

## **Inclusion and Exclusion in the Curriculum of Teacher Training: The Case of the "Education and Social Change" Project**

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This work examines the issues of inclusion and exclusion relating to the curriculum of student teachers at the teaching colleges throughout Israel. The course "Education and Social Change", which I taught this past year, will serve as an example of this examination.

"Education and Social Change" is a unique educational project given for the first time at the Beit Berl College this past year. The course integrated education and teaching students in civil political activities through participation in social organizational frameworks dealing with controversial subjects in Israeli society.

The course was born as a result of the initiative of "The Community Academia Forum for Social Change" established by the law faculty at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The Forum would like to establish for the first time within a higher education institution various political projects which would make it possible for students to be involved in the community. Until now the institutions of higher learning in Israel held various social activities in the philanthropic field only. These activities dealt mainly with tutoring of youths from low socio economic backgrounds. These frameworks were meant to help youths with school assignments or specific social problems but they did not take part in social struggles or in creating political awareness among students and those receiving the help.

The forum wished to replace the philanthropic activity with clear political activity which would be part of the academic curriculum and would receive credits towards a degree. Needless to say the Forum found it difficult to convince the higher education institutions in Israel of the project's necessity. The Council of Higher Learning refused to allow controversial subjects such as the Palestinian – Jewish conflict or ethnic – status conflicts existing within Jewish society to become part of the academic routine. These types of issues penetrate the academic gates only on an academic level. Israeli academia refuses stridently to see itself as the body carrying the flag of social reform. This would deviate, in its opinion, from the academic obligation of "objective" scientific research.

After a long struggle, the Forum received recognition. In 2005 it requested proposals for relevant courses and projects from all the universities and colleges in the State of Israel. In this manner the Forum succeeded in integrating the higher education system and its students within Israeli social leadership.

In the 2006 –2007 academic year the Forum aided in the development of 11 academic courses integrating community activity in 8 different academic institutions in Israel: The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University, Haifa University, Ben – Gurion University, Bar – Ilan University, Emek Yizrael College, Gordon College and Beit Berl college. All the courses chosen for the project were for two years and concentrated on subjects related to human rights on a national, ethnic and sector basis. Each addressed the issues of justice and equality. All the courses in the project integrated high level theoretic studies and intensive field activity in N.G.O.'s dedicated to making deep changes in Israeli society. The courses emphasized as their goals the component of social change as the desired influence they are requested to achieve within the community and among the students.

The course "Education and Social Change" was dedicated to theoretic studies and field activity in informal education organizations obligated to social justice values. Thirteen students participated in the course: 5 women and 8 men. The group included those majoring in informal education and from the Institute for Arab Teacher Training at the college. The group was characterized by its great heterogeneity expressed in the conspicuous differences in the students' backgrounds: Sector, nationality, religion, country of origin and ethnic group as well as their political positions.

The course placed as its priorities the following goals:

1. Examination of the education field as a possible arena for civil activism and social change.
2. Creating change in the student's professional prospective: An attempt to influence the student's future work so that it will include contributing to the community.
3. Creating the feeling of ability among students: Strengthening the belief that the student has the ability to influence and change his/her surroundings by granting students the internal feelings that they have the tools and training to influence various social changes.

During the recent academic school year the students worked in the framework of various organizations that for the most do not serve as a conventional activity

framework within education courses. Some of the organizations emphasize defense activities or activities that are meant to influence policy while other organizations emphasize local humanitarian aid. All the organizations deal in one way or the other in various educational activities: Writing curriculum, managing after school centers, organizing conventions, publishing journals, leading groups and more. Among those organizations taking part in this project:

- Messila Organization – aid and information center for illegal work immigrants in Israel.
- Arfad – shelter for Arab women smuggled out of the Jerusalem area
- Dora Center – support center for homeless Ethiopian youths
- Beit Keren – home for Jewish female adolescents who previously worked in prostitution
- Zochrot – an organization meant to raise the awareness of the catastrophe (Palestinian) among the Jewish public
- Ahoti – a feminist organization for Jewish women coming from Islamic countries (Mizrachiot)

An examination of the course's influence was done through an integrative action research with the help of the "Tzafnat" Institute which accompanied the course from its beginning and my own research which I carried out during the academic school year. The research is based on observations, comprehensive interviews and partially open questionnaires.

The research integrates qualitative methodology based on the participant's narrative point of view (as expressed in the comprehensive interviews and observations), and quantitative methodology based on the student's position (as expressed in the questionnaires).

All the participants in the course passed 3 comprehensive interviews throughout the school year documented in a field diary. The participants also filled out two detailed questionnaires: One at the beginning of the year and the second at the end of the year. In addition, 4 different observations were carried out by a research assistant from the Tzafnat Institute (2 during the first semester and 2 during the second semester).

The findings which I chose to present in this framework relate to 3 essential changes: **The academic contents, the academic discourse and the student discourse.** Though these initial findings relate to this specific course, they can serve as evidence

to the possibilities and the limitations that the connection between academia and community can produce.

## **Findings:**

### **The Academic Contents Field – cancellation of the separation between**

**"social" and "political" subjects:** The public Israeli discourse distinguishes between the "social" issue relating to the economic field and the underprivileged class among the Jewish population and the "political" issue relating to the national field and the Jewish – Arab conflict (as claimed by Yehuda Shenhav and others). The integration created by the course between "social" and "political" organizations offered the students a panoramic view of Israeli society. This view allowed the students to see Jews and Arabs as full partners in one civil society, and beyond that, it created a clear connection between economic status and national issues. In this way the students learned how economic inequality projects on the national conflict and how the national conflict creates economic inequality.

### **The Academic Discourse Field – canceling the separation between**

**professionalism and politics:** Many students aspire to define their position as educators in professional "objective" terms. This trend sees pure professionalism as an aspired status symbol aiding in raising the status of the education field which suffers from a poor self image (to expand see Vered Kraus and others). The course challenged the removal of politics from the education field by binding the educational act within an explicitly political activity. As a result of the course, many students changed the manner in which they see educational activities. If at the beginning of the course the educational function was defined mainly in instrumental terms, as a result of the course the students defined themselves as social – political agents whose work in the education field must touch life itself.

- - Another change which took place **in the academic discourse field** touches the concrete discourse characterizing institutions for higher learning in Israel. Many students claimed that the course integrated the dominant – hegemony discourse presently learned in the universities, with the discourse of the "other" who does not appear in the official curriculum framework. This is most prominent in the teaching

colleges. Most of the students in the teaching colleges are women Mizrachim and Arabs. In spite of this significant demographic fact, the subjects taught in the colleges barely touch the history, culture and identity of these sectors in the population (these facts are confirmed also by research carried out by the multi – cultural unit at Beit Berl). The students claimed that the course brought into academia the language of the other, and as such recognized the other's existence and the way in which he/she is classified by Israeli society. At the same time, a number of Jewish students claimed that bringing in the other within the curriculum damages the strength of the State of Israel.

**The Student Discourse Field** – between intellectual and emotional discourse: The type of discourse which develops in class is usually an intellectual one which prevents internal and emotional conflicts. At times it seems that students remain distant and uninvolved even when faced with the most alarming issues. There are a number of factors influencing students not to take chances in emotional participation: First of all, the academic discourse is conceived of as intellectual – scientific and second, the number of courses does not allow the students to get to know each other better. In spite of these findings, the students testified that the course succeeded in integrating within it biographical – personal aspects relating to their personal life. This process allowed the students to bring into academia knowledge that is not seen by most as relevant to the curriculum. As such the students created a significant connection between the personal and the political and they saw themselves as important agents of social change. At the same time, a number of students claimed that integrating their personal life story and their political positions caused them confusion and embarrassment. They were not accustomed to personal exposure in the academic framework. A number of students were afraid that exposure of this type would harm their academic future.

In conclusion, in spite of the difficulties and partial successes, the course allowed students a different view of the academia, the community and their personal life. This trend may possibly create a greater obligation by education students, and even turn the education field itself into a field seen as significant by youths searching for their future career.