An Analysis of Jewish-Israeli / Arab-Israeli Relations in Israel &
A Shared Citizenship Educational Response

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A. Context:

Society:

- *Fact* - There are 6.9 million Israeli citizens, 80% Jewish majority and 20% Arab minority.
- *Fact* - Jewish and Arab-Israelis overwhelmingly live and virtually always learn in separate schools.
- *Fact* - Big socio-economic gaps remain between Jewish and Arab-Israelis - education, employment, income, health etc.
- *Assertion* - Fear is largely routed in regional conflict and compounded by lack of familiarity of "other"
- *Assertion* - Jewish-Arab Israeli relations remain very fragile. Riots and deaths of Arab-Israeli citizens at start of October 2000 intifada was a big crisis and remains an open wound.
- *Assertion* - That while Israeli society has many internal tensions, all detrimental to building a cohesive, inclusive and strong society, the Jewish-Arab one is a particular threat to Israeli society's sustainability...

Legal:

- *Fact* - Israel has two official languages: Hebrew and Arabic
- *Fact/Assertion* - Arabic however remains de facto low status, is often not used officially and publicly as required by law, or taught to Jewish-Israelis as actually required by 1953 basic education law
- *Fact/Assertion* - Liberal equal rights, opportunity legislation etc. in place but not fully applied
**Education:**

- *Fact* - As stated, Jewish and Arab-Israelis study separately (as do secular and religious Jewish-Israelis). - there are big gaps in investments and achievement.
- *Fact* - Arab-Israelis learn Hebrew from 3rd grade and have to study Hebrew through 12th grade to get a full matriculation.
- *Fact* - Jewish-Israelis overwhelmingly don't learn Arabic at all, or learn literary Arabic that does not allow communication, in junior-high schools. Jewish-Israelis rather learn firstly English, which is very high status, and often secondly French...a questionable strategy for long-term integration in the Middle-East
- *Assertion* - For all above and other reasons Arabic is low status and very hard to teach...then as we live separately when can we use it?....the only answer until now has been in the army...

**B. So I assert that there are major perceived challenges to building a cohesive society:**

- The separation and lack of familiarity, caused and compounded by the long-standing regional conflict creates great mutual fear and suspicion.
- How can we educate towards building a cohesive and sustainable society of shared citizenship in a society of wide gaps and structural educational separation...(the American Supreme Court in Brown famously ruled that separate cannot be equal)
- Arabic is not studied and hence understood by Jewish-Israelis - also because it is perceived as the language of the "other", of the "enemy".  
- Lack of knowledge breeds fear...is my fellow citizen, who is the fellow shopper in the mall, asking his friend if he wants a pizza...or where to plant the bomb...?
- Against the background of the regional conflict Arab-Israelis are constantly suspect and torn as there is an obvious tension and confusion between their civic and national identities.
- Jewish-Israelis and Jews everywhere have not done well on grasping the basic and critical distinctions between the overlapping but not co-terminous categories of "Jewish Peoplehood" and "Israeli citizenship"...(hence we/they frequently don't know/remember that "Israeli" doesn't mean "Jewish" just as, and whereas, we know and always remember that "American" doesn't mean WASP)

**C. Possible Educational Responses:**

- Integrated and bi-lingual schools with students studying together. - Creating integrated bi-lingual schools is an important paradigm, helping break the Israeli "assumption" that "separate is normal"...but MERCHAVIM believes this structural change will not be broadly adopted and will remain simply what they currently are: important and worthy exceptions
D. MERCHAVIM's response:

Underlying principles of shared citizenship education:

- Citizenship is what all Israelis share and the only possible foundation for building a more cohesive, potentially all-inclusive, Israeli society - without threatening Israel's particular national identity, the particular legitimate identities of any of its citizens or the idea of Jewish Peoplehood
- All specific tensions - including Jewish-Arab tension need to be addressed in multi-polar way and not in binary fashion - as only Jews and Arabs (the traditional co-existence approach) - but as citizens with many identities - also, in this instance, national
- Citizenship education must be values-based, contextually relevant and involve "doing" - not just "learning"
- For strategic impact it is essential to partner with Israel’s Ministry of Education. NGO's, like MERCHAVIM, and philanthropy can develop and catalyze successful models but not roll them out nationally. It is essential to have an exit strategy.

E. Core concepts of shared citizenship education

- identity
- access
- fairness
- limits of agreement
- active shared citizenship

F. Evaluation:
   Approach: Formative and summative; including interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, observation.

Evaluation Measures:

1. Quality of key processes and cooperation between partners
2. Knowledge acquisition about Israeli "others" in general and Arab-Israelis in particular
3. Attitudinal change: do students gain and retain more positive attitudes to Israeli others in general and Arab-Israelis in particular