

## Aviv Cohen

### Methodological Aspects of Documenting Civics Lessons in Israel

In this paper the author wishes to shed light on some methodological aspects of documenting civics classes as part of educational research. Rooted in the research traditions of grounded theory and the use of ideal types, this study concentrates on one case of a civics course taught in an Israel high school. Touching on the empirical and theoretical aspects of this case, this study will present the contributions of using such methodologies, particularly regarding the ways in which contextual factors such as the students' academic level and socio-economic factors influence the teaching of this subject-matter. Practical pedagogical implications that were identified as a result of this study will also be presented.

#### Keywords:

Civics, citizenship, Israel, methodology, grounded theory, ideal types

#### 1 Introduction

In a chapter titled "On seeing of moral in teaching" Hansen (2007) explains that "seeing as a human experience constitutes more than the biochemical operations of the eye" (p. 35). While pointing to the role of researchers working in classroom settings, he stresses the importance of focusing on "the ordinary, the everyday, and the apparently humdrum and routine in classroom life" (p. 43) in order to better understand the complexity of such educational processes. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate this "art of seeing" while relating to the teaching of the civics subject-matter in the Israeli context.

In order to better understand such methodological aspects of documenting and learning from Israeli civics classes, following I will display some of the guidelines and considerations that I have as a researcher rooted in the qualitative traditions. Based on my own experiences in educational inquiry, I will detail one specific case study while highlighting both its empirical and theoretical aspects. First, I will offer some theoretical insights regarding the research methods of grounded theory and the use of ideal types. Afterwards, I will display the case study itself and will conclude by pointing to the lessons I learned from the research of this one case.

#### 2 Background

My particular interest in this study was how conceptions of citizenship manifest into a civics classroom setting. This field of study is based on the fundamental notion that such conceptions of citizenship are an important aspect of the teaching of civics that must be considered. Inspired by the biblical proverb, "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29: 18), it is clear

that philosophical conceptions of citizenship function as ethical aspirations that gear the educational practice. This notion was brought forth for example in the well-known study by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), who explained that the practice of civic education is influenced first and foremost by predispositions regarding conceptions of citizenship and that the choice of a specific conception is not arbitrary, but rather influenced by "political choices that have political consequences" (p. 237).

In order to understand the ways in which such conceptions of citizenship manifest in an Israeli civics classroom, I utilized a qualitative instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995), influenced by the research traditions of grounded theory and the use of ideal types. I was inspired by scholars such as Glaser and Strauss (1967), Geertz (1973) and Britzman (2003), adopting the approach that enables the researcher to touch upon practical knowledge and thus provide some insights regarding how we understand the educational arena. It is important to point out that the purpose of such research is not to simply supply a description of what occurs in a classroom, but rather to explore the ways in which different ideas, narratives and ideologies play out in reality.

In their groundbreaking approach, Glaser and Strauss (1967) presented the notion of grounded theory, offering an inductive research method in which theory is to be discovered based on what is found in the field. They offered a complex protocol of fracturing and coding based on categories and sub categories in order to understand main patterns and themes that in turn may generate general insights. Followers of this research tradition such as Marshall and Rossman (2010) point to the difficulties in inducting theories derived exclusively on what is found in the field. Therefore, they offer a more subtle approach in which the review of literature of the topic of study supplies general theoretical constructs, categories, and properties that can be utilized in order to organize the new data and to understand what is being

*Avis Cohen, Phd, is postdoctoral fellow at the The Melton Center for Jewish Education, School of Education, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem Mount Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, ISRAEL*  
Email: [aviv.cohen@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:aviv.cohen@mail.huji.ac.il)



observed. Several researches in the field of social studies education have implemented this methodological approach in numerous studies over the years (Hess, 2002; Larson & Keiper, 2002; Parker & Gehrke, 1986; Wade, 1995).

The modified grounded theory research method resembles the notion of ideal types, presented by one of the founders of the social sciences, the German sociologist Max Weber (1949). Weber defined ideal types as a “mental construct for the scrutiny and systematic characterization of individual concrete patterns which are significant in their uniqueness” (p. 100). He proposes the use of an ideal display of a phenomenon that has been created by what he refers to as an “analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality” (p. 90). With the ideal types in hand, Weber explains that the next step of research is the comparison of the actual phenomenon to these ideals. This comparison may generate insights regarding the manner in which the phenomenon approximates or rather exceeds the ideal. With this heuristic device, a researcher may better understand the social circumstances of reality at a given place and time. Based on this notion, several typologies of ideal types of civic education were composed (Cohen, 2010; Rubin, 2007; Sears & Hughes, 1996; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Acknowledging these methodological foundations, I defined the phenomenon I wish to study as the manifestations of conceptions of citizenship in one Israeli civics classroom. As will be presented herein, by combining these research traditions, I was able to identify the main characteristics of civic education as they appeared in the ongoing academic discourse and their appearance in the specific case study. In this manner I was able to approach this complex and nuanced topic with some sort of a foundational insight, but also maintain my sensibility to the particular nature of the case as it unfolded.

### 3 Methodology

The collection of data<sup>1</sup> for this study took place in the Dagan School,<sup>2</sup> a public state Jewish secular high school from the Jerusalem area. Being both Israel’s capital<sup>3</sup> and its largest city,<sup>4</sup> Jerusalem schools offer a good representation of the main social issues and political tensions encountered by teachers nationwide.

The Dagan School is aimed at students who were expelled from other institutions and thus may be seen as the last chance before students decide to quit their studying altogether. This school’s main goal is to make sure that the students pass the nationwide matriculation exam, known in Hebrew as the *Bagrut*, which is seen as the most important barrier that the students should pass. The civics subject-matter, usually taught in duration of 2-3 hours per week over the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, is a mandatory part of this matriculation protocol and thus its content is dictated by national curriculum standards.

Most of the students in this school come from the lower socio-economic class.

Ben is the teacher of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade civics course. He has 5 years of experience as a civics and history teacher, all of which he has spent in the Dagan School. He is a homeroom teacher and since the 2011-2012 school year he serves as part of the school’s administration, mainly in charge of the school’s extracurricular activities.

Course Observed	Civics
Grade Level	12th
Teacher	Ben
Lessons Observed (the duration of the lessons was 90 minutes long)	22 lessons
Interviews with Teacher	3 interviews
Documents Analyzed	1 test 2 worksheets 3 information sheets

Data Collection Summary Table

The data for this research was collected over a period of six months in an attempt to grasp the holistic educational process in this site. Data was gathered based on three resources: (1) observations of the classroom lessons; (2) semi-structured interviews; and (3) analysis of teacher-generated materials such as handouts, assigned projects and exams.

The goal of implementing this three-stage process of data collection was to trace how conceptions of citizenship appeared in the classroom activities. It is important to point out that I did not reveal my own thoughts regarding the different existing conceptions of citizenship to Ben. In this way I reduced the possibility of creating any bias and thus broadened the possibilities of my own interpretation. Over the official interviews and throughout the short conversations after the observations, Ben was given opportunities to discuss wide aspects of the issue of conceptions of citizenship and how they play out in his classroom. Following Creswell’s (2009) model of spiral data analysis, I used a four-stage process in order to analyze the data and generate theoretical insights based on the data that was obtained.

### 4 Findings

Following the tradition of grounded theory, I will display the main findings of this study in relation to this setting, concentrating mainly on Ben’s assumptions, goals, pedagogy and relationship to the national curriculum standards.



#### 4.1 Overview

When coordinating my first observation with Ben, I was surprised to learn that the Dagan School is set in an unpredictable part of Jerusalem – the school is set in the city center not far from one of the city's loudest and busiest pedestrian malls. Approaching the school for the first time, I encountered what one would expect when arriving at the center of a large city – lines of stores, busy people in suits hurrying to work, groups of loud tourists and quiet Arab sanitary workers beginning their day. Walking to the school, I could not ignore the plaque on the street wall a couple of blocks away, commemorating the victims of a terrorist suicide attack that happened on this street in the mid 1990's.

The Dagan School is housed in a building that does not seem to have any special educational benefits. It is set in a row of similar buildings that you enter after passing a souvenir shop and a store that sells sunglasses. Right in front of the building entrance stands a popular falafel stand. Whereas the first floor consists of administrative offices, only a climb to the classrooms on the second floor reveals that this is indeed a school. The classrooms are medium sized, each with 3-5 rows of desks that can accommodate around 20 students. This small size is not a regular sight in Israeli schools and I at once sensed a feeling of intimacy. Over the course of my observations, I was to find that one of the school's declared goals is in fact to create a feeling of intimacy between the students and the teachers.

One of the first things I learned from my first meeting with Ben at the Dagan School was the fact that all of the teachers held a copy of a key that opens the door to the teachers' lounge and to the staff bathroom. I learned that despite my initial feelings of intimacy these two important areas are off-limits to students. It became clear that the culture of this school is more complex than what I first encountered. The feeling of intimacy was accompanied by the not so intimate feeling of clear borders that were set between the students and the teachers.

Thus, as I was to learn throughout the observations, this school's atmosphere and culture could be characterized by what seemed like a combination between close and personal student-teacher relationships on the one hand and a clear set of rules and regulations on the other. A good example was something I nicknamed as "Ben's daily routine," which opened almost every one of the civics lessons I observed in Ben's classroom. The routine included the following: when the lesson is supposed to begin Ben enters the classroom, usually to find 1-3 students (in some cases these students are not even part of his class). He then walks down the steps to the street level, not far from the falafel stand, where the students tend to hang out. They greet him, and he invites them to come up to class. After 5 minutes or so Ben returns to his classroom. Some of the students follow him, some do not. As the lesson begins, students continue to trickle into the class. Ben

once mentioned to me in a conversation that some teachers in the school don't bother to walk all the way down the steps to gather their students from the street level. Instead, they stand at the balcony that overlooks the busy street from the teachers' lounge and holler at their students to come up to class.

With these general impressions I was soon to learn that the Dagan School does not enforce any serious learning culture. In order to illustrate this insight, during one specific observation, I noted and found that all together, over the lesson's duration of an hour and a half, there were 11 cases in which different students entered the class late. This lesson officially started at 9:00 a.m. with Ben conducting his regular routine. After Ben returned from gathering his students from the street at 9:09, there were five students sitting by the desks in the class. Additional students entered the class as individuals or in pairs at the following times: 9:16, 9:17, 9:18, 9:26, 9:28, 9:30, 9:42, 9:52, 9:57 and 10:02. It is important to note that Ben seemed indifferent to these late entries. He allowed all of the late students to enter and take their place behind the desks. To some of the students he even said "I know that you come from far away." On the other hand, when one of the late students asked a question about something that was written on the board, Ben replied angrily saying "if you wouldn't have been late you would have known the answer." This too is a sign of the culture of the Dagan School, a mixture between openness and strictness.

Throughout the observations I noticed that students would walk in and out of the classroom freely, sometimes leaving the class not to return. Although in general there was a quiet learning atmosphere in Ben's lessons, only a minority of the students had a notebook on the desk in front of them and even fewer actually used it to write down the material being taught. I received an explanation of this phenomenon at the beginning of one lesson, in which I overheard one student say "I made photocopies of summaries of the lesson so I don't have to write anything in class." Students playing with their cell phones, talking quietly to one another and solving crossword puzzles were common throughout these observations.

It became clear to me that this school culture was highly influenced by what Ben described in an interview as the students' "difficult backgrounds." For example, he explained, when he encounters some mode of intolerance between the students, he would explain to them that each student in this school has her/his own personal problems and psychological baggage and that most students respect and understand this fact. I asked Ben if this had to do with the students' socio-economic status, and he agreed, saying that most of the students in the observed class do indeed come from a lower socio-economic level. He continued to explain that this atmosphere, in which each student is aware that the other students also have complicated personal stories, leads to fewer incidents of violence and that in general



the school is characterized by a feeling of tolerance and respect. During another interview, Ben raised this point again, explaining that “in this type of school each student comes with his own baggage and they respect that and in that sense it is like a democracy that promotes pluralism and tolerance.” In this interview Ben was reminded of one example when, in a private conversation, one of his students decided to tell him that he is gay. Ben remembers that the student was surprised at his teacher’s open and tolerant response. The student told Ben that he was expecting a very different reaction, as he was used to receiving when talking to his teachers in schools where he studied in the past.

Throughout the observations it became rather clear that the students in Ben’s class are of a very low level of achievement and had a hard time dealing with complex thinking skills. For example, in a lesson about the Diaspora Jews, Ben understood midway into the lesson that the students did not understand the basic meaning of the word Diaspora. Therefore he stopped the flow of the lesson in order to supply a clear definition of this term. Later on in the same lesson Ben talked about the special connections between the Diaspora Jews and the state of Israel. He began the following discussion:

Ben: So how is this connection maintained?

Amnon: On the phone.

Ben: I mean the connection between the states, not between people.

This is an example of how the students in Ben’s class have a problem comprehending abstract and theoretical ideas and concepts. I learned that they mainly relate to a concrete and down-to-earth mode of thought. This may be why Amnon imagined regular people talking on the phone when Ben asked about maintaining a connection between a state and a population.

Another challenge that the students in Ben’s class have to deal with is their low level of language skills and vocabulary. For example, when explaining the issue of the Diaspora Jew’s own feeling of security, Ben made a connection to the Israeli Law of Return about which they have already learned in a previous lesson. Nevertheless, throughout the explanation it became clear that the students were confused regarding the name of the law:

Zvi: So the Diaspora Jews are afraid of a second holocaust, Holocaust part 2?

Ben: Correct, now this has to do with a law that we learned about, which one?

Alon: The law of settlement!

In this case Alon understood the issue and was even able to make the connection to the law that was studied in a previous lesson. Nevertheless, he got confused between the Hebrew word ‘return’ as in the first law that Ben was referring to (SHVUT) and the similar word for

settlement (HIT-YA-SHVUT) that is pronounced in a similar fashion.

In an interview relating to an exam he gave his students, Ben admitted that most of the students did not understand a certain question because the reading was too hard for them and that the passage they read was too long. In a different interview he was reminded of a professional development class he attended in which the instructor told him that he should have his students read and learn certain topics from the civics curriculum on their own at home. Ben laughed while remembering this incident, explaining, “I can’t even give them homework ... they will never read anything on their own,” while continuing to laugh for several more minutes.

A good illustration of the fact that the students themselves are also aware of their low academic level is a heartbreaking story that Ben spoke of in one of our interviews:

There was this one case when we went to a memorial tent for Yitzchak Rabin. The students were quiet so the instructors at the tent tried to get them to participate. My students answered back saying that they are not intelligent enough to participate when compared to the students from other schools in the city that were also present at the memorial tent.

From this incident we can learn something about the very essence of the way in which these students perceive themselves as part of society, a perception that as will be demonstrated following, was adopted by Ben. In this case the student admitted to his lack of ability to take part in the public discourse.

The culture and atmosphere of the Dagan School do not appear to encourage a high level of academic achievement. For example, in Ben’s lessons the students are not required to have a notebook or to open the textbook. Ben explains this practice saying:

I have no problem that the students don’t write things down in their notebooks. I don’t need them to write down stuff without really understanding, that is just false consciousness. Of course, when I feel like I am talking to myself I will try to arouse them but I really don’t need them to write or to open a book, those are all control mechanisms and I don’t need them. It is also part of the school culture, for example, we don’t give homework in this school.

Another aspect that characterizes the Dagan School is a type of racial tension that exists between the students. For example, the following exchange was observed in one lesson when Ben mentioned the American Jews that come to visit Israel on the famous “Birthright” trips:

Tamar: So those are those Americans we see in town that look like they are Russian?

Leah: Is there a problem to look like a Russian?!?

At the time of the observation I assumed that Leah had Russian origins, a fact that was confirmed by Ben in a following conversation. This exchange reflects the social



tensions that were apparent in this class on a regular basis.

In sum, the school's location, the students' low socio-economic background and a school culture that does not encourage a high academic level all create a mixed atmosphere of friendliness while maintaining a clear distance between the students and the teachers. When I asked Ben about this in an interview he explained that "it is all part of the school culture. The students are friends of mine on Facebook. There is a very casual school culture." The one limitation that Ben raised regarding his relationships with his students is the fact that Ben will not tell them who he plans to vote for in the general elections, thus transmitting a message that despite his likable approach, he is not really their friend.

As will be developed in the following Discussion section, an explanation to this school atmosphere is the assumption that was confirmed in a conversation with Ben. In general, the students that study at the Dagan School are treated in a manner that is in congruence to the way they are perceived, as belonging to a social class that feels underprivileged by society. These students are seen by the school teachers and administrators as expressing a genuine distrust in the political system and social surroundings that have discriminated them and their families over the years. Therefore, the rebuilding of such a trust between the students and the school as an institution is one of the Dagan School's main goals. As will be presented following, this goal was apparent in Ben's civics lessons as well.

#### 4.2 Assumptions

Two fundamental assumptions stand at the base of Ben's teaching of civics. First, he assumes that an important element of citizenship is a feeling of respect toward the national entity and its institutions. Second, he sees importance in the ability of citizens to potentially participate in the social and political sphere, emphasizing this potential rather than their actual participation. He explained these two dimensions of the teaching of civics in the following manner:

The way I see it there are two circles: the first is the general circle between people. People need to be tolerant toward one another and to understand that you can trust other people ... this touches on the basic issue of civility. The second circle is the political circle. This includes knowing about the political system in the state, believing in it and understanding that if there are problems with the system we can change it ... So there is the basic circle of how to act to other human beings and then there is the circle of the democratic regime.

Ben expressed this first assumption in an interview claiming that he thinks, "a good citizen has to feel solidarity ... they have to feel something toward the state." Therefore, it was not surprising that this idea was conveyed while teaching different topics from the national civics curriculum standards. A good example is

when Ben taught the philosophical term of the social contract. In one part of the lesson he decided to summarize the topic through the following exchange:

Ben: So what is a social contract?

Tal: It is an agreement between the state and the citizens.

Ben: This is correct; the social contract is a type of agreement.

At this point Ben turned to the blackboard and wrote this definition on the board: "an agreement between the state and the citizens." He then turned to the class and asked "What does each side give to the other? I mean, what does the state give to the citizens and what do the citizens give to the state?" To this question Eyal answered that "the state needs to provide security and order and that the citizens give money in taxes."

This exchange represents a specific type citizenship, one that is characterized by a relationship between the state and its citizens that is seen mainly in legal terms. As Ben mentioned, it is seen as a contract in which each side has to "give" something to the other. Interestingly, when teaching this topic, Ben did not mention other aspects that are affiliated with this term, such as the feelings of solidarity or mutual commitment between citizens.

In an interview Ben explained the second assumption that stands at the base of his teaching of civics. He mentioned that while working on his Master's thesis he read the book "The Civic Culture" by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. He explained that the idea of the citizens' potential to participate resonated with him. He said he liked the idea that not all the citizens can be active all the time, and therefore the need to emphasize the potential of each citizen to be active when they see fit. It became clear that this insight had influence on Ben's teaching philosophy. For example, when asked about the goals of teaching civics, Ben explained that he wants his students to:

Know about the political system in the state, believe in it and understand that if there are problems with the system we can change it. Being a citizen isn't just sitting in tents all day and constantly posting stuff on Facebook. The civic culture is the understanding that you don't need to be active all the time. But, when something bothers you, you do have a way to change it. For me, it is the potential of being active that is important.

He continued to explain that:

Some teachers want their students to be active and organize demonstrations, I don't. I want them to know about their rights, to understand how the system works and that if a red line is crossed they will know how to act and what to do.

The basic assumptions that guides Ben in his teaching of civics is a portrayal of the good citizen as a person who phrases his relationship with the state in legal terms,



emphasizing the official commitment of the citizens toward the state, and the responsibility of the state to supply security in return. In addition, he stresses the potential ability of his students to be discerning citizens, choosing when to participate and be active, but not necessarily participating at all times.

### 4.3 Goals

Naturally, these fundamental assumptions had direct influence on Ben's teaching of civics. Foremost, one of Ben's main goals was to develop within his students a feeling of respect toward the formal national institutions and symbols. For example, when asked about these goals, Ben explained that he wants:

Citizens to show respect toward the representatives in the Knesset ...<sup>1</sup> they should respect the judges, the institutions, they should respect the fact that this is the only way to manage life here ... I don't want the ideal citizen to be angry toward the institutions. They should be happy with what we have. Of course we need to fix the things that can be fixed but we need to appreciate what we have here.

This point of view derives from an authentic feeling of fear that Ben expressed. This feeling of fear mainly relates to the state of indifference that characterizes the youths' relation toward the political sphere. It is exactly this fear that gave rise to this somewhat surprising confession from Ben:

To tell you the truth and this might sound bad, I am indifferent to the students saying "kill all of the Arabs" whereas I get mad when they say "all of the politicians are corrupt." Of course it is all connected, but we need to remember that larger context ... when they say "all of the politicians are corrupt" it is just a sign of their ignorance – and that is why I go mad. I think that this kind of statement touches a nerve for me because of its implications – that it isn't worth going to vote and that all of the system is worthless. I don't see a reason for it to be this way. I am afraid of a situation where someone will come with a catchy slogan and the day after everybody will believe it. That is what I am afraid of.

In relation to the current situation in Israel, and of course in connection to the context of Ben's school and students, Ben represents a view that points to apathy as one of the main dangers to Israeli democracy, dangerous even more than signs of racism.

This leads to Ben's second main goal, that of the transmission of knowledge regarding the state's institutions and of the formal venues in which the citizen can be potentially active, if they choose to be so. In other words, it is Ben's belief that in order to create the ability of citizens to be potentially active, they need to have acquired certain essential bodies of knowledge.

A good example of the translation of this goal to the classroom setting was Ben's lesson about the political procedure of a referendum. After he explained the

concept of referendum, Ben continued on to explain the advantages and disadvantages of this procedure. He wrote two lists on the board, side by side, of all of these advantages and disadvantages. Afterwards he said "after we see the advantages and the disadvantages of a referendum, we can think for ourselves if a referendum is a good thing." In other words, first Ben set a basis of foundational knowledge for his students, in this case the meaning of the term referendum and the list of its advantages and disadvantages. Only then did he move on, asking his students to formulate their own value-based judgmental personal views on this topic.

This goal resonated with some of the students in Ben's class. For example, in another lesson, Ben taught the philosophical terms freedom and equality and explained the inherent contradiction between them. After this explanation one student said "wait, I don't understand and I want to understand, I want to have the knowledge!" This is a sign that at least this specific student internalized Ben's goal that sees value in the holding of knowledge.

A third goal that was identified in Ben's class was the development of a feeling of commitment between the citizens and the state, and the hope that with this commitment the citizens will contribute to the national goals. Specifically in Israel, in light of the mandatory military service, Ben explained that for him:

It is not a goal that the students go to the army, but I do want them to do some kind of national service after the 12th grade. I will be disappointed if a student doesn't go to the military or to some kind of national service. The idea that there is some kind of national burden that we all need to take part in is something I believe in.

Later in the interview he added that he does not like the whole popular discourse around the issue, which he framed as "the issue of what did the state do for me?" echoing his views regarding the issue of the individual citizens' feeling of commitment to the larger political entity.

### 4.4 Pedagogy

These educational assumptions and stated goals yielded a pedagogy that was mainly composed of the dictation of the basic concepts and terms that were seen by Ben as essential for any citizen that lives in the state. As he himself explained in an interview "I think it is important to teach the basic concepts of citizenship." Therefore, throughout the lessons Ben emphasized the definition of key terms while writing the definitions on the board and having the students, at least those who were willing, copy them to their notebooks. On one occasion he even told the students: "I want you to be able to repeat this material even in your sleep."

The following exchange demonstrates this type of pedagogy. The topic of this specific lesson was the term 'democracy':

<sup>1</sup> The Israeli parliament.



Ben: So what is the meaning of the word democracy?  
Eyal: A referendum.  
Ben: No, does anyone remember the meaning of the word?  
Oded: Demos means many.  
Arnon: It means that anyone can say whatever they want.

At this point in the lesson Ben writes down the word Democracy on the black board and asks again:

Ben: What is the meaning of this word?  
Doron: It is the opposite from dictatorship  
Ben: The origin of the word is from Greek. Now think - what characterizes a democratic regime?  
Doron: It's not a lone leader.  
Ben: So who decides?  
Doron: The people!

From this exchange between Ben and his students we learn that despite the fact that the students were correct in their line of thought regarding the democratic regime, it was important for Ben to pinpoint the exact institutionalized definition of the term being taught.

Another good example of Ben's use of this type of pedagogy was observed in a lesson about the connections between the Diaspora Jews and the state of Israel. This seemed like a good lesson in which the students were highly involved – they answered Ben's questions, asked questions of their own and some of them were even busy writing down what Ben wrote on the board in their own notebooks. In a conversation afterwards, Ben agreed that this was a good lesson due to the high level of student engagement. A description of the way in which Ben used the board throughout this lesson will provide a good illustration of the pedagogy that characterizes his lessons. In the beginning of the lesson Ben wrote the title of the lesson on top of the board:

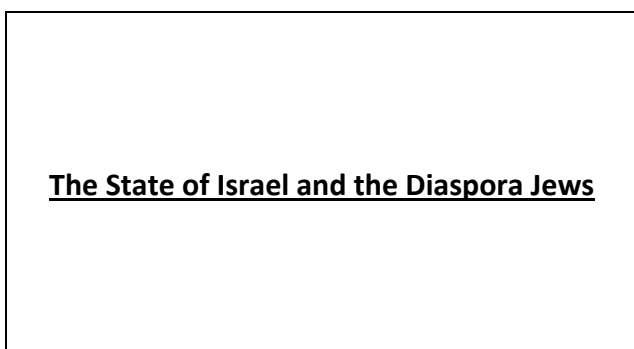


Figure 1: Description of Blackboard

He then divided the board into two parts:

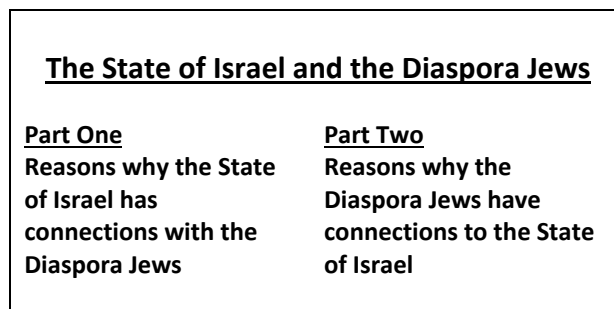


Figure 2: Description of Blackboard

Throughout the lesson he listed the reasons under each relevant part, beginning with three reasons for part one and then three reasons for part two. At the end of the lesson the board looked like this:

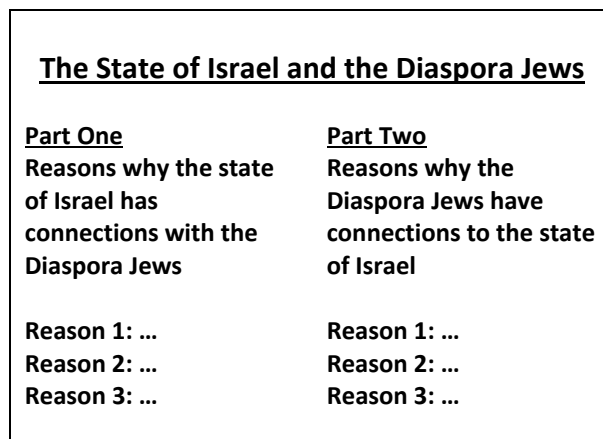


Figure 3: Description of Blackboard

In my view, this is not just a decision about how to graphically design the board, but rather a pedagogical approach that Ben adopted based on his basic assumptions and goals. Ben's pedagogy was organized and methodical: He began by presenting the topic itself and how he was going to present it to the students. He then made sure to detail the different reasons in order. This is not to say that he did not divert to different topics as well, but he always came back to this structure of the lesson.

This approach was also apparent in the evaluation of several documents that were utilized in Ben's lessons. For example, he used newspaper articles to clarify foundational issues regarding Israeli society, such as an article about Jewish ultra-orthodox religious groups that do not recognize Israel as a state due to religious reasons, and an article about the growing socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor in the state. It is important to point out that in both cases the articles were not critical in their nature, but rather informative. Therefore the use of such articles may be seen as a way to bring the lessons to life when transmitting these units of knowledge.



#### 4.5 National curriculum standards

The nation-wide curriculum standards seem to match Ben's own conceptions of citizenship. As he explained:

The way I see it, the curriculum is framed in a way that if someone learns it seriously they can have the knowledge about how to act in the system, like who to go to when you have a problem, which organizations exist. So, it is not that I expect my students to go on demonstrations every Friday, but that if they want to they will know what they can do.

Ben reserves similar feelings towards the *Bagrut* exam. He explained that:

The *Bagrut* is an educational tool I use ... of course I have criticism about the level of the *Bagrut* and I would like to see it in a different format. But, I think it is part of the idea of respecting the rules of the game – some smart people sat down and decided how we teach civics toward the *Bagrut* and we need to respect that.

That said, Ben did voice some critique toward the official curriculum standards. For example, on one observation, after writing more definitions of key terms on the board, he told his students: "When answering questions on the *Bagrut* you need to write the definitions in this manner." Later, he admitted to the fact that personally he doesn't agree with the definition he supplied to the term *welfare state* as it appears in the curriculum standards. Nevertheless, he explained to his students: "because this is the definition that appears in the text book this is the definition that you need to know." In the same manner, in another lesson Ben told his students that "in the exam there is no place for you to express your own personal opinion. You can talk in the lessons but not in the *Bagrut* – there you need to show that you know what we learned in class."

As a response to this statement one student said "in civics the only thing we need to do is memorize definitions by heart. It is all rubbish." This remark represents one of the main challenges that Ben faced regarding the curriculum standards – the fact that there is a clear separation between civics as it appears in the curriculum and the *Bagrut* and the "real" civics that appears in the real world, such as the students' own personal opinions and experiences. This is one of the main insights that will be discussed following.

#### 5 Discussion

As an answer to the central research question of this study regarding the manifestation of conceptions of citizenship, and with the use of the methodological traditions mentioned above, these findings reveal that such a conception did indeed influenced the different components of Ben's civics lessons including both the general goals, pedagogies and evaluation methods as well as the knowledge, values and dispositions that were advanced. In congruence with the notion of the teacher as a curricular-instructional gatekeeper (Thornton, 1991), Ben was identified as a key figure who framed the

conception of citizenship that was promoted throughout these lessons.

Based on this empirical data, I offer to see Ben's lessons as a reflection of a theoretical stance that I identify as a disciplined conception of citizenship.<sup>5</sup> This conception was translated into an educational practice that may be seen as an ideal type of civic education. The construction of this ideal type was based on the empirical data obtained from this study as it resonated with the academic theoretical discourse in the fields of social studies education and political science. In this sense, this insight is a good example of the ways in which the two research traditions, of grounded theory and the use of ideal types, may be combined in order to lead to theoretical insights. As will be presented following, the identification of Ben's teaching with this ideal type is helpful when trying to better understand the connections between the teaching of civics in this specific case, and the larger social contexts and implications.

Followers of this ideal type of disciplined civic education tend to see citizenship in the democratic state in terms of a legal contract between the state and the individual citizen, following the thin and procedural model of citizenship. Therefore, the two main assumptions that stand at the base of this conception of citizenship resemble the thoughts expressed by Ben, that: (1) the good citizen should respect the national entity and the political institutions; and (2) the good citizen should be able to potentially participate in the social and political processes. These assumptions are influenced by the philosophical stance that society is composed of individuals, and thus civic education should cultivate the role that the individual takes in the public sphere (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996).

In order to develop this role, supporters of this conception stress the required intellectual and practical tools necessary for life in a democratic state (Lawry, Laurison, & VanAntwerpen, 2006). Emphasis is put on the teaching of procedural knowledge, such as understanding the voting process or the official venues necessary to connect with elected representatives, as well as on developing values related to the individual's behavior, such as independence and personal merit. The aspiration of this approach is that such independent and responsible citizens will be willing to contribute to the state's national goals (Ben Porath, 2007).

These goals yield a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the acquaintance of the students with basic political concepts and terms. For this purpose the teachers will mainly dictate the meanings of these foundational conceptual building blocks and use primary sources in order to clarify them. The assumption is that such an approach will develop the students' feeling of respect toward the national entity and political institutions. Supporters of this conception will also support a mandatory nationwide curriculum that includes the teaching of such terms and concepts. Thus, the evaluation process will be mainly composed of the





ability of the students to memorize these key foundational elements.

A good illustration of this conception was observed in the lesson in which Ben discussed the mechanism of a national referendum. At one point in the lesson Ben posed the following question to his students:

Ben: So what are the advantages of a referendum?

Omer: In a referendum they ask me!

Amit: And that is a real democracy!

From this short exchange we learn about how the term *democracy* is framed in this regard. The “real democracy” is a mere procedure in which the citizens are asked questions directly, through a set institutionalized mechanism. This perception of citizenship resonates with my overall impression of Ben’s educational approach – teaching his students how to be fair and equal players in the democratic game.

Two aspects of this conception of civic education may be criticized. First, some scholars argue that the emphasis on procedural knowledge alone is not satisfactory in the complex reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, Barber (2004) stresses the importance of cultivating active participatory citizens who hold various civic responsibilities. This participation should be rooted in a strong value basis that acknowledges this need to be active citizens. Therefore, he will claim that the teaching of the procedural aspect of citizenship alone is simply not satisfactory. In addition, scholars such as Kymlicka and Norman (1994) argue that any debate regarding citizenship must relate to the social and cultural plurality of citizenship that characterizes our times. The emphasis of this disciplined conception on the individual citizen, they will argue, is simply irrelevant for our current age.

These points of critique help in shedding light on the contextual aspects of Ben’s civics lessons, aspects that yield important theoretical insights regarding the general topic of teaching civics in Israel and worldwide. The fact that Ben teaches in a school that will enroll any student means that many of his students have been expelled from their previous placements. Therefore, it was clear that Ben saw his students as citizens that have developed a feeling of distrust toward such institutions that dealt with them so poorly in the past. In addition, as detailed above, most of the students in the school are from a low socio-economic status and the low academic level of the students was also apparent.

Understanding this context helps in explaining why the disciplined conception of citizenship was chosen by Ben to be dominant in his class. For example, Ben dedicated one lesson to go over questions from the previous *Bagrut* exam. Throughout the lesson Ben read the questions out loud and stopped to explain the vocabulary to his students. These explanations included offering definitions for terms such as *privatization* and *employment service*, terms that most of the students have simply never heard of.

Ben reflected on his assumptions regarding the context of his school and of his students. In an interview he explained that he wants his students “to have the basic understanding of democracy and understand the power they have in the system – that is a lot for them, a lot.” He continued:

Don’t get me wrong, I will be happy if my students become politically active and I have students that are, but those students come from places where it is natural to be active. But other students that come from different backgrounds won’t be active at all, even if it is on issues that they are concerned about. So I won’t encourage students to be politically active just so they can say that they were. I think it is a lot more important to put emphasis on the knowledge and then create an interaction based on that knowledge.

When asked in another interview about a more critical conception of citizenship, Ben answered that “being critical isn’t worth anything if it isn’t based on basic foundational knowledge.” In fact, it is the understanding of foundational knowledge, which he believes that his students are lacking, that Ben sees as one of his main educational goals.

It was apparent that this disciplined conception of citizenship is influenced by both the school and by the students’ contexts, translated into Ben’s desire to build a feeling of mutual trust between the students and the official institutions of the state. In the lesson in which Ben taught two basic democratic principles of *freedom* and *equality*, Ben explained that a democratic state needs to translate these principles into the state’s policy. At this point Iddo interrupted and asked:

Iddo: So does Israel translate these principles?

Ben: Yes, Israel does believe in these principles and it also translates them into policy.

This is a good example of the way in which, as part of this conception, the idea of loyalty to the state is transmitted to the students. This theme was observed in several other lessons as well, such as the lesson about the social contract detailed above. In congruence with this philosophy, in this lesson Ben made a point of explaining to his students that the state does indeed supply its citizens’ basic needs such as police, fire fighters, schools and hospitals.

All of these examples point to the fact that Ben’s teaching was highly influenced by his identification of his students’ general civic orientation. In order to better understand this relationship, I build on the writings of the economist Hirschman (1970) who also offered a well-known typology of citizenship, based on the methodology of ideal types. While rooted in the field of political economy, Hirschman explains that his findings can be applicable to other organizations such as voluntary associations or political parties. It is my view that such a typology is also relevant regarding a citizen’s personal relationship to the state in which s/he lives. Hirschman



explains that when organizations show a decline in their performance, the consumer, or in our case the citizen, has two options: (1) exit – leaving the organization; or (2) voice – expressing their concerns within the organization. Hirschman explains that the option of exit does not necessarily need to be physical, but can also be emotional. For example, exit can be a citizen's feeling of apathy toward the political institutions and society in general. This insight is important when considering the fact that in most cases the option of physical exit does not really exist unless the citizen is willing to migrate to a different state. Therefore, he explains that one of the main dangers is that "the presence of the exit option can sharply reduce the probability that the voice option will be taken up widely and effectively" (Hirschman, 1970, p. 76).

Applying these insights regarding such modes of citizenship in relation to the conception of citizenship being promoted in Ben's classroom, my central claim is that Ben's perception of his students as "exit" citizens led him to frame his civics lessons while following the disciplined conception of citizenship. As stated, his main goal was to build and rebuild their trust in Israeli society and politics.

This conclusion represents the general issue of the ways in which teachers' own understanding of the context in which they teach influences the ways in which they perceive their own students and, based on this perception, influence the conception of citizenship that they wished to promote. Due to these contextual factors, Ben saw himself as a figure holding the official knowledge that his students lack, thus resembling the notion of hegemonic knowledge as presented by critical theorists such as Apple (1999). Students from the Dagan School were not exposed to a more critical conception of citizenship, despite the fact that their teacher saw them as belonging to the social group that is in need of exactly these types of experiences in order to enhance their own social situation. Instead, their experience concentrated mainly on the narrow and disciplined conception of citizenship that maintained their own social reality. In other words, from this study we can speculate about how teachers' perceptions of their own students influence the ways civics is taught, illuminating the fact that those students who are in need of enhancing their civic awareness and dispositions the most in order to enable their social mobility are not necessarily being exposed to the critical conceptions of citizenship that could have this effect.

## 6 Implications

Based on this discussion and on the methodological aspects that guided this study, one of its main conclusions is the importance of teachers reflecting on the context in which they teach and understanding the ways in which these contexts influence the ways in which they view their students and, as an outcome of this perception, their choices regarding the conceptions of

citizenship that they wish to promote in their classrooms. In my view, it is exactly this point from which we learn the importance of relating to methodological issues, such as the documentation of case studies and the use of ideal types. Exposing civics teachers and student-teachers to such typologies of citizenship and to various models of civic education may contribute to their ability to perform such reflection. As explained by Banks (1993), a prominent scholar of multicultural education, "typologies are helpful conceptual tools because they provide a way to organize and make sense of complex and disparate data and observations" (p. 7).

An additional aspect that deserves consideration in relation to the reality of the civics lessons described above is that of pedagogical practices. Despite the fact that Ben's lessons can mainly be framed in the realm of the disciplined conception of citizenship, he used several pedagogical strategies that are worth noting. These practical insights should be seen in light of the research tradition of models-of-wisdom (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Wineburg & Wilson, 1991), also known as the "good cases" approach (Hess, 2002; Shulman, 1983), that strive "to learn from the possible, not only the probable" (Hess, 2002, p. 15). It is my belief that the following list of pedagogical practices reflects educational strategies that can be put to use in congruence with different conceptions or ideal types, and in relation to diverse educational settings.

1. Dictation – In Israel the civics subject-matter is very much knowledge-based. Therefore a common teaching strategy that was identified was the dictation of terms and topics. In most cases Ben prepared in advance clear definitions to write on the board. The students then copied these definitions to their notebooks. In an interview Ben explained that in certain cases there is an advantage in choosing such a strategy based on the transmission of basic knowledge and ideas.

2. Use of Concrete Examples – One of the main characteristics of the Israeli civics curriculum is that it includes numerous theoretical terms and concepts derived from the fields of political science, law and philosophy. *Parliamentary regime, the rule of law and the social contract* are just a few examples of terms and concepts that appeared throughout the observed lessons. A common strategy that was identified in this case was the use of concrete examples in order to describe and clarify such abstract ideas. Ben described the use of this strategy in an interview and explained that such examples help the students remember the material.

3. Current Events – As expected with civics lessons in which one of the main goals is the creation of a connection between the students and their surroundings, the reference to current events was not surprising. In addition, living in a state such as Israel with dramatic news occurring around the clock, it is hard to ignore some of the events that eventually found their way to the classroom. On several occasions Ben decided



not to teach his planned civics lesson but rather refer to public events that were happening in the country. On one occasion Ben referred to the time of the year, connecting the content of his lesson to the national Memorial Day for Yitzhak Rabin that was to occur the following day.

4. Leading Classroom Discussions - Another common teaching strategy that was observed as part of this study was the use of classroom discussions. These discussions were mainly teacher-centered, meaning that once a topic was raised different students voiced their opinions, but the teacher determined who spoke and when. Several common pedagogical strategies were observed during such discussions. These included: paraphrasing the students' remarks so that the entire class could understand; clarification of key terms that came up in the discussion; reaction to the students' remarks; enhancing arguments by indicating to the students the quality of their arguments; connecting the discussions to the content being taught; maintaining order and making sure that the discussion were held in an organized fashion; playing devil's advocate by posing opinions that were the opposite of the opinions that the students presented.

5. Student-Relevant Pedagogy - Another important strategy that was identified was the connection of the content to the students' own lives. As Ben explained in an interview "the students need to have a personal connection to the material so that they can learn." Two examples from the observations expressed the strength of this pedagogical strategy. In the lesson about the Diaspora Jews, one student interrupted and said that his parent migrated to Israel from Russia in the early 1990's. Ben took advantage of this interruption and asked the students why it is that Jews of Russia felt the need to come to Israel. He continued to explain that special connection between the Jews of the world and Israel, which is seen as a safe haven. The student confirmed this explanation saying that indeed that is the reason why his parents came to Israel in the first place.

In another lesson Ben was trying to teach the concept of pluralism. Seeing the lack of response from the students regarding this topic he turned to them and asked "What kind of music do you like?" The students, somewhat surprised, began throwing answers such as pop, rock and *Mizrahi*.<sup>6</sup> To this Ben responded saying:

You see, in order for you to have developed your own personal taste you first needed to hear different types of music. What would have happened if there was only one radio station? You wouldn't even know what music you like. If you are not exposed to different opinions or styles you can't develop your own personal opinion.

6. The Teacher as a Role Model - Moving beyond the formal teaching strategies mentioned above, Ben also saw himself as an educational and civil role model. In this sense he understood that his students were monitoring his own behavior and thus made sure to maintain a behavior that reflected the civic conception that he

wished to promote. Ben explained this strategy in an interview saying that "the main thing that we do is modeling, meaning that the students look up to us and see the way we act. So for example I constantly try to show them that I don't think that all Arabs are bad." It seems like more than others, this pedagogy has to do with the main theoretical findings of this study in relation to the students' background and context. Ben wished to present an alternative model of an adult for his students. As he explained:

In a school like ours ... 90 percent of what we are doing is modeling. A lot of them come from backgrounds where they don't trust the grownups and it is our role to rebuild that trust in the way we act and in the interactions with them. In some senses it is more like a youth movement.

He added that he thinks that "it is excellent that my students meet something that they are not used to. They should meet something that is different from them; they understand that we are also humans despite our differences." For example, he was reminded of a case when he told one of his students that he does not watch a lot of television and cynically remarked how "the student's whole perception of the world shattered." In addition, Ben admitted that this type of modeling is a way of conveying the feeling of respect toward his students, explaining that "I will always be on time, and will never answer my phone during a lesson. This way I transmit to them that I am treating them seriously, this is the modeling."

## 7 Conclusions

As mentioned, the purpose of this paper was to show the advantages of documenting civics lessons building on the research traditions of grounded theory and the use of ideal types. This presentation of one case study from the Israeli educational context may be seen as an example of the ways in which the comparison between the data obtained from the field to theoretical constructs yielded important insights. In this case, these insights relate to the ways in which contextual factors influence the conception of citizenship being prompted as part of the civics lessons.

In addition, this focus on such a comparison between what happened in the classrooms and theoretical models of citizenship helped in identifying and understanding practical implications such as the importance of teacher reflection and pedagogical practices. It is in this manner this study may be a reminder of the original role of data-driven research to help enhance educational processes in classrooms across the globe.

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#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> See Table 1 - Data Collection Summary Table.

<sup>2</sup> All of the names that are mentioned, including the names of the school, the teacher and the students are pseudonyms. The following information was obtained from the school's web site as well as from the web sites of the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality that detail information regarding schools in the state and in the city. In order to protect the



participants' confidentiality, the addresses of these websites will not be detailed.

<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem was proclaimed as Israel's capital in 1950. Nevertheless, the U.N., the E.U. countries and the U.S.A. do not recognize its status due to the ongoing dispute with the Palestinians and other Arab countries. Therefore, most countries maintain their embassies in the city of Tel Aviv ("Israel," 2012).

<sup>4</sup> At the end of 2010 the population of Jerusalem was estimated at 789,000 (Choshen & Korach, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Of course other general conceptions of citizenship and of civic education also exist. For more on this see: Cohen (2010).

<sup>6</sup> A popular Israeli music style that is mainly influenced by Middle Eastern music.

