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DIFFICULTIES OF STUDENTS FROM THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY WHO LEARN IN AN ARAB HIGH SCHOOL IN ISRAEL

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Difficulties of Students from the Palestinian Authority who Learn in an Arab High School in Israel

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Abstract

The aim of research is to investigate high school students who have moved to Israel from the Palestinian Authority in order to study. We used qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews. The research participants of this study were students and teachers affiliated with a high school in the North of Israel. The paper discusses those students' experiences of identity crisis between their self-identity and their national identity. The paper also voices the students' feelings of alienation and disconnection to their school community, leading to gaps in the academic, social, and familial difficulties. This study shows that these difficulties lead to a conflict of identity between their original identity – the Palestinian Authority – and their new identity as students in an Arab school in Israel. This situation might lead to feelings of disconnection and alienation, that must be addressed by the entire school community.

Keywords: self-identity, national identity, sense of belonging, sense of alienation, adjustment problems.

Introduction

This paper deals with high school students born to Palestinian families whose families moved to a city in the North of Israel, and are considered as "traitors" by the Arab people living in the Palestinian Authority and those living in the State of Israel. These children find it very difficult to explain to everyone what their real origin is, and they live in a kind of conflict among themselves. This paper is part of a doctoral thesis the title of which is: "Integration of Palestinian High School Students in a Large City in the North of Israel: Aspects of Identity". The paper aims to answer the following research questions What is the impact of an interaction

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with a learning environment that encompasses Israeli-Arabs, on the self-identity, and national identity of Arab high school students from the Palestinian Authority?

Literature Review

The students under this investigation were born in the Palestinian authority, and with their parents came to study in Israel. In the eyes of the Palestinians, they are "traitors", because their parents "worked for the State of Israel", and that is why they have come to live in Israel.

I am teaching in the "Sheizaf" Almotnaby school that is considered the only municipal high school in Haifa who has to admit any student who enrolls to school. That is why most of the students who came from the Palestinian Authority territories learn in this school. It is noteworthy that the other private high schools refuse to admit those students. Today, the school serves as an educational home for varied students, characterized by different abilities and needs. Thus, the school management and staff are faced with a complex challenge of accommodating for the students at school.

Consequently, the integration of these students leads at the age of adolescence to conflicts of control and territory. According to Erikson (1968), at this age, adolescents are preoccupied with themselves, the changes in their body, their place in society, the way they look, development of areas of interest, to which is added the need for privacy. As teachers of adolescents, we frequently feel that the relationship with them is like a defeating and frustrating battlefield. We try reaching out to the students in any way possible. On the one hand, we try acting as an anchor during the period of adolescence that is filled with changes and difficulties, while on the other hand, we are pushed away time after time. Coping with the conflicts of adolescence and with the adolescents themselves is far from simple. Adolescence is the age at which the youths face one of the important tasks of the development process – shaping of their identity – side by side with external, hormonal, physiological, emotional, psychological and cognitive changes. Adolescents should manage to process by themselves all the emotions and changes, attempting to consolidate a stable and strong personality in order to be able to deal with the requirements of the world and with the obstacles of life. This is even more important when dealing with cultural and environmental changes, as our Palestinian Authority students had undergone. Conflicts during adolescence arise because these boys and girls want to develop an individual identity and independent way of conduct, an entity that is separate from their parents. Hence, they feel they have to rebel[3].

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[3]   https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/MadaTech/Megamat_hinuh/tohniot_ limudim/psicology/tohnit_limudim_tashav.pdf/8/8/2021

Self-identity

Identity is an entirety of components by means of which people define themselves. There are two types of components. The first are components of identity that belong to individuals since birth, such as gender, ethnic group, and skin color. These are affiliated components that cannot be changed. The second type includes acquired components that can be changed, e.g., profession, religion, and citizenship. Every individual chooses to underscore other components in his or her identity. Some emphasize only one component in their identity. For example, the professional component: A Jordanian doctor who presents himself only as a doctor. Others emphasize additional components in their identity, for example, the religious component: The Bosnian Muslim or the American Jew who emphasize the national or Jewish-religious component of their identity in addition to the American civil component. These examples illustrate that people define their identity by choosing those components that are important to them. This indicates that the definition of identity is subjective (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Erikson (1968) defined self-identity as the individuals' inner feeling of knowing themselves, their way and future goals. These basic feelings consist of a personality nucleus (i.e., characteristics, wishes, desires, talents) that does not change. This nucleus maintains the individuals' experiential continuum that transcends situations and times. Erikson (1968) defined identity as the collection of identities that the developing personality organizes on the one hand, and on the other hand, it reorganizes and orients them. The combination that occurs in the self-identity is more than the sum of its parts. This is an accumulated attempt of the self to integrate all the identities with the forms of expertise that have been developed from one's innate gifts with the options that the social functions offer. The feeling of self-identity is the confidence that the images and inner continuity match the images and continuity of the individuals' meaning about others.

National identity

The national identity of the Israeli citizens constitutes a component of identity that determines the individuals' sense of belonging to their people in the cultural-ethnic sense. This is based on a common ethnic origin, common territory, tradition, culture, language and history that are common to all members of their people, their common symbols and values, as well as the sense of connection, identification and mutuality between them. The citizens of a state usually have a national identity (in the cultural-ethnic sense) that is not common to all the citizens. This identity unites members of the same national group who live in the state, distinguishing them from members of other national groups. In Israel there are three main national identities: Jewish, Arab, and Palestinian, as well as another identity that is not national but rather cultural-ethnic – the Druze. There is also another identity - national Jewish that is common to the majority national group of the citizens

of Israel. It emphasizes the tradition, history, and culture of the Jewish people, together with a strong sense of solidarity towards members of the Jewish people in Israel and abroad. Some Jews have a strong national affinity and they want to be in contact with the world of Jewry, whereas others feel less affinity to their Jewish-national identity, and more affinity to their Israeli-civil identity. Unlike the great majority who feels a meaningful affinity to the Jewish people, there are few who prefer an Israeli identity to their cultural-ethnic national identity. For example, the post-Zionists (implying verbally after the period of Zionism) who challenge the relevance of the national component in their identity. They believe that the Jewish nationality has ended its historical role and has lost its legitimacy due to acts of injustice perpetrated towards Arabs and Sephardi Jews. The post-Zionists do not attribute actual importance to the conservation of the contact with the world Jewry and maintain that in Israel a new people has been created: the Israeli people. Other Jews identify themselves as anti-Zionists, like *Neturei Karta* (Guardians of the Walls), who highlight their religious-national identity and object to the existence of the country as a nation-state (Al-Asmar, 1937; Shimoni, 1947).

Conflict between identities

Hoffman (1972) and Tessler (1977) adopted the model conceived by Miller, a model that distinguishes between two identities: public and personal. The public identity implies the way individuals are perceived by others, as well as the entirety of their positions towards selected aspects of the self. On the other hand, the personal identity is the way individuals perceive themselves and the entirety of their positions towards selected aspects of their own self (Miller, 1963). These researchers discussed self-identity of the Arab minority members in Israel as a set of positions people have about their social self and included the self-esteem, as well as the national, civil, religious, familial, professional and local identity. The public and personal identity in their model constitutes a comprehensive structure of the individuals' positions about the self (self-esteem) and about membership in different groups. Investigation of the identity of the Arab minority in Israel focused on the Israeli-civil and Palestinian-national identity, and the relationship between them (Hoffman, 1982). The research model designed by Hoffman et al. (1982) was called the Conflict Model. It was based on the fundamental assumption that members of the Arab minority lived under a prolonged psychological pressure, that their identity encompassed two components: Israeli-civil and national (Palestinian or Arab) and that the two components are in a conflict as far as their essence is concerned. Hoffman (1970, 1972, 1974, 1982) argued that members of the minority internalized an Israeli identity that is the outcome of their identification with the State of Israel. According to Hoffman, the social identity of the Arab minority members in Israel is a factor that mediates the relationships between them and the Jewish majority. Consequently, they demonstrate a willingness to establish social relationships with the Jewish majority that is greater than the willingness of the

Jews to establish social relationships with them. Hoffman defined this willingness as Israelization of the Arab minority members. The Israeli-Arab conflict affects the minority members who weigh every social or political issue according to "what does it mean to them as members of the minority group". The socio-political situations of the conflict create psychological situations in which the identity of the Arab minority is undermined, increasing the tension and conflict between the two identities – the Israeli-civil and Palestinian-national. According to Hoffman (1982) and Hoffman and Rouhana (1976), members of the Arab minority are aware of the conflict in their identity. Consequently, they have always maintained a balance between the two contradicting trends. This is also argued by Gabai (1984).

People are born into a group of affiliation. They learn to identify and define themselves according to this group. Every group has its norms, worldviews, as well as accepted and unaccepted behaviors. These elements are frequently transferred to the group members in an unconscious way. When we conduct a discourse between people who belong to different groups, people should be familiar with the identity of their group of affiliation and its effects on them. Moreover, it is important to know the identity of the other groups and its effects on their members. This process of getting acquainted can raise the awareness of the group of affiliation components, its effects on the group members, and the ways by which these effects function. This process reinforces and enriches the identity, enables the choice of preferred components and effects, and reject those that are not desirable. The assumption is that each group has sub-groups that represent different positions, different background, different cultures and genders. Hence, it is recommended applying this also in a group that seems homogeneous. Being acquainted with the unique group component of our identity facilitates a discourse with members of other groups and understanding of their unique components (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Sense of belonging

The Adlerian theory advocates that people are social creatures and, therefore, all their actions are motivated by the need to feel they belong. The sense of belonging is a basic need of all people, an existential, emotional, and mental need. The need to belong is manifested by the aspiration to feel part of the three life circles: family circle, society circle, and work circle. People have a basic need to belong and they all choose the strategy that is suitable for them in order to actualize this sense. This need is never satisfied and it motivates people to act. The sense of belonging of young children start by doing. Adler views people as one holistic and undividable entity. He argues that even before the physical needs, the basic need is to have a sense belonging. Adler maintained that people's behavior is purposeful and the arch-goal is the sense of belonging. The need not only to belong but the need to have a sense of belonging is the issue that comes up at every stage since birth and until adulthood, in all life tasks (work, love, and friendship). Goodenow and

Grady (1993) define a sense of belonging as the students' extent of the personal feeling of being accepted, respected, contained and supported by the school social environment (Ma, 2003). Students' sense of belonging or not belonging to school has social implications, up to tragedies of violent incidents at school. Many studies have shown the positive, even crucial impact of the sense of belonging to school. Thus, for example, the results of a case study conducted by Fine (1991) showed that the sense of belonging had a direct impact on students' dropout from high school.

Sense of alienation

Alienation manifests a sense of non-belonging and a perception of undesirable contact vis-à-vis others. The sense of belonging is the opposite of alienation and it encompasses sharing and collaboration that stem from the integration of individuals in social unions. In fact, it is psycho-social and extends to social and cultural phenomena (Johnson, 1973, in Benolul, 2013). A difficulty in the internalization of parent figures and their values is due to the parents' inability to act as optimal figures of identification. A home that fails in its role, and an environment that does not encourage, and even rejects acceptable norms and values, are the conditions under which abandoned and alienated youths grow up. Being in such frameworks that transmit low expectations, low motivation, and limited future perception, leads to a problematic and non-normative behavior, that evokes a sense of alienation (Lahav, 1999, in Benolul, 2013). Many at-risk youths have been experienced rejection and varied negative reactions from the environment regarding their behavior. These experiences developed a negative self-image and the fixation of non-adjusting behavioral patterns, that are survivors by nature and preserving themselves. These patterns greatly limit the wish and motivation to introduce a change and implement it. Alienated youths believe that the world is made of one piece, and it focuses on the environments where they live and on their peer group (Wozner, 1989, in Benolul, 2013). Studies of relationships among members of peer groups showed a relationship between the existence of supportive members and a positive self-perception, sense of belonging, and positive perception of successful future interpersonal relations of youths (Hartup, 1993, in Benolul, 2013). Members can shape the life patterns of their peers and can help them in the adoption of health-promoting behaviors (Connolly & Konarski, 1994; Shulman, 1993, *apud.* Benolul, 2013)

Adjustment difficulties

In his socio-psychological theory, Erikson (1968) discusses eight stages that people undergo from childhood until old age. At each stage, people face a conflict between their individual needs and those of society. A successful solution of the crisis equips people with instruments for successfully coping with the conflict at the next stage. Conversely, an unsuccessful coping might cause harm to one's

self-confidence, increase in the level of anxiety, and self-criticism and, hence, difficulties in coping with the next developmental stages.

Researchers, sociologists, and other social psychologists built the Adjustment Model. Smooha (1998) is considered the main representative of this model that it is sometimes attributed to him in the empirical literature. These researchers (Peres & Yuval-Davis, 1968; Zak, 1976) have also embraced the model conceived by Miller (1963) and engaged in the multiple identities of members of the Arab minority in Israel. However, they did not view the identities as a sequence but rather as distinct variables. They focused on the level of prominence of each identity, the relationship between the identities, and the order of their importance. Like Hoffman, they too explored the Israeli-civil and Palestinian-national identity. However, unlike him, they did not assume that the identities were necessarily in a conflict. They argued that the two identities were distinct from one another. Peres and Yuval-Davis maintained that the two identities were cut off from each other in the sense of non-dependence, whereas Smooha emphasized the inter-dependence between them. He believed that the relationship between the two identities was fluid and there was no final consolidation of these two identities. Hence, Smooha suggested that when the issue of identity was discussed, we had to ask about the relative dosage and extent of reasonable balance between these two components. He argues that there is no conscious relationship between the dynamics of the two components, and when one of them becomes stronger, that does not mean that the other one has grown necessarily weaker, although is exists in certain groups and at certain periods. Smooha (1989) adds that members of the Arab minority in Israel undergo two processes that are parallel and develop simultaneously side-by-side: Palestinization that started after the six-day war of 1967, and Israelization. Smooha indicates the formation of a new identity for the Palestinians in Israel, namely "A Palestinian in Israel", or "An Israeli-Palestinian". This identity is integrated and combines the two components – the Israeli and the Palestinian. According to Smooha (1984), the Israeli component is more prominent than the Palestinian one.

Methodology

Qualitative research

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, because it derives information from a narrow but deep population that is strongly related to the issues under study. This implies that the qualitative research methods aim to attain deep understanding of human behavior and the reasons for this behavior. Unlike quantitative research, the qualitative research does not require a large amount of latitudinal data, rather a relatively limited but maximally detailed amount of data at high resolution. The data collection in qualitative research focuses on a small group or on individuals. Usually, the researchers present to the group or

the individuals a certain issue or directed questions about the research topic. However, the researchers give the participants an extensive stage for the purpose of expressing their opinion and encourage them to provide in-depth explanations that might shed more light on the research topic (Shkedi, 2011). The research participants of this study were students and teachers affiliated with a high school in the North of Israel.

Subjects

Table 1. Subjects' profile

Subject	Gender	Age	Status
S1	F	40	Teacher
S2	F	17	Student
S3	M	16	Student
S4	M	16	Student
S5	F	30	Teacher
S6	F	16	Student
S7	M	15	Student
S8	M	15	Student
S9	M	17	Student
S10	M	40	Teacher

Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview has been chosen, because it is a conversation, in which interviewers ask the interviewees questions with the purpose of collecting data, while documenting the answers. The interview was conducted face-to-face. All the participants agreed to provide data and signed an informed consent form (Shkedi, 2021).

Content Analysis

Content analysis was used in order to analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Shkedi (2011) explained that content analysis is a research technique that aims to accurately describe data and generalize insights from them to their wider context. The data were analyzed by looking for recurrent phrases and words that were linked to the research aim and question. The content analysis yielded four categories that are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Categories obtained from the content analysis

Categories	Category 1: Conflict between identities	Category 2: Sense of belonging	Category 3: Sense of alienation	Category 4: Adjustment difficulties
Sample evidence	I was born in Jerusalem, my father was born in Jordan, and my mother was born in Jerusalem	"I like the school. This is the only place where I can chill out and feel at ease"	The move to Haifa was at first very difficult for me and it took me several months to get accustomed	At first, I did not like the transition because I was very close to my friends and this disconnection was very hard for me

Results

Findings Obtained from Research Question No. 1: What Issues Are Involved in the Interaction between the Palestinian Students and the Israeli-Arab Students at school? The content analysis of the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the students from the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli-Arab students and the teachers at the integrating school, gave rise to the following categories.

Category 1: Conflict between identities

The content analysis illustrated that the students from the Palestinian Authority experienced a conflict between identities, indicating several sources of this conflict. One source was their place of birth that was different from that of their parents:

"I was born in Jerusalem, my father was born in Jordan, and my mother was born in Jerusalem" (S2, F, 17).

"There are students who insult us about the way we have come here, the fact that we do not have an Israeli identity card. They also talk among themselves, saying that we are traitors" (S3, M, 16).

This internal conflict made it difficult for the students to understand their self-identity and the group to which they belonged.

As for the Israeli-Arab students, the content analysis indicated additional sources of the conflict between identities. For example:

"I am a Palestinian Israeli" (S4, M, 16)

"I cannot forget the roots and the love for the land" (S4, M, 16).

There were students who, although they liked sport and reached high places in competitions, stopped and did not want to continue competing because it was difficult for them to be represented as Israelis, particularly with the national anthem that they did not know and did not feel they belonged to it.

It was interesting to see the teachers' opinions about the category of conflict between identities:

"When I am explaining about a national topic, e.g., about a local poet like Mahmud Darwish, they I feel that they become united… like when there is some tension between two student groups (fights / threats / hot arguments)" (S5, F, 30).

There were other teachers who felt there were additional types of conflict between the students regarding the issue of identity:

"They would like to go back because they feel they belong more, but do not want to go back because life is better for them here" (S5, F, 30).

"They would choose a place with only Arabs from Jerusalem and in the same city that is theirs because they feel close to everything, both mentally, politically, and religiously" (S10, M, 40).

To sum up, the conflict between identities constituted a key issue in the interaction of the students from the Palestinian Authority with the Israeli-Arab students at the school where they were learning.

Category 2.2: Sense of belonging

The data analysis indicated that the students from the Palestinian Authority felt they did not belong to the place where they were now:

"My father told me, explain to them that you come from Jerusalem, you are an Israeli with a blue [Israeli] identity card. Life there is better because we have houses and properties. I feel that I belong there more, because all my family and my friends are there" (S6, F, 16).

The data analysis showed that, although many students felt did not belong, they had a comfortable life and preferred staying here because they had no other place to relax (since the parents did not allow them to go out alone after school and everything was forbidden).

"I like the school. This is the only place where I can chill out and feel at ease" (S7, M,15).

On the other hand, some students felt they belonged:

"I feel very good in this school" (S8, M,16).

"I feel that I belong to this school. The attitude of the school is very positive and I don't feel the difference" (S3, F, 15).

Regarding the Israeli-Arab students, the content analysis indicated that their sense of belonging was stronger:

"We don't have another place for living and in spite of all the discriminations, it is preferable staying here")S4, M, 16)

"I am not going to look for another place to live, except in Haifa" (S8. M, 16)

"I was born in Israel and I will remain in Haifa all my life" (S9, M, 17).

As to the teachers' opinions about the sense of belonging theory:

"The students that came from Jerusalem try to belong but sometimes they fail because they are rejected by other students" (S3, F, 15)

Other teachers mentioned:

"They are looking for a common discourse with the teacher and the other students in order to find something common that will evoke a sense of belonging" (S7, F, 50)

"The difference between the two worlds helped them in appreciating the new life and the new places" (S1, M, 40).

"Everyone learns about the other, leading to a connection that is difficult to disconnect because of the created chemistry that they would find it hard to give up" (S7, F, 50).

To sum up, the sense of belonging issue was illustrated as an important component of the interaction between students from the Palestinian Authority and the Israel-Arab students at a school in Israel.

Category 3.3: Sense of alienation

The content analysis illustrated that the sense of alienation was more prominent among the students from the Palestinian Authority than that of the Arab students who had been born in Israel:

"At first, I did not like the city of Haifa and it was difficult for me to be integrated because I love Jerusalem more. Until I feel that way, every weekend or vacation I go to Jerusalem" (S8, M, 16).

"The move to Haifa was at first very difficult for me and it took me several months to get accustomed. At the beginning I had only one friend who had also come to Haifa from the same school in which I had learned (when we come to a new place, we look for similar things that we had so that it is easier to be integrated)" (S9, M, 17).

Regarding the sense of alienation category, the teachers stated that the students' feeling was obvious and they did not like to join many of the school activities:

"If I had to choose another place except for Haifa, I would go back to Jerusalem in order to study" (S9, M, 17).

"It takes them more time to be prominent in certain areas, to break the boundaries of the social distancing and the shame" (S4, F, 40).

"This is manifested when school organizes social activities, such as parties, birthdays and activities in the schoolyard, or when they go on trips outside the school (they start doing that at least on the second trip)… Many of them are not really connected, the connection is temporary or on the background of a joint camp… whether it is a sense of belonging to the place or negative leadership" (S6, F, 52).

To sum up, the sense of alienation is mentioned as a key issue in the interaction between students from the Palestinian Authority and Israeli-Arab students at a school in Israel.

Category 4: Adjustment difficulties

The content analysis indicated that the students from the Palestinian Authority that experienced adjustment difficulties, got more connected to the students that came from the same place:

"I have a friend in my class who came from the same school in which I have learned in Jerusalem (S9, M, 17).

"At first, I did not like the transition because I was very close to my friends and this disconnection was very hard for me" (S7, M, 15).

As for the Israeli-Arab students, the content analysis showed that these students did not encounter any adjustment difficulties:

"I did not feel any adjustment difficulties at school" (S1, M, 16).

The content analysis demonstrated the teachers' opinions about the category of adjustment difficulties:

"At first, the students from Jerusalem did not feel they belonged to the place" (S5, F. 30).

"At the beginning of their way at school, it was quite easy to notice these were students from a region outside Haifa. This was manifested by their accent and body language that transmitted lack of self-confidence" (S1, M, 40).

"No one bothers me now" (S8, M, 44).

To sum up, the adjustment difficulties was illustrated as a key issue in the interaction between students from the Palestinian Authority and the Israel-Arab students at a school in Israel.

Discussion

The data collected for this study indicate that the self-confidence of the Arab students from the Palestinian Authority was very low. Most of these students felt emotionally threatened and their self-confidence was compromised. Hence, they experienced a loss of the sense of relation and belonging to school. Furthermore, they developed a feeling of alienation towards the school and the Israeli students from Haifa as a strategy for protecting their self-esteem.

Goodenow and Grady (1993) argued that students' sense of belonging stemmed from the extent to which they felt they had been welcomed at school, as well as the extent of feeling support and containment demonstrated by the learning environment (Ma, 2003).

According to Lahav (1999, in Benolul, 2012), the sense of alienation was a function of the sense of non-belonging that entailed irregular social behavior and a feeling of rejection by the learning environment. Moreover, Peres and Yuval-Davis (1968), Smooha (1998), and Zak (1976) maintained that, as a result of the sense of alienation and rejection, the students encountered difficulties of adjustment to the school culture, unfamiliar to the Arab students from the Palestinian Authority who came to learn in an Israeli-Arab high school in Israel.

Conclusion

This study engages in the integration of Arab students from the Palestinian Authority in an Arab high school located in a big city in Israel. This integration emerges from this study as a process that constitutes an emotional and cultural challenge to the students who try to be integrated and to the educational staff. This is manifested by the difficulty to adjust to the customs prevalent in the school. In addition, the students have a sense of alienation and feel they do not belong to the

student society at school. Moreover, this study shows that these difficulties lead to a conflict of identity between their original identity – the Palestinian Authority – and their new identity as students in an Arab school in Israel. This situation might lead to feelings of disconnection and alienation, as described by Benlulu (2013) and Hujerat (2005).

What can school do in order to help and enhance the sense of belonging among the Palestinian students at school? The students who have come with their parents from the Palestinian Authority have a difficulty in defining themselves, always trying to avoid the question, "Where are you from"? They find it difficult and/or are afraid to explain where they have come from. They usually say they have come from Jerusalem and they have a blue identity card. Based on the students' second name, the teachers know that the students came from the Palestinian Authority. However, as teachers, they have to accept all the students and integrate them with the other students in the class. Moreover, these students have a difficulty to speak and understand Hebrew. Consequently, the school allocates more individual hours for them so that they can take the matriculation exams. The matriculation diploma can get the students access to academic studies or any other path for making a decent living in Israel.

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