the municipality to promote the city. The same can be said for the school. Although the school had been brought around by a 10 year long and arduous process of renewal and now sits firmly in the center of acceptability, and although its team received the highest education award in the country, and although no formal reforms had been launched by the Dept. of Education, no "higher-up" had given instructions to change or find better solutions, and the school was doing very well according to friends and foes alike (the children were happy, their parents were happy, the superintendent and the municipality were happy) - there is no resting upon laurels at Tel-Aviv. It is a school that never rests.

In the summer of 2002, about 15 months after leaving the field, I returned to Tel-Aviv for a short visit and was updated on the radical changes – in thought and practice – the school had gone through in the past year. Conversations continued incessantly in attempts to improve practice, to address stubborn problems and to reach a higher level of inclusive, quality education. The focus that year was on the concept of "narrowing the gaps", a concept the education community in Israel at large has been dealing with for 55 years "*and has gotten nowhere*", reflected Amira, because they are thinking and acting in the wrong direction:

> *We have new understandings on the topic of children requiring special nurturing (yeladeem teh'oonei tepooach)* [109] *this year. The Shachar division* (within the

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[108] A poem by Mr. Chang Ti that was placed by a miniature glass sculpture he made, in the Glass Museum, The Forbidden City, Beijing, China.

[109] The label is a cultural one connoting children in distress (economically, socially, culturally) and it is also applied to families, grouping those who need special/extra care and attention from government

Dept. of Education) *in charge of narrowing the gaps and caring for the special needs kids says that what needs to be done so that the children can progress is to teach the three basic skills and this should be done in a process of giving the child more of the same. If the child fails in reading, he is given a lot more reading* [instruction], *if the child fails arithmetic, he is given a lot more arithmetic* [instruction], *if he fails English… But we had an inclination that we shouldn't be doing more of the same".*

The emphasis shifted at Tel-Aviv from the difficult (and many times impossible) task of searching for the internal/individual reasons for a child's academic difficulties at school, to looking at the child's environment. Amira talked about 3 to 5 generations of the same families in Israel today who are themselves as well as their children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, all stuck in the same breeding ground, not managing to escape the cycle of poverty and being 'special needs'. Although a few do manage to climb out, the majority have no relief and it is the understanding at Tel-Aviv that this is due in great measure to there not being something in these people's environments to show them a way out. As long as their environment stays the same, their thinking, motivation, perception of possibilities and hope for change, will remain the same.

> [Our aim was] *to create for* [the children] *different learning spaces within school. 'Learning spaces based on a humanistic approach' is what these are called in the Department of Education. Spaces they will not meet with if we don't create them here. And there is no content definition for this concept. I had to come up with it, and according to my sensibilities this means creating for the children different environments that will lift them to new places and will do so with* [the children's] *own tools and their loves, without the label of a teacher. It should create for them a very broad process of change while preventing them the frustrations of 'more of the same'"*[110].

So the new school year saw a change of focus from "giving more of the same" to introducing new literacies and creating for them new and different environments with the potential of propelling the children up and out of their cycle of distress. Based on this concept, three projects were developed:

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institutions (schools, social services). These are the underclass of Israeli society and in their schools failure is the norm. The Tel-Aviv School's population falls under this label.

[110] Dewey comes out strongly against those who think better education means giving the children more of the same! (Dewey, 1964/1974).

- Nurturing language acquisition in a web-based learning environment (Using computers and the internet to nurture personal and topic presentation) through work with instructors from the world of hi-tech.
- Working with and following a creating artist in school.
- Jewish values in a multicultural perspective (Creating a video film with a team of outside professionals).

Within a concept of a pedagogy of fusion, the outside world was brought into the school and intertwined with the students' lives. It was no longer life in school vs. life in the "real" world, but rather a linking of the two in theory and practice. The first project relates to the school's struggle with issues of language learning and teaching. English and math studies at Tel-Aviv, as in many other schools, are topics kids have the most problems with. There were also children having trouble acquiring Hebrew. Changing conceptual frameworks and thinking processes seemed the direction to try.

> The problem that was found to be in need of special attention among the older children at school, who are supposed to become integrated in one of the middle schools in the area, is the personal presentation ability. After the problem was studied in depth by the school leadership and the team of teachers and its solution was recognized as a central goal for 2002, it became apparent that improving the structural thinking processes of the children could be one of the tools that would help solve this problem[111]

The new project provided the children with advanced computer and networking skills through which they were expected to assimilate thinking processes that would improve their structural thinking. They were taught HTML, created their own web pages[112], worked on a communal project of commemorating school alumni who were killed as soldiers in Israel's wars, ended the year learning algorithms and flow charts and began computerizing the school library. The instructor came from a hi-tech company with no prior experience of working with children.

> *We thought we would change* [the children's] *environment from an educational-school-computer-lab to a hi-tech environment. Actually the teachers of these two grades and the school computer teachers could teach the children the material just as well but we wanted not only the program and the instructor, but also the message. The instructor they sent us was a young man with a shaved head, an earring and round glasses. There was a message in his appearance and personality and what he stood for – a computer geek. That is something they*

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[111] Translated from a school document.
[112] Which can be seen on the web at www.omegaisrael.com/totsarim.htm

would never meet up with on their own. In actuality, we allowed them, for 3 weekly hours, to be computer geeks".

Based on the school policy of creating experiences of capability and allowing the children to experience success, two ideas were promoted. The first was that the children be able to have products expeditiously. The second was to "*wrap them (la'atof otam)*" with assistance such that in every class there were 4-5 teachers who knew the material (the classroom teachers and school computer teachers) and could help out "*so they would not be frustrated by technical problems*", explained Amira. During the times between classes, the homeroom teachers worked with the children on research (and the language problems associated with it) to prepare them for the next computer class.

> *The products of this program are unbelievable. Children who couldn't learn the 9 times table were learning algorithms and developing logical thinking skills to work with HTML. Not to mention that both HTML and Access are languages based on English so the children had to learn English in order to use them. The changes in both math and English among the kids is dramatic. The children's attitude towards these subjects changed completely because they suddenly understood how much they need them".*

Amira was smiling as she talked, her excitement and pride were palpable. Then she told me about Ofer, a child who had a dismal attendance record, always late when he *did* show up, but in the new computer classes he had become an expert on burning disks. Since then he has been arriving at school every morning at 7AM and refuses to go home in the afternoon (the children are allowed to surf the web until 6PM every day). At the end of this story she was wiping away a tear, saying, "*You can't understand how emotional this is for me*".

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The second project was bringing a creating artist into school (an "in house" artist) in order to develop mutual relationships between artist and students, to expose the children to the idea of a working artist and introduce them to his natural creative environment, to use the school walls as a gallery of his art and to redefine the role of art in the community and in education. The artist was Ilan Sapira, the photographer who worked with the 1st graders the previous year. The kids helped him set up the studio, he explained the instruments and procedures to them and proceeded to document the school

and its life in photographs. He gave the children cameras, taught them how to take pictures, took them out on weekends for photo sessions on the beach, taught them angles, lighting…At the end of May, with the help of a professional curator, he opened a big show of his photographs along the school halls. "*The school became a gallery of art*"[113].

> *Where can these children see an artist in his process? Yes, they can go to a museum but there they see a product. They don't meet the artist. They don't see his atelier. They don't see him create. I purposefully chose a young artist because I wanted them to see everything from the beginning… how a person who studies to become an artist slowly builds his studio. Like in real life",* explained Amira.

This project also added new aesthetic sensibilities. Teachers who were willing to invest the time and energy and to involve their students in a cooperative project of revamping their classrooms, worked with Ilan as consultant and producer. Three classrooms were totally redone in a sleek, artistic style.

Two redecorated classrooms

The third project called "Forefathers' Theater" was an inter-domain program integrating Judaic studies and filmmaking[114].

> The program is intended to familiarize the youth with *Masechet Avot[115]* in particular and the wealth of the Jewish heritage in general. "Forefathers' Theater" puts the students in touch with the treasures of knowledge and culture of the Sages and directs them to create an original film based on the Jewish sources with an emphasis on personal expression and creative cooperation between the students [116].

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[113] A superintendent who saw the show was so impressed that he promised to give the school all the photographic equipment from the lab of a technical school that was being closed down.
[114] This was a national project for middle and high schools. Tel-Aviv was the only elementary school in the country doing the project.
[115] Writings of the Sages.
[116] Translated from a school document.

At Tel-Aviv they adapted the project to their specific circumstances by "choosing a 'value' from the sayings of the Sages and producing it in a multicultural perspective as an opportunity for finding connections between Jewish and universal values"[117]. The children began with the value of "Give your bread to the hungry…" and started telling a story about a foreign worker whose friends noticed that he was hungry. But they changed their minds when a new child joined the class, deciding to write their story about the process of his absorption amongst them. The value they chose was "*Heveh mekabel kol adam besever paneem yafot* (One must welcome every human being hospitably)" and in combination with a yearlong study of relevant topics and issues, they proceeded to write the script for the film (with an outside script writer as guide), work on improvisation techniques (with professional actors) act out their script, and the project ended with 2 days of filming, editing and a final product of a video film.

6.2. "We only do homework sometimes" (*"Anachnoo rak osot sheooreem leefameem")*: Scenes from the school

> *"Our starting point is the child, not the mate*
> Sara Lotan, School superintendent

Dafna is in 1st grade. She's very smart but vulnerable and anxious. She has a lot of trouble sitting in class without being disruptive and bothering other children and sometimes, the only way of keeping her from initiating fights is for her teacher to keep her by her side during recess, physically holding on to her. Dafna is unavailable for learning most of the day.

Her mother abandoned the family when Dafna was a baby and left her and her sister in the care of their father who is a drug dealer and addict, in and out of jail and rehabilitation clinics. His aging mother is trying to raise the girls but both have numerous problems that make the task daunting, she confides. There were many days when I saw her coming with Dafna to school in the morning, walking slowly, dragging her swollen legs. She would sit in class with Dafna all day to ensure her good behavior.

On top of the regular services Dafna gets, the school has arranged extra help in the form of a soldier who works for Tel-Aviv several hours a week as part of her army

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[117] Translated from a school document.

service. This young woman's time is devoted exclusively to Dafna, sitting by her at her double desk in the back of the room, hugging her shoulders and caressing her arms as Dafna calms down and becomes available for learning. I saw her whispering in Dafna's ear eliciting a rare smile and when recess arrived, the two remained sitting, talking quietly, oblivious to the rest of the world.

As I was observing in the class one morning, the children were trying to figure out how to spell a difficult word that had come up in their discussion. Some tried but nobody knew. Finally Dafna, who was sitting curled up close to her soldier-friend, quietly watching the goings-on, raised her hand. The teacher responded immediately, *"Come smart Dafna. Come to the board and show all of us how to spell this difficult word"*. And she did. The teacher hugged her and she returned to her seat smiling, victorious.

Without being conscious of the process, Dafna and her soldier friend were proving that when there is emotional engagement, one finds longer and more sustained attention spans - an ability to learn (Lima, 1995).

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Emphasizing the children's emotional and social welfare prior to academics at Tel-Aviv is manifest in two "institutions": the choir and the community center enrichment activities. Any child can join the choir. Language and musical skills are not required and the reasoning behind this is that children can express themselves through music, even if, and especially if, they don't know the language, says Ella the music teacher. She adds that singing is an area in which every child can achieve success, feel part of the experience and feel she is on level ground with the rest of the children. The professional teachers are not happy with this arrangement because if a child is in the choir she may leave any class to practice for a contest or performance, and they lose many of their students at these times, but the choir has priority.

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A second unique arrangement at Tel-Aviv is the enrichment program at the nearby community center. Many Israeli schools can't provide extra-academic classes during the school day so most children go to after school private programs for dance, sports, art, etc., at their own initiative. Every town has a community center where subsidized classes are available. The families of the children at Tel-Aviv either can't

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afford these programs or are not knowledgeable about using the community resources (many of which are free), so the school took it upon itself to provide these experiences for its children, hoping that with time they will learn to use and benefit from the system themselves. Every child travels to the community center once a week and engages in an activity of her choice (soccer, karate, jazz or crafts) for two hours at a time (mixed-age groups of 40 children, grades 3-6, leave for each such outing) [118]. This activity has priority over any other school activity at that time period. Neely, the technology teacher goes along with one of the groups as the crafts teacher:

> *The children need these enrichment activities and they have fun doing them. They take place at the end of the school day when the kids are hot and tired anyway, and this is a nice break for them".*

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A third institution – homework, the great stress inducer for both children and parents – has been re-examined and re-thought. Consequently, it is seldom given, especially in the lower grades. The teachers realized that work sent home was rarely done, the main excuses being "*I didn't understand" (*i.e. there was nobody at home who could help me*) and "I didn't have time"* (i.e. I don't have the discipline nor the structure to do school work at home). During her first year teaching at Tel-Aviv Eemee tried. She gave all her students her home and mobile phone numbers and instructed them to call her for any question about the homework. She also paired them up to work together and assist each other where and when parents were unable to help. But to no avail, she was still hearing *"I didn't understand*" or *"I didn't have time*" at the beginning of each class.

I was talking with Eisha (5th grade from Gaza) and Elinore (5th grade from Columbia) who proclaimed they were best friends. Eisha started talking about homework:

> "*We only do homework sometimes because sometimes it's too difficult for us and sometimes we don't understand, sometimes we don't understand the sentence that we have written down".*
> *"And what happens if you don't do your homework?* I asked.
> Elinore: *"The teacher explains to us and then we understand".*
> *"Is she angry that you don't do your homework?*
> *"No!"* they answer together.
> Eisha: *She's actually happy that we tell her we didn't understand because it shows that we tried and then she can explain it to us.*

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[118] Videos 3 - 1:46:52-1:56:44 and 4 – 0:09:43-0:10:13

Elinore: *We could just tell her we did it but forgot it at home and then she would be angry, but we tell her we're having a difficult time and she helps us".*

"*What can you learn from fighting with your parents about homework in the afternoon?*" Amira reasons. So, if you can't beat them… The current policy is that school learning is done at school as much as possible. A very limited amount of homework is given in the upper grades, most children of which go to the Mo'adoneet (Little Club) for 3 hours after school, 4 days a week, where they receive an hour of homework and language help daily and are prepped for upcoming exams. Priority here is being given to the child's emotional and physical[119] well-being, and to reducing unnecessary stress on the children and their families, rather than to an attempt of reaching higher academic achievements. The teachers of Tel-Aviv broke free of "petrifactions and fixities, to perceive alternative realities"[120] that worked best for their kids and their realities.

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Movement is a major part of life at Tel-Aviv. I observed a lot of actual movement and noted openness to any additional movement needs of the children. Sending a sad or hyperactive child to the gym teacher "for airing" and movement is a regular occurrence. A child may ask to go out for a while if she feels she can no longer deal with the confinement of the classroom. Sometimes a teacher will take the whole class outside instead of teaching a regular lesson when she feels she can't teach due to the children's emotional state or excitement (since I was visiting during springtime, I saw this behavior often as the children were beginning to shake off the winter "blues").

The children at Tel-Aviv spend about 1½ hours a day outside of the classroom either before school starts or during recess. In theory, they are not supposed to run in the hallways and stairwells but, in practice, it seemed that few even considered walking. They play tag, organize soccer and basketball matches, the gym teacher gives them balls to play with, the older girls are always blasting the cassette recorder and dancing.

Some of the younger girls go around bothering the older children, running away squealing when they are chased. When I observed the children in the afternoon club (1½

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[119] The school heard about children who were being physically punished at home after the teacher told the parents that their child wasn't doing homework. The idea of homework was dropped and the offending parents were called into school for conversations about punishing children.
[120] Borrowing the words of Maxine Green, 2001.

hours of the total 3 are spent outside), I noted that while in the yard the children organized games (their favorite seemed to be tag of boys against girls) and competitions rather than "hanging out". On their weekly outing to the community center, they engage in activities involving movement: soccer, jazz, karate, arts.

In addition, the children move from one classroom to another throughout the day according to their individual schedules, and in the classrooms there is much freedom of movement whether the children walk up to the teacher's desk, go out to drink, group and regroup for projects or as translators for others, come in late, leave early, get pulled out (e.g. by the nurse or social worker). I observed children reading and writing while standing at their desks; in Rachel's class kids could sit in any position they felt comfortable in (as she said – as long as they don't disturb others) and some classes did not have assigned seats[121]. And Ella's music classes are about movement as much as they are about music. The children and the teacher are in constant motion singing, standing, acting out, incorporating arm and leg movements to the songs, etc.

Wallon (1984a) mentions the connection between movement and positive feelings: "Movement is another source of pleasant sensations. Through associated feelings in the muscles and joints, movement produces an excitation similar to that aroused by intimate caresses…" (1984a, p.157). Likewise, those of us who like to keep up with the literature on health and nutrition have learned that exercise benefits the body in many ways, not least of which is fighting depression and raising serotonin levels. Witkin (1977) describes her work with children "for whom learning is difficult" in which she incorporated a lot of movement into the school day for several purposes: to strengthen motor skills, aid learning processes and tap into the children's bubbling energy. The most important aspect of movement as part of the curriculum, she says, "are its potential for strengthening a child's self esteem, for equipping him with a securer sense of self by helping him to learn who he is, what he can do and something about the other people in his life" (Witkin, 1977, p. 4).

I thought of Wallon when I returned to school one afternoon after lunch and heard a roaring noise coming from the gym. The closer I came, the louder the noise, but I was beginning to discern music within the racket. As I opened the door to the gym just a crack to see what was going on, I was hit by the sound of a hundred children singing at the top

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[121] In one of Annie's classes, a child wanted another child to move out of "her" seat. Annie said sarcastically: "This is not the Knesset (Israeli parliament) here. We don't have fixed seats!"

of their voices accompanied by an accordionist who was pulling and pushing his accordion with gusto as if it were a body-building exercise machine. The energy in the room was amazing. Every child was singing and everywhere I looked there were smiles. But what struck me most of all were everyone's movements.

The accordionist was moving back and forth and jumping all over the stage and the children, who were seated on the floor in front of the stage, were in constant motion: clapping to the rhythm, performing hand movements that go along with some of the songs, rising to their knees and otherwise just swaying as they held on to each other, all this done as they stayed in their places. I watched some of the children, whom I knew to be new to Hebrew. They were singing only some of the words but they didn't miss a motion. It was a happy event charged with positive energy. I was very moved (as Wallon says – emotions are contagious!).

6.3. "I love the school very, very a lot!" (*"Ani ohevet et habeitsefer hachee hachee hamon")*: Love and reciprocity

> *"I give the children my love and trust as provisions*
> *to nourish them on their way into the future".*
> Rachel, 6th grade teacher at Tel-Aviv

Freire sees one of the great challenges to an educator being "how to make education something which, in being serious, rigorous, methodical, and having a process, also creates happiness and joy" (quoted in Shor, 1992, p. 25). Amira picks up the glove and when asked about priorities in the educational process she says:

> *I think the most important thing is that the children will love coming to school and that they will experience acceptance, love and happiness here. From this position they will learn all the rest*.

Consequently, a highest priority at Tel-Aviv is given to creating a positive school experience for the children, having them look forward to coming to school and feeling good about their experiences, both social and academic. Hugging Bobby, a new child with multiple problems and very disruptive in class, Annie said, "*It is so important first of all to love one another, right?"* (She looks at Bobby and he nods in agreement. She faces the camera again)*. 'Studies are only a marginal issue. First of all we must let every*

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new child who comes in know that he is loved and then all the rest of the things fall into place".

In order to create a productive learning environment the children's affective and cognitive lives need space to coexist, explains Tsipi, the school counselor, *"We are fully aware that in order to teach and make progress with children, one must start from a position of love and warmth"*

Creating a social and emotional safe haven, they believe, provides fertile ground for sowing and growing the seeds of academics. Tsiona shared the school philosophy:

> *In the long run, we don't care how fast a child learns to read or how well he reads. For that there is always 'next year'. We are much more concerned with how the child feels, that he has a small corner in which he feels good".*

Annie discussed her pedagogy and its origins:

> *When I was in school I remember I didn't like school because I didn't like most of the teachers. I was a good student in the subjects in which I liked the teacher, to the point of excelling. That's why I cherish the relationships with the students in my classes today. I know that if they can love me as a human being, as a human being who gives them respect, talks to them at eye level, addresses their problems… I know that their success in school will grow because they love me and know that someone is listening".*

I went up to her classroom to take pictures of her with her students (3rd grade) and try to check out if her pedagogy was working[122]. It was recess and there were about 10 children around. Annie sat down among them and asked teasingly, with her usual smile and good cheer, *"Whom do you love most?"* They all caught on and shouted *"Annie! Annie!"* So I asked them to tell me why they loved her so much and was astonished by the outpour of emotional and articulate responses. Every child wanted to speak first and they cut into each other's speech:

> *"Because she makes us laugh. When she reads to us she does it funny like this* (imitates Annie's movements) *and she laughs with us"*
> *"She brings us gifts"*
> *"Because she learns us"*
> *"It's more fun with Annie because we can do things that we can't do with other teachers. I can talk with her in Spanish and sometimes she plays with us".*
> *"She's talented and creative. The other teachers always copy her".*

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[122] Video 7 – 0:54:43‒1:04:14.

"She has patience for children. She cares. You can talk to her באַרבע עיניים *(in privacy).*
"Annie is very nice and she only gets angry at us sometimes and we sometimes surprise her".

One of the boys told how they surprised her upon her return from a vacation:

When she went to another country we worked hard to make a surprise on her. We brought cakes and we made decorations…"

Annie is reminded of the event, her face lights up and she continues the story:

Ah-h-h…yes. I went to Istanbul for a week and missed 2 days of work, so while I was gone they organized on their own and bought cakes and sweets and when I came into class it was decorated and all the tables had candy on them and we had a party. I was very touched".

Talking to some girls as they were bouncing a ball off the school wall, I asked if they like the school and why.

Dinia (Gaza, 2nd grade): *"I like the school very, very a lot* (הכי הכי המון) *because there are sweet children and our teachers learn us good.*
Noelle (Columbia, 1st grade): *I like school because there are a lot of recesses".*

The 6th graders gave other perspectives:

Nisa (Chile): *"I'm very proud of this school because it's very good".*
"What's so good about it?" I asked.
"There's a lot of help given here".
"They help children in every school, don't they?" I countered.
Mira (Dominican Republic):*"If you're having trouble, the teacher comes to you and helps. Children who are having difficulties get individual coaching and we have the* mo'adoneet *where for a whole hour we get help with anything we need".*
Omer (Ukraine):*"I like it here because I'm having fun. It's fun to learn here. Not like in The Ukraine. It's much more free here. There you couldn't go out to the yard and you had to sit up straight with your arms folded all the time. Here if anyone wants to they can go out to drink"*

I asked Hana why she liked school. She answered slowly: "*It's because of the teachers… their teaching and their attitude. They help… and they smile*". She continued saying she was also happy because she was accepted socially, and even though she is very new to the school she already has good friends from different grades.

Walking through the library, I bumped into a group of 6th graders hanging out. Did they like coming to school? Everybody said yes, because it's boring at home when all your friends are at school and there's nothing to do (this sounded rather banal to me). Omer, who came from the Ukraine 18 months ago (his family and home situations happen to be among the best in school), offered the following story, which gave credence to the first responses:

> *One Friday morning my mother asked if I wanted to come with her to the amusement park or somewhere else nice, because she didn't have to work that day, but I told her that I would come with her another day when there is no school because I didn't want to miss school, not even for an amusement park*!"

> *I get up in the morning and go to school happily. When we have a vacation I scream at my mother that I want the vacation to end so I can go back to school"*, Nisa added.

A few other children nodded in agreement. Robin, a short 2nd grader from the Philippines, tilted his head back, looked up at me with his black eyes sparkling and said: *"Tel-Aviv school? I love it the most. And my teachers? I love them the most too*".

Three Things in Particular / Batia Levy[123]
We had many teachers
Some were interesting and some boring
We learned many subjects
We made many friends
We received many reprimands.
But three things in particular
[Were given] to each and every one
Wisdom, responsibility and love.

The following conversation was overheard in the hallway:

Mazal (to her 4th grade student, a usually sweet child with a notorious temper, who had just come back to school after several days of suspension due to behavior issues): *"Where are you going now*?" [124]

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[123] From a book of Tel-Aviv children's writing.

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Salim: "*To Orly* (the socialization teacher)".
Mazal: *"You'll behave yourself there, won't you?"*
Salim: *"Sure, 'cause I like/love her!"*

I also talked to Salim about his overall experience at Tel-Aviv. He has made much progress in school this year, he behaves well, not badly as he used to and the teachers like him, he said. How does he know they like him? By their good attitude towards him, because even when other kids ask to go to the bathroom and the teacher refuses, for him the answer is always yes. Why is he getting such a great attitude from the teachers? *"Because I also help them a lot. I like to help the teachers"* he responded.

Amira looked at her diary and was reminded of the event of a teacher's impending wedding. Her students "*turned the world and the neighborhood on their heads*" to find a present for her and they all wrote her very moving letters. "There is an unusual feeling of gratitude here", she said (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.81).

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A Poem about Tel-Aviv / by Anna T. [125]
The sun rises and the children wake up
And they go to the Tel-Aviv school.
At Tel-Aviv the sun shines and the children
Go out to play in the yard.
At the Tel-Aviv School there are a lot
Of friends that play and also act out (*meeshtoleleem*).
At Tel-Aviv, at Tel-Aviv there are many friends
Who disturb the teachers and also act out.
Tel-Aviv Tel-Aviv is a good school
For the teachers and for the children
The Tel-Aviv School is
The best in the world.

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The motto of the school that appears on every official cover-page and on every report card reads (this rhymes in Hebrew) "*kan melamdeem moreem shehohaveem yeladeem* – The teachers who teach here love children". Amira told me it is a motto the children came up with several years ago.

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[124] Each child at Tel-Aviv has an individual schedule.
[125] From a book of the children's writing published last year.

'Unconditional acceptance' and 'unconditional love' of the children are basic concepts at Tel-Aviv - unspoken but practiced behaviors. Amira unconditionally accepted the teachers that she 'inherited' with the school and the teachers try to similarly accept their students with all their weaknesses as well as their strengths. It doesn't always work, Rachel confided: "*I love all of my kids, but as for Jordan, he really upsets me and even though I try hard, I can't get myself to like him*".

The teachers speak of their love for both the children and the school as a workplace. *"I like the team of teachers very much, I love Amira and the school*", said Olga, one of the school's two English teachers, who immigrated from Russia several years ago where she had been a linguist specializing in Spanish. Despite this being her first placement as a teacher in Israel and the rough initiation into teaching she experienced, she is enthusiastic and says in a heavy Russian accent:

> *I'm not exaggerating. For years people would pity me when they heard I worked at Tel-Aviv, but I discovered that I feel like in a first love relationship. I truly love the children and the school*".

The school gym teacher, ever-smiling Boris, came from Uzbekistan where he was a wrestling champion and a veteran sports teacher. At the beginning of his career at Tel-Aviv he would give directions "*in pantomime*" because not only was his own Hebrew poor, most of the kids didn't understand Hebrew anyway. Today he is the school's savior. Any child or class in need of fresh air, an outlet for excess energies or a cooling down period, or even if a teacher reaches the end of her wits, the children are sent to Boris and he takes care of them.

> *For me all the children are like my own. I care for them if they get hurt. I aim to help them grow up strong, and I take them to as many competitions as possible because when they get medals they are so happy. I love teaching here*" he told me, *"because I love children. Without children I have no life. It's in my blood, like… like a germ!*" he smiled at his own metaphor.

Elana, the petite home economics teacher, who takes two busses each way in order to teach at Tel-Aviv, told me a similar story:

> *I enjoy working here very much. Last year I was offered a job at a school near my home with a higher salary and less hours, a job that would have been more convenient for my family, but I found it too difficult to leave. I like being here. I like the administration, the team of teachers, the children. Many teachers teach for the salary. I work here because I love the children".*

And Rachel says, *"I give the children my love and trust as provisions to nourish them on their road to the future".* Amira sums it up: *"You see, that's why I say that we have to change the method. The children don't have to be changed and the teachers don't have to be changed. Only the method".*

6.4. "She respects us and we respect her" (*"He mechabedet otanoo, ve'anachnoo otah"*): Weaving a fabric of care.

> "It is not the subject matter that makes some learning more valuable than others, but the spirit in which it is done"
>
> John Holt

Intersubjectivity, the sharing of purpose and focus among individuals involving cognitive, social and emotional dialogues (Rogoff, 1990) is strongly present at Tel-Aviv. As someone from the outside looking in, I sensed that the school was like a ship with everyone aboard coming together and sharing the work of sailing it toward a mutual goal. Through the eyes of a veteran teacher, I noticed that nobody was forcing anybody else to do anything against her will (teachers were not involved in "making" the children learn, children were not busy making the teachers' life difficult, nobody was being forced to take responsibilities, yet they were). There was a feeling of a shared purpose and a shared focus on all levels of interaction and this was expressed in a web of caring relationships within which all those involved in the school were embraced.

"The most human aspect of learning is that it happens in a web of relationships", relationships that create a sense of belonging and inspire learning and curiosity (Berriz, 2001, p.75). The "caring teacher's" role is to initiate a relationship with the student followed by an involvement in the student's welfare. This relationship should create "emotional

displacement" as energy flows from the teacher towards the student, her projects and her needs (Noddings, 1992). When the teacher overtly conveys her acceptance and confirmation of the "cared-for" child, the child will usually respond by showing a willingness to open up and "reveal her/his essential self", creating a reciprocal relationship of caring. It is authentic (as opposed to superficial) caring within a pedagogy preoccupied with questions of otherness, difference and power, that should be implemented in schools and that such caring *for* the children must precede the expectation that children will develop caring relationships with their teachers and towards the school (Valenzuela, 1999).

At Tel-Aviv, personal, caring relationships between students and teachers and among peers are an important structural element buttressing the learning processes andmitigating some of the negative circumstances the children may face outside of school and inside themselves. Students are constantly being asked to give of their time and space in order to help new students. They are expected to befriend newcomers, they are expected to share with others who have less. Teachers often care for their students in ways that are more like parents than teachers. *"It's all about motherhood here; like in a family*", says Ella the music teacher. Her pedagogical philosophy and practice are normally authoritarian and strict, but here, as opposed to the other school she works in, she is more open with the students, more lenient and expressive. She gives them more of herself ("*10 times as much"),* warmth they don't always have at home, the sandwich she brings for lunch:
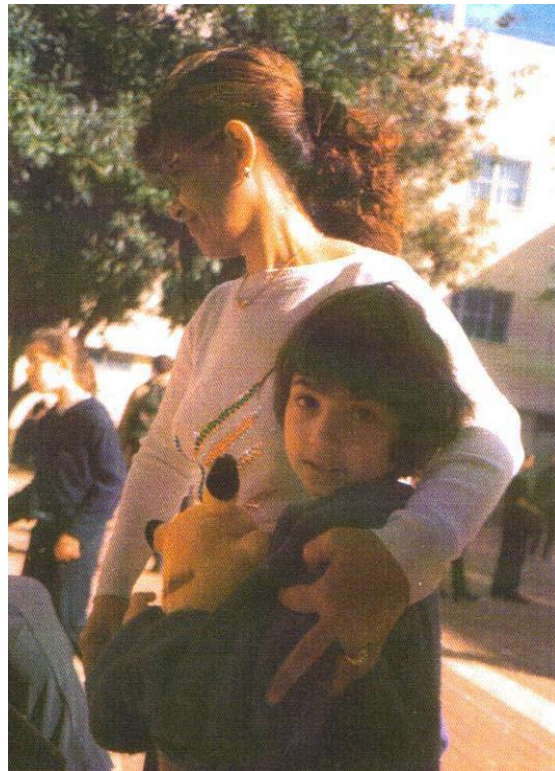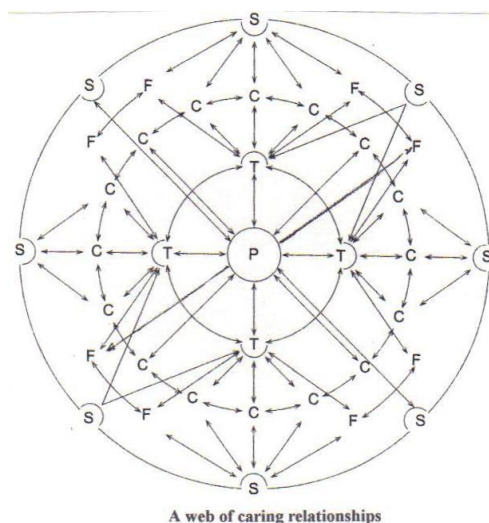
> *If someone in my class comes to school with no breakfast, I give them half of my sandwich, and if two children are hungry, well then I just try to find something for myself to eat in the teachers' lounge. I can't eat if I know that one of them is*

hungry. I feel that here I'm a mother and a woman first. In the other school I'm a teacher and an educator. The other things they get at home".

Olga, the English teacher, adds[126], "S*chool for these children is like home, in some cases it's even better than home*". David affirms this sentiment when he mentions his teacher Sharon: *"She's like a mother to us. She respects everyone. This school is like our home. The same as our home"*

There seems to be a different prioritizing of responsibilities, roles and identities among the faculty and staff of the school where care-taking roles precede educational roles and identities. As Amira says of herself: "*First of all I'm a human being. Being a principal only comes second*"[127].

The graphic describes the web of caring relationships that have been constructed and have evolved vertically and horizontally between the participants in the school setting: principal (P), teachers (T), children (C), families (F) and support services (S). The support services include social workers, psychologist, teaching counselors, principals' support group, *Perach* and *Ma'hapach* (one-on-one mentoring programs provided by university students), community center enrichment activities, vacation camps in school, Escolita (Spanish language and culture school), subsidized lunch and *Mo'adoneet* (afternoon club), *Mesilah* aid center for foreign workers, and lately, an ENT specialist who heard about the school and the children's problems with recurrent ear infections and hearing loss as a result of not having access to medical care. He volunteered to come and check all the kids and see what he could do to help.

A web of caring relationships

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The language and the tones of speech one hears at Tel-Aviv are not necessarily always those associated with politeness and respect in American culture. Teachers raise their voices, lose their tempers, use blunt language when nothing else seems to do or when they are in a bad mood. Emotions are very much on the surface here (although a visiting teacher said that as he walked through the school he heard teachers raise their voice but none was as loud as he sometimes gets in his own classes. On the overall, he found the school to be exceptionally calm). Ohz condones teachers raising their voices in school:

> *I think Anat M. is a cool teacher even though she sometimes yells at me. I think that any teacher that yells at me is OK because I know that I make mistakes too and they yell at us for our own benefit because they want us to learn and they don't want us to be disruptive. They want us to grow up and go to the university. They don't want us to be ignorant".*

The children themselves naturally use language more aggressively than we are used to hearing in schools in the U.S.[128] Amira addresses the issue of violent language as she muses upon the reflexivity of language,

> *Our language* [in Israel] *is very aggressive. If the whole world talks about "cancer prevention", here we have a "war on cancer". When the world talks about preventing traffic accidents, we wage "a war on traffic accidents". It is very important to use a different language for education, a language of peace".*

Yet, even using this everyday aggressive, loud, emotional discourse, the Tel-Aviv school is a cocoon of mutual love and care[129]. Mrs. Lotan, the superintendent, commented on this when she told me that when studying Tel-Aviv it isn't enough to document the words one hears and the actions one sees,

> *It is the spirit associated with these events, the special interaction between the teachers and the children that are most important, interactions through which the teacher transmits to the children that she really loves them. This essential quality is very strong here".*

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[128] Discourse in Israeli society in general is more blunt, direct and usually louder than the accepted norm in the U.S.

[129] I think we can all agree that the language of loving and caring families at home isn't necessarily only that which is found in storybooks. One finds loud, aggressive and exceedingly emotional discourse, on occasion, in any situation of human relations, including warm and caring homes.

Tsipi, the school counselor, concurs: *Whoever isn't aware that in order to educate children you need to invest warmth and love, isn't able to move the children forward*".

Mugno and Rosenblitt support this theoretically:

> The depth of the teacher-child relationship is the single most important factor that will contribute to the teacher's ability to help any child, and particularly the at-risk child, develop emotionally and socially. And they add, As long as we are able to reach out in a caring and empathetic way to a child, we will create a deep relationship, even if the child acts in a rejecting, provoking, ambivalent or distancing way (Mugno and Rosenblitt, 2001, p.65).

"To care and be cared for are fundamental human needs… [W]e need to be understood, received, respected, recognized" (Noddings, 1992, p. xi). At Tel-Aviv, this need is constantly being addressed as they focus is on the individual student and her "real needs" rather than on the group and its achievements. Tsipi gave an example:

> *There is a little Arab girl in school that we diagnosed as having a severe learning disability and we really should send her to the special education school, but we're not letting her go because she is too weak. We know that she'll feel comfortable only with us so we want to continue raising her here. At the special education school there are almost no Arabs and they probably won't know how to care for her, or might even abuse her. There she will be anomalous, and here she isn't. She belongs".*

Batia (6th grade, Israeli) illustrates the teachers' care and concern from her perspective, as she answers my question of: "*What happened in class when you came here and were on a low level in math?*" (she told me that since she fought with her teachers in her former school she didn't learn English or math as she should have).

> "*I would create mayhem in class)*". And she added: "*When I don't know something I'm disruptive*".
> Me, "*So what did the teacher do?*"
> "*She understood that I'm behaving like this because I don't know the material so they helped me, the principal* [helped] *a little, the* [math] *teacher, Nechama* [the homeroom teacher] *would help me here and there, so slowly I made it up and now I'm better at my studies and in behavior too*".

Amira explained the idea to a group of visiting superintendents:

> *When you care for the special needs of each child, the very real and unique needs of the child, and the child feels that even if you were unable to solve his problems today, you may solve them tomorrow, then the child feels that he always has a*

chance to succeed, he's always within an experience of capability. The more you deal with and diminish the child's problems, you increase his prospects and possibilities".

Yonat, who teaches 4th grade, is an example of the caring relationships developed in school. She is a big woman who walks and talks slowly. To an outsider she seems gruff, unfriendly. She rarely smiles. But she's all there for the kids (she travels for over an hour each way to teach at Tel-Aviv, although she lives in a town where teaching jobs are plentiful). Yonat carries a large "Mary Poppins" bag and when the bell rings before class several of her students are usually waiting at the door of the teachers' lounge to help her carry her bag that they know is full of surprises and pencils. Surprises – for the students she adores, and the pencils – for the same students who are forever losing their own.

> *There are kids who always come without pencils and erasers to school",* she told me. *"I don't get angry and don't even mention it. Maybe their parents can't provide for them – I always begin with a positive assumption. What's really important is not the pencils but that they'll learn, and it's the same with the notebooks. I used to ask them for a notebook for each subject but now, if they have something to write on, it's good enough.* [A different teacher] *gets angry and punishes them if they forget their notebook. I told her 'Give them a piece of paper and don't waste your time'".*

This ethos underlies the idea that each and every child is important and must be afforded "experiences of capability" *(chavayah shel mesoogaloot)*, because it is their human right to succeed. Accordingly, Amira separated between professional teachers (math, English, science) and homeroom teachers (language, literature, social studies):

> *I wanted the homeroom teachers to have as many hours as possible with their class. The reasoning was that children here need a lot of care, and they'll get this care best from their homeroom teacher who will be using humanistic tools such as literature, Bible – topics that have social and remedial associations, a bibliotheraputic approach. The teachers can choose the texts they teach to emphasize emotional therapy and general humanistic values, something that is difficult to do in math or other hierarchical topics".*

The special relationship that can develop between the children and their *mechanechet* (homeroom teacher) is described by Sara, who asked to be taped again after having already been interviewed that same morning.

I want to add a few more things about my teacher. If someone doesn't have food, she runs and gives him from her own food or she prepares something from the teachers' lounge. She cares for us and she didn't have to be promoted with us to the next grade but she wanted to because she knows we're good children. She respects us as we do her even if we fight sometimes".

Lena was 8 years old and lived with her mother (who made a living as a prostitute) and her maternal grandfather, who was known to physically abuse his daughter. She had taken the play money from the school's Monopoly game and refused to return it. Her mother came to school at the principal's request and there she complained bitterly that at home Lena keeps "stealing" money from her purse and she doesn't know how to deal with the problem. Amira mediated and all the monies were returned to their rightful owners.

Talking to her alone, Amira asked why she was taking all this money. Lena answered that her dream was to get a computer and since mom couldn't buy one for her, she decided to "save up" on her own. She saw an ad in the paper about buying a computer for only NIS200 ($50). Looking through the paper Amira found the ad that announced a sale on computers for only NIS200 in **each of 36 payments**…. That evening she began working the phones to find a donor of a used computer for Lena.

Within the concept of a fusion pedagogy in which all aspects of the child's life are considered and dealt with, Tsipi described how she looks at the child's home situation when assessing school problems:

A child who had come from Russia was behaving very strangely. He would leave the classroom and walk around the school. At first we attributed this to issues of adjustment and we brought the mother in for some talks with the psychologist and things seemed to get better".

The strange behavior resumed and took more severe forms. The boy was tested and found to be very intelligent though in need of emotional support. In a conference he told the counselor that he was misbehaving in school to get his mother's attention.

I called the mother in again and even though I felt that I was being intrusive and I had a difficult time doing this, I told her that she needed to hug her child, to give him warmth and attention. She disagreed and on one level I understood her because I came from the same place, a place where education is very important but there are no hugs or kisses".

The mother seems to resent her son and needs help more than he does, said Tsipi, and it is for people like her that she is so adamant about getting a psychological clinic on school grounds. The mother refuses to go to outside services although they are free, but

Tsipi feels that she would come if the psychologist were associated with the school. *"We have to get her help for the sake of her child",* she concluded.

The staff, inclusively, although there are slips, cares for the children, each in their own way and according to their personality and best understanding. The janitors will fix broken zippers and "hungry" shoes, they go to children's homes if necessary and will cover up some of the boy's mischievous behavior such as when a group of 5th graders came running to the janitor one day complaining that the water to the school was cut off and they were so thirsty and wanted to go to the bathroom and what could they do…? The old janitor looked them over and without a word, slowly limped downstairs to the water main and turned it back on. He knew they had played a trick on him, he told me when he came back upstairs, but he didn't mind.

I was talking to Lee (3rd grade, born in Israel to parents from the Philippines) on the bus on the way to the community center.

> "*Teacher, who are you? Why are you here?"* she asked me.
> "*To learn about the Tel-Aviv school because I think it's special. Do you think it's a special school?"* I asked her.
> *"Yes, because I learn there",* she said and then she added*, "also because if we're hungry they prepare food for us."*

Anat K. (V.P.) explains this devotion*:*

> *Our care for the children is not only about teaching and learning. We feel responsible for them, see to it they have food and clothing, we worry about them when there is a strike*[130]*.Since teachers are prohibited from coming to school during a strike and many times the kids' parents aren't even aware of the strike nor of its implications for the children, Amira comes to school and opens the gates and lets them run around the yard so at least they're safe and off the streets.*

The guard at the front gate spent hours in his little cubicle cutting and pasting and building something. "*What **are** you doing*?" I was curious. He didn't seem the artsy type. "*You'll see*", he was guarding a secret. Several days later, on an overcast and windy day he gathered the children around him at recess and gave them a most beautiful kite he had made for them. He taught them how to fly the kite and helped them get it out of the tree…. And when the Habo family's apartment burnt down in the middle of the night and they were left with only the scorched pajamas on their backs, it was the school staff that

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[130] An almost regular annual occurrence in Israel.

helped them get their life together again by paying the first month's rent on a new apartment and giving them furniture, dishes, linens, clothes and a lot of personal attention. "*When I come to the school all the teachers ask me 'What do you need?' 'What can we help you with?"* Mrs. Habo told me when we met, at her invitation, for tea.

> Annie was about to read a poem about feelings and moods, so first she asked Josef, a relative newcomer from Ecuador: *"Do you know what regashot* (feelings) *means?"* Josef said he did. *"So tell me in Spanish"*, said Annie, who is fluent in Spanish herself, trying to make it easier for him, but he didn't respond. Annie said, "*Sentimentos. Regashot is sentimentos. Josef, you must always tell me if you don't understand a word, ok? Who would like to talk about feelings?*"
> Renaldo (from Columbia): *"Yesterday I was happy but then my mother told me that my uncle and his children are all sick in Columbia, so how could I be happy?"*
> Annie: *"Oh, no. That's sad. I'd like you to come to me every day and tell me how they're coming along. Don't forget".*
> Lee (from the Philippines): "*When I have no one to play with I'm sad and then when someone comes and asks me to play, I'm happy*".
> Annie: *"When someone asks us to play with them we're happy so pay attention during recess if you see someone from class who has no one to play with. Call him over to play and make him happy. We need to care for each other".*

Ella the music teacher told me about Tim, the 4th grader from Uzbekistan who asks to stay after every choir lesson to play the piano. Although the piano is old and frail, and although she has to go home, Ella lets him stay a while. *"He wants to learn how to play the piano so badly and mom can't afford to pay for lessons"*, she says.

For Olga, the English teacher, this concern for the children raises tensions at home. Every evening when she phones her friend Genya, the math teacher, she says that her husband complains: *"Don't you have anything else to talk about? Always the children? At school **and** at home?!"*

There seems to be an acute sensitivity to the children's holistic state of being as well as to their ability to engage in academics at any given time, but most often at the end of the day. In every school there are days when the kids are "off the wall" for some reason or other (we may say it's the spring or a full moon). At Tel-Aviv the teachers don't seem to fight the situation when they can't control it and there were instances I saw where the teacher let the children "hang out", do whatever they wanted to quietly in class or otherwise they would go down to the yard to play. Annie told me that at the end of the day, especially when it's hot outside, she reads the class a story and allows the children to

draw, put their heads down or rest on the floor. Sonia (4th grade, from Russia) told me about her teacher Yonat[131]:

> *Yonat teaches us many subjects but during the last hours we play because we're already tired and can't do anything, so we play "Bank". We made money and wallets and we play and buy things".*
> "*And you learn how to use real money that way?* I ask.
> "*Yes*", Sonia smiles.

Mrs. Lotan, the superintendent, sees this as part of an educational process:

> *Amira sets the tone and the teachers, who have gone through long-term and serious learning and adjusting processes, have learned to enjoy and love what they are doing, to love the children, to take responsibility. They all demonstrate responsibility and commitment to every child, to the last of the children (ad acharon hatalmeedeem)".*

Annie tells a story about a little girl in her 1st grade class several years ago. Her mother came from Chile and had been working in Israel while the child was raised in Portugal by her grandmother. The mother had a baby here and the girl was sent for, arriving in Israel after not having seen her parents since she was 2 years old. She was thus faced with several daunting problems – being separated from her grandmother and her native environment, having to get used to her parents and new sister, getting used to a new environment with a new language and starting 1st grade – all at the same time. *"No wonder she was unavailable for learning!"* said Annie.

"She was very quiet and introverted. She wasn't learning Hebrew, didn't talk and couldn't read. It was very difficult to get through to her on any level. So I left her alone for 6 months in terms of academics but tried to make her time in class pleasant, reinforcing her emotionally and socially. I wanted her to like coming to school. Towards the end of the year, I felt she was beginning to become ready to learn so I would sit with her every day, one on one. But in 2nd grade she was still not speaking or reading Hebrew. It seemed that she had some kind of emotional blockage that wasn't letting her open up".

Suddenly, toward the end of the 2nd year, the girl began talking and reading. She developed into a delightful, smiling child and underwent a significant change of behavior. *"We were happy realizing that all our efforts and patience bore fruit. And in 3rd grade, she was already in full bloom and became a very good student".*

"And then one day she announced that they were leaving. I was very sad. It is so frustrating to know that you invest so much work and energy and emotions in a child and someone other than you is going to enjoy the fruits of your labor". Annie asked the mother to throw a farewell party for the class and they all stood around and cried, she remembers.

"I still think of this child often. She wasn't a good student and I had a lot of trouble with her, and maybe just because of this I really loved her. From my years of

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[131] Video 4 – 0:02:56-0:04:33

> *teaching I have learned, that children I have trouble with, those that pose the biggest challenges, those are the children I love even more".*

Most teachers could tell me the life stories of every one of their students (although they were not forthcoming with the information and when they did talk, they usually didn't mention names to protect the children's dignity[132]). "*The great amounts of information we have on each child, brings us closer, makes the children our friends. Knowing them binds us, not on the educational level alone",* says Rachel.

 I understood exactly what Rachel meant because I was going through the same experience. As I got to know the children on a personal level, whether I initiated the conversations or it was them coming up to me, the more I learned about them and their lives, the more involved I became with their stories, the more I felt a relationship of caring developing between us. And it wasn't a one-way relationship, but more like a process of my being woven into the school's fabric; we became parts of the same story on certain levels as we told each other our stories, included and made space for each other in our lives. If I was late coming to school or if I missed a day, there were always kids that noticed and came to ask about my absence. I asked about their lives, thoughts, school experiences and they asked about my children and about America. They invited me to their parties, trips, dance practice, soccer games. They offered me their snacks, as I offered them mine and when some of them heard that I like to read, a group began showing up with books during the long breakfast recess and we all sat around in the hallway, I read, they listened and we talked about the books. They were looking for acknowledgement, attention and a listener for their stories, just as I was, and it was from there that we composed the webs of our relationships.

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Touching the children and hugging them are regular practices at Tel-Aviv.

There are teachers who love children in every school, but here it's more apparent because our children are more in need of love. They demand it. They have a need, they transmit it and we respond with warm words, good words, loving words. It's not that we love more, it's just that we show it more" says Anat M.

Sveta, the (originally Russian) computers teacher tells of her feelings:

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[132] I noticed similar behavior in my interview with Ohz and David. Both would not mention names of teachers they were criticizing or children they were talking negatively about.

I can't say that I love all the children. I don't know if I would use the word 'love'. It is a strong word, but I have never yet bumped into a child that I don't like. Sometimes I get angry but that quickly passes. Take Gabrielle, for example. Very often she drives me crazy but then she jumps up into my arms and we hug each other" [133].

"*We communicate through hugs*", says Annie about her new Turkish student who doesn't know Hebrew yet. Amira mentioned the countless times the teachers came down with lice because of the physical contact with the children, but she says, it doesn't deter them from continuing the practice. Tsiona tells me at the end of the Purim celebration about her ongoing concern for Dafna (what Hargreaves would have termed "never ending" care, Hargreaves, 1994:147):

What is happening in Dafna's life comes home with me every day. Just thinking about it is painful for me. There is no happiness in her life. She has no joie de vivre. That's why I danced with her all day today, only with her".

Rachel, who has been teaching at Tel-Aviv for seven years, came to the school from a background in theatre. She's always studying one thing or another and bringing her new knowledge into the classroom. From studying Eastern philosophies she became aware that, as humans, we tend to understand things by putting them into categories and labeling them. "When conceptions of person, self and community are not continually called into question in professional practice, reified and reductionist concepts emerge as common practice" (Witherell, 1999 p.84). This was happening to Rachel in her relationship to her students: "*this child is bad", "this child is from such-and-such a home"*, she would label in her mind. But once she became cognizant of the practice, she "*began looking at* [her students] באמת (really looking)", and she discovered that "*there is a genius in every child"* and that a teacher needs to be patient for the expression of that genius. "*I love my students as if they were my own children. They teach me so much!"* she says as we stand together near the school gate and she hugs and caresses a student of hers who had just

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[133] Gabrielle is a 1st grader with multiple learning and behavior problems who is largely uncontrollable at school. The teachers send her from one to another in search of some respite. For the 2001 school year the school finally persuaded her parents to agree to sending her to a special education school which they adamantly opposed the previous year.

been brought to school by the janitor dispatched to her home to get her when she didn't show up in the morning after vacation[134].

> Arkan came from Turkey and knew no Hebrew. It was a difficult time in Israel when every day bombs were going off, busses were exploding and people were getting killed. The children in school were on edge. Mazal, Arkan's teacher, assembled the class to discuss the events in an attempt to placate their fears and ease their worries. Since she knew Arkan wouldn't understand the Hebrew, she sat next to him and throughout the talk had her arm around his shoulders, holding him close to her. Afterwards, she asked another Turkish child to ask Arkan what he understood of the conversation. He said that he understood that the situation was difficult and the teacher was telling them not to be afraid. *"Love is the same in every language"*, said Orly, the school counselor.

It was cold inside one February day so I went down to the yard and sat by Natasha, the 1st grade teacher who was monitoring recess, both of us trying to catch some warming rays of sunshine in the breaks between the clouds. Natasha was hugging her sweater tightly to her chest to protect herself from the wind that had kicked up, since she had just come back to school that morning after staying home for two days with a fever. She didn't look as if she was better yet and I asked her why she hadn't stayed home another few days to regain her strength.

> *The doctor had given me a five-day sick leave but I couldn't do it. I know that when I'm away from my kids they don't get what I think they should be getting. The substitute teachers are just not good enough and I can't let them fall behind. I know it sounds crazy, but that's how I am"*, was her answer.

Ella told me about her relationship with Sara, a disruptive and hyperactive 3rd grader who joined the choir the previous year[135].

> *You can't imagine how much trouble Sara gave me last year. She was driving me crazy, bothering anyone who stood by her, disrupting every session, until I understood that I have to approach her through hugs. Words alone didn't work. Since then, she has become my best student. These days when she has trouble with other teachers she runs to me for comfort"*.

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[134] The school kept a close watch over this 6th grader. Her mother left very early for work and her stepfather, who was a shady character, took no responsibility of waking her up for school. There were also suspicions about his abusing the child but these suspicions had not been substantiated. So by 10AM on the day after vacation when she hadn't shown up on her own, her teacher wanted to go get her but was afraid of the 2 huge dogs the family kept tied in the front yard to deter trespassers. The janitor volunteered to go and returned shortly with the child. When Rachel, hugging her, asked why she hadn't come to school that morning, she smiled, and said, "*Cholah (sick)*" in a very heavy Russian accent and went off with her friends towards the classroom.

[135] Although 2nd graders are not usually encouraged to join, Sara asked to and was accepted.

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Anat K. (V.P. and pedagogical counselor), told about her care for the teachers as she was explaining her role to Dr. Bar-Shalom (2000, p.78):

> I avail myself according to the need. I postpone everything and sit down immediately, giving [the teacher] counseling and help. We counsel with the wish of reaching a higher place next time… A new teacher arrived. She found herself in a 3rd grade class that was on a much lower level than she expected [and she was distressed]. Yesterday she felt that she couldn't take it any longer. I gave immediate support, including mental [support]. Sometimes it's a touch, a close bond. This kind of support allows us to continue, and that is what actually happened yesterday.

Most of all, though, I was impressed with the caring relationships among the children. One day Michael was punished and told to sit in the office for the rest of the afternoon. I was sitting in the same room and observed the following interaction: Avi, Michael's friend, passed by and saw him sitting on the small couch by the door. He came in and asked what was happening and Michael told him. Avi sat down beside him and put his arm around Michael. They sat like that for a few minutes without saying a word and then the bell rang and Avi left to return to class. And at another time in the teachers' lounge I saw one girl holding a pack of ice to her forehead after being hit by a ball and her friend sitting beside her, comforting her.

I asked some children how they deal with the multitude of languages at school,

Everyone gets along in his own language. I talk Spanish with my girlfriends, but if a child that doesn't know Spanish shows up suddenly, I'll speak Hebrew so he won't feel bad", Nisa answered.

The older children often show care for the younger ones. Amira told me how she saw Omer "working" the front yard during recess. The younger children were climbing up on the window grates and Omer was picking them off and gently placing them on the ground, one after another. I often saw older and younger kids playing together, especially the 5th and 6th graders with the 1st and 2nd graders. Sometimes it seemed to be the language that bound them, at other times…who knows.

An outcome of the caring human relationships is the care the children show for the school itself. When 3rd graders Iris and Evette were explaining their role as cultural brokers, one of the things they mentioned that they tell the new children - after advising them about food they should bring and not to hit other kids - is not to litter and not to break things in school. And the building displays this concern. It is clean and tidy. Amira walks around picking up scraps and the children follow suit.

> From the media
> "Research shows that when kids care about the setting they're in, they're happy and their achievement goes up", said Professor of education Karen Stout (Lehigh University, PA) in an interview to The New York Times Education Life [136].
> In the same section of the paper, in a different article, the journalist describes seeing Mr. Moss, the principal of Alice Deal Junior High School in Washington, pick up scraps of paper from the floor. He asked him if keeping the halls clean was part of his job. "It's everybody's job, beginning with mine, because when kids see me cleaning up they will begin to care too", he replied [137].
>
> - * - * - * -
>
> "Teaching is above all a matter of forming caring and supportive relationships".
> Sonia Nieto

Giving everyone attention at Tel-Aviv extends to the children's parents as well.

In the past", said Anat M. *"only parents of children who had problems were invited to parent-teacher conferences. This was a practice that put* [the teachers'] *needs before those of the children because the fewer parents we invited, the less time and work we had to invest in the meetings".*

The issue was raised in one of the teachers' meetings resulting in the decision that every parent had the right to meet the teacher of their child and get a progress report, "even" if the news was good. She continues: *"We decided that it was our duty to serve*

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[136] January 13, 2002, p.15.
[137] *The New York Times, Education Life,* January 13, 2002, p.58.

the needs of the parents despite the extra work it entailed for us. Today every parent is invited to our meetings".

Tsipi, the school counselor, does limited psychological intervention. The complex cases are referred to a (free) psychological clinic in an adjoining town. She told me that she had found out that the parents were not using the psychological services either because it wasn't an accepted norm of behavior in their culture, or they were embarrassed to do so or, sometimes, they just didn't have the time to go So she began a totally hopeless campaign to have the municipality open a psychological clinic on school grounds because she felt the parents would be more comfortable coming to school for services that she believed were imperative for alleviating some of the serious problems they and the children faced. Amira, who has strong connections in city hall, backed Tsipi's efforts but they were both told not to waste their time. There was no money in the city for more important projects, and most of Tel-Aviv's kids didn't even exist legally, anyway. But they persisted and won. A part-time psychological counseling center will begin operating as of this school year.

For years Annie was an informal liaison for the Spanish-speaking parents of her students, helping them adjust to the new country, helping them find jobs, translating. Other than in school, she would meet them in the park where she came with her daughters on Saturdays and they would talk while the children played.

> *Of course I didn't have to, but I liked going to the park on Saturday mornings. They were always eating their delicious foods, listening to Latin music and dancing, and when I came it gave them the feeling that I cared, which I did. I would listen to them, try to help. I had such good memories of the years I lived in Mexico that being with these people, listening to their music, eating with them – I was reliving my Mexican experience through them".*

Mr. and Mrs. Habo invited my husband and me to tea one Friday afternoon. They told us how they came to Israel many years ago from Ghana for Mr. Habo to study medicine, but due to political upheavals in his country he ended up studying theology but dreaming of studying agriculture and bringing new technology and progress to his country. In the meantime, both he and his wife are living in Israel illegally, working as house cleaners and raising their son, Benny. Their old apartment over a woodworking shop burned down one night leaving them with the clothes on their backs. Mrs. Habo told about her family's experiences with Tel-Aviv:

The teachers are very good and very kind. Some are better teachers than others, but all of them are very tolerant. They don't discriminate against you if you are Black. They have always treated Yossi well and since the fire, this treatment has passed on to us. Last time I came everybody hugged me and asked why I hadn't come there for so long. Also the parents are very friendly since the fire. Yossi's friend lives nearby and every Friday they invite us to eat with them and we can't refuse".

And the Habos were just as hospitable and giving towards us, in a way, passing the caring forward. When I asked if I could interview them regarding the school, they graciously invited my husband and myself to their tiny apartment, which still only had 2 chairs (Mr. And Mrs. Habo sat on a foot rest together), served us cakes, juices and fruit in abundance and did all they could to help me in my quest, although I was a perfect stranger and offered nothing in return.

6.4.1. Paying the price

"Depression is the flaw in love. To be creatures who love we must be creatures who despair at what we lose".
Andrew Solomon, (*The Noonday Demon)*

The flip side of care and nurturance is a prevalence of depressive guilt among teachers, particularly in elementary schools. "The more important that care is to a teacher, the more emotionally devastating is the experience of failing to provide it" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.145). Eemee talked about this aspect of her work at Tel-Aviv:

I'm especially frustrated when I feel that despite all of my efforts and investment I didn't reach that boy and didn't have enough time for working with that girl. The day ends and I am wiped out yet I realize that I forgot someone. It's very upsetting".

When I talked to her about changes she would suggest for the school, the topic came up again:

I think classes should be smaller and more homogenous because, you see, my class has 32 children and they are all over the place in terms of their needs and abilities. I try so hard to help the weaker students that I sometimes ignore the stronger ones, and some of them have great potential, but I don't get to them. Whenever I catch myself, I feel very bad about it".

Annie expressed another aspect of guilt that results from the intense caring relationships all are involved in, guilt about not having enough left for one's own family.

I hug my students all the time. I love them so much. But my conscience isn't clear because I don't hug my daughters as much, but when I come home I am so wrung out that all I want is peace and quiet. I'm lucky that my husband has the capacity to give our daughters what they need in this sense".

Noga told of her personal struggle as she was working at Tel-Aviv:

"My husband had to learn to braid our daughter's hair and my son complained that I love the school more than I love him since I left the house at 7AM and returned home late at night".

Boris

"Hugging the walls" was something I'd only read about, but when I saw Boris walking down the hall, I immediately understood. I saw him continuously walking along the hallways during recess with either his shoulder or his hand touching the wall at all times. He would proceed slowly, his expression sad, his mouth in a pout, occasionally sighing deeply and sometimes mumbling to himself. When I interrupted his walks to say hello, he would look up at me for a second with his dark eyes peering out of a pale, almost translucent face and continue silently on his way. Boris had only come to school several months earlier and was making very little progress academically. He never did any of the homework his teacher assigned. *"He always tells me he's too bored alone at home to do any homework, but I see him in class everyday and, believe me, he's not bored, he's depressed"*, she said.

One very beautiful morning I noticed a group of excited children sitting in a pool of sunshine near their 3rd grade classroom. In their midst was a mechanical puppy yelping, jumping and turning summersaults. Everybody was talking at once: *"How cute!", "Look, his tail is moving!", "Can I wind him up?", "What's his name?", "Does he want a piece of my sandwich?"* Boris was beaming. He was the proud owner of this wonder and was answering the kids' questions as if he was a regular in the limelight. Later that day, I used the puppy to strike up a conversation as Boris was going about his routine along the hallway, puppy in hand. "What's his name?" *I asked.*

"I haven't really decided yet, but I think I'll call him Max", came the unexpected lengthy reply from a happy child whose face was now almost taken over by his beaming eyes. And so we became friends. It was as if Max was the key to a floodgate and Boris began talking to me (although Max was never brought to school again. Mom was afraid it would break). His monosyllabic answers to my questions became longer and sometimes he would even seek me out on his own accord

He had come with his mother from Russia last year and they had moved around from place to place until they settled, temporarily, in a tiny apartment near the school. *"There are mice in the apartment"* he told me, *"but we're moving soon".* Boris's mother gets home from work at 9PM and from the time he comes home from school until she returns he isn't allowed to go outside because they live near a "big" street. The only

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thing he can occupy himself with is playing with the neighbor's cat on the staircase as there are no other children in the building[138]. On Saturdays Boris and his mother go up to the neighbor's apartment to chat and play cards. *"She is too tired to go out to the park"*, he said. When she was sick Boris stayed home from school for a week to care for her.

One day life changed as mom brought home a real puppy to keep him company. I received daily updates on Spike's behavior – how he caught a mouse, how he soils everywhere and how he barked at Max the mechanical puppy. Boris often smiled now.

"They say I'm in love", he told me one day.

"Who with?" I asked, delighted at this development.

"With Joanna. But it's not true" he replied and ran off. Several days later I saw him running after Joanna down the hall…

Boris's teacher, put much effort into finding ways of reaching him and teaching him Hebrew. She tutored him privately on her free time and taught him in scheduled semi-private lessons. She talked to his mother often and tried different teaching methods, but to no avail. He was not making significant progress. Now she decided to use Spike in order to try to get Boris going on some learning. *"Well, here's the deal"* she offered one day. *"I'll give you some pages from a coloring book so you can color pictures instead of writing at home since you are 'too bored' to write, but in return you will have to read the little booklet I give you out loud to Spike. That way you'll be learning Hebrew and doing your homework and you'll be making Spike's life interesting as well".* It was a deal[139].

Exactly a week later, I raised my head from reading something at "my" desk and saw Boris standing in front of me, his look concentrated, his eyes sad again. Butterflies began flying around in my stomach

"What's up?" I asked, *"How's Spike doing?"*

"We gave him away", he said. *"Maybe we'll get him back one day".*

"At least you can still play with the neighbor's cat" I tried, forcing a smile.

"She doesn't allow me to anymore" he replied, turned around and left.

Our conversations went downhill from then and Boris went back to hugging the walls and sighing.

Fast forward 2 weeks. Annie came into the office and told me that Boris had come to school that morning to say good-bye to her and the class. They were moving to another town that day. *"He was standing there waiting for me to hug him as usual, but I didn't. I was too mad. Do you know how much I invested in this child? How much time, patience, thought and worries? Do you know what I did for him?! This is always the story in this school – children leaving suddenly after we've all created strong relationships.*

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[138] Leaving an 8 year old alone at home is against the law in Israel and since the social services are constantly following her, the mother tells everyone that a Russian neighbor looks after the child in the afternoons. In reality Boris is on his own and may go up to the neighbor only if there is a problem.

[139] An article titled *Listen, Spot,* in *Time Magazine* of May 10th 2002 (more than a year after Boris's story), tells about the Reading Education Assistance Dogs program that pairs reluctant readers with dogs as companions whose nonjudgemental presence promotes reading activities of children unsure of doing so with an adult listener. *"One of the things we know is that when kids are in the presence of animals, they'll relax. They start looking forward to the work they need to do",* said Sandi Martin, the program's founder.

> *It's so hard for me to take!"* said the usually cheery Annie with tears in her eyes and a deep sigh.

There is always sadness in their voices when the teachers talk about children who have left. They invest energy and emotions and then the children leave suddenly, not only severing caring relationships, but also not allowing the teachers to see whether their efforts bore fruit – What happened to the child? Did she succeed? Is he happy?

> Yonat had a student from Turkey two years ago whom she loved very much. The child's mother used to come to school and bring food and sweets for every event. One day her father was deported and the mother decided to try and marry an Israeli in order to get papers so the family could stay in Israel. She paid the guy several thousand dollars and left for Turkey for the marriage ceremony. In the meanwhile, Yonat and the PTA arranged for the girl to be taken care of until her mother returned. "*She would be at a different home every day, but, mind you, only homes with love and warmth – you need a lot of love in a situation such as this"*. In the end, the mother was conned; she lost all her money and couldn't come back to Israel. The girl left to join her parents and that's when Yonat broke down. *"I cried until I told myself there was nothing to be done. After she left there were those big earthquakes in Turkey. Imagine how worried I was! One isn't made of steel, you know."*

And Annie expresses her letdown in such situations:

Children come to us from all over. Some have a better grasp of things, some are not as good and take much longer to learn, to speak, to understand. We invest tremendous amounts of energy and resources in the children. We look for the right materials they can deal with and not become frustrated, we try to see to it that they can work with everything we give them and not feel incapable. The frustrating thing for us is that suddenly they have to leave, from one day to the next they just vanish. You invest so much physical and emotional energy, you give them so much love and then they disappear. It is very, very painful".

The children suffer from the transience as well[140].

> **Next week I'm going**
> Next week I'm going.
> I'm leaving for Spain with my dad, my sister and my mom.
> We are going to my uncle in Spain. He asked my father to come and help him find work and if they find something they can work there together.
> The uncle, when he visited us, said that in Spain there are many things for me, that I could go to school.

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[140] From a book of stories written by Tel-Aviv kids.

> I'm not so happy because my friends are all here and there I don't have any friends. Here almost all the children in class are my friends.
>
> I will also miss my uncle Christian and my aunt Miriam and my cousin Yafit, who was already born here in Israel, but most of all I will miss, the most special are my friends.

And there is a physical price to pay, about which I heard from Noga (among others) when she was talking about the behavior pattern of hugging and kissing the children at school. She asked rhetorically: *"Do you know how many times Amira became ill as a result of this? Ear infections, viruses… as a result of the close contact with the children. And I'm not even mentioning lice!"*

It's a continual struggle and constant concern, explained Amira. One can never rest at Tel-Aviv: *"What worries me constantly are the moral questions – are we doing the right things for the children?"*

6.5. "There is room in the world for every human being" ("*Lechol adam yesh makom ba'olam*"): Extending a welcoming hand

> "Once we have seen the look of discovery and learning in students' eyes, we can no longer maintain that some young people - because of their social class, race, ethnicity, gender, native language or other difference - are simply unmotivated, ignorant or undeserving. The light in their eyes is eloquent testimony to their capacity and hence, their right to learn…"
>
> Sonia Nieto (*The light in their eyes*)

Israel is one of the countries that has signed and is upholding, to a large degree, the International Treaty for the Welfare of the Child. Accordingly, every child residing in the country for over three months, regardless of the legal status of her parents, is entitled to rights similar to those of the children who are citizens of the country, including free education. The law includes children from age 5, but in distressed locations such as the area around the Tel-Aviv School, the age goes down to 3 years [141].

Opposition to this practice is heard across the country from different sectors of the population. During a questioning session after a meeting at *Mesilah*, the aid center for

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[141] Currently education is the only formal service these kids receive free from the government. A law to provide the foreign children health care was passed in the Knesset, but these services must be paid for by the children's parents.

foreign workers, a young man stood up and protested: *If we do so much for these people, if we give their children free education and health services, we'll be creating a paradise for them and they'll never leave!"* he said, voicing the xenophobia and expressing the concern many people are feeling[142]. Although she was not on the panel, Amira said that she felt she couldn't accept this example of historical amnesia in silence. She rose from her seat, turned toward the young man and responded in defense of "her" children:

> *The history we share as the Jewish people leaves us no choice but to care for these children. Our people have been in similar situations throughout history. We know what it's like. Even the Bible deals with the issue 32 times[143], commanding us to care for the strangers that live among us".*

From the media:
The Israeli feature film *Foreign Sister* (directed by Dan Wollman) addresses the plight of the foreign workers in Israel in a sensitive yet unflinching approach using a story about the relationship forged between Nechama, an Israeli wife, mother, bank executive, and Negsit, an Ethiopian woman living in Tel-Aviv illegally, who comes to work for Nechama doing housework so she can send money to her two young children she had left behind in Ethiopia.
The movie exposes the different responses people have to the foreign workers – from those who are angry about them "making a lot of money without paying taxes" and "being cared for" by the country "for free", through those who accept them kindly but condescendingly ("*Oh, you were an actor in Ethiopia? I didn't know they had theaters there*"), giving them used clothes, asking them to join a family soccer game only after one of the players is hurt, to those who recognize them as fellow humans, get caught up in their lives and bond with them on a personal level as symbolized by the relationship between Nechama and Negsit, who says at the end of the film, "*Me, you… now sisters*".
The film raises the problems of random police roundups, arrests and deportations, the constant fear, poor living conditions (5 adults in a room), lack of medical services, discriminatory attitudes, humiliation and despair. It also shows the bright side of being able to make money and send help to families under worse conditions overseas, of friendship and community among the foreigners themselves, of natural acceptance and understanding by some in the general public and, at times, reaching a better life than had been possible back home [144].

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[142] A different perspective was offered by a shopkeeper in the area: *"These [foreigners] are good, hardworking people. They do the work we don't want to do. The problem is our own people who can't accept them because they seem different".*

[143] Amira showed me a paper written by a colleague that documents every time the *ger* (stranger living in the country) is mentioned in the Bible.

[144] I took a taxi one day in Israel where it is very natural that one converses with the driver quite openly. Having picked me up in front of the school, he asked about the foreign children and proceeded to tell me that he used to be a work manager of building projects and was in charge of foreign workers. When he realized they were not being treated fairly and not paid as they were supposed to be, he fought for them

The law providing their children free education was not known to many of the families who were living in the country illegally, and since most worked long hours, they set up babysitting services for their children. These so called "child care centers" turned out to be "holding houses" where the kids were literally kept locked in from dawn to dusk. The problem is that since the child care services are provided by non-professionals (which is against the law in Israel), are located in basements and back rooms, where the windows (if any) are kept shuttered so neighbors and authorities can't see what is going on, and where the rent is cheap and the landlord turns a blind eye (at least someone pays rent for these mostly uninhabitable spaces)- the rooms have no hygienic accommodations (like refrigerators to keep the babies milk in), no heat in winter nor, much more important in Israel's very hot climate, any air cooling systems. These are dangerous as well as inhuman conditions to raise children in, especially school aged kids who are entitled to regular schooling.

Several years ago the Tel-Aviv municipality opened a help center for the (100,000?) alien workers living in the city and began reaching out to the child care centers in order to bring them up to some kind of standard. Today the care takers are given courses on child care, hygiene and child development, volunteers paint the rooms and donate toys, crayons, television sets. Alternative spaces are sought for hazardous ones. A center that cooperates with authorities in shaping up becomes "almost legitimate" and can begin operating with open windows, letting air and light into the children's lives. School age kids are placed in public schools and many ended up at Tel-Aviv, which today has by far the greatest concentration of foreign children in the country. But not all children came. Some are still warehoused in secretive care centers that have not come to light. The head of *Mesilah* told me that every time they make contact with another child care establishment, they inevitably find a child or two of school age among the younger children.

This June there was a very touching ceremony, Amira told me. Since two kindergarten classes were added to Tel-Aviv, there was a "moving up" ceremony at the end of the school year for all the 4 year-old preschoolers who will be attending

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but understood the system was too big and corrupt for him to change so he left his job and became a driver. *"At least in this job I make my own rules"*, he said.

kindergarten in September. For the first time this year there were several local care-takers that had prepared their children for kindergarten with the help of the outreach programs of *Mesilah*, and they presented the children to their future kindergarten teachers in this ceremony attended by dignitaries from the Dept. of Education and the Tel-Aviv municipality (who had come "t*o show them respect"*, Amira said). Many people in the audience had tears in their eyes as they watched the little children from all over the world sing Hebrew songs indicative of having gone through a process of preparation for school, said Amira.

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The usual process in the city of Tel-Aviv elementary schools is that by March or April of the previous school year, the 1st grade classes are filled and registration closes. At Tel-Aviv, only a handful of children register ahead for the 1st grade. In late August several years ago, when only a few children had registered for the upcoming school year, Amira and 1st grade teacher Annie, set out to scout the neighborhood for school-age children that should be in school but had not registered.

Amira noticed a little African girl, about 6 or 7 years old, dusty and forlorn, sitting alone in the shade of a building, hugging her knees to her chest. Her name was Victoria, she originally came from the Seychelles Islands and she didn't know where her parents were. She spoke only a little English and no Hebrew. Inquiries through other members of the community revealed that Victoria had been living with her mother who worked as a maid in several homes. During the days, although Victoria was of school age, she was kept at a babysitting-cum-day-care establishment from early morning until her mother came for her at night. Several days prior to having been found, Victoria's mother suffered a stroke at work and was taken to the hospital. When the babysitter saw the child was not being picked up for two days, she let her go out on her own to look for her mother. After a night on the street, she was found by Amira and placed temporarily with another family. Again, through the community, Victoria's estranged father was located, and although he was living in another town and had a new family, took Victoria in and he brings her on the bus to school every day, one hour's ride away. *"Everybody asks me how I come in school in the morning because that I live* [far away]. *But I love coming with dad in the bus",* she told me.

Just outside the bus terminal, Annie noticed a woman holding the hand of a child and looking slightly lost so she approached her and offered help. The woman spoke only Spanish, a language Annie knew well from her years of living in Mexico, and the two began a conversation. As it turned out, the woman had recently arrived with her son from Columbia to help her husband who had been living and working in Israel and had run into some kind of trouble. She had not thought of registering Hiram for school because they were in the country illegally and she did not want to identify herself to any governmental institution for fear of deportation. Annie explained that there is no need for her to fear the school system because it gives Hiram the right to an education, regardless of the legal status of his parents. She said that school registration involves the child only and there is no disclosure of information to any other office. Annie also told the woman that if Hiram comes to school, she will be his teacher and since she knows Spanish, she'd make him feel comfortable. The next day Hiram was registered for school and I was told, has not missed a day since. He is a central figure in the school today, a bundle of energy, quick to smile and a heartthrob. I saw him at the school celebration of Passover. He was singing at the top of his voice, leading the others with his knowledge of the words and melodies of the Hebrew songs.

Pause I: "Every person has the right to succeed" ("*Lechol adam zcoot lehatzleeach*"): A Conversation about Success

> *"If we believe that every person has the right to succeed we will search every route to get there".*
> Amira Yahalom

It was exam time one afternoon in Mariana's math class of 3rd and 4th graders in the Squares (lower ability) group. When all the children finally showed up (a few were late and another student was sent to look for them) and the teacher, very calmly, reiterated her policy regarding tardiness, it was time for the test. But before giving the test, Mariana reviewed the material with the children. The topic was multiplication by 10, 100, 1000, and every child in the class got a chance to review. *"I'm giving you this test so you can all show me how well you know the material. You really do know it",* said Marianna handing out the test sheets. During the test she walked between the seats

monitoring the children's work, commenting, correcting when needed. When two boys began whispering to each other, she walked over to them. "*You don't need to bother each other. I'm here to help you*", she said and did. And when the bell rang, Lewis hadn't finished his test. He told the teacher that he would go home and study some more and come back tomorrow and finish. Was that OK with her? Sure, she answered. Later she explained to me that the tests are given to allow her to plan her teaching and the progress of the class. All the grades the children get on the tests are "good", she said, they usually all succeed because she will not give the test to a child she knows has not mastered the material well enough yet. I had witnessed this when she told Adam that he will have to take the test the next day because he had been absent and she would like him to do some work sheets and polish up on the skill while the rest of the class was being tested.

On the one hand, I have described the children of Tel-Aviv as belonging to marginalized groups normally expected to successfully achieve failure in school[145]. However, in the spirit of shaking off the shackles of traditional discourse, it is possible to see the children from a different perspective, one that allows for every child's achievement of academic success. "Dewey once linked the idea of freedom to becoming different in this way – to seeing new options in the field opening before you, new possibilities for being" (Green, 2001, p. 70-71). This actually happens at Tel-Aviv where success is a readily available commodity and measured differently than in other schools.

Amira complained about the Department of Education administrators who spend great amounts of money on testing and then on questionnaires to find out what was happening in the field. What will they learn from these questionnaires?

> *They'll learn again that in Shderot* [146] *and at Tel-Aviv the children failed their reading comprehension tests. It's because they don't have enough time. They can't read at the end of 1ˢᵗ grade. So what? They don't fail **our** tests, though".*

She accused the education system in general of focusing on failure instead of success and thus itself failing to achieve success across the board.

> *Our education system is constantly busing itself with failures. For over 50 years they are pouring more and more money into failing districts, sending them new*

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[145] Martin Orland (1994) shows statistical correlation between schools with a high concentration of students of poverty and low overall achievement. This is true also for a non-poor student at a poor school who is more likely to be a low achiever.

[146] A town on the social and economic margins known for its failing education system.

books, improving them, devising new programs. And where has this brought them? The same districts are still failing. So why are they wasting their time on all of the testing and statistics to find out who is failing? Wouldn't it be much more logical and practical to look into success? There are so many wonderful schools and districts that are successful, why not learn from them and apply what is already working well to restore health to a failing school? I know so many schools with populations in distress similar to ours, and our system could really work for them but they're not willing to listen".

What she considered success at Tel-Aviv is the fact that the children like coming to school and are all learning, that the teachers like teaching there and that they address the child holistically. *"This is what the Department of Education should test us on"*, she says, "***There*** *they will find success".*

There is also the issue of feeling safe and secure in school as a precondition to becoming "available for learning"[147]. "[L]earning won't happen unless a child feels safe – safe enough to listen to the self and others, to be curious, to ask questions, to express what he or she knows or does not know". Such a sense of security profoundly and positively affects the children's self image, the learning process and success at school (Cohen, 1999, p. 19). At Tel-Aviv the premise is that all children are able to learn, that all children are in a process of learning at all times and that success is their right, as I learned firsthand one morning.

> I was interviewing Amira in her office and our time was very limited. The door was open, as usual, and a group of 5th graders ran up to the door, all talking at once, asking for Amira's help.
> "*Don't bother me now*", she told them, *"I'm busy".*
> They moved further into the room.
> "*Please, please. It's very important. We can get 7 points*" (They were in the midst of a grade-wide competitive knowledge-hunt).
> "*Go find someone else*", she answered sternly.
> "*What is vitamin C and why is it important?"* one of the children decided to call out and try their luck. It worked.
> "*What does the C stand for*?" Amira gave a hint but there was no response. "*What do we need vitamin C for*?" Silence. "*What in your bodies is growing now*?"
> "*Cells*".
> "*I won't say…*"
> "*Yes, that too*" said Amira, "*But what else*?"
> "*Hair*".
> "*Bones*".

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147 More on the concept of "safe space" in Pause II.

> "*Y-e-s…*" Amira directed an anticipating look at them.
>
> "*Calcium! Calcium*!" someone shouted and they all turned around and ran back to wherever they were supposed to be, vanishing as suddenly as they had appeared. Amira smiled at me and we went back to our interview.

In a conference of the Department of Education in Jerusalem, Amira was speaking about her belief in every person's ability and right to experience success. *"What happens with a child who can't succeed?"* came a question from the back of the room. Amira said that she answered as follows:

> *There isn't a human being that can't* [succeed]*, and who am I to determine that someone can't succeed? If he can't succeed at one thing, he can at something else. If we believe that every person has the right to succeed, we will search every route to get there".*

At a different meeting she talked about the reciprocal relationship between the care of the teachers for the real and unique needs of each child and the children's feeling of capability and achievement.

> *When you care for the special needs of each child, the very real and unique needs of the child, and the child feels that even if you were unable to solve his problems today, you may solve them tomorrow, then the child feels that he always has a chance to succeed, he's always within an experience of capability. The more you deal with and diminish the child's problems, you increase his prospects and possibilities*.

Annie talked about her approach to increasing children's achievement and success at school. It was born of her own experience as a student in school and is based on the understanding of the importance of reciprocity and affect in learning:

> *When I was in school I remember I didn't like school because I didn't like most of the teachers. Because I didn't have a personal relationship with most of the teachers. The teachers were distant. I was a good student in the subjects in which I liked the teacher, to the point of excelling. That's why I cherish the relationships with the students in my classes today. I know that if they can love me as a human being, as a human being who gives them respect, talks to them at eye level, addresses their problems… I know that their success in school will grow because they love me and know that someone is listening".*

But what does success mean? How does a school categorize its students into those who do and those who don't succeed? Moll and Diaz write that it has nothing to do with the aptitude or attitude of the child towards schooling but rather with the social

organization of schooling and the organization of experience itself that allow some children to succeed while others are entrapped and fail.

> [T]here is nothing about the students' language or culture that should handicap their schooling; the problems some language minority children face in school must be viewed as a consequence of instructional arrangements that ensnare certain children by not capitalizing fully on their social linguistic and intellectual resources (1987, p. 300).

Amira is of the same mind and offers a solution to the problems the Department of Education has been having for over 50 years of not being able to close the educational gaps between certain population groups and in certain localities, where despite continual testing and changing programs, the same schools (including Tel-Aviv) always fail the national tests. Her solution - that the classrooms in the affluent, predominantly "white" (originating mostly from Europe and North America) and white-collar populated areas such as North Tel-Aviv (the "Upper East Side" of the city of Tel-Aviv) would have 40 children in each, while those in the poorer areas where the population is predominantly from Muslim countries and employment is blue-collar (when it is available at all, since levels of unemployment are high in the same areas where school achievement is low), would have only 20. It's not really a matter of teachers, she says, because teachers can be trained - see the teachers at Tel-Aviv today (Bar-Shalom, 2000).

McDermott and Varenne (1995) agree that success or failure do not reside in the child or her abilities but in the cultural/linguistic constructs within which the child resides. The culture has the power to disable some and enable others, both by means of the categories it defines (i.e. "getting an A", "reading fluently", "knowing the multiplication facts") and the context in which the category is situated. "It is one kind of problem to have a behavioral range different from social expectations; it is another kind of problem to be in a culture in which that difference is used by others for degradation". Yet again I refer to Rorty who wrote that "[t]he world does not speak. Only we do" (Rorty, 1989, p.6). When society speaks and determines categories for success and failure in schools, and when the same society determines that schooling will be a zero-sum game, where only some can win and the others must lose, inevitably, school becomes a race track for the limited resource of success. Inevitably, too, the losers of the race will be those who compete "differently", those not as strong in the determining characteristics (mirroring those of the dominant Western culture, such as linguistic and mathematical intelligence,

knowledge of the dominant language, belonging to middle or upper classes, etc.), those "ensnared" by the organization of the system.

Edwards et al. (2001) and Delpit (1995) describe how African American students whose teachers believed in them achieved school success. "They learned where they were accepted, valued, motivated and encouraged. They flourished when they perceived that the teachers believed in their ability" (Edwards et al., 2001, p.130). Basing their pedagogy upon the idea that success is a right the children have which the school has the responsibility of providing them through "experiences of capability", the faculty at Tel-Aviv focus on individual processes of progress (rather than on general products that can be compared to one another). Children are placed in ability groups to *help* them succeed, to allow them to achieve success on their own ability level and at their own pace (report cards don't mention what ability group the child reached her achievements in)[148].

After observing several classes with Orly, the school advisor and therapeutic teacher (who deals mostly with emotional difficulties the children have by way of individual counseling and life skills classes), I asked her how she assesses the success of her work.

> *From the very nice relationships I have with the children who smile even when they are having difficulties and show respect even if they're angry. I feel that the values I believe in and teach about, like friendship, dealing with anger, sharing etc., are being learned because I see the children practicing them now and then. It's really a mutual relationship"*, was her answer.

Eitan, the organizational consultant, talked about assessing the attainment of teaching goals at his meeting with the 5th and 6th grade teachers regarding the new grouping plan.. He said that since the system had so much openness and flexibility built into it, the teachers have a great obligation to watch out for the children's progress and achievements. They must come up with definitive individual goals for each student and definitive ways of assessing the attainment of these goals. *"How do we check that the children have actually achieved those goals that we have placed before the)?"* he asked.

The plan should be as follows, he said: creating goals for each child, finding the right group for the child, determining the goals for the group and seeing how this all fits

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[148] These groupings do not limit access to literacy, as we might understand some of the tracking processes in U.S. schools to be doing.

into the system. Then the teachers must check very carefully to see if the children have achieved their goals. And how does Amira determine the success of her teachers, I asked.

> *I believe in examining results. If the teachers tell me that they have learned from me to love the children unconditionally, that they are committed to the school process and to the process of every child and I see that the teacher is satisfied professionally, the results are that the teachers are happy and the children learn better".*

The school counselor told me that the best students at Tel-Aviv tend to be children of immigrants rather than native Israelis, and some come from the most impoverished homes[149]. Henson explains this seeming anomaly:

> People who leave their homelands to escape poverty or tyranny, may still be impoverished but feel that a better life is possible in their adopted country, if not for them then for their children. These immigrant minorities tend to be more successful in school than indigenous minorities… because they bring with them the belief that anyone that is willing to work hard to overcome the temporary obstacles that all foreigners have to overcome, can have some level of success… (Henson, 1993, p.48).

As they emulate successful people in the new environment, they are functioning on the premise that there is hope for the future, an idea that positively impacts learning. Indigenous minorities, on the other hand, seem to view barriers to success as permanent and built into the system, understanding the meaning of being successful as emulating one's oppressors while hope for the future seems illogical (Henson, 1993). Amira acknowledges that the foreign kids raise the level of studies at Tel-Aviv due to the high level of motivation both they and their parents have for improving their situation.

> From the media [150]:
> "The attitude towards excellence in school [among the families of foreign workers] is almost reverence. The parents, some of whom don't even have a high-school education, are willing to do everything to give their children an opportunity for a good education. "In my family I'm the first generation to finish high-school and I know that many people worked very hard for this", said Jennifer.
> The article continues with the reporter talking to Amira Yahalom, the principal of the school in which most of the children of foreign workers in Tel-Aviv study. She says that the fact that these parents attach great importance to studies is strongly felt in school. "As I see it, the foreign workers that came here from Africa and South America are people who decided to take their fate in their own hands in order to give their children a better life. They are a kind of elite, and so are their children. These are very well mannered

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[149] See Anat K.'s research conclusions, section 5.2.2.
[150] www.haaretz.co.il, Wed., July 24, 2002.

children – there is no violence in school; these are intelligent children that invest a lot in their studies".

Not all is well however, since what counts as success in one culture may conflict with what is valued as success in another (Edwards et al., 2001). At Tel-Aviv, their noncompetitive, inclusive approach to school achievement and success - which states that as long as a child is making progress compared to her own abilities and circumstances, she is being successful - creates an ideological problem for many of the Russian children and families. Omer told me that schools in Russia are very competitive. Each child has a notebook in which every teacher gives them a grade (1-5) for each subject, every day. Parents must sign the notebook every evening, returning it to school for the next day's grades. On top of this are the regular tests and discipline is also very strict. So when the children begin attending Tel-Aviv, the parents are disappointed at what they perceive is the "non-serious" attitude toward learning. They don't understand the lack of competition and the little importance attached to grades. Gregory (6th grade) told me his parents think Tel-Aviv is not a good school at all, that he and his brother Don (4th grade) are not learning anything there, and anyway, how can you teach or learn when there is no discipline and the children *"do whatever they want and can say whatever they want to the teachers?"*

"The challenge that teachers face is to prepare students from diverse backgrounds to become successful within the culture of power, while respecting and building upon the cultural knowledge and experiences that students bring into the classroom" (Edwards et al., 2001). I learned this lesson during my second day at Tel-Aviv when I was invited to observe Tsiona's 1st grade class and saw her pedagogy at work. In the class of 25 children only 5 were Israeli who spoke and understood Hebrew well. The rest of the children came from all over the world, 11 of them were African who spoke some English and the others were from various countries and in various stages of Hebrew proficiency. How does one teach reading and writing to 25 children with such a great disparity of language skills? For the entire period Tsiona taught phonics and used echo and choral reading from the board. The children were chanting or singing along or playing recognition games with consonants and vowels, some making up real words, some independent of meaning. And

I was critical: still residing in my comfortable box, I understood echoing, chanting, repetition of meaningless sounds to be teaching methods of times long past.

After class Tsiona explained her thinking. She had taught in religious schools for 17 years before coming to teach at Tel-Aviv. She noticed that the children there learn to read much sooner than children in secular public schools and she attributed this success to the rote method of teaching reading, based mostly on phonics, that is used in religious schools. In addition, she mentioned the big push toward reading the children get from the daily prayer sessions in which they follow in their prayer books while reciting, choral and echo reading, even before they can actually read the words. The daily prayers were all set to melodies, which she said, helped the children remember the words in order, after which recognizing the words in print in the prayer books was an easier task.

Appropriating these concepts from her previous experience resulted in her unique blend of acting and skill-and-drill as a teaching method. As she was teaching certain vowels she would play games with the children, draw pictures of the words, she would sing the vowels and consonants to the tune of, say, "Old McDonald had a Farm" (which is a children's song in Hebrew too) or other songs the children knew, and the children would join in and sing with her or echo her. There was choral reading from the board or from print and rote memorizing of sounds and words, creating "a rewarding reading situation" in which the student gets an opportunity to mimic and emulate a reading expert (Edwards et al. 2001). Conceiving such a context for success, for that is what was happening in Tsiona's class where all students were in the process of learning to read, is a work of art and an example of both the problems the teachers at Tel-Aviv face and the freedom they have of coming up with solutions to promote success [151].

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There is another level on which I find success expressed at Tel-Aviv - the incorporation of the school's values and their expression by the children. I will give two examples of the many I came across.

David and Ohz are mischievous and disruptive in school and they get their share of punishments. David complained about a teacher who punishes by sending kids home.

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[151] Although this seemingly "embarrassing" learning experience was a shock to my own system, it threw me right out of my box and served to pry open some windows in my mind.

A kid can't learn anything from being sent home, he says. *Sending home! What will* [the teacher] *gain from this?* [The child] *will go home, come back, be disruptive again…"* Ohz turns to David with some "above-age" wisdom:

> *You're making a mistake.* [Sending home] *is a worse punishment than you think. When he grows up he won't have learned. He isn't making the right calculation now, because if he's disruptive now and likes to play around and doesn't want to study, when he grows up the opposite will be true. Everybody else won't be working hard. They'll work from 9 to 12 and will go home and get their salary and enjoy themselves. But he will have to work hard and won't enjoy himself much".*

Eemee had to go to a meeting one afternoon on very short notice and she asked me to sit in with her class for half an hour. She had given them work to do and they were good kids, she said, so she didn't think I would have any trouble. After a few minutes of quiet and diligent work, the children assessed the situation and decided to have fun instead of sweating out the Bible worksheets. They asked if they could play a circle game and I agreed (since I was fully aware of my inferior position at that point and I also had no idea of the game they were going to chose to play). They all regrouped at the back of the class where they arranged the desks in a circle and led by Ohz proceeded to play "The Kissing Game"[152].

During the 10 minutes that they played I noticed two things that seemed outstanding to me. The first was that the girl most often chosen to be kissed was Dina, an Arab child. The second was their practice of inclusion. The game began by the more "popular" children being chosen over and over. At a certain point, however, as one of the boys was standing in the center and deciding who to kiss while the rest of the children were shouting out suggestions, Ohz's voice came through louder than the rest: *"Choose someone who hasn't been chosen yet"*.

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[152] The child in the center kisses someone of the opposite sex on the cheek and that child then comes to the center, and so on.

7. "It's like magic" (*"Zeh kmoh kesem"*):
The teachers at the Tel-Aviv School

Student learning is not simply a personal discovery, but also a social act;
It is also deeply connected with the beliefs and daily practices of teachers
Sonia Nieto

"*D'ya want to know about the teachers in school? They're achla (cool)*" said David in a videotaped interview along with his 5th grade classmate and best friend Ohz[153]. Both boys have been at the school since 1st grade, live in the neighborhood, come from unstable homes and are a constant source of trouble and mischief in school (Ohz acknowledged being disruptive in class, but when David is around it's even worse because together they "short the circuits"). But they are lively and eloquent and provided a perspective of the school from a different eye level. David gave me an example of how good his teacher is:

> *I had a quiz in geography...no, not just me, a few kids, and they were having trouble with the material, so the teacher told them to come to school at 7 and she would teach them until 8, in the morning that is, without overtime pay, she does it on her own".*

Ohz continues the topic:

Yes, and when Yossi's apartment burnt down and he had smoke inhalation our homeroom teacher Eemee asked each one of us to make him a pretty drawing and to prepare a surprise for him. I gave him lots of cards with some other children. And she went to him and visited him, and talked to him and played with him. She did a lot of things with him. I've never seen a teacher that does so much for a child in my life. A different teacher might have said 'This child, broke his arm, so and so... and that's it, and now we have to learn'. But this teacher spent class time to prepare things for him. She also went over the material [he missed] *with him and while she was gone we had a substitute and* [Eemee] *prepared work for us so we would have something to do".*

> *"I'd like to say also that in my opinion this school is very special because they don't pay the teachers much but the teachers give **so much** to the students. Anyone who comes here and goes to the ulpan (Hebrew language school for newcomers), within two months he knows Hebrew already, he can communicate a little, he understands"*

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[153] Video 7 – 0:02:15-0:32:55

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Later he adds,

This is what's so nice about this school. It may not be the most beautiful school, there's a crack here or some dirt there, but... how do you say it...oh, I remember - Don't look at the container, but at what it contains" [154].

Sonny was talking to his teacher Nechama, comparing school in Turkey to his experience at Tel-Aviv:

There if you make a few mistakes, you fail. If you misbehave, they hit you. You can't ask to go out to drink in the middle of the lesson. But here the teacher always forgives, she always forgives. One can't learn anything from hitting and threats. Here, if I do something bad you talk to me, you don't get mad and you don't threaten, you don't send me straight to Amira. You explain, you teach, and even when I'm punished you let me get a drink and usually you let me go even though you said I'm punished".

Isaac (6th grade) was talking about Neta, his teacher in 2nd grade, who he considered to have been his best teacher because, "*She made everyone exert themselves*".

Sima (5th grade, from Bolivia) had some heartfelt words:

Our teachers are very patient with us. They explain again and again if we don't understand. They push us forward. They teach us how to study and prepare for the test. When we have a test we are anxious but when we see the questions we know the answers because we have them in our brains because the teacher teaches us so much!
 "*I have a teacher called Eemee and I don't know how she does it but she give us a lot of courage and strength to do things that we could never do alone. You can't see* [how she gives us courage] *but we think it. It's like magic. With her I learn geography and history and reading comprehension and texts and many other things. I don't know if when I grow up I will see Eemee but I will be very grateful to her because she teaches me so much, so much. That's it".*

"*What's the best thing about the Tel-Aviv School?*" I asked Salim, a 4th grader from Turkey who was in the middle of explaining about his technology project in which he tested several kinds of paper to determine which was best to write on. *"That the teachers love the children"*, was his immediate answer. At another time Sonny tried to make me understand that the teachers at school are very good and patient:

I'll give you an example", he said. "*If a there is a child that is eating in the middle of a lesson the teacher tells him not to eat. OK, he puts it away and after a few*

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[154] This is the Hebrew version of "Don't judge a book by its cover".

minutes he's eating again. So she tells him again. And then he's playing cards with another child because he thinks she doesn't see but she sees everything so she tells him to put the cards away otherwise she'll take them away from him. So they put them away but they really keep on playing and she tells them to put them away. You see, the teachers have a lot of much patience because you need at least five times to get the teacher very angry".

Sara wanted to be recorded telling about her teacher, Annie.

Annie is a good teacher because she helps children. D'you want to hear an example? Bobby in my class has already called her a liar three times. Another teacher would have thrown him out but Annie forgives him"
"Why do you think she forgives?" I asked.
"Because she's kind and cares for children".

Julia, a 5th grader, made a different point. She told about her experience in 1st grade in Columbia where her teacher hit and pinched her until her mother had to go to school and ask the teacher to stop. *"Here the teachers only speak, they tell us what to do and sometimes they yell, but they don't hit".*

Chasina (6th grade) came from Turkey 2 years ago but hardly speaks any Hebrew. When she does say something, it's in a whisper. She has a beautiful smile, which she readily displayed whenever our paths crossed and she followed me often, listening to my interviews with other children, yet always refusing to say anything herself. One day toward the very end of my stay, Chasina told me she would like to be interviewed. The interview was short because of her limited Hebrew and the unavailability of a translator at that time, but she did manage to say that she likes being in Israel and at the Tel-Aviv School because, *"Turkey teacher hits. Tel-Aviv good. Teacher doesn't hit".*

Batia came to the school at the beginning of the year from a bad experience in another Israeli town where she described herself as being disruptive and said the teachers hated her and took revenge on her.

"How do you find the teachers here?" I asked.
"They're OK. I mean, they're fair to everybody. They don't make comparisons between kids who are disruptive and good kids. They treat everyone nicely".

After David remarks that his teacher Sharon respects everyone, Ohz talks of the teachers' respect for the children:

The teachers here don't pay attention to the groups. They don't say 'this kid is in squares because he doesn't know anything in arithmetic so I'll give him

something easy to do and won't pay any more attention to him'. Here the teachers give every child the same attention and also their time. To tell you the truth, the teachers even give time from their breaks in order to teach and to explain".

Not all children love all teachers. Ohz and David agreed that there is one teacher they don't like at all (they wouldn't name her and I didn't ask) because she's too strict, and when at the end of 4th grade he learned who his 5th grade teacher would be, Ohz was upset and worried because of rumors that "*she gives many punishments and that she's a mean teacher*", David finished the sentence. They both decided they wouldn't like her.

Suddenly, when I arrived [in 5th grade] *I understood that every teacher has her own kind of kindness. She has her good things and her bad things. And in my opinion this teacher is excellent and all the other teachers are the same. And I want… I want all of America to know that this school is good because of many people, one of them is the principal!"* said Ohz looking straight at the camera, smiling whole-heartedly.

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"The educator is he or she who doesn't remain
indifferent and neutral when faced with reality"
Moacir Gadotti

I heard, I saw but I remained skeptical about motivation. Work at Tel-Aviv is harder than at other schools due to the emotional issues that need to be dealt with continually, the extra elements of creativity necessary for reaching normative achievements, and the longer hours of work. There seems to be a greater-than-usual responsibility shouldered by the teachers.

"I take their problems home with me";
"I can't sleep at night thinking of…";
"I cried until I told myself there was nothing to be done";
"I am always bringing things from home for them. My friends all know that if they have something they can do without they bring it to me and I pass it on to the children";
"I had a computer at home that wasn't being used very much so I gave it to Danny".

"It just flows in our veins here", said Neely the technology teacher. Or maybe it's what Anat M. said that it isn't that the teachers at Tel-Aviv love the children more than elsewhere, it's that the children here need and demand more expression of care and warmth and the teachers are responding to those needs. But what is it that keeps them

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coming back every morning and every year despite the hardships? Why teach at Tel-Aviv when there are much better teaching jobs out there? The pay would be the same, but the population less demanding, less hours of teaching[155], much less responsibility, less problems to bring home…?

> From the media:
> In an article on "The science of happiness"[156], the author distinguished between 3 kinds of orientations toward work: a *job* one does for the paycheck, a *career* that entails a deeper personal investment in the work in aspiration to money, prestige and power, and a *calling* that is a passionate commitment to work for its own sake and where "the effort you expend becomes its own reward, regardless of the money or status it brings".

In one of the weekly teacher workshops Amira posed the question to the whole staff. *"Why are you here?"* she asked.

Natasha (teaches 1st grade) who is herself an immigrant from Russia said: *"I like the feeling of being needed. It makes me feel good to be essential".*

Mazal (4th grade) *"I'm here from love. I love this place very much and I love the steady job".*

Tsipi (counselor) works at Tel-Aviv to bring about changes in the system: *I'm here from my own need to do something real and significant, to initiate processes of change so that these immigrant children and their families won't have to go through the difficulties we went through when I was a new immigrant little girl in elementary school".*

Rachel (5th grade): *You're asking why I'm still working here even though I have long thought that teaching should be left to the young teachers… I think it's the pleasure I get from teaching these children. I'm not in love with everything in this school, but the children give me a lot of pleasure".*

Yonat, an older teacher about to retire: *"I come here to give a personal example to the children. I feel that in my behavior, the way I dress, talk, my manners, I model for them".*

Others called out sporadically *"it's a challenge"*, *"devotion", "the excitement"*, *"just plain satisfaction", "I love the children".* And Ronny, the art teacher said, *This place gives* me *a lot. I like being here and I identify strongly with the kids because I grew*

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[155] For many years Tel-Aviv has had an extended school day due to its serving "a population in distress" (*te óonei teepooach*), yet compensation for the extra teaching time had just began this year.

[156] *Newsweek*, Sept. 16, 2002, p.49.

up in this same neighborhood. I see myself in every one of them and this is my way of giving back to my community". Amira explains:

> *I open the school every morning at 6:30AM because there are children who don't have a place to be after this time when their parents go to work. I don't get paid extra for this nor for the extended teaching day we have here. I choose to be here and accept the conditions. I'm here with a certain feeling of being on a mission, and the best thing is that the teachers are ready to join me in this respect – to take the love of the children, the giving and receiving we all experience, as their reward instead of the money that doesn't come".*

The dedication one finds among the Tel-Aviv faculty undoubtedly has to do with their perception of their work as a calling. "*A feeling of being on a mission" or "the children need us"* are answers I heard most often in response to my frequent questions on this topic. There was no "logical" answer that would make sense beyond the specific environment, but within it, these answers explained a lot.

The following are lyrics the teachers at Tel-Aviv wrote (to the tune of a popular song called *When the festivities end*) and preformed at the year-end party [157].

And sometimes when another year ends

And sometimes when another year ends, with report cards
And the classrooms are locked, so-long to papers,
Farewell to students, the time of liberty has arrived,
We'll go about our business, we'll care only about our health!
Refrain:
We'll get up tomorrow morning with a new song in our hearts[158]
We'll allow ourselves to take delight in the break
We'll rest, take our time, go to the pool,
And mainly, we'll enjoy the tranquility.

As always, when another year is over, and the attrition
Has accumulated somewhat, you are a little burned out,
The mind disrupted by the intensity of frustrations,
But we do nothing to change what we have!

August is over and another year is at the gate, so soon
And the tensions are up again, the head is spinning,
We wanted to recuperate, to catch our breath a little longer,
Why must the school reopen just now?

We'll get up tomorrow morning with a new song in our hearts
We'll open the doors again, the heart will expand once more
Vacation is over and the children are coming back,
That's how it is when you love.

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[157] Written by Amira and Anat M., performed by Hava, Anat K., Amira, Anat M. and Ella; produced by Anat K. and Natasha S.
[158] A line from the original song.

7.1. "The teachers who teach here love children" *("Kan melamdeem moreem shehohaveem yeladeem"):* A Journey of Transformation

> Eighty-five years ago
> The ghost dancers thought
> That by dancing
> They could change the earth.
> We dance to change ourselves.
> Only when we have done this
> Can we try to change the earth
>
> Mary Crow Dog (*Lakota Woman*)

Multicultural education is about transformation, writes Nieto, but above all it is a journey. "Beginning with their personal transformation, teachers can move on to create more productive ways of working with others, and from there to challenge the policies and practices of the schools in which they work" (Nieto, 1999, p. xviii-xix). When Amira took over as principal of Tel-Aviv in 1991 she didn't begin a formal process of reform and restructuring but one of *reculturing* (Hargreaves, 1997) – emphasizing and working upon improving the internal interactions and relationships in the school. She began by focusing on the teachers.

Due to the school's location, reputation and history, many of the teachers at Tel-Aviv had, historically, come from the bottoms of lists. After teaching in the school for a short time and being exposed to the physical neglect, stressed relationships, violence and lack of leadership, the teachers became disillusioned, angry, disappointed and quickly burned out. Infighting among the teachers lead to the creation of camps that didn't talk to one another and the animosity and anger extended towards the students and their parents[159]. Teachers were showing up at school in slippers, torn clothes, uncombed hair. Nobody seemed to care. School was a battleground one would try to survive each day so as to get a paycheck at the end of the month. "*They were considered among the most faltering school faculties in the country at the time*", said Amira.

The district superintendent was grateful that Amira was willing to head this very problematic school and as a way of extending some help suggested getting rid of the

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[159] One of Amira's first memories of Tel-Aviv is seeing a teacher holding a chair in the air and running down the hall after a child. The child's father, also waving a chair, was running after the teacher…

whole faculty and beginning anew with teachers that Amira would choose and hire herself. Amira had been a math counselor in the school for a year previously and knew the sorry situation well, but she refused the superintendent's offer on the basis of two ideas. The first was her belief that there is room for every person in our world. No one is superfluous, she said, and just as she accepts the children as they are, she accepted the teachers that came with the school.

> *They are not bad teachers. They are teachers who have been beaten and bruised. They deserve to get another opportunity to succeed under different conditions. I know we will have a wonderful team*", she told the superintendent.

The second idea had to do with transformation. Amira believes that it is possible to change things and make an impact on one's environment. Commented Mrs. Lotan, the current superintendent:

> *This is the overt and covert message running throughout Tel-Aviv – that it is possible to take anyone from the place he is at and bring him to a new and different place*".

Amira explained:

> *I devoted the first two years to the teachers. Since I had a vision in my mind of what things would look like when the transformation process was complete, I took my time and did things thoroughly. We had patience. I said that this process is a wagon proceeding slowly on its tracks, and each person, at their own free timing will come aboard, or not*"[160].

The process involved much listening and meaningful dialogues as well as weekend retreats, bringing in fashion consultants and personal beauty advisors. For two years the teachers were her focus and priority, not the children nor academics. Not one academic or pedagogical counselor (from the Dept. of Education) was brought in during that time in order to eliminate sources of stress on the teachers, she says.

> *All we did was take care of the team (טיפלנו בצוות) – their behavior, their speech, we talked about the teacher's position and the teacher's job. The idea was that every achievement of the teacher translates into better care for the children*".

One of the first faculty activities was going on a retreat, and for 24 hours "*We studied the Pygmalion Effect*", Amira said, explaining the underlying idea that it doesn't

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[160]. Amira became principal in 1991. In 1994 the school received a national prize for staff development.

matter where one comes from, the important thing is where you will take him. Whatever you think of the child, that is what he'll become, she taught the teachers.

Above all, Amira's belief in all of them was unwavering, "If *you stay with me and take up the challenge of the school, we will together graduate fighter pilots from here in the future*[161]", she told them.

Noga, a counselor who helped reculture the school at the beginning, tells about the first difficult year. Her words echo hooks who writes "that it is difficult for individuals to shift paradigms and there must be a setting for folks to voice fears, to talk about what they are doing, how they are doing it and why" (hooks, 1994, p. 38):

> *Our first goal was to work with the teachers on accepting diversity. To that end we needed to help them unburden their anger and frustrations so that they would be open and available to listening. We began by legitimizing their anger and giving them a time and place at the teachers' meetings, to vent and freely express the frustrations they suffered in their classrooms. They could say anything they wanted, even against us. Only when these hard feelings were drained and the teachers felt cleansed and ready, did we commence our teaching. And the teachers used the same techniques in their classrooms, bringing all of us to the realization that just as there were no "bad" teachers, there are no difficult children, but children with difficulties, no problematic children, but children with problems that need to be addressed prior to and in order for them to become available for learning*".[162]

And for the children's benefit, school curriculums were transformed. Noga tells about the transformation of the school's reading program:

> *First of all we sent teachers to workshops dealing with teaching of reading, all kinds of techniques of reading. At the same time, we brought leaders in the field to our school workshops. All the gurus of teaching of reading came; afterwards the teachers went out to other schools together with a reading counselor to see how things are done in the field; then we evaluated – what would suit our school with our specific difficulties. And we changed our method of* [teaching] *reading. It was a fantastic success. Almost everyone learned to read".*

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[161] Fighter pilots are considered the *crème de la crème* of Israeli youth and they usually don't come from population groups such as those served by the Tel-Aviv School.

[162] A supervisor from the Department of Education came to meet with Amira about the Arab children in school. When he described his position he said that, among several other titles he had, he was in charge of all of the more difficult schools in the country. Amira shot back: "L*et me teach you something in the twilight of our days* (both seemed around 60 years old…), *there are no difficult schools, only schools that have more difficulties".*

All of the above fits well into Fernandes' ideas about the relationship between the environment and the individual in an educational setting.

> The role of education in the modern world is not only to transform the individual so that he can act upon his milieu; it is also to act upon the milieu to change it so the excluded become included. To transform the environment is also to change the possibilities of personal transformation (1989, quoted in Lima, 1995, p.449-450).

As the environment at Tel-Aviv was transformed both conceptually and physically - when the teachers saw Amira practicing her ideology of total acceptance of them, of listening to them and believing in their abilities as teachers, when they saw the renovated, clean, respectable building they would work in - the teachers went through a process of transformation themselves and practiced the same ideology on their students. The personal transformations dialectically effected the environment in an ongoing process that eventually brought the school to the place it is at today.

Transformation and reculturation are ongoing processes at Tel-Aviv and are based upon education, modeling and dialogue.

> *When I talk to the teachers, I have to talk differently to each one, to accept each of them differently, to listen to each of them differently. And they do the same to their students. If I change teams or teachers who I don't agree with, the teachers would want to exchange the kids, and, of course, they can't exchange the kids. They have to learn how to cope with them and accept the children just as I accepted each one of them, even with some very disheartening information I had on them when I took over the school. I give to the teachers what I want them to give to their peers and to their students"*, explains Amira, and adds, *"Just as we talk about an individual plan for each child, I spent much energy persuading the leadership teams here that we must have individual plans for each teacher, as well"*.

The concept behind this practice is a major principle of pedagogy at Tel-Aviv. Amira explains that in order to provide equal educational opportunities to children (as well as adults), one must treat them differently, not equally[163]. Each individual must receive what *she* needs at the appropriate time and place. Comparisons, averaging, "one-size-fits-all" types of ideas have little space in this pedagogy. In the principal's office and on most official school documents, one can find the following quote attributed to the

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[163] Echoing Young's (1990) ideas about social justice and equity being based on differential rather than equal treatment.

Rabbi from Kotsk: "There is nothing more inequitable than equally teaching children who are different from each other"

As for modeling, Amira says,

If I won't be flexible and different, how will my teachers be flexible and different?" And she adds, *"I never talked to the teachers about the need to hug the children. It never crossed my lips. But for the past ten years I've been going through the halls and doing just that, so they learned. All of them now do it, even more than I, even the ones that had in the past been reserved and remote"* [164].

Transformation is couched in conversation. "If conversation cannot occur then transformation cannot occur. Without exchange of ideas, we are limited by our own position, unable to imagine possibilities, there is no change" (Boozer et al., 1999, p.75). At Tel-Aviv dialogue is nurtured in the atmosphere of empowerment where risk taking, exploring uncharted venues and the willingness to think outside of the box are valued and encouraged in order to transform both the environment and the participants within[165]. Dialogues are ongoing on all levels and are especially fostered among the faculty in meetings throughout the week, in the weekly workshop where actual and immediate professional issues are addressed (i.e. teaching reading, teaching second language students, dealing with heterogeneity, rethinking report cards), and in teacher-talk (Soo Hoo, 1994) in collaboration among the teachers and between teachers and the administration. Dialogues between teachers and students are a major structural concept of the school's pedagogy and a tool for eliciting student learning and transformation.

7.1.1. Joining the flow

The teachers currently working at Tel-Aviv are a mixed lot. About half are veterans of past eras, having worked with past principals (one teacher has been teaching there for 25 years), while others have joined the school within the last 10 years. Many of the teachers ended up at Tel-Aviv coincidentally, only few actually requesting the specific position. And they are a diverse group, coming from the different ethnic groups in Israeli society as well as from other countries. They are cultural insiders serving,

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[164] This approach brings to mind the observation that "You cannot create and sustain a context of productive learning for others unless that kind of context exists for you" (Saunders et al. 2001, p.318).
[165] Susan Church (1999) tells of a very similar process of transformation that she put her Nova Scotia district through when she was assistant superintendent. She talks about creating critical conversations, shared decision making, advocacy, rethinking disruptive behavior, becoming political.

among other things, to provide insights into the lives and experiences of their diverse students (Delpit, 1995).

Ronny, the art teacher, grew up in the neighborhood and says he sees himself in many of the school's children and understands them well; the teachers who have themselves experienced immigration, uprooting, alienation and adjustment, all bring their experiences to the aid and understanding of their students who have gone through similar experiences; Annie lived in Mexico for several years, speaks Spanish and is familiar with the Hispanic culture of her students. She also brings in her own personal school experience, that of being a child that only worked and studied in school if she thought the teacher liked her, and this has made her very aware of creating warm and caring relationships with her students; Tsiona, who comes from a very religious background, figured out that the structured and skill-oriented teaching practices she learned and later taught in the religious schools she worked in were highly suitable for teaching her students who entered 1st grade without any knowledge of Hebrew.

An element of their pedagogy of fusion seems to be a fusing of teachers with diverse personalities, life histories, teaching experiences, sensibilities, into a team characterized by innovation, flexibility and the ability to adapt to the special conditions and demands of the school, albeit on a personal level – every teacher adapts differently and there is no forced standardization. This process is very heterogeneous, different for every teacher in terms of the pace of adaptation, its form and its comprehensiveness, but each is doing her best "to flow" with the program.

There are, however, teachers that do not share the flexibility of the others or have yet to find it. This poses a problem and Rachel complains:

> *We made big changes, canceled the center system and created a fantastic new one that solves our major problem of reaching every child and responding to his specific needs. This system is based on "days" – whole days of flexible groupings of math and English into which children can come and go as needed. But the professional teachers aren't ripe for the change yet. They haven't changed their former thinking and are still in the "centers" frame of mind. I really don't mind the extra work that is associated with the new method but if it isn't working, who needs it? It was much easier before".*

Those who find the school too difficult to deal with, leave. Amira remembers: *A new teacher came to me complaining: 'They never taught me at teachers' college that I would need to hug Arab children'. That teacher left us very quickly"*.

Anat M. describes the ongoing processes of transformation and of joining the flow of the school from the teachers' perspective:

> *The problems grew out of the ground situation (צמח מהשטח) and we raised them at our meetings. This was where we named the issues, we labeled them. With time we constructed a general direction that the school is following and most of the teachers are connected to this flow. But for some teachers this process was not as easy because some people deal with change slower than others. Things didn't grow within them at the same pace and they had more difficulties accepting the changes. Even today there are differences between the teachers in terms of following the general direction. Each teacher is somewhere in the beginning or the middle or at the end of the process"*.

Much in the spirit of Barbara Rogoff's guided participation (1990), Yonat and Sveta are examples of the processes of transformation continuously going on at Tel-Aviv. Sveta, the computers teacher, came from a very different world – Russia, with what she characterizes as "traditional" understanding of people and education. When at first she saw the African students in her class she thought they would never be able to learn computers "*because they come from a lower culture*", she thought. But, she admits, she was mistaken. Teaching at Tel-Aviv has transformed her thinking and has taught her that *"all children can learn*". The transformation is not limited to her prejudices, but has also impacted her understanding of the teacher- student relationship:

> *When I first came, I was embarrassed to ask my students for help with my Hebrew. I thought I would be showing weakness. Today I know that asking for their help is a way of creating a relationship with the kids and they correct my mistakes ever so gently. I have learned here that our weaknesses connect us to one another"*[166].

In response to a question about changes in her teaching practices along the many years she has been at Tel-Aviv, Yonat said emphatically:

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[166] As bell hooks writes "That empowerment [of students] cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (1994, p. 21).

It's not my teaching that has changed, I've changed my personality! [167]*Once everything had to be just so, I was very strict about every little thing. Today I understand that there is no need to put extra pressure on the children. Most of them live under very difficult conditions and some things are impossible to expect. I feel they do enough by just coming to school. I lead them from there".*

7.2. "When you give people space" *("Kshehnotneem leh'anasheem chavaleem")* : Leadership and professional development

7.2.1. Leadership

"The Cultural Change Principal" is the focus of Fullan's work (2002). He writes about school (and business) leaders who manage to establish deep and lasting reforms in a knowledge society by being attuned to the big picture, being a sophisticated conceptual thinker who is able to transform the institution through people and teams, a person who displays energy, enthusiasm and hope and someone whose work is characterized by five essential components: a moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, an ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. I read this article with a smile. It seemed to be describing Tel-Aviv's principal Amira and her work at reforming the school, to a 'T'.

"A moral purpose is social responsibility to others and the environment. School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students". The Cultural Change Principal is always asking "What is the role of public schools in a democracy?"; she treats all those associated with the school, well; works to develop other leaders in the school that will be able to sustain and continue the school's trajectory after she departs; she displays an explicit and comprehensive moral purpose (Fullan, 2002, p.17).

Such is Amira. Fully committed to the children and their families, she recognizes the centrality of the child and her "real needs" in the learning process, her pedagogy is based on the belief in human worth and ability and it is practiced through meaningful dialogues (a concept she has taught the staff and they, the children) that allow for the

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[167] Amira described how one day Yonat appeared in her office bearing a gift. *"I want to thank you for a gift* **you** *have given me. The most important gift I have ever received",* Yonat said to Amira. After the school instated the concept of meaningful dialogues and the teachers were trained to carry them out, they apparently used this technique in their private lives as well. Yonat explained that her friend told her that she had undergone a great change. *"You have learned how to listen to others, you ask the right questions, you have stopped interpreting everything through your emotions…"*

development and persistence of open and ongoing relationships horizontally as well as vertically. Amira is always questioning the school's role in the lives of her students. She is constantly struggling with the larger picture in her political efforts to get the foreign children recognized in the education system, to get them the rights promised them in the International Treaty for the Welfare of the Child[168], to state out loud and in public what she thinks is the country's moral obligation to the Arab children from whom the official gaze is, wrongly according to her value system, averted, and to connect her students and their families to the wider community, to make sure that they know there is hope for every one of them, at least within the walls of her school and the hearts of its personnel. She worries about many of her students' futures, as they reach the end of high school and will be excluded from continuing the normative cultural route of serving in the army or going to the university. She sadly talks about school dropouts and teen pregnancies among her former students.

Amira worries on all levels, yet she is proactive wherever there is a space or even a crack (her metaphor was *letaftef – to drip*, like dripping water that can eventually dissolve rocks, so she constantly raises the issues she thinks need addressing at higher levels). Many times this policy works, such as getting psychological services to school, moving legislation on a parliamentary level, putting the school and its issues in the public social conscious by participating in television and radio shows and any public forum that can provide space for their voice, including allowing national television to make and broadcast a documentary film about the foreign children in school[169].

During her tenure she has worked on creating leadership within the school – whoever wanted to take a leadership position was given it in conjunction with professional development in the field and she has raised a successor from within. "She's an amazing woman. I forced her to study. She went for her B.A. and is finishing her M.A. Today she runs the school*"* (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.82). When Amira's request to resign this year was rejected, she made sure her V.P. got an official position and compensation at Tel-Aviv "*to make sure she didn't have to go looking for work elsewhere"*.

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[168] The governmental committee in which she takes part is now at the point of amending the law.
[169] Consequently, whenever I mention the Tel-Aviv school to people in Israel, from within the field of education or from without, the majority know of the school.

Understanding the change process is again, characteristic to Amira's leadership. Fullan talks about selective innovation with coherence, helping others find collective meaning and commitment to new ways, appreciating the difficulties and pain accompanying changes, redefining resistance in a way that allows for addressing concerns, reculturing as a process of transforming what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it, knowing the difference in being an expert in specific content and being an expert change manager and, most importantly, having the vision of change as well as the patience for it to be achieved.

For the first 2 years after taking over the school, Amira worked with the teachers . She had in her mind the vision of where these changes would lead, so she had the patience ("*Her greatest asset, and she never tires of giving it*", said Noga, her assistant in those first years, of Amira's patience) to wait for the transformation process to take its course, she told me. Then, as she had anticipated, the teachers reached the point where they themselves were transformed and were ripe for changing the school for the benefit of the children. There is a coherent and simple overarching ideology at the school – the child's real needs lead the way – and with time, for some teachers it takes longer than for others, everybody joins the flow. In addition, the process of transformation and reculturation were carried out through modeling and through ongoing professional development.

> *Just as Amira treated me and allowed me to complain, legitimizing my own problems, I, too, allowed the teachers to complain and they did the same to the students. We learned from each other and we learned to transmit it* [to others]", said Noga,

Fullan's next category is improving relationships, the one factor he found common to all successful changes. "Well established relationships are the resource that keeps on giving" (p. 18). This is and has been a major goal and practice at Tel-Aviv since day one of the "new era". It began with acceptance of the teachers by Amira and Noga, and bringing about a process in which they learned to accept each other, in spite of the animosity that was an established fact of life in the Tel-Aviv teachers' lounge as long as anyone could remember.

> *Accepting the different – this is what is profoundly etched in my memory from my Tel-Aviv days*", said Noga. *"There are those who are different and one must know*

how to accept this. [Accepting the different] *happened among* [the teachers] *as well".*

After they learned to accept each other, they learned to establish open and accepting relationships with the children, based on the practice of meaningful dialogues[170]. Today, caring and respectful relationships are the norm at school and an example is teachers covering for each other: if a teacher is late in the morning, asks to come in late the next day or take a day off, she isn't questioned and when she is asked to do extra work, she doesn't question this either. Amira told me that several times in the last few years she had family emergencies. The teachers told her she could leave (mostly to sit in hospitals) for as long as necessary and need not even think of the school. They would fill all of her responsibilities, they said and did faithfully.

Creating and sharing knowledge is, again, central to Tel-Aviv pedagogy beginning with the weekly workshops in which teachers present topics to their colleagues, teachers doing their university research projects about school issues (with full help from the administration), creating think-tanks and having the teachers drive and monitor the school process and projects. Amira mentioned that all the procedures of mapping and assessing children at school were decided upon by the teachers. They developed all the forms associated with these activities, nothing was dropped from above. They are partners to the process and, therefore, largely committed to its success.

"Because complex societies inherently generate overload and fragmentation, effective leaders must be coherence makers" writes Fullan (p.18). Amira does this at Tel-Aviv by reciting her mantras, as she calls the few basic values upon which the school stands: the equal worth of all human beings, the right of every person to succeed and the idea that there is space in the world for all people. From these come the more focused school values of total acceptance of the child, that the real needs of the child determine the ways and the means by which she is taught and that the purpose of teaching is to allow the child an experience of capability. Keeping a simple and coherent conceptual framework was nicely expressed at one of the teachers' workshops I attended. The topic was "Large stones", metaphorically standing for the basic and most important values, concepts and

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[170] Section 8.1.3.

issues the teachers try to deal with and implement in their classrooms. The workshop began with a story:

An older professor was asked to give a short lecture to a group of young executives about efficient time management. When he entered the hall, saw them all with their laptops, constantly looking at their watches, he decided to use a metaphor.

On the table in front of him he placed a glass jar and in it put several large stones, filling the jar to its rim. "Is the jar full?", he asked the audience. "Yes!" was the collective answer. The professor then took some smaller pebbles and poured those into the jar. They filled up the spaces between the large stones and filled the jar to its rim. "Is the jar full now?" The "yes" from the audience was much fainter this time. The professor proceeded to pour sand into the jar, filling up the spaces between the pebbles and the stones, all the way up to the jar's rim. "Is the jar finally full?", he asked and there was no answer from the audience who had become unsure of their perception.

To end his experiment, the professor poured water into the jar and the water filled up all the space that was still left in the glass jar. "Now the jar is efficiently full and this is what I would like my lesson to you to be. When you are managing time, always be sure to put your large stones in first, otherwise you will not be able to fit in all of the smaller pieces".

Anat K., who led the discussion, asked the teachers to write down what their personal "big stones" in the classroom are. The following were some of their responses:

- Providing the children with a "tool box" (a metaphor used in school to express the skills needed to learn anything and anywhere), teaching them to be curious and conveying the message that knowledge is power.

- Teaching responsibility, dealing with ethics, being consistent, and showing love (for the children and for the job).

- Stressing creativity, practicing and teaching flexibility, listening, love and professionalism.

- The ability to change and the ability to reach every child.

- Creating an atmosphere of emotional support and security for the child, unconditional acceptance.

- Creating an atmosphere of growth.

- Being able to differentiate between what's important and what isn't.

- Allowing every child to reach success, that the children will want to come to my class again, to leave them with a good taste in their mouths (or as they say in Hebrew "leaving them wanting more").

- Multiple-domain responsibility, unlimited acceptance, availability.[171]

7.2.2. Professional development

Saunders et al. (2001) came to the conclusion that if schools don't promote professional development of their teachers, there will be no possibility of the school becoming a setting for productive teaching and learning or of raising student achievements. On the constructive side, their research indicates that meaningful professional development coupled with measurable school improvement "contributes significantly and positively to teachers' and administrators' perception of the value and the promise of their work and the potential and capacity of their students" (pg. 319). Similarly, the Houston Annenberg Challenge for transforming public schools in Texas (August 2000), has targeted teacher learning as one of the three conduits to pursue in their drive to reform schools and improve student performance. They maintain

> That successful school reform requires development of a strong professional community [in which] faculty members become better teachers because they have clear consensus on learning goals for their schools, and they share information, collaborate and take collective responsibility for achieving school goals (pg. 11).

More than 4o% of the project's direct funding has been targeted for teacher learning, focusing, among other things, on creating in school learning activities and programs, supporting external professional development activities and employing external sources of expertise. After three years of the program, all schools in the project have increased students' performance in math and reading.

Watkins & Butler (1999) describe a role-play seminar they developed to prepare teachers for the challenge of the 21st century – the multiethnic and multicultural classroom, because "moral exhortation and conversation about pluralism is not sufficient" for dealing with the reality in our schools. Teachers today have to deal with concepts of otherness so that variations from expected behaviors in the classroom won't be interpreted as challenges to teacher authority, lack of interest or inability to learn. By learning about and experiencing "otherness", teachers can develop a better understanding of the nuances of other cultures and a willingness to see children from different cultures in a new light.

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[171] At the end of the session Amira commented (proudly, I think) by asking the teachers whether they had noticed that not one of them thought of putting "academic achievement" as one of their core values.

Professional development is a major structural element underlying the Tel-Aviv School pedagogy and an offshoot of its leadership vision. "Professional development is enormously important at schools serving language and cultural minority children, especially in highly concentrated, low-income urban communities" (Saunders et al., 2001, p.290). Tel-Aviv fits the bill for its location, population and approach to professional development. Amira explains her philosophy and practice:

> *The more complex the disease, the more professional the doctor has to be. The same goes for education – the more distress the children are in, the more professional the teachers must be. I let every teacher who is willing, take positions of responsibility, leadership and authority in school, provided she goes back to school, studies and specializes. Ten years ago many of the teachers here hadn't been to college, had not studied education, didn't even have teaching certificates. Today all have their B.A.'s and many are working on their Masters degrees. To this end I'm willing to deal with all the scheduling problems and staff absences".*

Noga talked about the beginning of the staff development process she oversaw, about accepting the teachers as they were, giving them opportunities for personal development, challenging each one with the work at Tel-Aviv, giving her space in which to vent frustrations, to complain, because "*a charged teacher can't teach*". "*We came a long way towards them*", said Noga, and most of the teachers rose to the challenge. In 1994 the school received recognition for their achievements in staff development with the Education Prize awarded them by the President of Israel[172].

The high value placed on professional development is clearly apparent at Tel-Aviv. Anat K., the vice principal training to take Amira's place, is working only part-time this year because she is in the process of writing her Master's thesis. Other teachers leave early or come late as the school accommodates their study schedules, which are commonly known. On a day of an important test, teachers ask other teachers to fill in for them so they have more time to study. The school accommodates these requests matter-of-factly.

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[172] A choir was put together at school and brought along to the prize ceremony at the President's residence where they sang songs in several languages. Ironically, some of the choir members being applauded by the crowd of dignitaries were the "non-existent" children of foreign workers… (I have a videotape of the ceremony).

Every Tuesday (the students leave early) between 1 and 3PM, all teachers convene for a workshop on general topics related to teaching and school-wide issues (for which they receive credit and monetary compensation). Some of the instructors are professionals from outside the school, other workshops are given by the V.P. and by Amira or by a teacher who has learned a topic and teaches it to her peers[173]. These professional development forums deal with general issues of teaching. Amira:

> *We built more diagnostic tools, tools for alternative ways of assessing, we emphasized individual teaching rather than teaching a whole class, we learned to construct a social dialogue and a remedial dialogue, we talked about both the content and the forms",*

These sessions are crucial for the dynamic development of school pedagogy. In them teachers raise and address problems, thoughts, issues. Anat M. gives an example:

> *Most of our issues originate from ground level. We sense that things are happening and at the meetings we label these feelings, we give them form. For example, today we try hard to see that our glass is half full; to say things in the positive rather than in the negative, but this didn't come easily. Due to the multitude of problems in our school, we noticed over time that we were talking negatively most of the time. In a regular school, if you have 3 things to complain about daily, you can live with it. But here, we felt the negative was engulfing us. We felt there were only negative things to say all day. So we raised the issue in our meetings and we dealt with it. This is how things rise from ground level and have led to many changes along the years.*

Professional development meetings take place throughout the week with different groupings of teachers and different topics being addressed. Teachers are encouraged to attend outside conferences and seminars and they often accompany the principal to meetings regarding their areas of interest and responsibility. The leadership group meets weekly with Amira and ad hoc for special projects. While I was at Tel-Aviv, they met several times with an organizational advisor to reorganize the system of ability groupings. The school was planning a major revision of both practical and ideological aspects of the program and every teacher came in at some point to provide her class information and personal perspective.

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[173] I took part in workshops dealing with language acquisition processes, leadership, determining priorities in classroom practice and pedagogy, a social get-together with a theme of multiculturalism and respect for otherness, including excellent food from around the world.

Every Tuesday each grade level (1st and 2nd, 3rd and 4th, 5th and $6^{th)}$) meets with Anat K. for one period to discuss pertinent issues and to coordinate teaching, and every teacher also has a weekly meeting with the V.P. regarding her own class issues. Professional teachers of language and math meet on a monthly basis with outside counselors who monitor their curriculum and progress in comparison to other schools in the district and help with topic problems. All outside counselors report to the principal and to the school's superintendent.

7.3. "Three steps back" *("Shlosha tseh'adeem achoraneet"):* Stepping back and paying it forward: Control, power and responsibility

In the daily prayer of *Oseh Shalom (The Maker of Peace)*, a Jew asks God to make peace on earth like the peace He made in The Heavens. As he is praying, the person takes 3 steps backwards, symbolically stepping aside to allow God to take over. Amira uses this metaphor in her work at Tel-Aviv as she describes how she moves aside, giving the teachers the freedom to teach and make decisions as they see fit for their students. She interferes only if they request her input or when she considers her understandings to be better for the children.

> I *know how to be a principal and you know how to be teachers, so the teaching is all up to you', I tell the teachers. I move a few steps back and give them their own space to take responsibility in",* she explains. *"I give the teachers freedom for thought and the right to personal initiative"*[174]

An example of this approach is teacher professionalization. Based on her many years of experience in the fields of math teaching and curriculum writing, Amira believes that math and language should be taught by professional teachers – teachers who have learned specifically how to teach these subjects. Most of the school works this way, except for the 1st and 2nd grades. For seven years now she has been trying to persuade them to professionalize, but to no avail. *They haven't agreed yet and I will continue to try. In the meanwhile I let them do what they want because things are working out OK and they know best, it's their territory"*, she told me.

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[174] Susanne Soo Hoo lead her school through a process of renewal, echoing Amira's ideas and actions: As my role was transformed from authority figure – the person who made decisions and imposed them on teachers – to teacher enabler – the person who facilitates teacher talks from which decisions are made – I learned to appreciate the benefits of shifting control to the teachers and becoming comfortable with the few knowns and the greater number of uncertainties that typify renewal (Soo Hoo, 1994:218).

An example of the opposite happened when the 4th grade teachers couldn't agree on a new division into groups during Bible classes, something Amira thought would benefit all children, including the better students whose needs were largely being neglected due to the weakness of others in class. One of the teachers opposed the idea so it wasn't put into action. After several months of discussions and stalemate, Amira decided to, uncharacteristically, drop a directive and divide the classes as she saw fit. Ultimately, it was the needs of the children dictating the path to be taken.

Teaching at Tel-Aviv is a daily and daylong struggle, much of it due to the heterogeneity in the classroom, and the younger the children, the greater their diversity impacts the teacher's control over them[175]. At times I witnessed so many conversations going on at once in a single classroom that it was difficult to imagine how children end up learning anything in these environments (yet, they do). The following are snippets of conversations recorded in one lower-grade class at different times (taken from Sapira, 2001), illustrating the uni-directionality of parts of the classroom discourse and the seeming absence of teacher control[176]:

> Jill: *"Make, make, make."*
> Jennifer: *"Thanks God I brought an umbrella"* (in English).
> Teacher: *"Who wants to write – 'Dan was sick'* [on the board]?"
> Mona: *"Can I write 'I love [the teacher]?"*
> Yaffa: *"So why isn't it raining in the classroom?"*
> Teacher(exasperated) *"If you can't write this I can go home! Put away the toys, we're in class now. What? Are we in the central bus station now?!"*
> Betty: *"Dina is pretty".*
> Dina: *"Not pretty. I'm disgusting".*
> * * *
> Teacher: *"Today Yaffa is getting 10 points for good behavior".*
> Yaffa: *"Erase them!"*
> George: *"[Teacher], he told me 'go --- yourself'".*
> Teacher: *"Ignore him".*
> * * *
> Teacher: *"How much is 4 times a hundred?"*
> Eisha: *"Excellent".*
> * * *

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[175] At times I was reminded of Bel Kaufman's *Up the down staircase* where nothing and no one seemed to have any control over anything, except for the school bell that controlled everything and everyone.
[176] All names have been changed to protect the identity of teacher and class.

It was Rememberance Day[177] and the teacher was telling the children in a mixture of Hebrew and bad English that they must *"recognize"* (instead of "remember") the soldiers *"to dead"* for the country.
Teacher: *"Who guards the country?"*
Mona: *"God, King David".*
George: *"The mayor".*
Teacher: *"Whom did the soldiers die for?"*
George: *"God".*
* * *

Yoram: *"[Teacher] I want to sit near Dan"*
Betty to Yoram: *"Two plus three is one".*
Teacher: *"Go away, Peter!"*
Dina: *"Too sour… anybody want?"*
Yoram: *"Wow, ten is a lot!"*

It sounds as if every individual in that class is in a world of their own, yet this is a strong class in which most of the students are achieving normatively[178]. It raises a question regarding the necessity of the teacher having total control in the classroom (as we expect in our schools) and the possible benefit to the learning and development processes of open dialogue between the children.

The teachers at Tel-Aviv admit there is no pressure put on them to conform to any curriculum or strategy and they can choose to teach in any way that works for them. "*I have total autonomy",* told me Ronny, the art teacher. *"I feel as if I'm in my own kingdom",* said Elana the home economics teacher when explaining to me why she preferred staying at Tel-Aviv, rejecting a more lucrative job offer. *"I can teach whatever I want",* explained Nechama, the 6th grade teacher who was grappling with the teaching of history to her heterogeneous class. *"It allows us to think for ourselves, but also entails much more work".*

This autonomy may positively impact the school's dynamics. In the literature we find that the more power and autonomy teachers have, the more they are likely to present alternative attitudes and perspectives to the given practices of the school (Gitlin, 1983).

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[177] The concept is similar to Memorial Day in the U.S. (maybe closer to the 9/11 Memorial). It is a very somber day of national mourning in Israel, since almost every family has lost a member in one of Israel's wars or in acts of terrorism. Memorial services are held all over the country and in every school, a siren goes off and the whole country comes to a standstill, radio and television have special programs all day, the music played is slow and symbolic. A very important occasion on the Israeli calendar and one that Israeli children learn about and are involved in from infancy, but obviously, very far removed from the minds and cultures of people who are new to the country and to the history of the State of Israel.
[178] According to the teacher's statement that was accepted without contest by the school counselor and principal.

Teachers who have more control over classroom conditions consider themselves more efficacious (Nieto, 1997) and concomitantly, more dedicated and more self confident about changing and trying new approaches. It is possible that the freedom and power the teachers have of making their own decisions, running their classrooms to the best of their judgment, being allowed to imagine improvements and actually implement them, all lead them to invest more-than-usual thought, time and energy in the school and the children and take on more positions of leadership and responsibility.

Schutz warns of too much freedom within a system: "[E]veryone in a public space must be able to arrive at her own interpretation of a common effort or issue, while not interpreting it so idiosyncratically that its 'common' nature is lost" (Schutz, 2000, p.237). And the teachers in Tel-Aviv are not really totally independent. They have the freedom to think for themselves, make choices and decisions, but all is done within a framework of the basic school pedagogy, like variations on the basis of an unified underlying tune, reiterated and discussed at the frequent teachers' meetings, where they align their teaching, discuss joint projects, learn from each other and problem-solve together.

> I*n the past, every teacher could do whatever she wanted to in her own classroom. Today, with all of the diversity here, everything is part of a system. Dealing with diversity necessitates work and cooperation across grade levels, on multiple age levels and in teams*", says Anat M.

From the media:
Michael Gold developed Jazz Improv - a seminar for business improvement based on ideas underlying jazz bands. The premise of the theory is that if old-economy companies can be compared to symphony musicians who never deviate from the parts the conductor assigns them, today's successful corporation must be more like a jazz band "from the CEO down, everybody needs to learn to improvise and play off one another". In jazz there is a specific tune used as a common ground but each person can present a unique version of that tune, creating a basis for innovation.[179]

Reading this article immediately brought to mind the dynamics of the Tel-Aviv School. Within a unity of a basic tune (its basic ideology) each cooperating teacher/ artist can improvise, imagine, rearrange and innovate her art of teaching as she plays off the rest of the team and moves the piece forward.

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[179] Time Magazine, May 2002, p.B5.

The school organization encourages cooperation and collaboration, questioning, imagining and risk-taking. Hargreaves (1996) found that teachers are more likely to be supportive of school processes and have a positive attitude where they are able to work across subject boundaries, where there are strong cultures of collaboration, in a school that has a clear moral purpose and where teachers are given access to professional development and help with implementing the changes. Many teachers take responsibilities upon themselves, assuming leadership positions, volunteering for extra work, all with no outwardly apparent personal incentive and in contrast to the way things seem to be at other schools [180]. This year's "face-lifting" project is an example. Teachers willing to take upon themselves the extra work and organization of changing the face of their classroom in cooperation with their students, received all the support (artistic, technical and financial) the school could provide and ended up with sleek, new environments. Gitlin (1983) argues that shouldering extra responsibility at school is related to the fact that both conceptualization and execution of the curriculum and its changes are in the hands of the teachers, who rather than being solely concerned with efficacy and implementation, have been given the power to and assumed critical roles of questioning what is and imagining what should be.

> When you give people ropes, they use them to climb up ", says Amira. "That's the key to our school. All the people here are good and have potential. Whoever wanted to, has proved himself and made progress" (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.83).

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The system of "paying it forward", of treating others as you are treated - with respect, acceptance, stepping back from positions of power and opening possibilities for transformation and taking responsibility, are evident throughout the school among the teachers as well as the students.

> Annie was reading a poem to the class. Everyone was watching her and paying attention because she was engaging them by acting out the funny story. Everyone in class was involved except for Bobby who was sitting at the teacher's desk, his head down on folded arms. Bobby had come to Israel at the beginning of the school year and was

[180] Talking to friends of mine who teach in other schools, serving populations considered "better" than those of Tel-Aviv, I learned that teachers try to avoid and evade any kind of extra responsibility in school because *"it entails only extra work, more hours spent at school, and no compensation on any level"*, said my friend Ye'ela (veteran 1st grade teacher). *"We already do much more than can be humanly expected of us for the salary we receive"* added Michal (teaches high school).

struggling with many problems at home and at school.

Annie (stroking Bobby's hair): "*Bobby, maybe you would like to lift your head and join us?*"

No answer.

Annie: "*Could you at least tell me why you're upset?*"

Bobby mumbles: "*Because you're a liar*".

Annie: "*I didn't hear you*".

Bobby raised his head and screamed: "***You're a liar! You're a liar!***"

Annie (very calmly): "*Why are you calling me a liar?*"

Bobby (shouting): "***Because you said you would call on me and you didn't***".

Annie: "*I called on you once and then I called on other children. Everyone needs to get a turn*".

Bobby (more quietly now): "*You're a liar!*"

Annie: "*I know that you're upset but calling someone a liar isn't nice. I don't even allow my own daughters to talk that way. So try to calm down and listen to how funny this poem is*".

Annie went on with the lesson in her normal high spirits, as if this exchange never took place and, with time, Bobby too joined the conversation.

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In an interview with Ohz he said the Tel-Aviv School was very special because even though the teachers don't get paid much, they give a lot to the students in terms of teaching.

"*What else do they give the children despite their low pay*?" I asked.
"*They also give them love from time to time*".

When the kids are tired after a long day of learning, the teachers are considerate and let them play rather than study and through their play and interaction the children bond Ohz answered.

Now-a-days in recess when we see a child that has no one to play with, we include him [in our game] *and it doesn't matter what ethnic group he is from or what the color of his skin is. We include him*".

- * - * - * -

The 3rd graders volunteered to clean up the schoolyard every Tuesday morning. A teacher was designated to oversee the project, but one Tuesday morning, arriving later than usual, Amira found the kids working in the yard and the teacher absent. Upon inquiring she was told that the teacher saw the kids were working nicely so she asked them if they wouldn't mind if she went inside to teach a few of their classmates who

needed language help, while the rest of them stayed where they were and continued working. Not only did the children not mind, one of them volunteered to take charge and throughout the period they sent delegates to the teacher in the classroom to report on their progress.

<div align="center">- * - * - * -</div>

Henya (6th grade, from Russia) was telling me about her family:

"*My parents are never home. They work all the time. I have to look after my 4 year old sister and its difficult sometimes because I have to keep her busy, so I decided to teach her to read*".
"*How are you teaching her?*" I asked.
"*I learned how to do this from my teachers at Tel-Aviv. When I work with her I'm always patient, even if she annoys me because I know that if I'm patient she'll become more confident and learn better. It's almost like being a second mother. In Russia my teachers were very strict and I didn't like their methods so I'm not using those*".

<div align="center">- * - * - * -</div>

> It was early one morning when a teacher brought a student to the office to call home and ask to be picked up because he wasn't feeling well and had a fever. He was a 1st grade Arab child nicknamed "*Chamoodee* (cutie)" and Amira asked him why he came to school at all if he didn't feel well. He answered that at the beginning of the year she had taught them that it was their responsibility to come to school every day and that if they are sick they must bring a note from their parents. So he (very responsibly) came to school even though he was sick but he brought a note from his father saying he was not well…

Why, asked a visitor to the school, were the wonderful teachers and principal of Tel-Aviv wasting their time and energy on these foreign students, who will probably end up leaving Israel anyway at some point, when there are so many nice, Jewish, Israeli students who could and deserve to benefit from their teaching more? Neta answered by

describing the profound goal of education - of transforming the world through the transformation of the learner:

> *Yes, some of these children will go back to their countries, and one or two or three of them may grow up to be prominent personalities in their country's government or maybe even ambassadors to the United Nations, and they will remember fondly their experience as children at Tel-Aviv, so Israel will have another advocate, a friend. We don't have too many friends out there in the world, do we?*

The feelings are of being on an important mission and the sights are set on the future. In the present they are sowing the seeds and then they will wait patiently for the time in which their efforts may bear fruit. In a sense, they are extending the range of space-time relations by teaching the children and letting them go with the winds to establish spaces of positive memory or action for themselves, the school and the country, in other places and at other times.

Pause II: "A human being is a human being is a human being" *("Adam hoo adam hoo adam")*: A Conversation about Space

> "Symbolic spaces and the semiotics of spatial ordering create texts that have to be read in social terms".
>
> David Harvey

The meaning of the concept of space is a social construct embedded in the material nature of a culture and the time and location in which it is observed. It is an amorphous and dynamic concept, emerging, stretching, contracting and disappearing as the situation calls for. Our understanding of space effects the way we make meaning of the world and our own positionality within it.

The Tel-Aviv School isn't a perfect place by a long shot: kids get into fights, curse, destroy school property, lie and manipulate the system; teachers lose their tempers, raise their voices, take days off when they shouldn't, come unprepared; problems are sometimes overlooked, kids do fall into cracks in the system, personalities clash…just like at any other school. The difference here is that all of these things are exceptions to the rule and when they happen they are approached as natural aspects of human behavior rather than transgressions. The idea underlying this approach is that of abundant space:

all participants in the school are given space – space to be themselves (use a language they feel comfortable in, take their time), space to grow (move from one group to another, try new things, change), space in which to take time out, space to move into and take responsibility, space to vent and space to err.

There are many levels of spatial constructs within the physical space that is the school and their exposition will allow for a better understanding of the school as a context for the educational activities it encompasses. One can address the physical space, the building and it's surrounding, the fenced-in yard, and continue to talk about social and ideological space which include symbolic, mental, linguistic, cultural and political space[181]. We can look at the space the school occupies in the general school system and the spaces created within it for the activities and processes that take place among its population. To begin with, the school is an institution that is part of the larger education system in Israel.

> Institutions are produced spaces of a more or less endurable sort. [They are] territories of control and surveillance, terrains of jurisdiction, and domains of organization and administration. But they also entail the organization of symbolic spaces… and the spatial orchestration of semiotic systems that support and guide all manner of institutional practices and allegiances (Harvey, 1996, p.112).

Within this system, Tel-Aviv is a school on the margins, both physically and in terms of its population. Although it is considered a regular public school, it is physically located in the old, southern (as opposed to The Northern, more affluent) part of the city of Tel-Aviv, in a run-down area characterized by low rent housing and low-income population.

> *"In the 70's and 80's the neighborhood was dying. People moved to better areas and those left were the old people. There were many empty apartments, so from the middle of the 80's, when the big immigration from Russia began, there was a new migration into the neighborhood and a cultural blossoming was felt. But the Israeli population here is a difficult population. These are people who weren't able to rise and get out",* (the words of Ronny, the art teacher who grew up in the neighborhood and did get out, although his father still lives there.

In a way, the Tel-Aviv School can be compared to an American inner city elementary school, in which most students can be characterized as belonging to minority

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[181] In some cases the distinction between the different spaces is blurry.

groups (the poor, ethnic minorities, immigrants) normally marginalized within the larger society. Historically, the marginal position of the school had a lot to do with its educational and political decline[182]. The physical as well as the ideological space of the school reflected discrimination,

There is room for everyone

hopelessness and neglect. Principals came and left (sometimes within a school year), parents burned school property to protest the poor conditions and the school came to be deemed the most violent in the city.

But the school's marginal position was also a catalyst for its change and ascendance. "It is in its nature as a supplement to the center that the margin is also a place of resistance" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 22). Spaces on the margins can become valued loci for those who are trying to establish differences (Harvey, 1996/2000). bell hooks talks about the developmental possibilities inherent in marginality:

> This marginality [is] a central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and in the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or to surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (hooks, 1990, pg. 149-150).

The potential hidden in marginal spaces is apparent on different levels. Williams (1960, cited in Harvey 1996, p. 101-102) dubs it a borderland in which refuge can be found from "the embrace of overwhelming powerful social processes and social relations", where one can exist "outside of the language of dominant and hegemonic discourses" in a critical space characterized by more conceptual freedom from which to challenge these

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[182] In its first few decades of existence the school was considered central and mainstream and had a strong reputation. Its decline began with the shifting of middle-class population to the newly built northern neighborhoods, the neglect and physical deterioration of the older southern neighborhoods and the concomitant influx of low-income residents.

otherwise overwhelming discourses. In addition, being on the margins gives one a double perspective, of looking from "here" and from "there" simultaneously, offering advantages of a wider vision and added strength:

> We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margins. We understood both… Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole (hooks, 1990, p. 149).

When Amira agreed to take over the school, officials were so pleased they allowed her to do as she saw fit. Using this *carte blanche* and the school's marginality as leverage[183], taking advantage of the larger degree of freedom and the wider perspective that went along with this position, the faculty at Tel-Aviv were able to imagine and implement alternatives in a process that brought the school back to the center in both educational and pedagogical terms. Physically, the school today is "like a rose among the thorns" (כשושנה בין החוחים, Psalms). It stands bright, tall and clean among the neglect surrounding it, whereas in the past it had blended in with that neglect, as Amira described: W*hen I came it looked like a ruin – all gray, no yard, mud and puddles all around in winter, electric wires hanging outside the walls, the bathrooms were outhouses with holes in the ground* ".

And it was crowded – 480 kids in a smaller space than the one available today. So the first project was an overhaul of the physical facility to pave the way for an ideological overhaul. Today, at the principal's request and following her own behavior, the school is kept as clean as can be (with 300 children running in and out all day, open hallways, dust and soot from the vehicular traffic outside, etc.), with special emphasis on the bathrooms. I felt a sense of responsibility towards maintaining this cleanliness when I saw adults and children picking up stray rubbish as they walked around school. When the 3rd graders were looking for a class project they decided to clean the school and the yard every week. And there is no longer crowding in the school. There is more available space and fewer

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[183] "*Since nobody is checking our results other than ourselves, we can experiment*", said Amira to the teachers who were about to begin the new social studies program they had created..

students. *"I could close half the school for my 300 kids but I want the kids to have corners for seeking solitude",* explained Amira[184].

Mrs. Lotan, the superintendent, sees an additional benefit coming from the extra space – the relative calm and reduced violence among the children (compared to the school's past and to other, similar schools in the district):

> *Scarcity of resources creates pressures and leads to violence. We see that in schools where there is less square footage of space per child, it invites more physical contact and violence".*

Classes themselves are small, ranging from 26 in 1st grade to 18 in 6th grade. The 5th grade has 32 children but they are divided into at least 2 groups most of the day. All of the classes break up into smaller learning groups within grade levels so that most activities are carried out in groups of about 10-15 children, but I often saw a teacher/aide/counselor sitting in (sometimes, literally) a corner working with 4-5 children. Gym, tech, music and homeroom are whole class activities. And the tall turquoise-painted metal fence is a protagonist in this story as well. Its role is physically and metaphorically keeping the outside world of uncertainties, pain and suffering, politics, rhetoric and humiliation, out and away from the safe space it delineates for the children within.

On many levels, there is a blurring of borders between the public/school space and the private/home space at Tel-Aviv. Knowing that many of the children at school were children of illegal residents, the police would come to raid the area in the morning and ask parents for documentation as they brought their children to school. People who couldn't come up with the right papers were arrested on the spot, in front of their children. Outraged, Amira met with the chief of police and they came to an agreement that the school and its close vicinity would be a safe haven for the children and their parents. If the police have to stop or arrest anyone they may do so after the child is dropped off and only after the parent is out of the child's sight. The police have been keeping to this agreement[185].

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[184] She said this during the 2000-2001 school year when there were about 300 children in school.
[185] Sadly, there are still children who come to school in the morning after having witnessed the arrest of a parent during the night. It is part of the reality of the school. Lately (at the end of 2002) the Israeli newspapers are full of reports about new and harsher deportation policies and the large numbers of foreign workers that have been arrested daily and await deportation.

The safe-space of the school extends from the physical to the mental. The children feel safe to be themselves, right down to their differences and weaknesses. The fact that there is no competition for grades eliminates the exclusion that usually comes with academic failure or success. Poverty, too, isn't grounds for ostracism, since most of the children come from similar positions. The concept of mother tongue is central to the understanding of children's spatial needs at Tel-Aviv. Amira bases her pedagogical approach on personal experience: *"I learned this from my British grand-daughter. She is fluent in both Hebrew and English, but when she is under pressure she immediately converts to English"*.

Language can also position people socially and politically within the given space and hierarchy. "Beyond knowing words and grammar, learning a language involves acquiring a role… also inhabiting, willingly and unwillingly, consciously and subconsciously, a location in the hierarchy" (Ogulnick, 2000, p.170). Consequently, there is an openness for allowing the children to express themselves in whatever language they feel most comfortable in. Children are allowed to speak and write in their native language as long as they find it easier to use than Hebrew. Rachel explains the logic, *"If they write in their own language I get better papers so why should I make them write in Hebrew?"*

There is, however, a strong drive to have them learn Hebrew as quickly as possible in the struggle for expediting their (and in many cases, their parents') acclimation into Israeli society and establishing a space in it for themselves.

This piece of the ideology at Tel-Aviv came into sharp focus for me as I was reading Anzaldúa's description of her experience with language and space, or better yet – the lack of space, in her American school (Anzaldúa, 1999:75):

> I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess – that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. *"If you want to be American, speak 'American'. If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong".*

Mental and personal space at Tel-Aviv is constantly being broadened to become more inclusive and more comfortable for the children. This year they've added elective language lessons to the curriculum, teaching Spanish, English and Arabic (the Russians have their own evening language classes outside of school). "This goes against the melting pot policy that was customary here", Amira told a newspaper reporter. "We give space to the

Holidays of the three religions and we encourage the children to bring their cultures into the school"[186]. The Escolita is an example[187]. Every Friday afternoon, when all other children have left, space is provided for a group of Spanish speaking children to congregate in one of the classrooms and study their language, culture and religion with teachers from their communities. About 60 children are registered for the program. While I was at Tel-Aviv, the Turkish children asked for a similar arrangement for themselves, which has, by the time of this writing, come into existence.

Additional mental space is provided for the children in the texts they are taught. This is evident both in the texts the teachers choose to teach[188], in the workbooks and worksheets that are not standard, but rather fit the child's ability level allowing her to proceed at her own pace, and in the projects the children are assigned which provide them space to develop issues and understandings that interest themselves rather than having to work on topics dictated from above.

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Here I would like to add another patch to the portrait of the Tel-Aviv School, a story about an experience of space and language and acceptance that was uplifting as well as a tremendous learning experience, particularly for myself.

Everybody was excited and anxious. Eight choirs from around the city were sitting together in a beautiful new community center waiting for the annual choir meet to begin. The children from Tel-Aviv had been practicing for many weeks and the moment to show off their work was near. Tension was high. Some children were chattering, others silent and introverted, a few girls were repositioning their hair clips, others were looking around, calculating their odds of being the best.

It began with the head music teacher for the city welcoming everyone to the meet. After a few words she asked the children to all rise, initiating a 10-minute warm-up session for everybody's voices. This calmed the children a bit, they were reseated and the first choir was called to the stage.

It came as a total surprise to me, a shock almost, to learn that the first choir to appear at the meet was a choir of deaf and dumb children. They began by accompanying their teacher, who was playing the piano, with percussion instruments. Then they got up to sing. They "sang" in sign language accompanying their teacher/conductor, who both signed along with them, conducted and sang vocally. They sang a song called *"A human-being is a human-being is a human-being – adam hoo adam hoo adam*"[189]:

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[186] www.haaretz.co.il Wed., July 24, 2002.
[187] A project of the Mesilah help center for resident aliens.
[188] See Appendix 3.1-3.3
[189] Lyrics and music by Doodie Shechter.

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You have a color	Yes the sun above
He has one too	Will shine here forever
Every person opposite you	Will shine on everyone
Has their own color... so	Because you're not alone.
We shall sing	In the world there are millions
Because it's in our blood,	Of people, of people
Adam hoo adam hoo adam.	Light and dark and different.
	Adam hoo adam hoo adam.

With blue eyes,	Refrain:
With brown eyes	Let us sing,
As long as you look	Yes we'll sing over and over,
With open eyes	If I show respect
And you can say too	I will earn it as well.
It flows in my blood	Let us sing
Adam hoo adam hoo adam.	Because it's in our blood,

The children in the audience knew the song (it had been the song everyone learned for the previous year's meet) and the conductor on stage asked them to join in both vocally and following the signs she and the children were making.

As they did so, the whole auditorium of hearing and non- hearing kids, speakers and non-speakers - signing and singing to each other "*adam hoo adam hoo adam*", seemed to be the manifestation of the ultimate experience of extending space for the inclusion of all children, of acceptance of difference and of the inclusion of others, naturally, into the everyday flow of life.

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The school, in many ways, serves the children as a home away from home, and at times, it may be better than home. Teachers talk about being mothers first and teachers second while at school, Ohz told me he loves his parents because they do so much for him but he loves his teachers just as much, and the art teacher was offered his job at Tel-Aviv with the expression "*You'll have a home here*". Many children don't keep, what others might call private or embarrassing information, to themselves, possibly because they feel that someone is listening or that the school will try to help. In a 3rd grade class discussion about something unrelated, George, a student from Africa, mentioned that his parents beat him with a stick when they think he isn't doing well enough in school ("*It's written in the Bible*" they told him). Isabelle told me how her father used to hit her mother and in the book of personal stories that the children published, many of the stories tell about abandonment and harsh realities. But it is safe to be whoever it is you are at Tel-Aviv and to talk about it.

The personal safe-space extends to the teachers as well, as they are trusted and given space to be human – to err, to vent, to grow. In one of the staff meetings the

teachers were providing numbers of children in their class who were achieving on a normative level. One teacher said defensively: *"In my class there are 22 and whoever doesn't believe me can test them"*. To which Amira replied, "*We don't judge people here*".

When teachers slip, when they make a mistake within their independent space, the principal always backs them up at first, she admits. The second step is to let some time pass and then open a dialogue about the event, discussing what went wrong and how to prevent a recurrence. And there is the acknowledgement that in order to make space for positive feelings, thoughts and actions, one must be able to vent one's frustrations. At Tel-Aviv it is safe to be open and honest about one's feelings. Going into the new social studies program that the teachers put together, Amira told them that it probably wouldn't be easy at first: *"We need to talk a lot about the difficulties. I'm ready to sit with you every Monday and you can pour your wrath over me"*.

Regarding growth and transformation, there is time, space and respect for these processes as well. Amira pointed out one of the teachers who, due to her upbringing, had a lot of difficulty accepting and teaching the foreign kids at first, but is now in her 4th year and doing a very good job. *"Look at what a long way she has come!"* she exclaimed appreciatively.

At another time she commented on a new teacher at school who had not been performing as Amira had expected of her in terms of working outside of her own classroom and adding to the general energies of the school. But she said nothing. Toward the end of the year this teacher suddenly came out of her room and began working and doing the wonderful things that the school had expected from her all along. To each their own pace and space to grow.

Communication with the parents, written or oral, occurs, as much as possible, in their native language, creating a space for them too within the school[190].

> *I want the parents to understand what is happening with their children at school*".
> And in another conversation: "*Another principal would have spent school money on a nice sculpture to decorate the front yard, but I invested instead in software in the different languages that we need for writing to our parents*", Amira explained.

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[190]Doc VI is a letter to parents in 4 languages.

When parents come to meet her and their customs are different than the local ones, Amira adjusts herself to them, such as standing when the parents may not, according to their customs, sit in the presence of the principal, or allowing them to address her as a male (there are cultures in which principals can only be male so some parents call her Mr. Principal). But this space does not extend to customs of child abuse or any kind of violence against children, which may be considered normative in other cultures but are against the Israeli law[191].

This openness to and inclusion of the different cultures at Tel-Aviv comes at a high price, contends Amos, the science teacher. He is very angry because he finds the school displaying a bias in favor of providing space for other cultures and restricting the space for the, supposedly, dominant Israeli/Jewish culture.

> *Every child has the right to an education and to an identity, but we must remember that this is a Jewish state and we can't forget who WE are and where WE* (his emphasis) *are when we teach these children…We let the children develop their own identity while discounting/canceling our own",* he said.

Other teachers talked about the first few years when they were debating about the allocation of space to other cultures in the curriculum and whether this would come at the expense of their traditional sense of spatial entitlement

Symbolically, this elasticity of space to include multiple cultures may be seen as part of what Harvey calls "time-space compression", a concept relating to the shrinking of the world, both in terms of physical distances which are today easily and regularly traversed, and in terms of the spread of information. This experience of blurring of boundaries, fast turnover and change and the new social and cultural mixing that result forces us to "adjust our notions of space and time and rethink the prospects of social action" (Harvey, 1996, p.243). Clearly this is happening at Tel-Aviv.

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[191] There are groups in which children are punished by having them kneel bare-legged on rice kernels for extended periods of time, by beatings or by starvation. It is into these areas that the cultural space does not extend.

8. "Is Purim an important Holiday?" (*"Pureem hoo chag chashoov?"*): Inclusionary pedagogy within a different Discourse

> You must be graciously hospitable towards every human being
> The Sages

In response to Wallon's theoretical question of who understands the child's needs best – the adults or the child herself (Wallon, 1984b), Amira gives the school's perspective: "*We must remember that for us the child leads*", she tells the teachers at one of the school workshops (a forum where she repeatedly talks about ideology to remind the teachers where the school came from and where they are headed, she tells me[192]). The needs of each child, her will, circumstances and ability profile are taken into consideration as her course is charted throughout her years at Tel-Aviv. It is a cooperative effort,"…a*nd this ability to relate personally to every child is the difference between this school and others who do it only partially*", adds Amira.

Eemee outlines her understanding: "*Every child is a world in itself. We can't expect that everybody will be the same so we make ourselves flexible to begin with*".

One of the school's mottos is a quote from the Rabbi of Kotsk: "There is nothing more inequitable than equally teaching children who are different from each other". Shiva and Aviva are 18 years old with contagious smiles, working in the school as 1st and 2nd grade teacher's assistants[193]. They have no formal background in education and have learned to deal with the greatly diverse needs of the students as apprentices to the teachers, conceding to having had a difficult time at first. They translated this motto into practice summing up the pedagogical approach they had learned: *"The point here is to get to know every single child, to learn how best to work with him. We can't and we don't approach every child in the same manner*", said Shiva.

Strangely, over a distance of thousands of miles, it seems as if Dewey is hovering over the Tel-Aviv School, since many of his ideas are realized in everyday practice here. He talks about attending to the needs of every child and assessing their availability for

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[192] *"They need me here to keep reminding them of our ideology. They can run the rest of the school themselves"*, she says.
[193] For a year of national service in lieu of regular army service.

learning and he warns that unless teachers take into account urgent tendencies in the existing make-up of the child, acknowledging the diversity of needs that exists in every human being, the child will be unable to initiate her side of the educational interaction and imposed learning will be impossible (Dewey, 1964).

The concept of "the child leads" is expressed in practice at Tel-Aviv in the sense that education is not something that is done to the child, nor is it a blanket concept covering everyone in a sweep. The idea is to bring the children to a place from which they will be motivated to learn. Teacher and student mutually investigate pertinent issues and set goals within the specific reality of each individual. "I cannot think *for others* or *without others*, nor can others think *for me*", writes Freire (1970, p. 89. Author's emphasis). In this spirit, learning decisions are made with the children, not for them, and it is the child who makes the final decision, thus the responsibility for acting upon her ideas is her own. The teacher shares in this responsibility by coaching and facilitating the child's attempts to carry out her decisions and move forward on the path she had chosen for herself.

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How does one teach "other people's children" so as to provide them with access to success in the wider society? Setting out on such a mission from an ideology of multiculturalism put the Tel-Aviv faculty in a difficult position because the traditional curriculums they had been using were products of a hegemonious melting pot ideology at the basis of the Israeli education system and were not working for them. As the diversity of the children in school grew, the teachers noticed that they were working harder than ever and the students were achieving less. Continuing on the same trajectory would mean a physically easier time for the teachers (they would probably not be held to task due to the marginality of the school), but it would also mean morally giving up on the children, on the responsibility of teaching them and on their principle that every child is entitled to quality education. After long processes of rethinking and reevaluating their situation, the faculty developed a unique pedagogy - a pedagogy of fusion – within which they developed practices that were congruent with their ideology, that brought together everybody's needs and gave each one of them – teachers and students - a voice.

"The practical work [of education] is one of modification, of changing, of reconstruction continued without end" (Dewey, 1964/1974, p. 7). Such was the approach to the development of the new pedagogy at Tel-Aviv, proceeding by means of transparent and fearless dialogue ("*There are no holy cows here. Everything is open and up for debate*", said Amira) that allowed for change and the development of critical consciousness ("*We are constantly in the process of self-examination*", says Anat K.). With a flexible attitude and open to renegotiation of anything that is not working well enough ("*No 'auto-pilot' here*" commented a visiting principal). "*We want to break out of the concepts that are holding us captive",* commented Amira at a planning session dealing with yet another reorganization of groupings at school. Explains Anat K.,

> "*Our team is characterized by the flexibility, ability and will to respond to matters of the hour. We are able to recognize that despite all our efforts and the great program we put together last year, changes must be made again this year because of new and different problems that we are facing. We have the ability to maneuver and respond in a timely manner to the many changes in our framework".*

Eemee studied special education and now teaches 5th grade:

> "*Here at Tel-Aviv we have to have our hand on the pulse constantly. We have to notice changes and transform ourselves to meet these changes. Flexibility is very important. Luckily I learned about this in college*".

Adds Anat M., the information-systems teacher,

> "*Even when we come up with a plan we don't know how long it will serve our needs. We are continually developing methods and tools knowing that they probably won't be the final answer and will have to be changed with the ongoing changes in our population. This is our reality and we accept it".*

"Things are in a constant process of transformation and humans inserted in this flux try to make meaning not only of events, but of the process itself" (Lima, 1995, p. 445). Amira talked about transformation and the need for flexibility at Tel-Aviv in an interview with Bar-Shalom (2000, p.60). She said that she and her team have to be in a constant process of change, to be flexible, to be aware of the multiplicity of cultures.

> "*There is nothing that we need to be set and unbending about. We are undergoing change all the time due to demographic and other processes of change in the*

neighborhoods…. The real need creates the changes. The school changes according to the changing reality surrounding it".

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Being "neutral" or "not seeing color" in an education system can result in "[t]he process, context and content of education or literacy instruction [destroying] the heritage, the essence of who and what a people are, [destroying] their knowledge of themselves" (Delpit, 1995, p.78). However, schools that adopt a proactive multicultural pedagogy that "reaffirms rather than negates a people's knowledge of its culture and heritage, then there is no better prospect for its success" (Delpit, 1995, p.90). "When we as educators allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve" (hooks, 1994, p. 44).

One of the things that intrigued me about the Tel-Aviv School was its openness to "otherness", its inclusivity. I was slightly incredulous upon hearing that the children learn about the holidays of every culture and religion represented by the student body and about other-than-Jewish interpretations of the Bible stories. Knowing the politics involved in determining the Israeli public schools' curriculums, it seemed impossible that such openness about things not Jewish would be condoned in a public school[194]. Yet when I walked into the school the first morning I saw a large corkboard hanging outside the computer room decorated with colorful greetings the children put together for the winter holidays that had just passed.

There were "Happy Hanukahs" decorated with Christmas trees and elves, "Merry Christmases" decorated with menorahs and "Felice Navidads" illustrated with dreidles and potato pancakes[195]. Between all of these were projects with Moslem symbols for the Ramadan.

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[194] The Israeli national public school curriculum is narrowly Judeo-centric. When I attended public school in Israel, albeit many years ago, mentioning Christmas or Jesus Christ was taboo.
[195] Symbols of Hanukah.

(Sveta, the computer teacher said she had to ask some of the Israeli children to make a second greeting to take home to their parents because their original work incorporated Christian symbols that she feared some families might not be open to accept).

The national curriculum was problematic when it came to the teaching of Jewish and Israeli Holidays, topics that take up a large part of the school year in elementary schools[196]. Most of the children at Tel-Aviv don't celebrate these Holidays (which are either religious or related to the land) being of a different religion or being newcomers to the country and its culture. Anat M. outlines the school's solution:

> *"So we started teaching holidays based on themes. We take a theme of a Jewish holiday such as the theme of light in Hanukah and try to find a similar theme in their holidays. This gives us legitimization to teach Hanukah, for example, because we also teach their holidays. This year we taught Hanukah, Christmas*

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[196] There are 9 major Jewish/Israeli holidays throughout the school year and they constitute a major part of the curriculum, especially in elementary schools. These same curriculums don't include formal space for any holiday other than the Jewish ones. There are a few (private) schools that are mixed for Jewish and Arab children and there they teach about the Muslim Holidays as well.

and Ramadan together, at the same time. When kids came to my class they each found information about their own holiday".

Tsiona was talking to her 1ˢᵗ graders, half of whom are African, about the approaching holiday of Purim, a holiday based on the Biblical Scroll of Esther commemorating a victory of the Jews in Persia against those who wished to annihilate them many centuries ago. The outward customs consist of dressing up in costumes, exchanging gifts of sweets with each other and with the poor, and being happy.

> "***Is Purim an important holiday***?" she, loudly and rhetorically asked the children, bending her upper body towards them and throwing her arms back.
> *"**Yes***!" they shouted back.
> *"Do you know why it's so important?"* (I was expecting her to go into some religious explanation, knowing that she is a very religious woman herself),
> *"Because it is suitable for **every** people (lechol am). It is suitable for Joanna from Ghana and for Eemreh from Turkey. On this day **ev-v-verybody** is happy and every child in the world can be happy, no matter where he comes from!"* [197]

Mazal dealt with the same topic in her very diverse 4ᵗʰ grade class. When they were talking about Purim she asked the children about similar celebrations in their countries. Several children spoke up and Mazal said:

> *"Today you taught me about yourselves and I found parallels between our cultures. Did you learn about parallels in geometry? Why do you think I'm talking about parallels here? Where are there parallels in what we have just talked about?"*
> Someone answers*: "Between countries".*
> Mazal continues*: "Wonderful! There are parallels between the customs of Purim in Israel to your own. How are they similar? Everyone dresses up in costumes, but each people (am) does it at a different time. Camillo (from Columbia) mentioned the custom of giving gifts. Is there something similar the Jews do?*
> Nava: *"Meeshloach manot".*
> Mazal: *"Yes. The Jews give food and money during Purim. There are parallels between the customs of different people. The reasons for the holiday can be different, the reasons for giving gifts can be different and I don't know them for other holidays, but these correspondences show us that all people are equal and similar".*

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[197] And they were. The Purim celebration in school was an all out success, so much so that the faculty decided to celebrate again the next day, reasoning that these children have so few celebrations in their lives, why not give them an extra day of fun!

Inclusion works the other way too, evident from the following newspaper report dealing with issues of religious dissonance for the foreigners living in a Jewish state.

From the media[198]:

Jennifer came to Israel from Ghana when she was 2 years old. She doesn't think living as part of a Christian minority in a Jewish state is a problem. "I know that in other places in the world the whole country celebrates Christmas, and that's surely wonderful. Here they don't celebrate Christmas but there is Hannuka. Since it's a local holiday, we celebrate also. We don't light a Menorah, but we eat *soofganeeyot* [199] and enjoy the festive atmosphere, why not?"

Elana, the home economics teacher said:

"I always teach about our holidays, even though many children aren't Jewish. I think it is important that they know how we celebrate the holidays and what they mean. But there is always room for everyone's holidays. We just celebrated Hanukah and while I taught the whole class about the traditional foods, every other child told us what the special foods of their holiday are".

It is possible that this fusion of multiple cultures into the school curriculum, the space made available for every child's voice to be heard, the respect for others and for difference, all work together to create a feeling of comfort and belonging that are responsible for the smiles, the happiness and the calm one sees and senses among the children at this school.

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Freire talks about "problem –posing education" in which the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education are exchanged through ongoing dialogue to horizontal patterns of teacher-students working together with student-teachers, a situation where all become jointly responsible for the process and in which all grow. Whereas banking education "attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness, [problem-posing education]

[198] www.haaretz.co.il, Wed. July 24, 2002.
[199] Jelly doughnuts – a traditional Hannuka food.

strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (Freire, 1972, p. 62)

The concept of problem-solving education and the creation of a teacher-student/ student-teacher relationship based on dialogue is a factor in Tel-Aviv's inclusionary pedagogy. Teachers and students act as cultural agents (Lima, 1995), exchanging knowledge in a horizontal dynamic. When I asked Sonny, a 6th grader whose family is Turkish, what he liked about Tel-Aviv, he answered after some thought,

> "[T]*hat we learn from our teachers and they learn from us. I'll give you an example – during* **Tu-Bee'shvat** *(*Arbor day*) in computers class I had an idea of taking fruits and giving them life. I gave them sounds, motions, eyes, hair. Natasha (*the computers teacher*) liked my idea so much, she told all the children to do the same thing*". And he continues: *"There's also a computers teacher*[200] *called Zelma. She's a good teacher but there are some things she doesn't understand and there are some things that I don't understand. So sometimes she teaches me and sometimes I teach her"*.

And I heard similar sentiments from many of the teachers. As Mazal was summing up her lesson about the holiday of Purim, she said to the class,

> *"Today you taught me many things about your cultures and we found similarities between the ways you celebrate and the way it is done in Israel*". She then turned to me and said loudly, so the whole class could hear *"You know, I didn't know many things. I draw (sho'evet) a lot from* [the children]. *Things I never knew"*.

Neely, the technology teacher, talked about how her teaching has changed as she listened to her students' voices:

> *"Throughout the years I was teaching here according to the curriculum of the Department of Education and I went to seminars and met with teachers from other schools and I taught exactly as I was requested to do by the Department of Education. But in the past few years I felt that I couldn't continue this way. The composition of the student body here is not like in a regular school. So I decided to let go of the requirements imposed on me and begin looking at the child himself and at his world. I look at them and I see what they like to do and how they play during recess and talking to myself about this I came to the conclusion that I will teach them through things that are in their world, like these games that they made* (she pointed to game boards posted all over the room) *from the worlds of their learning, like Bible, geography, science. Children who are able to work in the*

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[200] She's the assistant, newly arrived from Bulgaria.

Department of Education workbooks, however, continue to do so. I give them the workbooks.".

And Elana told me,

"*I prepare every lesson in advance and know what I'm going to talk about, but during the lesson the children often pull me in their own directions. The truth is that I learn a lot from them".*

Teaching well necessitates "imaginative vision which sees that no prescribed and ready-made scheme can possibly determine the exact subject- matter that will best promote the educative growth of every individual young person" (Dewey, 1964, p. 9). Nechama explains the dialogic process of curriculum development at school, involving the voices of both faculty and students and following the tenets of Dewey's theory:

"*We construct our program by integrating different subjects. The topic itself is generated through the learning process. Consequently, we know where we start from but have no idea where we will end up at the end of the year. We create multi-aged learning groups and decide on topics the children suggest so that one group may study a system (a human system or the solar system), another group may study interpersonal relationships and a third group will be looking at the relationship between life and art. The ideas come from the children and our products are research topics, individual projects, writing based on reading"* (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p. 66).

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Mrs. Lotan, the school superintendent: "*What is very special about this school is their culture of inclusion. Many of the kids don't feel they belong anywhere but here".* There may be more truth than poetry to this situation, says Anat M.,

"*What we do in this school isn't because we are better teachers, or love children more or are smarter than others. Everything grew out of our specific circumstances and the kids' special needs. In most schools 'normative' students are the majority. Here the majority are 'those that are different', hence our emphasis on inclusion and working with children with diverse needs".*

Neely, the technology teacher, explained her inclusionary practices:

"*Stemming from our combined histories of being Jews and Israelis, we cherish every child. Each child is so important, that we want only the best for him. That's how I am as a teacher, just as I am as a mother. Every child is important in my classes and I don't leave anyone excluded on the side. I don't know if* [this

feeling] *is the same with all teachers or only at Tel-Aviv, but* [this approach] *flows in our veins here".*

My First Girlfriend[201]

When I arrived in Israel, my mother registered me for school. This school was the Tel-Aviv School. When I arrived at school one teacher called a girl whose name is Romina and told her to take me to her class, then I didn't know Hebrew, so I told her in Spanish: You know that I am embarrassed to enter the class? So she told me don't be embarrassed because all the children are good and then the bell rang and all the girls that were there went away and left me alone and only Romina stayed with me.

Later we went back to class and I didn't have books because I didn't know Hebrew and only my friend Romina let me look at the book even though I didn't know Hebrew and that's how we became very good friends.

When the 5th graders were allowed to choose a topic for a video film they would write and produce, they chose to portray the process of *kleeta* (absorption, inclusion) of a new child at school based on the traditional value of *Heveh mekabel kol adam besever paneem yafot* (You must be graciously hospitable to every human being). They wrote and acted in a 15-minute video film about a new student who shows up in (their tightly bonded) class one day. The newcomer is dressed strangely (as actually had happened) and the kids make fun of him at first, then one of the children befriends him and the rest follow suit…

Inclusion is not a practice saved for the children alone. Ronny, the art teacher, was looking for a job and went for two interviews. The second one was at Tel-Aviv. *"I am looking for a home. If I come to work here I need to feel welcome",* he told the principal who was interviewing him. *"Come, then. You'll have a home here"*, replied Amira.

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"It doesn't matter where the child came from.
What is important is where he is headed"
Amira Yahalom, Tel-Aviv principal

Most of the families of the Tel-Aviv children are transient. The veteran Israelis are either waiting for their lot to improve so they can move out of what is considered a

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[201] From the book of children's writing *Happiness Has No End But Sadness Surely Does.*

"bad" area (if for no other reason than strong resentment by the veteran residents of the foreigners who have moved in), or they are down on their luck and have recently moved into the area from better places. The new immigrants from the former Soviet Union have come in the past several years, on their way from their former homes and lives in Moscow, the Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan, to a new homeland, a new culture and new beginnings. They hope living here is a temporary step on their way to greener pastures, and for some, it turns out to be just that. And the foreign workers who are living and working in the country - they come one day, disappear the next, some stay for years, others are deported in the middle of the night (their friends come to school to return books and other materials that were left behind in the hurried departure), some reappear after a time. The school has about 40 entrances and exits during the school year (almost 15% of the school population).

The children tell about their problems with transience[202].

I was left without friends

Yonatan was my best friend and he went back to Chile. I'm sad.

He didn't want to hug me so he wouldn't be sad.

They left in the morning and I didn't see them. I was at home, it was during the Pesach vacation, but only my mother said good-bye. My father was at work in the factory.

Now I'm left without friends. I would like to have a girlfriend my age and an older boyfriend. I like to play tag.

The diversity and transient nature of the student body raises several issues that are reflected in the school curriculum.

a. Teachers don't know how long the students will stay. Some show up during the school year and need to start from the very beginning (children are placed in classes as close to their age group as possible, based only partially on their prior educational experience). Others leave suddenly to faraway countries and the school must consider the literacies they will be taking away with them. Ultimately, an understanding of their situation to be one of a constantly changing milieu, and a willingness to be as

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[202] The following story is from the book of Tel-Aviv children's stories *Happiness Has No End But Sadness Surely Does.*

flexible as the circumstances require, came together at Tel-Aviv to create a curriculum in which teaching is skill/tool[203] (*kayleem*) rather than content -oriented.

b. Grouping of children for teaching and learning purposes is a central practice at Tel-Aviv. The groups tend toward homogeneity and are used during Hebrew, English social studies, Bible and math lessons. Placements in the groups are based on dialogue between teacher and student but they are not fixed. Groups are fluid and placement flexible, often temporary, as kids move from one group to another according to their individual circumstances.

c. The diversity of the students is extreme. Not only do they come from different countries and cultures with different approaches to education, their literacy background is very diverse – many come from situations where they have never held a book, others come from strict, disciplinarian, achievement-oriented schools, yet others, despite being older, have only limited experience in school. Assessment, consequently, is individual rather than comparative, and isn't couched in the binary language of success/failure. Assessment is of "the process of the child" and, according to Amira, every child is successfully "*making progress*".

8.1. An Israeli song ("*Sheer Yeesra'elee*") : Curriculum

> *To open up our experiences (and, yes, our curricula)*
> *to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend*
> *and deepen what we think of when we speak of community.*
> Maxine Green (*The passions of pluralism*)

8.1.1. The principles

In her article "Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a curriculum for human beings", Maxine Green wonders whether it is possible to devise curricula that will awaken and move people to fight what she calls "the plague" – abstract thinking, indifference, depersonalization. Curricula with a vision "to perceive the voids, take heed of the violations and move to repair". She would like schools to awaken to see "alternative possibilities of

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[203] Smagorinsky (2001, p. 139) talks about the notion of tool. Quoting Luria (1928, p. 495), he writes: "*instead of applying directly its natural function to the solution of a particular task, the child puts between that function and the task a certain auxiliary means…by the medium of which the child manages to perform the task*". Yes, a tool can be a hammer or saw, but from the perspective of activity theory, tools can be psychological (i.e. speech) as well as culturally conceptualized implements".

existing, of being human, of relating to others", to break with the mechanical and the routine that have anaesthetized educational thinking. Rather than coming up with curricula that determine *a priori* the frames into which students must fit, Green is calling for releasing potential learners to order their lived experiences in different ways, to give them narrative form and voice. "[I]t is only when persons are enabled to shape their own experiences in their own fashion, when they become critical of the mystifications that falsify so much, that they become able to name their worlds" (Green, 1993a).

The Tel-Aviv school has appropriated such a trajectory.

"I think that school should stop teaching information. What we need to teach instead is the use of information and socialization, which includes social responsibility and human relationships, both areas that have suffered a lot due to television and home computers that have caused the almost total reduction of face to face relationships between children outside of school" , says Amira.

One of the outcomes of the faculty's brainstorming sessions and the process of renewal was the idea that teaching in the school would focus more on providing the children with learning tools and study skills – within the context of critical and creative thinking[204], rather than specific content, much of which, as contained in the Israeli elementary schools' curriculum, is irrelevant to the lives of most of the children and unrelated to their histories and life experiences. Talking about her teaching of research/ information systems, a subject not taught in many schools in Israel, particularly not in elementary schools, Anat M. explained[205]:

"As the number of foreign students in school increased - children that we have no idea how long they'll stay - we understood that we have to concentrate on principles, themes, tools, because if you give a child a tool such as research/ information systems, the research can later be done anywhere, in any language, in any culture[206]. This was a major concern for us in establishing information as a subject on its own, with all the due respect".

[204] As Delpit, 1995, suggests.
[205] In a meeting with a group of visiting superintendents and principals, Amira presented a typical schedule of a student and one of the classes on this schedule was *mey da ánoot* . The root of the word was 'information' and I guessed it meant 'information science', but I had never heard the word before. I was sitting at a table with 4 others - 3 principals, and a superintendent, so I asked them if they could tell me what *mey da ánoot* was. They didn't know.
[206] Video 4 – 0:55:59-0:59:16 shows A group of 2nd graders learning about the dictionary and words beginning with the letter "cheit". Their mission is to arrange the words in order according to the second letter in each.

Amira explained that it is the populations making up the student body who shape and dictate the direction of the school pedagogy: Israeli children from some of the "most disadvantaged" groups in Israeli society, immigrant children mostly from the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union, children whose culture and educational background are very different from those of the dominant Israeli culture, and transient children from the world over. In a Freirean spirit of understanding education to be an instrument of human liberation, Amira says:

> "*These are the populations we have to care for, and what are the most important services we can give them in our school? We have to give them language so they can become integrated in Israeli society as quickly as possible for their own and their family's sake, and we have to provide them with diverse strategies – strategies of socialization, strategies of learning, how to deal with texts, how to use a library, how to pack a backpack…So no matter where they end up and what language they'll be using, these strategies will be useful to them in their future*".

This is a philosophy that moves "beyond minimal interpretations of literacy as the ability to read and write to a view of literacy as a resource which offers possibilities of access to what has been said and thought about the world" (Wallace, 1989, quoted in Moll and Gonzalez, 1994, p. 454). Anat M. explains the theory behind the pedagogy:

> "*Because the children come from so many different places and will also probably end up in different places, one of the ideas we developed was to give them tools for learning, information too, of course, but actually to emphasize the learning tools because this is something very universal. After we provide them with the tools they'll be able to acquire the relevant information in Israel or South America or anywhere else. We will qualify them for life no matter where they will be, not necessarily here in Israel*".

How I Learned Hebrew and Spanish[207]

My father has been in Israel for 8 years already and knows Hebrew.

In school we got a teacher that speaks Spanish and Hebrew, Neta, she helped us, whatever we didn't understand in Hebrew she translated into Spanish.

Then we started to learn Hebrew quickly until we moved up to 2nd grade and we understood everything and we didn't need any more help.

My mother, Estella, taught me to write Spanish, first the vowels and then the alphabet

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[207] From the children's book *Happiness Has No End But Sadness Surely Does.*

Lankshear (1993) writes about Freire's concept of functional literacy as the practice of reading and writing integral to living humanly, the practice of liberating literacy that allows people to pursue their life quest and fulfill their destiny. Similarly, the teachers find themselves concentrating on functional literacy practices that can provide the children with the ability to study and learn anywhere and at any time. They teach the children how to study, do research, find information and write papers in order for them to become independent learners. Mazal, the 4th grade teacher, told me: *"The information itself is less important, it's tackling that information and utilizing it that we emphasize here. So even if a child goes back to his Arab village, he will know how to deal with the information and texts he gets there"*.

In practice, Mazal spends much time in class on frameworks and form:

A general framework for analyzing a story

She teaches the children how to find the underlying structure in a story or Biblical tale something, she told me, she believes can help the children better comprehend the content and how to go about a writing or study project.

Similar to Mazal's is the philosophy of the home economics teacher, Elana:

"I could teach them to make beautiful cakes with frostings and decorations, but how would they benefit from this? My idea is to teach them things that can be helpful on a daily basis, give them tools that will help them care for themselves and survive".

"The idea that guides me is that I want the children to learn things that will be useful in their daily lives, whether here or if they leave to other countries. I teach hygiene, good nutrition and how to make simple food, things they can make for themselves when there is no one else to care for them, which is many times the case here with children staying alone at home all day".

Eemee adds,

"The important thing in our school is to provide the children with the tools/skills (kayleem) that they will be able to use to get the information they'll need in the future. Tools/skills such as becoming an independent learner, dealing with, reading and relating to texts, asking the right questions, looking up words in a dictionary, etc. This is what I focus on in class".

Alex (6th grade) described the process from his perspective:

"I like Rachel's classes because we learn good an nice things there. For instance, heroes. We have to choose a topic and research it ".
"How do you do research?" I ask.
"First thing, you ask questions about it. Then you go to the dictionary and see what a "hero" is. Second thing is you go to the encyclopedia and there they explain what a hero is. Then you have to choose one hero and write about him, and the very last thing [here he starts smiling] *when you finish you must show your work to the teacher".*

This approach is, at its root, similar to that suggested by Delpit (1995) when she talks about the importance of teaching minority children skills, defined as "useful and useable knowledge", skills that would allow them to communicate effectively in the general society as they negotiate their lives.

> From the media
> Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Stanford University, specializes in teacher-training and school reform. In a special report in Newsweek[208] on learning and education, she is quoted as saying that for the future of education she envisions "[t]eachers will be in more of a coaching role, directing students to the resources they need to solve problems – 'a guide on the side', helping students find answers, rather than 'a sage on the stage'".

This pedagogical strategy worked for the Israeli students as well, possibly because they too belong to a marginal group in Israeli society – the poor. The school's ultimate goal in the higher grades was to prepare all students for middle school, where most of the content (except for Hebrew, some math and English) would be new. The thinking was that if the school gave the students the skills needed to study and learn independently, rather than teach them another chapter in history or Bible, they would be at an academic advantage in their new schools. According to Amira, city of Tel-Aviv middle schools today gladly accept Tel-Aviv students[209], in contrast to their being looked down upon in the past. As I was browsing through school files I saw several letters that had been sent to

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[208] Oct. 29, 2002, pg. 61.
[209] In the second half of 6th grade the students and their parents consult with the teacher and principal as to which middle school to apply to. All schools are open to all children but the teachers try to direct children to those schools that would suit their specific interests and strengths. The teacher may not prohibit a child from applying to a school, but will try to reason with the family not to send the child to a school that might be, for example, to academically rigorous for her. The final decision is up to the family.

Tel-Aviv by middle schools describing how the former Tel-Aviv student was doing in 7th grade[210].

8.1.2. The contents

After the form was decided upon, the content was addressed in an interplay on what can be found both inside and outside the school (Moll & Diaz, 1987), a mixing of formal educational goals with local literacies and funds of knowledge in a process of "negotiating the curriculum" by teachers and students alike "for reasons of democracy and for reasons of student engagement" (Edelsky, 1999, p.4). Critical educators "make curricular decisions on the basis of what we see and hear [in our classrooms], but we also invite our students to talk with us about these decisions so they are not mere recipients of a curriculum we devise, but rather are co-creators of the curriculum" (Boozer et al., 1999, p.74). Rachel echoes these ideas responding to a question by Bar-Shalom (2000, p. 64):

> *"There is a wide array of cultures here. You can't just teach them the Bible literally. By necessity you fly away into different cultures".*

Nechama, one of the 6th grade teachers, had a conceptual problem. She couldn't decide how to teach the children history. On the one hand she wanted the topic to interest all of them – the standard curriculum advised Greek and Roman history, but on the other hand, there was no material she could find that would be relevant to 20 kids originating from 10 different countries and whose Hebrew language skills ranged from nonexistent to age level. On top of that, the school pedagogy urged her to emphasize study and research skills and pertinent content rather than the standard 6th grade curriculum. And Nechama was well aware of the idea that "[i]nterest in a task is indispensable – far more important than simple training" (Wallon, 1984, p. 145). The problem was solved based on pedagogical principles of the school: that the children's needs and best interests lead their educational process, that children be involved in their education, that teaching allow the children to create knowledge, that "learning flourishes when teachers incorporate the resources, histories and experiences of their students and their communities into the curriculum" (Beykont, 2001, p. 55), and that making use of cultural resources for instruction helps "learners establish novel connections between texts and social worlds to obtain or create knowledge and transform it for meaningful purposes" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994, p. 454). When Omer was about to begin

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[210] Doc VII is an example of such a letter.

presenting his project to the class, Nechama asked him to explain why it was important for him to choose the Ukraine and the city of Kiev for his study. *"Because I was born there and it's the capital"*, he said. And in the 6th graders "Heroes" project (whereby every child had to choose a hero of interest to himself, then research and write about him), Ya'acov (Russian) said he chose to study Boris Yeltsin who was elected prime minister of Russia the year of his birth, so he felt a strong connection to this hero. Alex's hero was Francisco.

> *"Who is Francisco?"* I asked.
> *"He is a hero who led the Mexican Revolution".*
> *"Is your family Mexican?"*
> *"No, Russian".*
> *"So why did you chose Francisco?"* I wanted to know.
> *"Because he was a really well known hero for me"* was Alex's answer.

When Hiram (Columbia) put together his computer presentation for Passover (on the topic of the slavery of the Jews in Egypt as they built the pyramids), he presented the concept using an Aztec pyramid…

Consequently, coming back to the history projects, Nechama asked the children to discuss the issue with their parents and each child had to come up with a historic personality or topic they would like to study, a topic their parents were knowledgeable about and could help them with. Thus, she was thus affirming her students' diversity, validating their family and community knowledge and giving all voices the same power and space. The kids came back with an incredibly diverse agenda: Simone Bolivar,

Stalin, the Six Day War, the Dominican Republic, Moldova, Lenin, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Kiev. From there they set out to do research, put together a digital presentation and an oral presentation in class. Children who didn't speak Hebrew presented in their native language and peers translated for the rest.

The other 6th grade teacher, Rachel, approached the issue differently. She used the formal curriculum as a guideline for concepts to be taught (i.e. the concept of democracy from the section on ancient Greece and Rome), and she taught these concepts as they related to her students' lives. She also combined her understanding of the centrality of visual literacy for today's children with the knowledge of her students' great diversity, deciding to use a video about the Maya. Using this video Rachel taught history as well as the concept of vanishing cultures and research methods. She said, "*At first, the Spanish speaking students got excited and very soon their excitement caught the rest of the class. It turned out to be an amazing learning experience*".

Bar-Shalom (2000) writes that the teachers at Tel-Aviv are in many respects cultural brokers (rather than socializing agents whose goal it is to "duplicate good Jewish citizens", a position he says characterizes the role of teachers in other schools in the country), and due to their assumption of this position the Tel-Aviv teachers' approach to the curriculum is interdisciplinary and comparative, with an emphasis on the "big stories". "It seems that the multiplicity of cultures associated with the school inspire the teachers to develop a more relativistic view of culture in general and the Jewish Israeli culture in particular" (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p. 65).

Pertinent to this aspect of the Tel-Aviv curriculum, a very problematic issue is the core subject of Bible studies. The Israeli public school curriculum has a narrow definition of what may and may not be taught as Bible studies within the understanding of the school as a socializing agent in the service of perpetuating the dominant culture[211]. How then do you teach the Jewish version of the Bible which is written in difficult and archaic Hebrew to children who are mostly not Jewish, were not brought up within the literacy of the Bible and its language (as Jewish-Israeli children usually are) and many of whom haven't yet mastered standard Hebrew or might not know Hebrew at all? Math and

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[211] Traditionally the ministers of education came from the religious parties or from parties affiliated with the religious right. Consequently, an orthodox-Jewish approach to Bible studies in the public school curriculum has been the norm since 1948.

history are universal topics, but Bible studies in Israeli schools come within the scope of local literacies.

> "*How do I teach The Torah (*the first five books of the Bible*)? Not always by the book",* said Mazal.*" I look for universal motifs and I try to relate those to all religions. I teach the Creation stories from other religions' perspectives as well and I also teach the scientific approach. The children talk about this at home so we create a family dialogue on the topic and then every child is on his own to construct his own niche and understanding*" (quoted in Bar-Shalom, 2000, p. 65).

Rachel approaches the teaching of Bible as if it were an historical document rather than a religious one, and combines it with her teaching of history, sending the children in search of similar concepts in both areas, looking at systems and relationships rather than at details.

The teachers are creative when it comes to teaching the children Hebrew, about Israel and Israeli culture – a part of the curriculum that is almost unique to Tel-Aviv because of the large percentage of children that do not have this knowledge. One of the first examples I ran in to was a sports class for 2nd grade girls (the boys were given balls and they went off to play on their own since there is only one teacher for the whole class). The girls had jump ropes and they were chanting the Hebrew alphabet to the rhythm of their jumps. After doing this for a while, the teacher taught them short ditties in Hebrew which they repeated as they continued jumping.

Ella, the music teacher, has her own tricks. She used the celebration of Purim to teach syncopation - she dressed up as an old man and taught this new rhythm where the emphasis is on the soft note "*like an old man walks*", she said. She also uses the songs she teaches in class and the choir songs to teach the children both the vocabulary and the context, a context that relates to life in Israel. She wants them to know what they are

singing (even though this entails much extra work for her since she is a newcomer to Israel herself and must learn the words and the spelling herself first).

> *"In my lessons I emphasize content: content of the lesson, content of our lives, content of the songs I choose. Every child has to know what he is singing about, not only the tune but the meaning of every word. So especially in our school where the children have difficulties with Hebrew expression, I often stop the lesson and devote time to explaining the significance of the songs they are singing. For example, in the song "Choref (The winter of) '73", I explain not only what choref (winter) means and what '73 means, but also 'Choref '73' which is The Yom Kippur War. I explain what the Yom Kippur War is and then they understand why they can't smile when they sing this song. I explain almost every word".*

An example of adjusting the material to the lives of the children at school and at the same time using it to better acclimate the children into the Israeli culture, is the song Ella chose for the children to sing and represent their school with at the city-wide choir meet. The following is a translation of the beginning of "An Israeli Song"

An Israeli Song	
	Refrain:
Your snow and my rain	In a Greek rhythm
Your valley my river	With a Polish accent
Finally meet on the Israeli shore	In a Yemeni flourish
With all the dreams and longings	With a Romanian violin.
With all the good and bad memories.	Who am I? Who am I?
In a new-old song that joins the shreds	Yes I am – my Lord, my Lord* -
Oh, it is so good, it is so good and pleasant*[212].	An Israeli song.

Ella said that she chose this song purposely because it shows *meezoog tarbooyot* – a fusion of cultures, it talks about people with different using musical instruments from around the world.

> *"This way the children feel very, very* [comfortable] *in the choir and they are not ashamed that one doesn't know Hebrew, the second one speaks with a Russian accent, a third came from South America and confuses English, Spanish and Hebrew.*

Teaching Hebrew through songs was evident in Ella's work with the 1st graders. For one song, which was mostly repetitious ("A child wakes up in the morning and says "*Shalom*" to___), she drew images of the changing nouns on the board (mom, sun,

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[212] Both asterixed phrases are taken from other Israeli songs that occupy central positions in the Israeli musical tradition.

family, a flower in the garden, etc.), and pointed to the drawing as the children sang so they could make a connection between the picture and the word. In another song she taught about "a long thread and a short thread" and had the children act out the concepts.

8.1.3. Meaningful Dialogues

> *"Conversation is the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood".*
> Richard Rorty

Knowledge is constructed as participants in an educational setting engage in dialogue and reach new understandings, thus, dialogue can be seen as a tool for social transformation (Gadotti, 1996). In the process, a speaker adds to the structure of meaning created jointly with another (others) and advances "her own understanding through the constructive and creative effort involved in saying and in responding to what is said" (Wells, 2000, p.74).

"Meaningful/significant dialogue" (*deealog mashma'ootee*) is a major pillar of the pedagogy at Tel-Aviv and is based upon active, sustained listening to others, listening that conveys interest and invests the parties to the dialogue with value (Dewey). People talk and listen to and with others in an ongoing process that provides space and gives voice to every member in the interaction. In a long-term study on the effect of SES on school achievement, conclusions "imply that school failure of low SES students is not a result of their inability to communicate; rather, it is the result of the school's inability to listen" (Henson, 1993, p. 44).

At Tel-Aviv, pedagogy is founded upon listening and dialogue.

"Children must physically come to school because early education is compulsory. The problem begins within schools since you can't compel the child to study. By providing the children with experiences and feelings of success while eliminating those of failure as much as possible, we attempt to create an environment the children will want to be in and in which they will participate proactively, shouldering the responsibility for their own learning", Amira says.

She explains that in order to create such an environment in school, a special dialogue needs to be developed between the teachers and the children – special in that it must be mutual, it must allow each party to the dialogue an equal status within the process. These dialogues are significant for the children in that they frame short term

policy, allow for changes and adjustments in personal schedules and positions in real time, and allow the children to lead their own learning processes[213]

The literature supports this concept. Understanding learning and teaching as a constructive processes that develops through interactions between the teacher and the learner, both of which have the same agentive footing as the other in the interaction (Ericson, 1996; Boozer et al., 1999), leads to a situation of co-investigation in which "[t]he more active an attitude men and women take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality" (Freire, 1970, p.87). "It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation" (Freire, 1997, p.108). Although the children at Tel-Aviv are not 'oppressed' in the sense that Freire is referring to, the attempt and the process of providing equitable educational possibilities to children of marginalized populations, is in itself revolutionary. Bringing the students to the understanding that they play an important role in their own education is a critical concept in the meaningful/significant dialogues at Tel-Aviv. The teachers don't make decisions for the children but with them, Amira explains:

> "*A child in any one of our learning groups knows why he is there and what he can do to change groups, whether up or down. His position is determined through dialogue that takes into account the child's will… his ability and his circumstances*".

Eemee had a dialogue with Ohz. He complained that he hates math, can't stand being in the class and that's why he has become so disruptive lately (the math teacher had been complaining bitterly about his behavior). Eemee tried to find out where the distress came from. They talked about whether Ohz doesn't like the teacher; maybe the time of his math class was too early or too late in the day or maybe it was right after the morning-break soccer games that take much of his energy (he's the captain of the team); might he be in a group that is too difficult for him? Finally they figured out that there was a child in class that made Ohz feel inferior and incapable, leading him to clowning and disruptive behavior that, Ohz hoped, averted the focus from his math ability to his

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[213] Doc. VIII outlines the framework.

behavior. Eemee and Ohz decided that he should change math groups temporarily and Ohz chose a lower group where he thought he would feel more comfortable.

Dialogues take place vertically between teachers and children, between teachers and the principal and horizontally among peers. They are taught/modeled at the teachers' workshops as a skill for building interpersonal relationships and creating community. A central notion upon which they are structured and which allows for such understandings to emerge is a "no fault approach". The purpose of the dialogues is not to blame anyone but to find solutions that everyone can live with; to move forward as best as possible rather than wallow in the quick sand of finger pointing.

In the best of situations, the partners to this dialogue would be three: the system/school/teacher, the parents and the child. At Tel-Aviv, however, there is a problem with the inclusion of the parents in the actual dialogue. Amira explains,

"*Our parents are usually unable to attend to their children's school issues because of the many difficulties and constraints in their lives so the actual dialogue takes place only between the teacher and the child. Therefore we see as our responsibility to inform them in their native language and in ways they can best understand their child's situation in the learning process The parents can comment upon the outcome of the dialogue on the written summary that is sent home and their thoughts are taken into account*".

"Part of what is learned in dialogue is interpersonal reasoning – the capacity to communicate, share decision making, arrive at compromises and support each other in solving everyday problems" (Noddings, 1992, p. 53). A meaningful dialogue between the teacher and each one of her students is a tool used to teach the children skills of interpersonal communication, making them aware of their own learning process, giving them a sense of confidence that they know what is good for their situation and that they can help themselves and direct their own learning. "A child who can recognize her own strengths and weaknesses, who can reflect on these and accept help, will be more securely engaged in the world and thus able to risk new experiences" (Eishold, 2001, p.32). Additionally, students who are encouraged to develop positive personal identities through interaction with their teachers "…experience a sense of control over their own lives and develop the confidence and motivation to succeed academically" (Nieto, 1997, p. 398). Katz (1998) describes teacher-child relationships in Reggio Emilia that are based on genuine conversations engaging the

minds and interests of both conversants. Rather than the usual classroom talk (mostly addressing mundane routines and behavior/achievement issues), Katz found teachers and children relating to each other in content-bound conversations on matters of real interest to both, raising the quality of the program and defining and strengthening the nature of the vertical relationships.

Organizationally, dialogues take place twice a month for each child (the teachers get extra teaching hours to do this). Psychologically the children are given the message that there is a time, place and respect for each of them, both physically and conceptually. Teachers and principals from other schools almost always comment on the tranquility at Tel-Aviv and Amira comments on the cause:

> *"What they can't understand is that our children know they have meaningful dialogues, and these give them a sense of fulfillment and contentment. When one has respect and dependable space, there is not so much need for violent, loud or inappropriate behavior".*

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> "Dialogue is the encounter between humans,
>   mediated by the world in order to name the world"
>   Paulo Freire

Dialoguing is the opposite of silencing. The practice of dialogue at Tel-Aviv ensures that nobody is actively silenced nor is a child neglected if she chooses not to speak[214]. The school proactively seeks out those children who are "too quiet", not as expressive as expected, kids who are introverted or sad. Attempts are then made to address their problem. The school's dealing with the language-learning problem of the Turkish children exemplifies this approach.

Some of the 15 or so Turkish kids at school were not learning Hebrew as fast and as well as children from other countries. It was taking them the longest to begin using Hebrew freely or to communicate with adults. Some of them were completely silent in class even when a translator was present, and the girls, when prompted, tended to speak in almost inaudible voices, their eyes cast down avoiding direct eye contact. There seemed to be something in the nature of the Turkish language and culture that was

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[214] Teachers are familiar with kids who chose to remain silent, to exist on the margins of the classrooms trying to float through the years, *"hiding behind his gaze"*, as a teacher once told me about my son.

making it more difficult for these children "*to learn Hebrew and use it as a tool for thinking, learning and communication",* said Amira to Mrs. Shalem, a language specialist who came to Tel-Aviv volunteering to help find a solution. She continued:

> *"I don't know if it is because they don't have a solid basis in their own languag*e, *because most of them speak dialects such as Azarian and not proper Turkish, or maybe it's just a very difficult transition between their specific language and Hebrew. We find it almost impossible to communicate with the children and it's very upsetting when we have to send them to middle school without being able to assess them".*

Rather than assume that the children's intelligence or abilities were lacking, the school's position was that there was probably too big a discrepancy between the Turkish and Hebrew languages and discursive practices, causing a "loose fit" between the literacies of the Turkish children and school and local literacies[215]. Juliette, a Turkish woman (who happens to also be a teacher) explained the main difference between the written Turkish and Hebrew:

> "*The writing of Turkish using Latin letters is a fairly new phenomenon resulting in a one-letter/one-sound correspondence. It is very different from Hebrew and English where the same letter may have different sounds or different letters may stand for the same sound… In addition, Turkish doesn't have male and female nouns like Hebrew does".*

Although the number of children with severe problems was only about 6, the school, taking a socio-ecological approach, looked into the learning environment for anything that could constrain learning. They checked into the lives, culture and language of the Turkish students so as to be able to use culturally responsive and appropriate teaching practices. They decided to put together a Turkish-Hebrew dictionary with words the children most needed in school (a complex undertaking since many of the children couldn't read or write in any language). And they also decided to make a video in Turkish and Hebrew, in which the Turkish children would describe their lives, culture, country, and with the aid of Turkish speakers, the school would explain life and culture in Israel to the Turkish children.

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[215] Reminiscent of Heath's conclusions in *Ways with words,* 1982.

In order to learn more about the children, Josette came to school and sat with the Turkish children during several sessions for a total of 4 hours[216] in an attempt to a) open channels of communication with them, b) learn about their lives, and c) elicit their thoughts and feelings about their learning at Tel-Aviv. In the beginning of these sessions, the children who had been in Israel for many years and knew Hebrew well did all the talking. Even during games that Josette played with them to create bonding, many of the other children remained silent. When questioned directly, some responded, but a few couldn't provide much information (where they came from, for example). Some of the children had very poor language skills in their native tongue, said Josette, and towards the end of the sessions, only slight progress had been made. But in the concluding 15 minutes, after all of the "stronger" children had left, some barriers finally fell and the few silent children left in the room began talking.

> Merveh, a 4th grader, had been at Tel-Aviv for 6 months but had never spoken to an adult in school on her own initiative. Talking very quietly, Merveh told Josette that she had been placed in 4th grade but she is 12 years old and should be in 6th grade, that the math she is currently learning is too easy for her because she already learned it in her Turkish school and these things make her unhappy. The issues were addressed and corrected the same day.

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Conversation requires a willingness to give of oneself
and to receive of others.

Ralph Peterson

Nikki is another example. He came to school just about when I arrived so I had the opportunity to observe the process he went through. Lara (6th grade) and Nikki (5th grade) arrived from Tajikistan (Russia) knowing no Hebrew. In contrast to his sister who immediately fell in with a group of Russian speaking girls who translated for her and facilitated her participation in all class activities and work, Nikki was withdrawn and silent[217]. He didn't respond to oral approaches by adults and would hang his head in silence if the teacher, through a translator, tried to create contact with him. If someone tried to put an arm around him, he would recoil. He stayed to himself during recess too,

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[216] Video 8

[217] bell hooks writes that "It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement" (1994, p. 39).

rarely speaking to a friend, and then, only in whispers. For a long while, although I persisted, he was unresponsive to my greetings.

The Russian-speaking counselor talked to Nikki and had his mother come in several times. The school suggested psychological services for both but the mother refused. After a while, when his teachers attempted to communicate with him, he would respond in a limited manner when the dialogue was private, but remained silent in public. There was progress, but it was slow.

One day I stayed after school to observe the children at the *Mo'adoneet*, the after school club. During the hour that everyone was doing homework, Nikki was playing cards under the table and trying to incite a friend to leave his work and play with him. I noticed a spark in his eyes, an opening that I decided to step into, but when I approached him to ask if he had any homework to do, he reverted to his public persona, clammed up and hung his head, shutting me out. The next day I found out ahead of time what work he needed to do and proceeded to sit by him at the beginning of the period, asking him to take out his books. He did so reluctantly, but sensing that I was adamant he slowly complied and we began working. He read in a whisper and I responded in whispers but I noticed that as we proceeded and I praised his knowledge, his voice grew louder. We did the same the next afternoon and the following mornings I noticed his eyes smiling in response to my daily greeting. By the end of my stay at Tel-Aviv, Nikki was actually saying "*boker tov* (good morning)" to me in a full voice.

8.2. "Every child is taught on his own level" (*"Lechol echad notneem et harama shelo"*): Grouping

> *"Every person has his good side: there is a child who reads better, there is a child who answers better, there is a child who writes nicer and stuff"*.
> Ohz, 5th grade, Tel-Aviv School

8.2.1. History

The groupings at Tel-Aviv originated from an ideology of praxis and evolved over time. Amira describes how during her first 2 years as principal she concentrated her energies on the teachers and their needs because they were desperate. Whatever they tried and whatever they did, they felt the children were not achieving academically. Amira felt the teachers were very quickly burning out so in order to ease their loads she suggested -

"*from an ideology of helping, not an educational ideology*" - that instead of each teacher having to prepare and teach every subject for her class, the teachers in every grade level (there were 3 classes in each level at that time) would each chose one subject that they were good at and *"that they like to teach"* (the choice was among math, Hebrew and social studies), and they would teach that subject to the 3 classes. In a way, this was bringing an "out of school" solution (Lave, 1985) into the school setting. It was an attempt to deal with academic achievements of the students not through addressing the academic content, but by lightening the teachers load and increasing their comfort level by having them teach what they liked teaching most. Amira explained:*"We didn't want to change the math program again. Our goal was to ease the teachers' load of work and this solution worked well for a time"*.

And as the teachers became more comfortable and less stressed, they began thinking about making things easier for the children.

> *"We understood that creating learning groups that are more homogeneous would be beneficial for the children's learning. We did, however, have somewhat different criterions for creating the groups in the different grade levels. This is where the grouping actually begun and the whole process came from the teachers.*

Noga, school advisor and Amira's right hand during the first years of the remaking of the school, details the actual process of math grouping and the thinking behind it:

> *"In the regular classrooms we had so many levels and languages that we were not reaching many kids. So we mapped our curriculum according to age levels and according to ability levels, and during math and language lessons the kids would be divided into 3-4 groups by ability. We called these groups: circles, triangles and squares. Even though there were other schools that were grouping, it was considered a loathsome practice (*mooktzeh*) throughout the system. But we decided to do it and we did it differently. What was new was that our groups were inter-age - we always moved the child up, never down, inter-class and even inter-grade levels. The weaker groups ended up with 2 teachers at a time. We grouped all the weaker children from the grade levels and did the same for the average and the strong kids. This division raised our chances of reaching more students. We found that in homogeneous groups you lose less children and the percentage of success is higher"*

"The classes began with 10 minutes of a whole-class lesson, and then division into groups and sub-groups within the larger groups. The sub-groups were organized by topic. Children who didn't understand a certain topic, sat in a special sub-group for that topic. And there was a lot of mobility. We explained to the children that our goal is not to fix their position. We showed them that the groups were open".

These primary groupings were for math and Hebrew at first, later English was added. For every number of classes that were taking part in a particular division into groups, one extra teacher was added according to *ad hoc* needs – a special education teacher or an *ulpan*[218] teacher, depending on the composition and needs of the specific classes involved, so that the groups were always smaller than a whole class.

A point of contention that was brought up repeatedly at the teachers' meetings, noted Amira, was whether Hebrew or math ability would determine the child's placement because as the groups were structured, a child could be in only one ability level across all grouped subjects (i.e., if she was strong in math she would be placed in a similar ability group in the other subjects, regardless of her actual abilities). The thinking went back and forth, but ended with a decision upon math determinism. The next step in the process was to group in more subjects. The different possible subjects were brought up at the teacher's meetings and a decision was made regarding each one as to whether it would become part of the "*grouping pool"* or remain in a whole-class format. Today there is grouping for math, Hebrew, English and social studies in the 5th and 6th grades and for math, Hebrew, English and Bible studies for grades 3 and 4.

8.2.2. Practice

The main concern to which groupings are addressed at Tel-Aviv today is dealing with the child's "real needs" by framing a space in which the teaching and the human environment would be compatible with the child's abilities and comfort level, setting her up for a better possibility of having "*an experience of capability*", explained Amira. In addition, there is an understanding that such compatibility plays an important role in limiting frustration. When discussing children with behavior issues at the 5th and 6th grade teachers' meeting Amira said:*"We want the child to have such a good fit* [between his group and his abilities] *that he won't need to be disruptive any longer"*. To this point,

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[218] Hebrew language class.

Ohz told me that he is sometimes disruptive in class. Was it boredom? I asked. Sometimes it was boredom, but sometimes he just didn't understand and didn't know how to ask for help, he answered.

Formal groupings at Tel-Aviv begin in the 3rd grade. 1st and 2nd graders will be placed in ad hoc learning groups, but they don't have a fixed schedule and depend upon the individual teachers' initiative. Ya'acov (6th grade) tells of his 1st and 2nd grade experience with groupings at Tel-Aviv:

> *"For me, Neta taught the best"*, he said.
> *"How so?"* I asked.
> *"She didn't work with only one child every time. She made groups in class, groups of children by levels (lefee ramot) and this way, if one kid didn't understand, she explained to the whole group"*.

The system in grades 3-6 is set up as follows: based on prior knowledge of her abilities - if the child had been in school in the past year(s), or on preliminary testing done when a new student comes to school, the child is placed in ability groups for Hebrew, math and English with math ability determining the English placement, and other than cases of students who don't know Hebrew at all, the Hebrew placement as well. There are 3 possible ability groups in each subject: squares, triangles and circles - from lowest to highest ability.

This placement process, explained Amira, isn't dictated from above. The teachers don't make placement decisions *for* the children but *with* them in a joint process of assessment that allows the children to take responsibility for their learning. She explained the ideal situation under which the child's will, his ability and his current circumstances are consulted and weighed for making placement decisions:

> *"A child in any one of our learning groups knows why he is there and what he can do to change groups, whether up or down. His position is determined through dialogue that takes into account the child's will, for example, a child may choose to be in a lower group in English in order to concentrate his efforts in math, his ability, and his circumstances, for example, if the child needs a translator for a language that the teacher and other children don't know, he'll be placed in a group with that specific translator. Ideally, all three sources of information will have equal weight in determining the child's placement.*

In essence, Amira is talking about transparency in the grouping system, a concept that "is a way of organizing activities that makes their meaning visible [and] opens an alternative approach to the traditional dichotomy between learning experientially and learning at a distance, between learning by doing and learning by abstraction" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 105). The use of transparency, of having the child involved in the dialogue determining her own placement and giving her a large measure of control over her trajectory, may be one of the determining factors in the success of this system. It is a concept that helps the child shoulder responsibility for her own learning because rather than being locked in a passive, dominated position, this places her in a fluid, open process where she can actively take charge and change directions.

Eemee explained that a child who has recently arrived in school from an Arab country, from Turkey or from Poland, for example, countries where they speak languages the teachers at Tel-Aviv don't speak fluently enough, and if there are no appropriate peer language brokers available, that child may be placed in the lower ability group in math in order to allow her to concentrate her efforts on learning Hebrew, which the school considers most important for the child's acclimation. As she makes progress in the language, she may be able to move into a higher, more suitable math group where the teacher's explanations are more complex and language abilities more imperative. Or, alternatively, a child will be placed in a group in which there is a peer language broker she can work with, even though the ability group may not fit her abilities at the time. Another child, who is going through difficulties impacting her availability to learn, will be moved down (upon her approval) to a lower group in order to relieve some pressure. And a different child, who has overcome difficulties and regained her energies or one that is making progress, will be able to move up to a higher group if that suits the child's needs. Olga, the English teacher, told me about Ziva who is the best student in the lower ability English group. A while back she tried to move her up to the higher ability group, but Ziva felt ill at ease so she promptly returned to the lower group where she is achieving well and feels comfortable.

"*Every child is taught on his own level*" Ohz told me when he was commenting on the good things at Tel-Aviv. He explained:*"For example if a child is better at reading,*

they give him more difficult reading and if there is a child who understands better, then he's given more difficult questions. That's what's nice here".

Placement in an ability group is based on the integration of the cognitive and the social, based on an understanding that every child is able to learn the age-appropriate material but possibly not at all times and although these *are* ability groupings, for some children - especially for those in the lower groups - they are also a temporary station, a shelter for riding out a storm, an interim solution. There is an underlying understanding that a child's pace and academic abilities are to a large extent contingent upon several temporal factors including maturity, academic and language background (has she studied Hebrew, English or math before and if so, on what level), "availability for learning" (are non-academic issues impacting her ability to focus, to invest the necessary energies, to engage with the learning process?). *"All of our kids are able to function on grade level, but maybe not now. A child in the lower ability group may be there because of lack of language, family or personal problems",* Anat M. said.

In the grouping process, each child is first placed according to the teacher's best understanding of her abilities and circumstances at the time of placement and the placement is negotiated in the upcoming assessment, if necessary. Since assessments are done every 6-8 weeks with every child (adjustments made in "real time"), issues of placement in the ability groups are constantly up for evaluation. Anat M. explains: *"We like the children to work to their ability, but we push only where we feel we can do so without causing difficulties for the child"*.

The system works as follows: within a 3-period block of time called "centers", a grade level (made up of 2 classes) is divided into 3 or 4 groups: squares, triangles and circles – determined by their math ability, plus another small group of children with special issues that are taught by the 4th teacher. This teacher will sometimes teach the small group separately or within the classroom of another teacher. The groups make the rounds of math, English and Hebrew lessons (i.e. for the first hour the triangles will be in Hebrew, the squares in English and the circles in math. They change topics for the second and then the third period. The teachers teach all levels of their topic).

Due to the language diversity at Tel-Aviv, there are also ability groupings for Hebrew, but these are slightly different. The children who don't know the language at all

go to an *ulpan*[219] - a Hebrew-learning class that is ability based and mixed age, with the goal of having the newcomers join the regular Hebrew classes as soon as possible, explained Nechama. The rest of the children attend a regular Hebrew language class in which the learning is ability based and is mostly individual - after giving the whole class a mini lesson, the teacher works with the children individually – each child is called up for a short session and anyone may come up with a question. Every child has her own workbook, so although all children are working in one classroom, on one topic, with one teacher, the ability groupings are reflected in the material given to each child and in ad hoc groups created as needed[220].

Video 5 – 1:24:29-1:40:21 documents the working of this methodology of individualized teaching and learning in Annie's 3rd grade classroom (across two groups) and the different levels of texts the children are working on concurrently. The desks are arranged in 2 groups – and outer perimeter of desks in a U shape, within which is a group of 3 desks pushed together to form a rectangle that is pushed up to the teacher's desk. In one segment (1:30:05-1:40:21) we observe the following dynamics: at the inner group of desks Annie sits with 5 students. All other students sit around the U. Looking at the tape it is obvious that the inner group are those students who need more immediate help while the students in the outside desks are more independent, but not necessarily more advanced (Gregory is doing very basic work of matching words with pictures, for example[221]). Annie is sitting by Ryan (Philippines), a student with whom she is working closely (1st grade material) but she also addresses the questions of the other children in the group.

Joanna, who had very recently arrived from Poland and knows only a little English, hands her workbook to Annie to check. Someone asks : *"Annie how do you spell....?"*Annie: *"wait a minute"*. She checks Joanna's work. *"Very good, Joanna"* (she says in English). *"Now they ask you what Chanan has and you have to answer '2 fish', '3*

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[219] Both adults and children who are new to the country go to *ulpan*s in Israel. Sometimes this happens simultaneously - the parents go to an adult *ulpan* at the same time that their children attend *ulpan* in school. These classes don't have a negative stigma as some ESL classes do in the U.S. On the contrary, they are perceived as an enabling stepping stone, opening up possibilities for life in Israel

[220] Docs X-1 to X-5 are examples of work on 5 different levels - from kindergarten to 3rd grade, found in a 3rd grade Hebrew class during one lesson.

[221] Video 5 – 1:30:54-1:31:15.

fish', '4 fish'... you understand? OK"[222]. Joanna nods and takes her book back. Then Annie turns to Carmella (Columbia) who is reading the Hebrew version of Hansel and Gretel, called "*Ami vetami*". She doesn't know how to answer one of the questions and Annie directs her back to the story and shows her where to find the answer. Then she adds a short explanation in Spanish.

Sara walks in. Annie: *"Shalom Sara, what did* (the teacher) *Marianna want?"* Sara answers and Annie directs her to start doing her work. We then see Annie working with Evette (from Turkey, on her left) on finding names of different animals in lists of nouns. They argue about a word, Evette says something, Annie says *"No"*, Evette says, *"It is…"* She turns to help Ryan again and then turns around to reprimand Sara for misbehaving, returning to finish up with Ryan. Going back to Evette she explains, *"You see, it's either an animal or something inanimate"* and she touches her fondly on the chin. Evette: *"Ma zeh (what is) ez?"* Annie makes the sound a goat would make.


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[222] Joanna is working on the 'ah' sound – the first level of reading. Fish in Hebrew is *dahg*.

Someone calls out: *"Ma zeh (what is) treeseem?"* Annie explains it means 'shutters'. She goes back to Ryan and in the background we see Joanna asking something of the child sitting next to her and he explains something to her in her workbook. He signals *"no"* with his head and Joanna erases. Annie goes back to Ryan and realizes she had made a mistake mixing up characters in the story. She says to him: *"Ryan, you are especially smart today. You brought a-l-l your brains from home and didn't leave anything there. It was my mistake. You are very smart today".* Ryan smiles and Joanna giggles watching them, seemingly understanding the humor.

These kinds of back and forth interactions go on to the end of the segment.

In a visit to Tsiona's 1st grade classroom one morning, the children were working in their reading workbooks and coming up to the teacher with questions or problems. At a certain point Tsiona noticed that some of the children were dealing with a similar problem so she asked those children to come up and sit in front of the board where she gave them a mini lesson. The rest of the children continued their work (and came to me with their questions). The aim of these types of lessons, said Neta, is for every child to make progress in the specific topic, but each child begins at her personal starting point and progresses at her own pace.
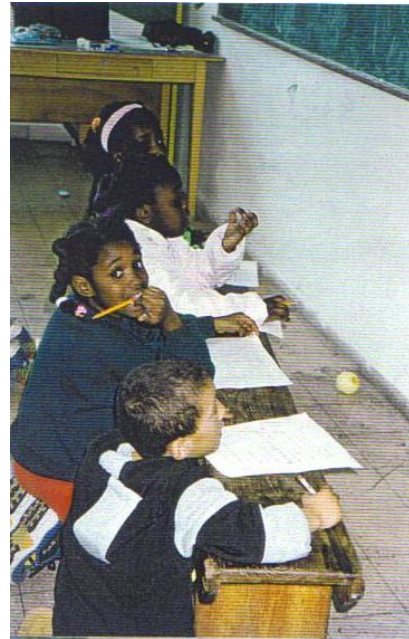
In a video of Sharon's 5th grade classroom we can see 7 children working on Hebrew language work sheets. On the teacher's desk was a big folder holding work sheets color coded by difficulty level and individually placed in protective plastic sleeves. Each child either had a sheet she was working on or chose a new project from the folder. When choosing a new sheet, other children would suggest or comment on the choice. The work was basically individual but there was much cooperative work as well as off topic conversation going on (some of it possibly due to my presence in the class). Sharon dealt with problems that were sometimes called out and at other times the children came up to her for help. When questions were called out, other children took part in the conversation.

Ohz: *Teacher, what does **ma'ameedah paneem** mean?*
Sharon: *Read me the whole sentence*.
David: *"I know. It's 'pretends'"*
Sharon: *"Yes, you're right"*.
Later Levitan asked*: What is **pazeez***?

David, who apparently didn't know the answer this time, raised his head from his own work and listened as Sharon explained that it meant someone impetuous. When she finished, David bent over his own work again.

8.2.2.1. The adjustment process

The "math-level determinism" was causing trouble. The teachers noticed that the system was not working well for too many children and they themselves had a difficult time with the multiple levels of ability they were getting in the, supposedly, homogeneous ability groups. There was frustration all around, Rachel told me, so they went back to the drawing board to find a better way of grouping. Amira said:

> *"The most important thing I want to emphasize here is that this was a process, and like other processes we undergo in school, we focus on the practical aspects as well as on the participants in the process. We are interested in the progress of the process itself, but also in the people involved progressing to the appropriate places. Our end goals are achievements, but we are continuously checking what is happening on the way"*.

At the meeting Nechama gave the experience of her student Batia as an example of a major fault in the current grouping system. Batia came to Tel-Aviv from a different city at the beginning of the school year and, being an Israeli, her Hebrew was strong and her English was OK but her math was lagging far behind the two other topics. In order not to pull her down in her stronger areas, the teachers went into high gear to bring her up to the level of the top math group (Circles), which would corroborate her standing in Hebrew and English.

> *"What didn't we do for her?"* exclaimed Nechama in frustration. *"We consulted with Amira*[223]*, we talked with the people at the Ma'hapach project*[224]*,* [the math teacher] *gave her individual lessons, all to teach her fractions so she could be in the Circles in comfort. Now it's already 6 months into the year and she's not there yet"*

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[223] Amira is a professional math counselor.
[224] Special math teaching project.

Sitting together for many hours with an organizational advisor brought in from outside the system, everyone's goal was to find a way of allowing the groupings to be independent of each other in order to better meet the "real needs" of more of the children - the stronger as well as the weaker students - and to have less fallout than with the current arrangement[225]. Amira told each group of teachers she met with that part of the new plans must address the special needs of the stronger students who to be losing out because most of the class time is devoted to the weaker and needier students while the stronger students have to be peer tutors or language brokers, activities that may negatively impact their own progress.

Rachel outlined her vision of the process: the math and English teachers will choose their groups and schedules first since their subjects necessitate teaching the most homogenous ability groupings. This will be the "more or less" fixed base of the structure. At the next level will be the homeroom teacher who would get those children who are not in either math or English. The homeroom teacher "*would scan*" the group she has in her class at any given time and decide on the spot what and how to teach that specific group at that specific time ("*whether language or something from my own issues with my class*"). Next would be those teachers ("*like the home economics teacher, for example*" who have no need for ability groupings and would be on the bottom of the receiving line, getting those students who are neither in math, English or homeroom.

Eitan had words of warning to the teachers regarding the proposed system. One of the problems of working within a flexible schedule, he said - a problem resulting from the flexibility itself - is tracking children's progress within the program, requiring the teachers involved to come up with not only a strict definition of goals for each group, but also with ways of assessing them. Another problem was that the flexibility of allowing children to choose for themselves how many more English or math classes they will attend during a day (above their assigned period) might create a problem[226]:

> "…*of diversion for an immigrant child, for example, who may be very bright and will choose to focus on that area in which he has a relative advantage*[227]*and in*

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[225] Parts of these meetings were video taped, video 1 − 0:38:07- 1:16:00. At others I took notes.
[226] The new plan would allow children to attend more than one English or math class a day if they feel up to it.
[227] Alluding to the mathematical strengths of many Russian children.

which the language component is limited, to the detriment of learning the language which is very important for his acclimation in Israel".

The result of the re-evaluation and re-drawing of the framework is, per Amira, a much more fluid organization of ability groups in which placements are determined by the needs of the individual child as much as possible and more than before. What has changed is that the groups today can be mixed-age groups within the grade levels and more flexibility has been built into the time scheduling in that there are whole days devoted to math and English and the kids have less restrictions about attending these classes. They may even attend them for an additional (above schedule) period if they feel they want or need the extra time - a concept Rachel feels is the most important for the new arrangement, mainly because it allows the stronger students to push forward at a faster pace and be at a better position to begin middle school.

For the 4th grade there are new groupings for Hebrew and Bible studies. Mazal and Yonat divided their students into 4 categories: excelling, average, weak and *ulpan*. It was decided that Mazal would teach the 15 excelling students, Yonat agreed to teach the larger group of average and weak students together (18 students). Yona, an auxiliary teacher, would teach the *ulpan*.

The new plan went into operation toward the end of my visit and it was still limping along by the time I left The main problem at that time was the incompatibility among the teachers, some of which had different understandings of the new system and different agendas than others. The exasperated Rachel exclaimed:

> *"We made big changes, canceled the center system and created a fantastic new one that solves our major problem of reaching every child and responding to his specific needs. This system is based on "days" – whole days of flexible groupings of math and English into which children can come and go as needed. But the professional teachers aren't ripe for the change yet. They haven't changed their former thinking and are still in the "centers" frame of mind. I really don't mind the extra work that is associated with the new method but if it isn't working, who needs it? It was much easier before".*

8.2.3. The children's perspective

I talked to children about the grouping and their implications. Sonny (6th) raised the topic in a class discussion I attended. When talking about what he liked about the

school he said that he likes the ability groups at Tel-Aviv because he likes being in a class with children of the same abilities as his own. This was his reasoning:

> *"Other schools don't have groups like we do and I like it here because let's say I was in a class with children who know math well. Who would the teacher talk to? Of course she would talk to the children who know and wouldn't pay attention to me!"*

When I came in to observe his group during English, Sonny asked that I sit by him as I took notes. He worked well throughout the period and at its end turned to me smiling and commented in his raspy voice, *"See, I told you the groupings were good!"*

Don't the kids in the low groups feel bad about their placement? Ohz responded:

> *"I don't mind at all* [being in the lower group] *because sometimes you're in a higher group and sometimes in a lower group and you can change groups if you want to make the effort, but I don't always feel like making an effort".*

And I asked Dina (5th grade) what her opinion was. She explained that groups are good because every child learns according to his own level:

> *"Let's say that I'm in squares, I can improve* (anee yecholah lehishtaper) *and move on to triangles and then to circles. That way it's possible to make progress* (efshar lehitkadem) *in the groups".*

My dialogue with Elinore supported Dina's opinion:

> *"Do you find your studies here difficult?"* I asked.
> *"Yes. I have difficulties",* she said.
> *"What group are you in?"*
> *"I'm in squares and it's good because they don't teach things that are too difficult. I once was in the triangles but I moved to squares and that is why I have to study a lot so I can move on to circles".*

Ohz talked about the groupings from a different perspective. He was trying to explain to me how good the teachers at Tel-Aviv were and gave an example of how they treat every child with respect, regardless of that child's placement. Even if he is weaker in math, for example, and is placed in "squares" or "triangles", if his teacher knows he is stronger in Hebrew, she will give him more advanced texts, just like the kids in "circles" get, regardless of his formal placing, *"because she knows that I'm good at it".*

In a letter written last year by a graduating 6th grader to her fellow students at school, Smadar writes openly about her placement in the low learning group, indicating to the reader that it is a natural aspect of life in school rather than a stigma.

> I liked learning in the Tel-Aviv school in which there are students from different countries.
>
> All of the students are nice to each other. Sometimes there are hitting and cursing but most of the time we are friends.
>
> Studying at school was easy and difficult. I find it hard to cope but I get along. If something bothers me I talk to the teacher and she helps me.
>
> In the beginning I had trouble getting used to the school, getting used to the children, to [grouping] but at in the end I found my place.
>
> I am learning in the low group because I have some difficulties learning and I get help from many students.
>
> I'm active in the student government, I was chosen by the whole class. And I enjoy the work in the student government very much. I liked learning in a school that functions democratically, particularly in the student government.
>
> I hope you will learn something from these words.
>
> > Good luck,
> > Your friend Smadar

Bar-Shalom discussed grouping with education students from the *Levinsky Teachers' Seminary* after their visit to the school. They told him they were impressed by the children's smiles and self-confidence in talking with them.

> They said that the children talked about the groupings without embarrassment because they knew that whoever did well could really move on to the next level. They didn't see [groupings] as a stigma or a static/immutable (*keeba'on*) position (Bar-Shalom, 2000:80).

Although I talked to many children about the groupings, I didn't find anybody willing to confess to having trouble with the concept or feeling that they had been placed in a situation they were uncomfortable with[228]. The younger kids didn't really understand my question. I felt that they accepted the grouping system as normative and comparisons of academic achievement rarely came up in our dialogues. On the contrary, I had the following conversation with 4th grader Isabelle who surprised me with her thoughts that originated from a paradigm different than my own.*"What else do you like learning at Tel-Aviv?"* I asked, after she had told me that technology was her favorite subject.

"Arithmetic".

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[228] The exception being Merveh whose story was told in section 8.1.3.

"What group are you in?" (asked I, expecting the best…)

"Squares", she answered matter-of-factly.

"Why do you like arithmetic?" I continued, not understanding how she could like something she was weak at (my paradigm).

"I don't know. Maybe because you learn a lot in arithmetic and with it you can be many things in life".

<div align="center">- * - * - * -</div>

The following is part of a conversation I heard as I was sitting at a meeting between Amira and a national superintendent:

> Amira: *"What I want most is for the children to like coming here".*
>
> National superintendent: *"Aren't you after achievements?"*
>
> Amira: *"We reach achievements, but not through competition. I don't have to prove to anyone that we are like Ramat Aviv* [229]. *And despite all this, our children are very much sought after by the middle schools".*

Reaching the expressed goal of having the children, first and foremost, like coming to school and coupling it with a quest for academic achievement is a tough and somewhat contrastive mission. Nonetheless, this goal seems to have been achieved at Tel-Aviv partially through the particular understandings underlying the practice of grouping. Foregrounding the children's best interests, giving the children a measure of control over their own learning and placement and building the flexibility into the system so that the learners don't feel trapped or forced into situations in which they feel uncomfortable, are major distinctions of this system compared to traditional tracking practices. It is a confirmation of the school's child-centered pedagogy in that both the teachers and the children feel that the system was created for the children's benefit, that it isn't imposed nor etched in stone. There are venues for protest, for addressing problems and for change, whether it is for a single child or for the system as a whole. Noga described the system of checks and balances:

> *"We checked child by child. We made plans how not to forget anyone, to check how each child is integrated* [into the program]. *Our aim was not to have any children fall between the seats, that there will not be situations in which the teacher had not met with the child in the plenum or in the small groups…We were constantly checking to see that we stayed true to the mobility concept to make sure we are not **mekabeem*** [keeping children in fixed positions]. *There were*

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[229] A "high class" neighborhood in the north of Tel-Aviv.

many, many meetings, many mappings. Everyone worked hard, but they agreed to do this because they saw that there is no other way".

"The thing that is most characteristic to this school is its non-fixedness", said Anat M. The flexibility and fluidity of the system seem to be what makes it work, avoiding the major pitfalls of tracking in our schools where we find increasing marginalization and situations of hopelessness and frustration of teachers as well as children. There is a practice of continual dialogic feedback between the teachers, the child and the system such that the child isn't "stuck" in any specific position nor is she constrained by limited expectations of achievements. The expectations do not stop at the parameter of the geometrical shape, as Dina and Elinore explained so well.

It seems that what is being done At Tel-Aviv is appropriating the concept of ability grouping for teaching/learning purposes by adjusting and readjusting its practice to suit the principles of having the needs of the child lead the education process and of trying to make the school experience a positive one for all children. The system probably works as well as it does also due to the small size of the school, the small group sizes and the fact that each child has an individual schedule within a pedagogy that values flexibility and is fearless of change, as Anat K. explains,

> *"Our team is characterized by the flexibility, ability and will to respond to matters of the hour. We are able to recognize that despite all our efforts and the great program we put together last year, changes must be made again this year because of new and different problems that we are facing."* And she adds: *"We are constantly in a process of self-examination".*

When Rachel presented the new idea of grouping that the teachers had come up with, Eitan, the organizational consultant, named the concept "working within a flexible time framework". He said:

> *"This is a nice idea. There are schools in the city with a lot of experience in this area. I know of two or three schools. The G- School, for example, has reached a very high level, maybe the highest I have ever seen, of working within a flexible time framework I suggest we begin a pilot study this year, see if it works".*

Flexibility has its limits, even at Tel-Aviv. When the new program was implemented, problems arose since some children were missing gym and this is one of the areas in which schools are given no discretion or flexibility at all.,

"Wherever the outside system allows for flexibility we take it and work well with it. Problems, big problems, begin with issues in which we are not allowed to be flexible, like giving each child 2 sports classes a week with at least one day in between. These things are carefully monitored so we had to go back and make changes to our program in order to accommodate the regulations", Amira explained.

From the children's point of view, it seems that at Tel-Aviv, cultural capital isn't attached to academic achievements (in contrast to being closely attached to achievement in sports - soccer among the boys and athletics among the girls). From Smadar's letter we can understand that although she was a weak student in the low group – something she was not embarrassed to write about in an open letter to her peers and any future person wishing to read it, she was elected to the student government, an indication of a disconnection between academic achievements and social standing. Isabelle liked arithmetic very much even though she was in the lowest ability group. Additionally, Elinore, Ya'acov, Sonny and Ohz talked about the comfort zone they find in the ability groupings. The lack of pressure and competition, the absence of stigmatization, its transparency and flexibility, all seem to be working for and with the children in an authentic learning process.

8.3. Assessing "the process of the child"

"What do you see when you look at a child?"
Maxine Green

To assess comes from the Latin *assidere* meaning "to sit beside" in order to gather information. Stefanakis (2000, p.140) defines assessment "…as an interactive process of 'sitting beside the learner' to gather authentic and meaningful data for improving student learning, instructional practice and educational options in the classroom". This leaves open the question of "Whom is assessment for?" and Murphy argues that assessors must realize that even if they believe educational assessment is about accountability of the system, it is ultimately about and for students. Assessment should not become an end in itself, as we find it to be in much of our system, but rather an opening of possibilities for both student and teacher (Murphy, 1998). However, evaluation (the placing of value on specific acts or objects) connotes a choice among a range of value systems and schools usually value an educational activity for its efficiency - a factory metaphor of process-

product rationality, leading to the consideration of people as objects and to efficiency becoming a goal in itself rather than a means for evaluating educational worth. In a critical environment it is necessary to question this criteria and check if what one is evaluating is what one wants students to actually achieve (Apple, 1974)

At Tel-Aviv they have looked long and hard at assessment for just those reasons and have come up with a different-than-usual approach that takes into account their own value system and school goals of equity and affording all children experiences of success[230]. Rather than test for disabilities (the efficiency model), as was historically the norm at Tel-Aviv and as is the prevalent approach to assessment in most schools ("*emphasizing to the child what he doesn't know rather than what he does*" interjects Amira), and rather than using testing and assessment for the purpose of the school's statistical needs and comparison of students (decontextualizing assessment and having it become an end rather than a means[231]), the Tel-Aviv School's solution was to develop a system that assessed *"the process of the child"* by looking at each child's learning process individually, seeking abilities and strengths, planning and assessing individual progress, outlining possibilities and basing the school's curriculum and general trajectory on the findings of these assessments.

In order for this kind of individually focused assessment to take place, two other levels of assessment tools were developed – class and school-wide assessments, together creating a three-tier spiraling system that as it narrows in to focus on any child it keeps the larger picture as a backdrop. And above all, particularly for the higher-grade children, sights are kept on the national curriculum and general achievement standards[232] for the

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[230] In contrast, Moll & Gonzalez "lament that [they] have to spend so much of [their] careers documenting competence, when it should simply be assumed, suggesting that "language minority" students have the intellectual capabilities of any other children, when it should simply be acknowledged, and proposing instructional arrangements that capitalize fully on the many strengths they bring into classrooms, when it should simply be their right" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994, p.454).

[231] Apple argues that the discourse surrounding educational evaluation tends to be apolitical, "…as if the means and ends of education were not context bound and linked to a specific nexus of institutions, economic interests and political power" (Apple, 1974, p. 9).

[232] The coordination of the Tel-Aviv curriculum with the national curriculum is done through school coordinators who serve as liaisons to the wider system. For every topic in school there is a coordinator representing the school at periodic meetings with all other coordinators from the district. There they inform the district of their achievements and problems and get the necessary help and advice from the district coordinator. This forum is also used for comparing the achievements and difficulties of students from around the country.

purpose of directing those students who are able to achieve on the national level for their grade, to do so.

Anat K., the V.P., is in charge of the school-wide assessments, which are done twice yearly, or ad hoc. She explained:

> "*We open and close every school year with diagnostic testing. The objective is very clear – creating the groups for the centers. Our closing assessments also provide us with information upon which we plan the next year. But all we can do is plan, because every year brings with it a new set of problems and we have to sit down and check new plans. The beginning of the year assessment covers, other than Hebrew and math, an initial discovery that includes specific details about the general social, emotional and behavioral issues of the child. There is no success or failure in these assessments. They are only for placement purposes*"[233].*

During my stay at Tel-Aviv, the school was going through a process of reorganizing the ability groupings and the organizational advisor suggested school-wide testing as an internal control mechanism for the experiment:

> "*Since we are creating a turnabout (ma'hapach) and trying to adjust these groups to the real needs of the children, we need some form of control. Will it be possible to systematically check the situation of each child today, and then again in 5-6 weeks to get an indication if this is all worth our while? A comparative examination, not a test. An examination to see where the child started from and where he will be in 5-6 weeks*".

The teachers agreed but they were nervous. I felt they were worried about how their kids would do on an "outside" test, as this was supposed to be, and how the results would reflect on them as professionals. There were endless discussions in the teachers' lounge about the tests with the two most bothersome issues being the fact that the tests would remain secret until they were actually handed out in class and that the teachers wouldn't be allowed to monitor their own classes. Anat K. hinted to me that these steps were taken because her teachers have a tendency to help their students when they have difficulties and they may not be able to keep themselves in check during the testing. But the secrecy issue had another objective. Apparently, if the students know there is going to be a general test on a certain day, many of them don't come to school. It was better to surprise them since there was no need to prepare for the test or to fear it, said Anat K..

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[233] Doc XII is an example of a school wide mapping of special needs.

School-wide and class assessments are called mapping at Tel-Aviv. The mapping for this test was done on pre-printed tables as follows (Doc XI is an example): The top row listed every question and the skill it was testing (e.g. 5.3.6 vocabulary, 5.6.1 cause and consequence, 5.7.2 main idea); on the right are the children's names in order of their achievement on the test (from the child with the least mistakes to the one with the most); wherever a student made a mistake, a dash is marked under the appropriate question column; at the far left is the total number of mistakes per student; the bottom row indicates the total number of mistakes per skill for the whole class. For this specific class (5th grade) we can see that there was little difficulty with cause and consequences problems (5.6.1, 5.6.1.1) and more difficulty with conclusion problems (5.8.1). As for the individual students, their strengths and weaknesses on this specific material are clearly pinpointed and mapped out. This information will be used by the teacher in planning the curriculum for each child and for the class as a whole.

Sitting with the 5th grade teachers to go over the test results, Anat K. asked them to check if any of the results seem out of the expected range for the child, indicating that the child was under excessive stress or that he copied from another.

> Eemee (homeroom teacher): "*Benny made only 3 mistakes. I would have expected more. His reading on 4th grade level texts isn't good. Even silent reading… he doesn't understand well*"
> Sharon (Benny's Hebrew teacher): "*When Benny is focused he works very nicely. He can work on 5th grade texts. But I see here that Leah made no mistakes. It doesn't seem right. It can't be*".
> Anat: *Let's look at her test and see what was going on. These results are for our own consumption. They don't have to be reported to anyone, so we don't have to have answers yet, only to pose the questions*".

At the end of the meeting Anat asked the teachers to share their thoughts about the test results. Eemee said: "*This mapping can lead me directly into a work plan. I can see that in our class the children had most difficulties with coming to conclusions, but I also see that there are 8-10 different levels in the class. This makes things so difficult*".

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At the beginning of the year and then for every quarter, each teacher maps out her class on the following levels: 1) Social and emotional skills, 2) Academic skills, and 3) Personal background. The first mapping determines the child's position, her baseline (or

launching point - *nekoodat zeenook* – as the Hebrew expression translates), socially, emotionally and academically. Eemee explained:

> *"These mappings allow us to see the situation in its entirety and at the same time we have a few different angles for looking at each child. The goal is to understand why there are problems".*

The class teachers meet and discuss these assessments with Anat K. in unit groups once a week. In one such meeting of the 1st and 2nd grade teachers, I heard Tsiona say she was worried about Michelle who wasn't keeping up with the class. Neta, a veteran teacher and the informal head of the group, reacted to Tsiona's concern:

> "*We don't really care to compare Michelle's progress to that of the rest of the class. We are interested in her individual progress. If you consider her baseline (nekoodat zeenook), where she started with us from, has she made progress?*"
> "*Very nicely*" answered Tsiona.
> "*Then we are happy. That means that the program we chose to work with her is appropriate. Give her time. Things will fall into place*", Neta said summing up school philosophy.

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Individual assessment at Tel-Aviv is a teacher-sitting-beside-the student event.

> "*All assessments and diagnostic testing in our school are done for the benefit of the child, not for that of the school. The child is really and truly our focus and our aim is to get to the causes of the behaviors we see so that we can deal with the child in the best possible way for him and his family*", explains Tsipi, the school counselor.

The homeroom teachers do all the academic and social assessments. They get help from Tsipi, school counselor and special education teacher, and from Orly, who is also a counselor and a socialization teacher. A psychologist speaking the child's native language is called in when such services are necessary[234]. Tsipi:

> "*The Department of education doesn't allow any assessment to be conducted in 1st grade, except where there are serious deviations from the norm. Most of our children begin 1st grade with minimal preparation. Many don't know the language and even those who do speak Hebrew don't know their colors, numbers, alphabet. They don't have the necessary school and social behaviors yet. So we wait and give them a chance until 2nd grade, but if the behavior is very*

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[234] This principle created a huge problem for the school when they needed a Turkish speaking psychologist because it turned out that there is only one such person in the whole of Israel and she happens to live several hours drive away from the school. But she came and helped out.

anomalous, I begin checking it out even in 1ˢᵗ grade. My assessment looks at the child and his environment, I ask myself whether it is a problem of lack of maturity, maybe the child hasn't been in previous groups of children, I look at the parents and the home situation, and I also always keep in mind that if the child is new to this country, he is going through a huge crisis, just as I did when I came here in 3ʳᵈ grade, and this must be taken into consideration".

Irit, an inclusion teacher for 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ grades, told me:

"*We evaluate only those children we expect will have problems in the future. We closely observe their phonological awareness, their fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, their visual perception. But surprisingly, not all of the children we find having difficulties in our evaluation go on to develop learning difficulties. For some the problems come from environmental deprivation – they didn't have regular experiences or never attended a formal education system. Even though academics are important here, we first look into the physical, emotional and mental health of the child".*

Anat K. explains:

"*A teacher may say 'I suspect such-and-such a problem with this child' and nothing happens if she's wrong, but we prefer to over identify as many children that are having difficulties than to miss someone - something that does happen at times. We're only human".*

The individual assessments occur mainly through the daily contact between the child and the teachers and on the basis of periodic significant dialogues between the homeroom teacher and the child. Testing is a very minor assessment tool at Tel-Aviv. However, Nechama, a 6ᵗʰ grade teacher, does give tests,

"*Because I've learned that parents value the children and children value themselves according to grades. I've also learned that if I tell them there's going to be a test, they put more serious effort into learning. I don't like giving tests but that is what everybody is used to".*

Rachel, the other 6ᵗʰ grade teacher, works differently.

"*I almost never give tests. I know who knows and who doesn't. Through their work sheets, through my dialogues with them. But I confess that it is a personal problem I have, which I have to work on. I think it is important to check what the child knows but somehow I am always running ahead. I know where everyone is, but it isn't structured".*

And the math teachers test the children after every unit for their own information - to allow the teacher to plan her teaching and the progress of the class by determining whether the children have mastered specific material before moving on.

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Report cards are given twice a year in a personal meeting between the teacher, the parent(s) and the child[235]. Each time, about a month before D-day, the teachers convene and air out the "old" report cards (really more "documents" comprised of several pages, than "cards") they had re-designed 6 months previously. When I inquired about the need for such frequent re-evaluations of the documents, I was told that their circumstances change so often that fine-tuning is always necessary. At a meeting I attended there were several issues on the table: adding Home economics (nutrition) as a graded topic, the music and English teachers wanted to add categories for assessment, and a decision was to be made about the choir – shall it be an assessed topic in the report card? The teachers decided that it should not because being in the choir is a prerogative, not an obligation, and if there would be a grade for choir, kids might not want to come. Instead, it was suggested that every child in the choir receive a certificate of recognition. They decided on the date the report cards will be given out and teachers were asked to arrange the meetings so that parents with more than one child would have their meetings consecutively and that parents within a language group would come at the same time so as to be available to act as translators for each other. *"What if a parent can't come during this time?"* Amira's answered decisively:

> *"I don't allow any teacher to appoint a different time of meeting with parents unless I approve of the change. The parents owe it to us that twice a year they'll show up for 15 minutes and I expect them to use this opportunity to thank the teachers for all that they do for the children".*

The issue of parents coming to school is a complex one at Tel-Aviv. For many families, being in different states of social, economic or political distress, hiding from the authorities, working very long hours at unsecured jobs, not appreciating the need for a dialogue with the school (whether because "everything is OK" or not having the strength to face the child's problems), not being aware of the meetings - all contribute to the

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[235] Teacher-parent meetings in the presence of the child are the norm for high schools in Israel, but at Tel-Aviv they adopted this form due to the need for some children to translate for their parents.

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picture of very limited parental involvement in the school throughout the year and a low turnout for parent-teacher meetings. Amira believes that the parents need to know how hard the teachers are working for the children and she expects them to acknowledge this by attending the conferences.

Assessments at Tel-Aviv are done with fine rather than broad brushstrokes as evident in the report cards where every topic is broken down into component skills and abilities to provide a more detailed and pinpointed picture of the child's strengths and weaknesses[236]. Report cards are given to the parent in Hebrew and in a second language (a shortened version) in those cases where the parents need the translation[237]

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There is one process of assessment at Tel-Aviv that is conceptually different from the others as it singles out a few children from the total student body, based upon their outstanding achievements. Once a year, during the celebration of Arbor Day (usually during February) "Certificates of Excellence" are given out in a special ceremony in the presence of the whole school, amid much fanfare, singing and excitement. The honors are given to children who have exhibited exceptional academic progress or learning behavior (the starting point doesn't matter) or exceptional social behavior (being a good friend, helping in the classroom, overcoming problems, making progress in social behavior, etc). Every teacher selects two excelling students according to criteria she chooses. This year 1st grader Rami received a Certificate of Excellence for making progress in his behavior and for maturing after overcoming a great fear of school he had at the beginning of the year. Two 2nd graders received certificates for catching up with the class in math after beginning the school year far behind their peers, having difficulties adding and subtracting numbers to 10. Ben, a 5th grader, was commended for exceptional social behavior, being always ready to help any child and being well mannered, and Dana (6th grade) was commended for overall excellence: academics, dance, choir, being a good friend.

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[236] Appendix 5 follows a 2nd grade report card.
[237] Documents XII-1, XII-2 are the 2nd grade's English and Russian translations of the report card.

Pause III: "There is even time for the kids to be disruptive". *("Yesh afeeloo zmahn beshveel shehayeladeem yafreeoo")* : A Conversation about time

> "In this world there are two times. There is mechanical time and there is body time. The first is as rigid and metallic as a massive pendulum of iron that swings back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. The second squirms and wriggles like a bluefish in a bay. The first is unyielding, predetermined. The second makes up its mind as it goes along"
>
> Alan Lightman *(Einstein's Dreams)*

Coming to Tel-Aviv was in many ways like stepping into a looking glass. Many things were not what one expected in a school. The concept of time, for example. I repeatedly bumped into "*Take your time*"'s and "*We're in no hurry*"'s and "*We have as much time as is needed*"'s. Amira explained that her preferred mode of action is to move at a relaxed pace, even if that means that progress is slower - a matter of priorities:

> "*If you ask me what I consider to be most important for the children here at school, its not the academic accomplishments, not the amount of knowledge they amass, but experiencing acceptance, love and happiness. From this position they will learn all the rest*".

Amira tells of a teacher who burst into her room[238] very upset, crying and shouting that she's had it with one of her students who was ruining her life as well as her class; she couldn't deal with him any longer! Amira told the teacher that she would like her to take time off – an hour, a day or several days, as long as she needed, her class would be covered, she was not to worry – during which time she would like her to think about something positive in the child, a spark that could be kindled, a strength of his that teaching and a new relationship could be built upon. The teacher came up with an idea immediately – the child was an excellent artist - and the rebuilding process began the next morning[239].

Osnat, a first year teacher at Tel-Aviv, learned patience here: "*In my former school I was always rushing to finish the material. Here I go along with the children's*

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[238] The principal's office as well as other offices in school, is called "room" rather than the official "office".
[239] Oatley and Nundy write about children with externalizing disorders due to home circumstances who tend to disrupt their own educational possibilities as well as those of others in the class. "*It is known*" they quote work by Jenkins and Smith, 1990, "*that achieving recognition in some domain at school helps protect*" these children from such behaviors (Oatley and Nundy, 1996:261).

pace. There is no rush, nothing to finish. It's more important that the children learn and understand".

Ronny, the art teacher who is also working here for the first time, is practicing postponing his own gratification.

> "*I'm not by nature a calm person, I usually need to see immediate results. But this school has a calming effect on me – I have a steady job, good relationships with the teachers and the principal, I come to work happily because I identify with the kids – I grew up in this neighborhood. I've learned here that I have time for getting results; if it won't be this year it'll be the next. I am learning to wait*". And he continues on another aspect, "*I asked the school to give the upper grades 2-hour time slots for art, and they agreed. Now during class we have time to have conversations, to create and there is even time for the kids to be disruptive. It doesn't bother me*".

Who would have thought that one different and possible solution to children's acting out in class is to factor in time for such behavior?

Time is an ordering system inherent in social practices, a system that is more "chosen" than "given" (Harvey, 1996). Societies construct their concepts of time and these differ across space and history. At Tel-Aviv, it seems that they chose to use time in a way that promotes their mission. Rather than being the tyrant of school activities, time here is considered a resource - as are the faculty, the physical facilities, the children - to be used and manipulated toward the goals and ends the school considers its priorities. Time at Tel-Aviv is a means used by the faculty to better serve the children's needs, while time in our systems is more an end to itself, a reified concept that teachers and administrators must bow to and serve as it masters their lives in schools. Everyone in our system is highly constricted by time and it often takes priority over our innovative ideas, enthusiasm, feelings of responsibility towards the children. Being on time seems to matter more than finding the right way to teach the children.

Time in schools is a two-headed sword (a Biblical metaphor). Teachers are constantly using it and working against it. It is wonderful when it is on your side, apt to be devastating when you are running against it. "Time for the teacher is not just an objective, oppressive constraint, but also a subjectively defined horizon of possibility and limitation" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.95). Time has become so compressed and valuable in our age that it can raise expectations for speed of turnaround and responsiveness leading

to error, ineffectiveness and superficiality; it can accelerate the pace of change yet shorten the timelines of implementation, leading to workers experiencing overload and guilt of not being able to meet their goals; it can lead to concentration on quantity and appearances instead of on quality; it can exacerbate uncertainty as knowledge is produced and disseminated; can erode opportunities for reflection, relaxation and developing human relationships, all leading to increased stress and loss of contact with one's basic goals and purposes (Hargreaves, 1994) - a sorry state of affairs, within which we seem to be conducting education.

Edward Hall (1983) distinguishes between the monochronic and polychronic aspects of phenomenological time[240]. "Monochronic –time scheduling is used as a classification system that orders life" (1983, p. 45). It is arbitrary, imposed, learned and is oriented towards tasks, schedules and procedures. People in a monochronic time frame will usually do one thing at a time in a linear progression through fixed stages. They are intent upon completing schedules and dispatching the business as well as they can within those schedules, yet it is the schedules that have priority, not the business. They are blind to the humanity of their members and there is little sensitivity to particularities of context or the needs of the moment. People and administrations working within such a concept – prevalent in Western cultures, the business world, large bureaucratic organizations, the professions and among males - tend to stress and exert high control over timelines and timely task completion. Procedure here predominates over cultivating human relationships as monochronic time is alienating, especially to women.

Comparatively, people functioning within a polychronic time frame, "are so deeply immersed in each other's business that they feel a compulsion to keep in touch. Their knowledge of each other is truly extraordinary" (Hall, 1983, p. 49) such that there is no need to create large and complex bureaucracies with delegated authority in order to take care of business. All participants feel part of the larger system. This is a time frame in which human relationships predominate. "If you value people, you must hear them out and cannot cut them off simply because of a schedule" (Hall, 1983, p. 50). Pace and schedules for completing tasks are not of the essence, rather it is the tasks themselves that are prioritized and ultimately evaluated. Multitasking and combining tasks are regular

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[240] Somewhat similar to Lightman's mechanical and body time in the quote opening this section.

practices with heightened sensitivity to context and circumstances. This time frame system is prevalent among Amerindian, Latin and Mediterranean-style cultures, in domestic life, small organizations and among women.

One can recognize the education system as we know it to be an example of a large organization working according to a monochronic time frame. Even more so when Hall adds that "Monochronic type bureaucracies, as they grow larger, turn inward; oblivious to their own structure, they grow rigid and are apt to lose sight of their original purpose" (1983, pg. 48). No wonder then the tensions inherent in the system between the administration (which is mostly male) and the classroom teachers, especially in elementary schools (mostly female), as they naturally tend to function within opposing conceptual time frames[241]. Time pressures, "finishing" the material, being on a standard, single schedule, neglecting issues of context, running ahead and leaving many students behind in the name of efficiency and forgetting the original purpose of schools and education – all these can be seen as an outcome of the imposition of a monochronic concept of time on a system that could potentially be much better off, in terms of the children it is supposed to serve and the learning that is supposed to be taking place within it, if a polychronic time frame were used.

The Tel-Aviv School functions within a polychronic time frame, possibly due to it's being in a Mediterranean culture, it's small size and lack of exterior (administrative) and interior (parental) pressures, the fact that it is headed by a female principal and supervised by a female, and the informality that characterizes the relationships among its members. Concomitantly, there is an emphasis on human relations rather then on objects (tests, text books, grades, decorations, etc.), context as well as content receive primary standing and are held to strict standards, while time tables are flexible and relaxed. Neta illustrates this:

> "*At the teachers' seminar we were taught that at the end of 1st grade the children* **must** *know how to read. There was no other way. But here things are different. We have two 2nd grade classes: one is normative and achieving according to the standards of the Dept. of Education and a second group has not yet mastered reading. They're still struggling with the language. We work with each child*

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[241] With much finger pointing and blame all around…

making sure to bring them up to par by the time they finish 6th grade so as to secure their success in the future" (quoted in Bar-Shalom, 2000).

And Tsiona said:

"*In the long run, we don't care how fast a child learns to read or how well he reads. For that there is always 'next year'. We are much more concerned with how the child feels, that he has a small corner in which he feels good*".

Another concept I first became aware of at Tel-Aviv was that of "flexible time". It came up in the 5th and 6th grade teachers' meeting regarding the new ability groupings. As Rachel outlined the suggested program that the teachers had come up with, the organizational consultant named the process "working within a flexible time framework" – a concept highlighting the fact that time is subservient to the educational needs of school and child and can be stretched and adjusted to fit local needs.

In *Racing against the clock* Hargreaves suggests that in order to improve schools in the U.S. we must become "time bandits", breaking free from being conceptual prisoners of time, to be able to use and manipulate it for our own purposes, i.e. educating children. He proposes many of the actions I saw actually happening at Tel-Aviv. For example, the school organizes "camps" on school grounds during every holiday that lasts a week or more, recognizing that out-of-school- time is also part of the children's lives that must be dealt with for the children's benefit. At Tel-Aviv they know that if the children won't have these activities they will most probably be locked up inside their apartments while their parents are at work, or they'll be running around the streets, both possibilities the school doesn't like and doesn't ignore, says Amira. The same happens during teachers' strikes when Amira comes to school (teachers are not allowed to come[242]) and allows children in, keeping them safely off the streets until someone comes to pick them up, or when she opens the school early every morning for the same reason. The formal school time of 8AM to 3PM and the formal school calendar of school days and holidays are taken as general suggestions. When they don't work well for the children, they are adjusted.

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[242] While I was at Tel-Aviv, there was a strike that included all school janitors. The head janitor snuck in to see if everything was ok and ended up having to fix a flood in the bathroom. Unfortunately, his supervisor caught him and he was disciplined.

An understanding of the concept of time in child development is also central to school ideology and practice. In contrast to our system that strives for uniformity and universal standards, teaching here is based on the idea that children develop at different rates and have different paces of being, ideas that were dealt with by Vygotsky and Wallon, among others. Wallon uses the concept of *duration*, which "is the slow transformation of organic structures; and, by extension, the sudden modification, quantitative or qualitative, of relations with the milieu. It is from these conflicts that new forms of equilibrium come, that new ways of being emerge" (Voyat, 1984, p.12), and new ways of understanding and naming the world, as well. The idea being that transformations and the construction of knowledge are processes that take time, time that is often internal and isn't standard nor constant. Time in child development, according to Vygotsky and Wallon is relative, like any other time in the universe, and it varies from child to child.

Incorporating this idea into their ideology allows for the accommodation and inclusion of more children into the educational discourse. "Total acceptance of the child" means also accepting her pace of being and of acquiring knowledge, qualifying all children for possibility. Olga talked about children who sit for long periods of time playing around, "*doing nothing*", until one day they wake up and start learning. *"So I wait for them*", she said. *"One child once sat and played for a whole year, but at the end of that year he woke up*".

> Consequently, there is very little emphasis on standards and uniformity.
>
> "*A child in a 'normal state of learning'*[243], *according to* **my** *understanding, is a child who is making progress*", says Amira. "*All of our children are in such a state, then*".

How much progress, what areas the progress is being made in, those are issues to be assessed individually. Talking about time and child development, Rachel sums up thoughts I had heard from other teachers:

> "*I believe there is genius in every child, but maybe today isn't yet the time for his genius to appear, maybe it isn't his moment yet. We must be patient and not judge everything in the present. The time will come when each child's genius will erupt*".

> And Anat adds, regarding the tracking and groups in the school:

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[243] An expression taken from a form sent to the school from the Dept. of Education and which was to be filled out for every student.

"Our groups are open and fluid. All of our kids are able to function on grade level, but maybe not now. A child in the lower ability group may be there because of lack of language, family or personal problems. Once these issues are addressed and overcome, he may move up. We like the children to work to their ability, but we push only where we feel we can do so without causing difficulties for the child".

Annie concurs: *"In my classes each child does what he feels comfortable with and proceeds according to his own pace. I don't put pressure on them, but every month or so another child joins the circle"*[244].

The idea of differential pace extends to the teachers as well. Anat K. meets with all of the teachers on a weekly basis, both individually and in groups, advising, coaching, problem solving and counseling on personal issues. She uses a pedagogy of "compatible instruction" in her work[245]. She explained,

"I have to convey almost the same messages to each teacher, but like the fingers on our hand that are similar but disparate, so are the teachers a diverse group. Their sensitivities are different and I must work differently with each one. Not only is my approach non uniform, the pace of our work together changes from one person to another as well".

Similarly, in their study of time issues in school reform, Adelman and Walking-Eagle emphasize the need to allow for different rates of learning and change among teachers, least there be no change at all, they argue. They quote a building administrator who says that those seeking to implement change must acknowledge that all individuals, including teachers, learn at different rates, so that any change process in schools must allow for a range of differences in teachers' ability to adapt to new teaching methods and classroom routines (Adelman & Walking-Eagle, 1997, p.108).

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> *Time is*
> *Too slow for those who Wait*
> *Too swift for those who Fear*
> *Too long for those who Grieve*
> *Too short for those who Rejoice*
> *But for those who Love,*
> *Time is Eternity.*

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[244] Or as Henson (1993) would say, the child joins the Community, that place where all members of the class are bound together in ties of communication, where everyone's voice is heard.

[245] Compatible instruction is a teaching methodology whereby the teaching and materials are adjusted to suit the learner and her strengths.

During my stay at the school, sitting through teachers meetings, sharing breaks in the teachers' lounge, throughout personal interviews, in all of which I witnesses both subtle and explicit criticism of the school and of children's behavior, I never heard teachers giving up on a child. What I did notice, though, was an absence of pressure and an abundance of patience - teachers waiting for the child to be ready and able to learn as they tried to help them with other-than-academic issues they were dealing with. "The Eskimo have a word for this kind of long waiting, prepared for a sudden event: quinuituq. Deep patience" (Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams).*

Amir is a child in Annie's 3rd grade class. I had seen him many times in the office where he would have to stay during recess as punishment for having gotten into fights and hitting other children, especially his younger sister. During a regular class period every child worked individually while Annie called up each child for a few minutes so as to reach everyone. One day, Annie's eyes and ears were solely with Amir and she devoted almost the entire period to him alone. They were reading a beginning-of-1st- grade reader and she was getting more excited as he kept reading along. Annie had been Amir's teacher since 1st grade and for two and a half years it seemed that she had not managed to get through to him. He wasn't learning how to read. It was the middle of 3rd grade and he had yet to master reading the most basic texts in Hebrew, yet Annie waited and didn't give up. She called on him every day, and that particular day patience paid off. At first he read "*Sh*a-a-*l*a *R*a-*m*a *m*a *sh*a-*m*a" (all vowels being the 'ah' sound which is the first sound taught in reading Hebrew). A few minutes later Annie decided to try something new and we hear *"Ra-m*ee *n*ee*m-tsa ba-k*ee*-ta"* (an addition of the 'ee' sound, which is the next step in the reading sequence)[246].

As if a locked gate had suddenly opened, Amir was reading and Annie was beside herself with pride and compliments for him and his progress. She later explained her excitement: Amir was the youngest in an Arab family whose father was severely abusive towards his mother, as were the father's relatives. The father was jailed and lately, there had been a few quiet weeks at home and it seemed that Amir had for the first time become available for learning. Annie's patience, tenacity and her belief in the child were rewarded. She had practiced deep patience.

[246] Video 5 − 1:24:37−1:29:50

Dialogue cannot exist without hope, and hope cannot be silent or passive. "As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait" (Freire, 1972, p.73). The concept of time at Tel-Aviv is related to the meaningful dialogues upon which are based most of the vertical relationships in school. These dialogues convey the sense of hope and possibility both teachers and students have, and they serve the continuous efforts of motivating the children, leading them towards their goals and motivating the teachers to continue pulling the load. The idea is that there is time for everyone in the physical reality as well as in the minds of those above them in the hierarchy. A teacher has time to spend dialoguing with each of her students, just as the principal will actively listen to teachers whenever they need the attention. Meaningful dialogues are "*giving them a sense of security and respect that allow them to delay gratification*" explains Amira, also providing the time needed to overcome situations of anxiety when cognitive resources must be allocated to issues of personal safety and danger (as in the cases of Danny and Amir, for example) rather than to learning.

> One hot day the whole school was downstairs in the yard playing with a group of soldiers who wanted to get to know them in order to attract as many of them as possible to an after school club they were about to open in the neighborhood. Two of the soldiers left and returned to school with cartons of Popsicles. I was watching from the 2nd floor window and expected the kids to mob the Popsicle carriers, but something altogether different happened. Without anyone giving directions, every class assembled around their teacher and waited patiently to be served. It was as if they knew there would be enough for everyone. It was almost surreal[247].

"The products of the meaningful dialogues are astonishing", says Amira. *"Both the teachers and the children learn to delay gratification. There is always a promise for later. This leads to a feeling of satisfaction that, in turn, results in the calm one senses in the school, the same calm all our visitors mention and try to understand. They ask if a large number of children are absent, otherwise they can't understand the calm and quiet they see around them".*[248]

"And there's another outcome of these dialogues – the understanding that it's OK to remain in the question phase and delay coming up with solutions", says Amira.

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[247] More so even in an Israeli context where, from my own experience, a mob scene could be expected.
[248] 'Calm' which is relative to Israeli reality…

In a world where "everything moves faster and faster until speed becomes an end in itself" (Taylor, 2001, p.3), at Tel-Aviv there is still time for patience, used as tool and means for promoting learning. Shor talks about the concept of time in education using Freire's idea of being "patiently impatient", characteristics necessary to meet the challenge of gaining critical knowledge and using it to transform education and society. "It takes impatience with the way things are to motivate people to make changes, but then it takes patience to study and develop the projects through which constructive learning and change are made" (Shor, 1992, p.25). At Tel-Aviv one can sense the impatience with things that are not working for their students as the faculty gets together to address the problems that arise, and one can simultaneously sense the patience and tenacity of the faculty as they continually reassess their situation and develop alternative programs for better reaching and teaching all of their students. But there is an additional layer of patience here – patience with the children and their development, the "*Take your time*"s and "*We're in no hurry*"s, the patience of waiting for tomorrow, keeping up the fight because hope is never lost.

9. Putting it all in perspective

> "[A] seamy web in which what comes together is held apart
> and what is held apart comes together".
>
> Mark Taylor (*The moment of complexity*)

Our ideas about equitable education have traditionally been based upon averaging and the metaphor of the melting pot. If we didn't see color, if we considered all children to be more or less similar in needs and abilities, if we taught to the average, to the mainstream – we would be making education equally available to the majority of those who would themselves either be of - or make the effort to become - "mainstream"[249]. We thought teaching a "universal" curriculum to a "universal" child while equitably distributing our resources would bring social justice to education in the form of equalizing educational opportunities. The solutions we have sought and implemented for correcting educational inequalities have been material, technical, scientific and linear,

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[249] Those who could not fit into the box themselves would be "helped" benevolently with extra instruction, would be "dropped out" of the system or, alternatively, would be placed in special, marginalized classrooms.

resulting in our moving in circles[250] as we remain trapped within traditional language and paradigms, all this while the number of children excluded from a meaningful education continues to rise.

At Tel-Aviv they came to recognize literacy as a human right that must be equally available and accessible to each and every child. In order to attain this goal, ideological (rather than material) resources were enlisted, creating a pedagogy contingent upon the ideas of the equity of human worth and the diversity of human needs and abilities, the right of every child to learn and the responsibility of the education system to afford them success in their educational endeavors. Their pedagogy of fusion exemplifies a paradigm change compared to the traditional approaches. It is based on revised language and Discourse, shifted priorities and a negation of the simple dichotomies associated with the metaphors of society as a melting pot and schooling as a race and a zero-sum game. It is a pedagogy into which differences are welcomed, diversity incorporated and multiplicity fused into the fold. A pedagogy founded upon an ideology of social justice and equitable education opportunities put into practice by means of a dialogic process between the environmental circumstances and the deconstruction/rethinking of schooling and education.

How is such an ideology brought down to ground level to become a working pedagogy? We are currently living in a moment of unprecedented complexity from which we cannot turn away (even if our minds pine for "past simplicity"), but rather with which we must learn to live creatively, constructing new types of structures within which to consolidate out ideas and information, writes Taylor (2001). He states:

> Neither totalizing structures that repress differences nor oppositional differences that exclude commonality are adequate in the plurality of worlds that constitute the postmodern condition. To think what post-structuralism leaves unthought is to think a nontotalizing structure that nonetheless acts as a whole… We are gradually coming to realize that complex communication webs and information networks, which function holistically but not totalistically, are the milieu in which everything arises and passes away (Taylor, 2001, p.11-12).

Acknowledging such complexity, and when the ends we are seeking are no longer being attained by the means we use, there arises a need to modify our systems and replace the technical/mechanical grids upon which information systems (education being

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[250] The phonics/whole language debates are an example.

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one of these) were traditionally based. The Tel-Aviv School did just that by abandoning the traditional rigid, totalizing and repressive structure of schooling and adopting a dynamically evolving "nontotalizing structure that nonetheless acts as a whole" within an open (*"no holy cows"*) and flexible mindset that challenged traditional educational practices and concepts that were not working (such as grades, integration, closing the gaps, etc.). Through this process the school has been able to find appropriate practices through which to express its unique ideology in ongoing active adaptation to its environmental niche.

The school's pedagogy has risen from a situation of hardship and marginality not unlike jazz music had many years ago. Searching for a conduit, it has successfully (and unconsciously) modeled itself upon the principles and flexibility of a jazz band[251] in which, over a foundation of a unifying tune of the value of equitable human worth, purposeful creativity, spunky improvisation and controlled change rule.

<div align="center">- * - * - * -</div>

The driving force behind the Tel-Aviv School is its ongoing, intense struggle - ideological as well as practical - to allow all of its students meaningful access to literacy despite the often daunting obstacles that pile up in its way in almost every domain: in the national domain - the refusal to acknowledge the existence of many of the school's children, let alone their rights to education. Today, *"the school is an island of humanity in an ocean of alienation, imperviousness and bureaucratic evil"* (Bar-Shalom, 2000, p.85); in the national education system and curriculums which are nationalistic and Judeo-centric, lacking the flexibility necessary for teaching large numbers of transient, non-Jewish children and usually unsuccessful in bringing children of low SES families to significant academic achievement; in the local domain – dealing with a population of poverty, communities in distress, issues of discrimination, migration and legitimacy, fear and mistrust; in the school there are issues of plurality on every level challenging the creation of unity within the diversity; in the classroom – reaching and actually teaching a group of children from several different countries, speakers of different languages, with considerably diverse educational histories, abilities and cultural values, children who appear and disappear frequently during the school year, children in high levels of social

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[251] Rather than a symphony orchestra, in the spirit of Michael Gold's Jazz Improv model (section 7.3.)

and emotional distress, children from countries at war with each other, children who are often hungry and neglected, children in need of love and acceptance more than academics; making space for every child's voice to be heard and ensuring that everyone is accounted for.

Buttressing themselves with a vision of the school's relationship to the larger political, economic and social orders, and approaching their circumstances critically and creatively, the faculty formulated a holistic, nontotalizing educational milieu in which multiplicity flourishes within a traditional/public school environment. By piecing together a pedagogy of fusion characterized by a dynamically evolving and changing network of practices and by an incorporation and celebration of diversity, the school today manages to bring together disparate elements and weave them into a working web of education. Beginning with the child, understood and accepted as a complex being whose cultural, historical, social, psychological and biological aspects of identity and needs are always on the table, through the faculty who are accepted with their weaknesses, celebrated for their strengths, encouraged to bring their own experiences, thoughts and initiatives into the school processes, to the outside support system (ideological and material) and to the families and community beyond the turquoise fence, there is a pulling together of multiple threads to construct a unity within which children can and do learn.

This pedagogy of fusion is founded upon two immutable principles: the equity of human worth and the right of all children to achieve success in school. It is couched in an atmosphere of love and care for the children and from here emanate its unique understanding of the concepts of success, space and time in school settings.

Traditional approaches to schooling understand school success to be a limited good for which all children compete and only some can achieve. Success in school is a strictly (numerically) defined concept that all kids are compared to and there is only a one-way route to get there. But at Tel-Aviv school success is a common good for all to partake in if they so will. For all others it is always a goal, reachable when they are ready to proceed. *"If we believe that every person has the right to succeed, we will search every route to get there",* says Amira. The Tel-Aviv pedagogy is constructed in such a way as to assure maximum success to the greatest number of children within an individual time

frame. Ability grouping, individual assessment, non-comparative testing (kept to a minimum), polyvocality and a dialogue-based pedagogy, giving the children time and prioritizing issues so that the child's social and emotional needs are met prior to applying academic pressures, are all strategies for creating a fertile soil for the children having experiences of capability that fuel motivation. And success at Tel-Aviv isn't monolithic, nor is it in any way restrictedly defined. A major measure of it is the child's happiness and her willingness to come to school every morning. Other measures are expressed in the social and emotional domains, as well as in academics (as the Certificates of Excellence indicate

Traditional schools are usually considered spaces for the pursuit of academics. At Tel-Aviv space is a multifaceted concept, changing back and forth between a home, an educational institution, a cultural facility, a safe space, a comfort zone. There is ample mental, emotional as well as physical space for every voice. When the classroom is no longer spacious enough, the outdoors are always an option providing both mental and physical space; when internal pressures are stressing a child, the schools moves back and allows her space to realign; children are given space to grow, make mistakes, misbehave, be themselves; teachers have the space within which to make decisions about teaching, take responsibilities, err, vent, change and grow; there is space for everybody socially and culturally, both in the pedagogy and in the curriculum.

In traditional school settings, time is of the essence. Actually, time is the essence. It seems that it is more important to finish teaching a topic within a specific time frame, than to inquire into the children's readiness to learn or to whether they had learned anything at all of the topic. Every child is supposed to have learned to read by June of her 1st grade year, otherwise she is labeled deficient, as are all the others who's pace is different than the "average" child's. At Tel-Aviv time is appropriated for the benefit of the children and the implementation of school goals. Different paces for teachers as well as for the children are accepted naturally. There is patience to wait for everyone to reach their potential. There is time for rest and play (understood as foundation building for better academic achievements), time for extracurricular and enrichment activities, time to listen to everyone's story, time to deal with each child's issues. There is impatience with

what is not working well for the children but much patience to rethink, plan, construct and implement new ideas that would work better.

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At the conclusion of this work I would like to re-raise the question posed in the introduction to this study: What does a teacher do on Monday morning facing a class of children with multiple literacies, multiple ways of understanding the world, multiple personalities, behaviors and issues and, probably, a principal (or superintendent) looking for higher scores on state tests? How can she apply her belief in all children's right to an equitable education when she has at her service a mechanical tool kit that includes mostly averages, testing, numeric/comparative assessment, achievement goals, teacher-manuals and a ticking clock? How can a teacher/principal/school prioritize the children and incorporate multiplicity and difference into its curriculums, yet remain faithful to the overall system to which they belong and which often overpowers them?

What can we appropriate from the unique case of the Tel-Aviv School to make our own schools more inclusive?

What if we could imagine **-**

- A school that is ready for the children whenever they arrive and wherever they are in their educational process. Total, non-judgmental acceptance of the child, focusing not on where a child is but on where you plan and manage to lead her.

- A holistic approach to education that looks at all possible mitigating factors in the child's life and prioritizes social and emotional issues, helping the child reach a point where she is "available for learning" academics.

- Accepting children's diverse pace of development and having the patience to wait for each child to come through. Having high expectations of all children, yet challenging the child only when she is ready.

- Understanding a child's native language to be a place of safety and comfort and allowing the child to use that language orally and in writing until she feels comfortable to use the new language without fear.

- Challenging the entrenched ideas about schooling, learning, educational priorities, social justice and being willing to take risks for finding better, more inclusive and meaningful ways of teaching (non-competitive groupings, individual assessment, tailored curriculums). Having the integrity of closely examining our practices to see who (us? The system? The children?) is benefiting from them.

- Creating safe and inclusive spaces for the children to grow in and where they shall be given voice.

- Basing human relationships on meaningful dialogues (with children, families, communities, authorities, the system, written, oral and behavioral texts) in order to eliminate oppression and hegemony on the one hand, and promote inclusivity on the other.

- Having the courage and stamina to stand by the children, fight for their rights, address their needs and those of their families, keep going in spite of the human toll, pain of separation, discouragement at injustice and the hard work involved.

- And above all, what if we could imagine valuing human life beyond boundaries, despite differences, above prejudices?

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The journey to and through the Tel-Aviv School has now come to an end. I hope you have found it interesting and, possibly rewarding as well. I also hope that I have managed to convey the message that there are other ways of understanding schooling and education, ways that may differ from our own but that hold the potential of providing equitable and meaningful education to many more of our students, particularly those who currently find themselves excluded and marginalized in schools. And it is not really that difficult to implement. All you need is love and a group of kids.

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