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Representation of Arab Society in Educational Materials in Jewish Israeli Schools

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Policy Paper:

REPRESENTATION OF ARAB SOCIETY IN EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS IN JEWISH ISRAELI SCHOOLS

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Sikkuy is a civil society organization of Jewish and Arab citizens committed to advancing equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel, on every level and in all spheres of life. Since 1991 Sikkuy has engaged government ministries, local authorities, public institutions and the public at large in promoting deep change in policies affecting Arab citizens, while advancing equality and progress toward a shared society.

Continued progress requires that appropriate educational tools are thoroughly integrated throughout the school system. The underlying challenge is that Jewish and Arab primary and secondary school students study in separate school systems and almost never meet each other. In meetings with officials at the Ministry of Education and elsewhere, we have advocated for different policies addressing teacher training and professional development, the study of Arabic, and greater diversity in ministry-approved instructional materials. This policy paper provides a deeper look at the existing state of teaching and learning materials and current policies, along with recommendations for crucially needed changes.

Over time, the separate systems of education have created a reality of segregation which in most cases goes unchallenged. Meanwhile, the violent character of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continually influences the learning, attitudes, values and behavior of all schoolchildren in Israel. Given that context, mediating the influence of the Jewish-Arab divide in the work of the school system itself is imperative. A feature of the current situation is the highly restricted picture of Arab citizens (and other minority groups) to which schoolchildren are exposed in teaching and learning materials. This policy paper aims to introduce a broader range of alternative terms of reference for relating to Arab citizens in Israel's schools.

Introduction

Israeli society encompasses a rich diversity of identities, cultures, and communities. This diversity is reflected in part through the division of the educational system into separate streams intended to align with the preferences of different communities. Despite the legitimate interest in such separate streams, however, the profound separation they created between the various groups in Israeli society has developed at a heavy cost to society as a whole. This is true with respect to subgroups within Jewish society: citizens who identify as secular, Haredim, other religiously observant communities, Israelis of Ethiopian origin, Russian speakers, etc. The impact has been far greater, however, in terms of the segregation between Jewish (majority) citizens and Arab (minority) citizens.

A Jewish schoolchild in Israel can graduate from high school without ever having met a single Arab student in person, or virtually, and the reverse is also true. This vacuum has fostered distorted group perceptions on both sides, impairing the children's capacity to deal with prevalent negative stereotypes of the other group. Today there is an urgent need to re-examine the entire educational system and its separate streams, and to identify opportunities to provide students with direct or indirect encounters with the many communities that are part of Israeli society. This policy paper highlights potential opportunities for doing so by changing relevant aspects of instructional materials.

We know that the challenges posed by structural segregation are compounded by ongoing and pervasive Jewish-Arab tensions. Schoolchildren from both groups express alienation, estrangement, fear, suspicion and hatred toward the other group. Meanwhile, tensions from the national conflict between Israelis and Palestinians also taint the conduct of civil society in Israel. Delegitimization of Arab citizens is heard regularly at the most senior levels of Israeli political life; negative and racist stereotypes remain commonplace in the media and on social networks. Children are of course exposed to all of this in their daily lives. If we wish to reduce this alienation, hatred, prejudice and violence by making changes in the educational arena, we must begin by reinforcing children's ability to understand and respect the legitimacy of groups other than their own. Children need tools to see others, Arabs and Jews and all their subgroups, as unique and different but also as equally legitimate. This requires that other groups be portrayed as equally belonging in the society, in the state, in this place where we all live. Schools, and especially the teaching and learning materials used in them, can thus become a fertile ground for efforts to counter the negative impacts of real-world events.

It is important to note that this challenging reality persists even as the government of Israel is investing substantial budgets to narrow longstanding funding gaps and ensure that Arab citizens are fully integrated in academic and in the workforce. These investments are beginning to bear fruit, creating greater partnership for Arab citizens in the society and in the economy. The processes involved have the potential to dramatically reduce the existing segregation. Today's schoolchildren could grow into adulthood as citizens of a society in which meetings between Arabs and Jews are much more common, even a routine part of daily life. Today's schools must be preparing students to feel at home in this kind of future. The schools must help both Jewish and Arab children to expand their comfort zone to include sharing public space, studying at university together, and eventually working side by side at shared workplaces.

The shifting dynamics of power among the various "tribes" whose children are educated separately is spurring positive change in some quarters. A few years ago, for example, the Office of the President of Israel initiated a comprehensive process of educational rethinking about the representation of various groups in the society. The impact of the Jewish-Arab issue on the discourse and activity of education has long been obvious. It must be a key element in current efforts to rethink, revamp and adapt the teaching and learning materials used in Israeli schools. The ultimate aim must be to promote the spirit of, and practices of, a shared society.

The proposal set forth in the following pages is therefore intended to reflect the interests of the educational system. It presupposes a deeply-felt obligation to all students in Israel to prepare them to integrate as active citizens into a society rife with divisions. A policy that adopts the recommendations herein will help them to cope with the manifold complexities and contradictions in our society, especially in the Jewish-Arab context. A fair and equitable approach to education for the various communities of learners will feature respect for differences and diversity in teaching and learning. That kind of education aspires to strengthen tolerance for and recognition of diverse values on a bedrock of social resilience. In practice, this approach has two central features: First, it serves a mediating role to ensure that the children of all communities and groups, in all their complexity, are full partners in the educational enterprise. Second, it facilitates representation and expression of the values, cultures and worldviews of each group, so that all students find themselves well and fairly represented in the teaching and learning materials used in the schools.

Representation and exclusion

The way different groups, including minority groups, are represented in instructional materials is a common topic of discussion in various countries. Surveys and studies examining the representation of minority groups in textbooks around the world show a global trend toward change, with greater representation of minorities.1 The research points to an increase in the presence of women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ, etc., and to a moderate increase in the representation of minority groups' viewpoints. A great deal can be learned from the international experience in terms of its successes and failures. The correctives required will be discussed in greater detail in the recommendations section of this report. It is important to understand how minority group members choose to be represented; it is important that those who create instructional materials are well acquainted with the groups to be represented. Ideally, a balanced and realistic representation of a given minority group requires seeking clarification from its members or, at a minimum, acquiring an in-depth familiarity with its characterization in the overall social fabric. Another important factor is that various groups also be fairly represented among those who write, edit, and approve the teaching and learning materials.

Representation – quantitative or qualitative?

One implication of understanding that reality is socially constructed is that the representation of groups is understood to be influenced by social forces. Many researchers and educators stress that fair representation requires groups to have a quantitative presence in teaching materials in accordance with their proportion of the population. But the quality of that representation, not just the quantity, should also be addressed. Some groups are represented in a way that reflects their social and cultural world and faithfully expresses the identity and positive self-image of their members. Other groups, however, are portrayed in a distorted or superficial way that is hurtful or that diminishes them.

Thus it is safe to say that while the fact of appearing in teaching and learning materials is instructive as to the situation of a minority group in the society, so is the quality of the representation. This is especially relevant concerning the nature of representation of minority groups in countries with national conflicts -- including the Arab citizens of Israel and their representation in instructional materials. It is appropriate to ask not only whether

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1. Luke Terra & Patricia Bromley; Schissler and Soysal 2005; Faas and Ross 2012.

the extent of their representation is fair and reflects the fact that they comprise about one-fifth of Israeli's citizens, but also whether the quality of that representation ensures that the images representing them express the entire spectrum of their characteristics as citizens and as a minority group.

In textbooks used by Arab students in Israel, Jewish society is depicted in a positive and reasonable way, and includes an in-depth familiarity with the culture, literature and history of the Jewish people. Is this also the situation with regard to Arab citizens, or does their representation merely reproduce existing conceptions about them as a party to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Furthermore, special attention should be paid to Arab women and children, given that Arab women are a minority within a minority and thus are doubly excluded. Moreover, the manner of representation can simply reproduce existing inequality – or, instead, it can emphasize a spectrum of possibilities and play a role in creating new norms. For educational purposes, representing a group using just a few images is problematical, because that narrowness affects how members of the represented group then experience themselves and also how others will apprehend them. When (for example) the representation of Arabs in an Israeli geography textbook features only the traditional lifestyle in an Arab village, a Jewish student may mistakenly conclude that all Arabs live in small villages, work in agriculture, and are not integrated into the daily life of modern, urban Israel. Fast forward to that Jewish student as an adult manager interviewing job candidates and unconsciously perceiving all the Arab applicants as village farmers. **To avoid these kinds of scenarios, Jewish students in Israel need up-to-date, authentic and complex representations of Arab society to help prepare them for life in a country in which both Jewish and Arab citizens are living**.

Examples of existing policies of representation

Despite all of the foregoing, we have found that not only is there more knowledge and understanding today of the need for change, but the Ministry of Education (along with other government ministries) is already doing much more to achieve greater presence and representation of various groups in Israeli society. Three key examples of this are the director-general's report from the Ministry of Education addressing education for gender equality in educational institutions; the Biton Committee report on strengthening the study of Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewish heritage; and a government decision to adopt recommendations for more diverse representation in government publications, as proposed by a team seeking to end racism against Israelis of Ethiopian origin. These examples have directed official attention to a series of dos and don'ts and created a platform for both quantitative and qualitative change. Some of the proposed recommendations required regulatory mechanisms, while others have channeled resources into policy implementation. Regrettably, the change has not had a perceptible impact in terms of the representation of Arab citizens. The spirit and values embodied in these developments must be translated more forcefully now into concrete policy steps as detailed below, in order to bring about the desired shift.

Representation in current teaching materials: an overview

In the framework of the research for this document, we conducted mapping of samples of textbooks for Jewish schools – both the state secular and state religious schools – in use during the current 2018-2019 school year. (Some of the texts are also in use in Arab schools.) The mapping examined how Arab society is represented in textbooks in five fields – Hebrew language, mathematics, sciences, English, and homeland/geography. The findings show that the most common and central practice with respect to representation of Arab society and Arab citizens is exclusion.

> In texts for the study of Hebrew, sciences, mathematics and English, among hundreds of illustrations and photographs, name mentions, and citations from sources, no Arab images or Arab places appear. In only a few instances is Arab society mentioned at all.

For example:

> In a Hebrew language textbook, passages are arranged around (Jewish) holidays and other events. There is no mention of the holidays celebrated in Arab society.
>
> In another text there were two passages with statistics about Jewish society in Israel, with no mention of Arab society.

We found printed maps that simply did not depict the Arab cities in Israel; math textbooks featured many passages about travel between various towns in Israel, not one of them a place that was clearly Arab in character.

Texts for the study of English also serve the Arab school system and hence the instructions in these books are written in both Hebrew and Arabic, but they do not include images of Arabs or Arab places.

The homeland/geography textbooks were unique in that they included some presence for Arab society in the context of the subjects studied; for example:

> Passages on Arab families in the Galilee and the Negev.
>
> Mention of a visit to a Bedouin community as part of a trip.
>
> In the context of differentness among children, sentences about Jews and Arabs.
>
> A short explanation on the citizens of Israel as a Jewish majority and an Arab and Druze minority, and so on.

For these geography textbooks, there is a need to expand, improve, and add depth to the representation of Arab society, but they can certainly provide a preliminary model as part of the efforts toward change.

It is obvious that the representation of Arab citizens, both men and women, in teaching materials is problematic and inadequate. Today there are very narrow guidelines based on subjective elements that are supposed to ensure that representations in texts are not hurtful, but these contain no detailed criteria or guarantee of diversity in teaching materials. The current guidelines have no real power to ensure suitable representation for, or prevent hurtful references to, a given group. A two-pronged change is called for, along the lines of Psalm 37:27 to "turn from evil and do good." **We believe that the Ministry of**

Education has a responsibility to promote a clear and detailed policy in this spirit:

Turn from evil: A revised policy should prevent the inclusion of negative representations, stereotypes and one-dimensional images in teaching materials.

Do good: A revised policy should ensure that teaching materials enrich the learning process and broaden students' social familiarity with members of other groups.

There is a need to agree on the means to increase the quantity and improve the quality of the representation of the various groups in teaching materials – with an emphasis on Arab citizens.

Policy recommendations for greater presence of Arab society in instructional materials

1. Formulating detailed guidelines

The Ministry of Education must formulate a series of guidelines with clear, detailed criteria for representation and diversity in teaching materials. The guidelines should include explicit treatment of the representation and presence of Arab society in such materials, and should detail what is prohibited ("turn from evil") as well as clarify expectations for the kind of representation to be encouraged ("do good"). The guidelines should include clear criteria for both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of representation.

We recommend that guidelines require the avoidance of generalizations and stereotypes; dictate careful consideration of graphic images; provide for appropriate quantitative representation based on different groups' proportion in the population; and require high-quality representation for the entire spectrum of diversity in gender, social status, geography, age and generation. Crucially, the detailed guidelines must be officially published by the ministry director-general, obligating cooperation by all parties who write and edit textbooks for the state secular and state religious schools. The afore-mentioned guidelines on gender already formulated and published by the director-general offer an excellent beginning, and they should be adapted to address suitable representation of the various communities in Israel, including Arab citizens.

The guidelines should:

A. Determine the manner in which Arab society and other groups are assured an appropriate presence in texts, illustrations, and photographs.

B. Address the quantitative dimension of representation for Arab citizens (both men and women). For example, the guidelines should call for examining the quantitative representation of Arabic names of people and places, illustrative examples, etc.

C. Distinguish between subjects in the humanities and social sciences, and subjects in the exact sciences.

We recommend, for example, that with regard to Arab society the recommendations be worded as follows:

A. At least 20 percent of the names of people portrayed in each textbook should be Arabic names. Make sure to use a variety of first and family names rather than relying only on generic or stereotypical names.

B. Names and references to towns in Israel (especially but not only in geography texts) should include at least 20 percent Arabic names. Here, too, be sure to include geographic and social diversity.

C. Literary materials should include the work of Arab authors, poets, dramatists, etc., both works written originally in Hebrew and works in Arabic presented in Hebrew translation.

D. Mathematics textbooks should include the history of mathematics and the role of the Arab world in the evolution of science; verbal problems should include the names of Arabs and should mention Arabic place names and Arab communities.

2. Creating an approval and enforcement mechanism

■ Written guidelines should be formulated and published by the Ministry of Education director-general and should include a mechanism for approving textbooks and associated learning materials.

■ The approving parties (a committee or lectors) should function according to clear criteria for approval or non-approval of instructional materials, and will be authorized to approve or withhold approval of teaching materials and/or to demand revisions as may be required.

- Given the extensive decentralization with regard to developing learning materials and educational media that do not necessarily undergo the standard approval process (work sheets, video clips, etc.), an enforcement mechanism should be constituted that can intervene as may be required, to prohibit the use of inappropriate content or materials. This mechanism should be employed periodically to examine a sample of the materials in use and, crucially, must include an address for receiving reports (feedback, complaints, etc.) from parents, teachers, and students regarding inappropriate learning materials.

- The approval mechanism should include the ability to instruct that materials failing to meet the criteria be removed from circulation. For the sake of efficiency, we recommend that these mechanisms operate both to examine and to enforce the new criteria for representation proposed in this document, as well as the issues of gender that were already defined in the director-general's publication referenced earlier. The Ministry of Education should name a multicultural and diverse team to draft a detailed policy for content by subject matter for each field of study. Each Ministry of Education subject-matter supervisor responsible for examining the curriculum for subjects under her/his authority, should update their guidelines accordingly and distribute them to publishers, textbook writers and developers of learning materials.

We recommend that this process be accompanied by appropriate and relevant professional in-service training for teachers, to ensure that the guidelines are internalized and put to use at the level of the specific subject matter.

3. Systemic/declarative backing

Writing learning materials for schools in Israel is heavily decentralized and the schools have a high degree of autonomy in the selection of the texts relevant to them. If the new policy is to be effective, the Ministry of Education – apart from formulating concrete policy tools – must make a clear and unequivocal public statement to provide backing for these changes. The statement should stress the importance of instructional materials that avoid including any hurtful imagery or damaging stereotypes. Materials should accurately reflect the diversity of the society in which we are living, encompassing all its different communities, including Arab society. An assertive statement of educational and moral values, voicing strong backing for implementing the new policy and guidelines, will reinforce everyone's awareness of their importance – not just for those who write and

create learning materials, but also and mainly for those who use them: educators, students and parents.

4. Developing awareness and raising consciousness

To ensure successful assimilation not only of the proposed mechanisms and procedures, but also of the essence of the process, the Ministry of Education should create a formula to enable certification by the Standards Institute of Israel (SII) for learning materials that successfully meet the criteria. This standard certification will be applicable to all types of instructional materials (textbooks, workbooks, study sheets, video clips, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) for which approval is granted – helping to create an atmosphere of responsibility, awareness and engagement on the part of all principal stakeholders: parents, students, and educators. The Ministry of Education should also invest in public outreach messaging about the importance of the process and its outcomes, targeting the general public as well as school principals in particular.

5. Establishing an advisory body for the process and the formulation of guidelines

As noted above, the most effective way to ensure fair and appropriate representation for minority groups relies on engaging people from those groups in determining the guidelines and criteria for implementation. Thus we recommend that the Ministry of Education establish an advisory body to oversee the processes detailed above and to provide oversight for implementation throughout. This is critical to ensure the sustainability of the policy and its assimilation over the years. It is of course crucial to ensure fair representation of Arabs in the membership of this oversight body. We call on decision makers and stakeholders – the Ministry of Education, the Pedagogical Secretariat, the textbooks division, and the textbook publishers in Israel – to work toward implementation of the recommendations detailed in this document, in order to effect significant change in the full spectrum of learning materials.

The changes proposed in this paper will help the Ministry of Education and the educational institutions in Israel to prepare today's schoolchildren – both Jewish and Arab – for active citizenship in the society they will inherit in years to come. The diverse shared society that can someday evolve in this land will be built and sustained by its component communities, working together, and by the knowledge, skills and abilities of their members. Given the tools now to acknowledge and value one another, tomorrow's citizens can be prepared to deal productively with the challenges as well as the advantages posed by the complexity of the reality in Israel. A good-faith investment in today's instructional materials, revised and monitored to emphasize positive representation and mutual respect, can play a pivotal role in moving us closer to that kind of society.

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