

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEACHERS OF SECULAR PUBLIC EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS PUBLIC EDUCATION PERTAINING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTEGRATED EDUCATION TREND IN ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify possible differences between teachers of secular public education (PE) and religious public education (RPE) regarding their attitudes towards the establishment of the "Integrated Education Trend" in Israel.

In 15.7.08, the law pertaining to the "Integrated Education Trend" was accepted by the Israeli parliament (The Knesset). In accordance with the law, the "Integrated Education Trend" aimed at developing a curricula combined both of Jewish Scriptures and Israelite heritage with secular studies. The very law intended to meet both the requirements of the secular as well as religious populations.

The research findings, drawn from a quantitative questionnaire ($\alpha = .91$), revealed that teachers of the religious education significantly held greater defiance to the law of integrated education than teachers of the secular education. It was found that the attitudes of teachers of the religious education were both more conservative and more sceptical than teachers of the secular education.

Expressions of scepticism by the teachers of the religious education were explained by their fear that the new trend might become a centre of attraction to religious pupils who had been, previously, their devoted clients. On the other hand, expressions of conservatism by the teachers of the religious education were explained by their difficulties to modify their conservative traditional view of Judaism and to settle by a crossbreed of educational trend.

KEYWORDS: Secular Public Education, Religious Public Education, Integrated Education Trend, Conservatism

INTRODUCTION

Public Education Law of 1953 was designed to separate education from its political connections. Thus, it served as a legislative basis for the two-track division in public education, which bequeathed equal status to both secular and religious education. The law determined that "public education" is defined as state-provided education in accordance with a curriculum determined by this law, not affiliated with any political body, ethnic group, or any another non-governmental organization, and which is under the supervision of the minister of education or his or her designee. "Religious public education" (RPE) is defined as "public education whose institutions, programs of study, teachers, and supervisors adhere to a religious way of life." In the spirit of the law, the purpose of RPE is to serve the public interested in religious education, in all its nuances, in accordance with the public's political party affiliations, as well as its religious expectations (Book of Law, 131, 1953).

The Public Education Law and its regulations provided RPE with autonomous authority, and the RE department was established in the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture. The writings of RPE researchers (Schwartzold, 1990)

have revealed that while RPE is an integral part of public education (PE), its all-encompassing perception in the religious sector defines it as everything, and not as an addition to general studies as it is viewed in general education (PE). In their opinion, RPE should be viewed as a body aspiring to impart a religious perspective to its pupils in every life aspect—personal, social, national, and an education for life of Torah and good deeds.

PUBLIC AND RELIGIOUS PUBLIC EDUCATION: SEMANTIC DIFFERENCES

According to Brin (1977), the new Western public school is secular. The word secular comes from the Latin root *saecularis*, which means “connected to an era or generation.” Another interpretation is “national and material as opposed to religious and spiritual” (Oxford Dictionary, 1974).

The Hebrew words *hol* (secular) and *hiloni* (secular individual) remind Brin of the Arabic term *halal*, which means to untie a knot. Following, this concept, Brin argues that secularism should be viewed as “breaking the connections to the past and tradition.” This school of thought emphasizes the openness and absence of connections (Brin, 1997, p. 120).

Nevertheless, those who are labeled as “secular” have become more and more dissociated from the unflattering connotations and associations of the concepts of *hol* and *halal*, which have been linked to them. In the researchers’ view, these secular individuals do not enter the education system empty-handed, but rather with many alternative values; this also explains why the terms “public” or “humanistic” school are preferred over “secular” school.

The concept “religion” bears two essential meanings: one taken from the Latin root *religio*, whose meaning is connection wishes to the spiritual and ethical dimension of our lives, and the second, which is derived from the verb *relegere*, whose meaning is to ponder or deliberate over elementary questions. Within the definition *religiosi*, Brin formulates three overall aims for RE in Israel, which differentiates it from secular education:

- One should feel that he belongs to his people as well as to all humanity.
- One is obligated to rise above materialism, to be aware of the meaning of metaphysics, and to recognize that there is a positive force which has created the world and serves as its leader.
- The Israelite should derive his faith from the intellectual properties of his people, from the past and the present, and see that this faith will contribute to and advance the world.

In the practical realm, Brin differentiates between the religious public education (RPE) pupil, and general (secular) public education (PE) pupil; In his opinion, the secular pupil lacks vertical identification with his forefathers and his heritage, and he also lacks horizontal identification with the Jewish world Diaspora. Brin further indicates that the secular pupil is frequently drawn to materialistic achievements and does not pose questions about the meaning of life. Moreover, Brin claims that “in the eyes of this [secular] youth, stable values do not exist and there are no compulsory norms” (ibid, p. 123).

The General Public Education and Religious Public Education – Diachronic Outlook

RPE is considered the successor of the “Mizrahi” educational movement, as authorized by the Zionist administration in 1920. This movement represented, first and foremost, the perception of the population that views education as necessarily based upon Torah and good deeds; Yet, without such traditional educational patterns as the *Heder* (religious schoolroom) or the “Talmud Torah” (religious elementary school).

Mizrahi's activists requested that the school be instilled with a god-fearing spirit and that part of its curriculum be determined in accordance with the tradition of Jewish education alongside secular studies (Lamm, 1978). It is important to

note that the Mizrahi and Poel ha-Mizrahi political parties that cooperated in establishing and maintaining this movement were divided on most of social issues, including issues of Zionist policy. Even nowadays, one could argue that there is deliberation over the character RPE bears. Religious extremist trends can attest to this, for example, the separation of boys and girls, girls singing in school choirs, as well as the existing internal debate on the current political issues.

While RPE is to a great extent the continuation of the Mizrahi movement, the general public education (PE) mainly implements the ideology of the "General movement" on the subject of "national unity."

The followers of the General movement viewed this movement's school system as the education system for all, based upon national general characteristics in accordance with the common denominator with all societal structures, groups, and classes that have come into being in the Land of Israel. The first General educational movement established in 1913, following the "war of languages" (another aspect of the desire for uniformity), was in fact a branch of the central civilian parties (the General Zionist parties throughout their development) and of the Right parties (the Revisionist parties). This movement laid the foundations for the Hebrew modern school, beginning with the formation of the educational perception via teaching methods, and ending with the curriculum, which expressed a revival of nationality as well as cultural renaissance. The school was perceived as "the house of creation of the national soul" wherein the awareness of status was considered national betrayal, and the claim for autonomy of social groups considered the uprooting of national culture and heritage (Lamm, 1978).

While the Law of Public Education did not define unique values for RPE, these values are in fact, articulated in the religious education authority documents on educational goals, in introductory educational programs and subjects of instruction. They are also included within research literature pointing to the differences between the existing values of public education and RPE (Peled, 1978; Schwarzwald, 1990).

The religious education system is based on three main principles (Dagan, Loebel, Greenboim, 1992; Kiel, 1977)

- **Religious Education:** A traditional, Jewish religious education that includes teaching belief in God and the performance of commandments, the advanced study of sacred texts and Jewish scriptures maintaining the good deeds in daily life and likewise shape the pupil's religious behaviour and lifestyle according to the *a* Jewish law (*Malachi*).
- **Modern Education:** Teaching the basic skills pupils will need to function as citizens and conduct constructive lives as required of all members of a modern society in general, and a secular, democratic state in particular. Therefore, the RPE system has created a mandatory curriculum that incorporates secular contents and subject matter (math, physics, English, etc.) that will enable its pupils to pass the national matriculation examinations and allow them, upon completion of their education, to either continue with their studies or find a job that will permit them to support themselves and contribute to society.
- **Nationalist Education:** Education with a Zionist perspective, in order to preserve the unity of all sectors of the Jewish people (both secular and religious, as well as Jews living in the Diaspora), to intensify their feeling of identification with and contribution towards the Land of Israel (which is perceived as a territory with religious significance), and to reinforce their sense of loyalty and belonging to the State of Israel and its laws. RE promotes the commandment to settle the Land of Israel. This section asserts that "the holiness of the Land of Israel and the commandment to settle the land occupy a central part in the RPE perspective" (Dagan, et al, p. 11). There is even a call to instruct about the linkage of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, to educate towards one's right and obligation towards the land, and to encourage personal fulfillment in settling the land. RE endorses contributing to

the homeland through army service in elite military units. Furthermore, the SRE system requires identification with the state on national holidays, such as Independence Day and Jerusalem Day (in contrast with the ultra-Orthodox sectors which do not celebrate these special holidays). The ideal graduate of the SRE school system is one whose every activity in the private and public spheres is the result of a perspective based on intensive Jewish study, which is then translated into behaviour and lifestyle in accordance with Jewish law, on the one hand, while becoming integrated into the modern way of life and applying the general secular knowledge, on the other hand.

THE LAW PERTAINING TO THE INTEGRATED PUBLIC EDUCATION

In 15.7.08, the law pertaining to the "Integrated Education Trend" was accepted by the Israeli parliament (The Knesset). In accordance with the law, the "Integrated Education Trend" aimed at developing a curricula combined both of Jewish Scriptures and Israelite heritage with secular studies. The very law intended to meet both the requirements of the secular as well as religious populations. The law also specifies that each school which will join the new trend will receive a special funding determined by the minister of education.

The law advocates that at least 75% of the parents should agree before a school becomes "Integrated". Nevertheless, if the school is the only one at the entire dwelling place, 90% of parent's agreement is needed (458 protocol of the education committee, Knesset, 2008). During 2009-10, 9 schools joined the new trend. .

To a great extent, the suggestion to include a core curriculum in the various educational trends (Circular No. 3.1-22, of the general management of education, September 1st, 2003) was the first harbinger to bridge the value differentiation between the two educational trends.

In addition to the justifications arising from the development of knowledge, the declaration of the core curriculum also lists the justifications stemming from the need to establish a basis of common educational values: "Throughout the years since the state's establishment, the society has changed from one of social solidarity and care for the collective welfare... to a society of many sectors, sophisticated and individualistic, in which the collective values have almost completely disappeared, and wherein individual welfare is characteristic in today's Israeli society, to the detriment of collective solidarity. These developments led to the recognition of the necessity to formulate a common educational and cultural foundation, in which there are common elements of education and values for the general Israeli society through a basic compulsory program" (Circular of the general manager of Education, September 1st, 2003).

The purpose of this study has been to identify possible differences between teachers of public education (PE) and religious public education (RPE) regarding their attitudes towards the establishment of the integrated education in Israel. The population research included

Tools: A quantitative questionnaire ($\alpha = .91$) comprised of 18 statements concerning the subject's attitude towards the integrated trend. Factor analysis procedure revealed 3 factors: Scepticism, Conservatism and Avoidance.

Scepticism has been defined as doubting the sustainability of a particular claim, theory, etc.

Conservatism has been defined as the tendency to maintain the status quo.

Avoidance has been defined as the unwillingness to be a part of something or participate in something.

Scepticism (explained 38% of the variance). Demonstrative statements: The new trend will advance only the status of politicians; The new trend will not bridge the ideological polarisation/

Conservatism (explained 30% of the variance). Demonstrative statements: The new trend might expose my children to undesirable contents.

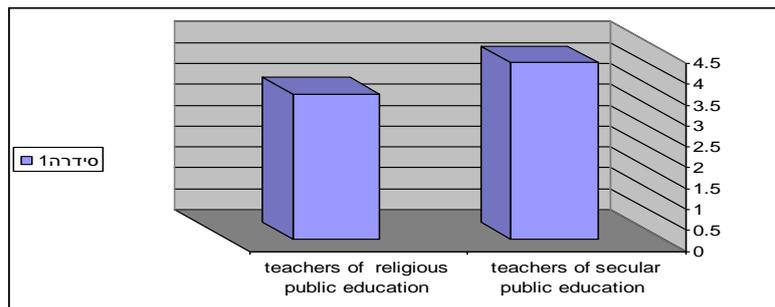
Avoidance (explained 11% of the variance). Demonstrative statements: teaching in the new trend will demand more efforts which I cannot afford.

The qualitative tool included one open question as follows: In case you would be asked to teach in the integrated trend, would you agree? Please explain!

Findings

Table 1: The Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' General Positive Attitudes Pertaining to the Integrated Education (T-Tests)

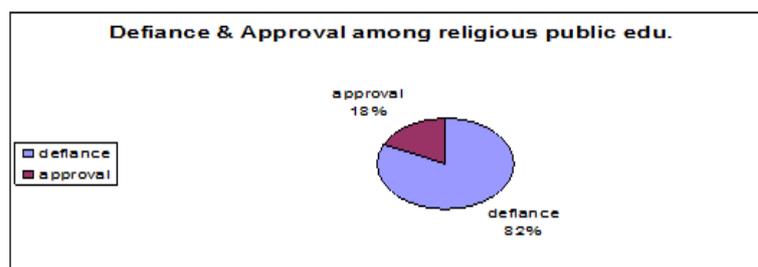
	Mean Teachers of GPE	Mean Teachers of RPE	T-Value	DF	Significance	No. Teachers of SPE	No. Teachers of RPE	S.D GPE	S.D RPE
teachers' general positive attitudes pertaining to the integrated education.	4.217	3.476	3.245	58	0.002	30	30	0.726	1.02



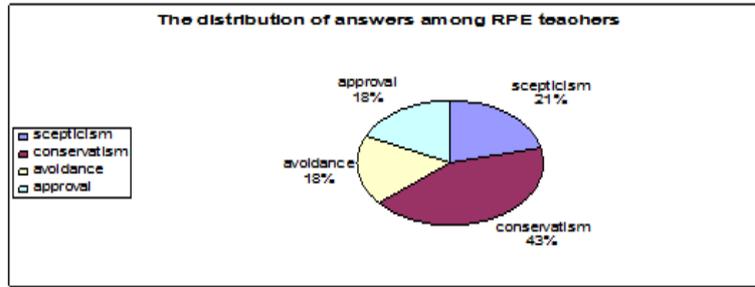
Graph 1: The Means of General Attitudes Pertaining to the Integrated Education of Teachers of Secular Public Education and Religious Public Education

It was found that teachers of the general secular education significantly ($P=0.002/2=0.001<0.05$) held greater positive attitude to the law of integrated education than teachers of the general secular education. The findings also revealed that teachers of the religious education significantly held greater defiance to the law of integrated education than teachers of the general secular education due to stands of conservatism ($P=0.00/2=0.00<0.05$) and scepticism ($P=0.07/2=0.035<0.05$). Nevertheless, no significant difference was found between the trends due to the avoidance factor ($P=0.447/2=0.22>0.05$).

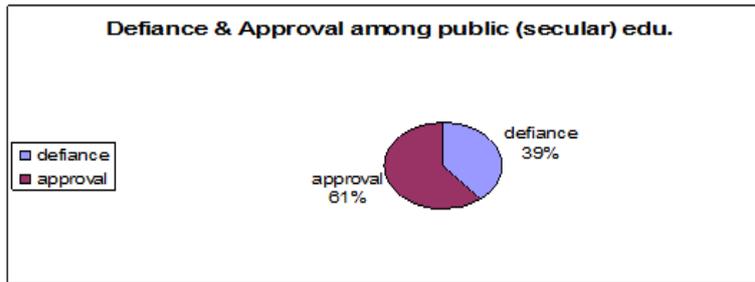
The Qualitative Findings Support the Quantitative Ones



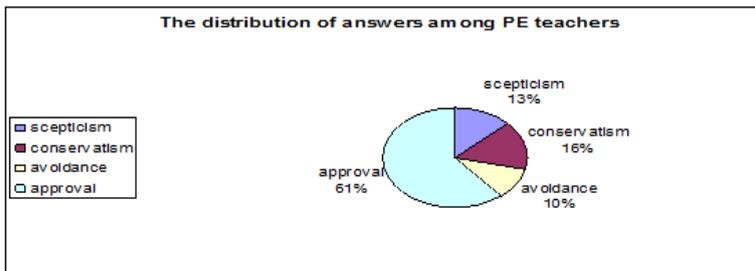
Graph 2: Defiance and Approval among Teachers of Religious Public Education



Graph 3: The Distribution of Answers among Teachers of Religious Public Education



Graph 4: Defiance & Approval among Teachers of General Public Education



Graph 5: The Distribution of Answers among Teachers of General Public Education

The difference between the PE & RPE teachers concerning defiance due to conservatism was manifested not only by frequencies alone but also by the intensity of the answers. Whereas the PE teachers expressed mild sayings as "I don't feel connected to this trend" and "I am not interested", the RPE teachers used acute reasons as "This is a new as well as dangerous way" and "I am comfortable with my own kind".

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The research findings, drawn from the quantitative as well as the qualitative questionnaires revealed that teachers of the religious education significantly held greater defiance to the law of integrated education than teachers of the general education. It was found that the stance of the teachers of the religious education was a slightly more sceptical yet significantly more conservative than teachers of the secular education.

It looks as if the need for the enhancement of programs of Judaism largely exists among the PE. Studies conducted in the 1990s show that about half of the population wants their children to have an education that combines Jewish tradition with genuine openness to the modern, democratic world (Zameret, 1998).

In 1991 Minister of Education and Culture Zevulun Hammer appointed a commission headed by the rector of the University of Haifa, Prof. Aliza Shenhar, to re-examine the issue of education for Jewish and traditional values in secular schools (commissions to examine the issue in State-Religious and ultra-Orthodox schools have not yet been formed). The committee submitted its recommendations in 1994; they were endorsed by Minister of Education and Culture Amnon Rubinstein and the government and became the official policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The Shenhar Commission recommended increasing Jewish education in the secular schools and called for encouraging schools belonging to the Tali network (a Hebrew acronym for "reinforcement of Jewish studies"), joint secular-religious schools. The commission also proposed the establishment of special centers to train teachers and offer in-service courses. Nevertheless, these recommendations have been implemented only partially mainly due to the harsh criticism voiced by secular circles when the Minister of Education and Culture Zevulun Hammer, the leader of the National Religious Party, who regained his office due to elections, stated his intention to set up a "values administration" in his ministry (Zameret, 1998).

Expressions of **scepticism** by the teachers of the religious education were explained by their fear that the new trend might become a centre of attraction to religious pupils who had been, previously, their devoted clients. Their scepticism may be explained by their disbelief that the new trend and their own (RPE) can actually co-exist side by side.

On the other hand, expressions of **conservatism** by the teachers of the religious education were explained by their difficulties to modify their total traditionalistic view of Judaism and their reluctances to violet their commitment to the old school of Jewish education, in practice. This commitment led them to decline "crossbreed of educational trend" which pretend to substitute the original education.

According to the quantitative results, both educational trends revealed similar level (intermediate) of **avoidance**, namely, unwillingness to take part in the formation of the Integrated Education Trend or participate in it. It seems as if the excessive reforms have exhausted parts of the Israeli teachers who seek professional stability. According to the qualitative results, the situation is worse among the RPE teachers (twice as much).

Studies (Darby, 2008) showed that success of educational reforms indeed demands primarily the emotional engagement and high motivation of teachers; Organizational as well as curricular factors proved to have less impact than the human factors. An early model of organizational change developed by Kurt Lewin (1947), described change as a three-stage process. The first stage he called "unfreezing". It involved overcoming inertia and dismantling the existing "mind set". Defence mechanisms have to be bypassed. Only then the second stage which is the implementation of the very change and the third and final stage, the crystallization of the change, may occur.

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