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## Dialogue in Democratic Education – From individual empowerment to social activism

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### 1. Dialogue in Democratic Education has many aspects.

Like any educational process, there is not, nor can there be, a reliable handbook for every situation. It takes on various forms at different focal points, and changes from encounter to encounter, both in content and in nature. Different people in the Democratic Education community view it differently, not only because of its newness in the field of education, but also for its pluralistic nature and commitment to constant self-examination and change, while trying to remain current and appropriate for different places. This broad range makes it possible to contain almost everything, almost any kind of educational encounter and activity, and thus holds a danger of its decline into the opposite of everything – into nothing. Thus the many possible definitions of dialogue in democratic education require an attempt to note trends and emphases which will help us understand.

Democracy itself derives from many sources and is expressed in many ways. The dialogue which typifies democratic education comes from the spirit of Buber, from the romanticism of Rousseau, from the teachings of Dewey and from learning processes suggested by Rogers, from the "Moral Community" of Kohlberg and from Neill's Summerhill. It stems from the cultural cycles of Ferrera and from many other radical writers as well. What they all have in common is their suggestions for alternatives to the existing school reality, taken for granted in most traditional educational institutions.

Dialogue in Democratic Education is taking its present form with the appearance of networks of democratic schools in the last two decades, in some 35 countries, among which Israel has a central place. The schools vary greatly in their methods, but it appears that the central question engaging most of them today is "What is the proper education for a democratic society?" more than resistance to existing education systems.

These schools emphasize values of democracy and the constant attempt to give practical application to equal rights and responsibilities, freedom of speech and action, participation through intrinsic motivation and involvement in decision making. In most of these institutions one can find varying degrees of a cooperative community, pluralistic contents and methods of education, or various aspects of learning focused on the learner and emphasis on social values in contents and activities. The types of communities, ways of learning and social emphases differ among the various institutions, and are expressed in different ways, stemming from the constant dialogue underlying democratic education and in keeping with each community and its needs.

In the light of the blossoming of this educational stream in recent years, one can note several principles and developmental trends in the discourse shaping dialogue in democratic education. In

this article we shall attempt to follow the nature of the various dialogues, both through an historic-philosophical observation and through action. The article will open with the historic and current place of democratic education and will derive several assumptions and principles through the presentation of examples from the field, examples representing intrapersonal dialogue, dialogue between the person and his educator, between the person and his community and surroundings, and between the person and all of humanity.

In light of the considerable change and commitment to constant examination, several questions will be presented for comprehensive examination.

## 2. Waves of Progressive Education

"the emergence of what is called new education and progressive schools is the product of **dissatisfaction with traditional education**. In fact, it serves as its critique.....when one attempts to formulate the philosophy embedded in the creation of new education, one can, I believe, discover common principles for a variety of progressive schools existing today. As opposed to education being forced from above, they present the **expression and fostering of the individual**. As opposed to external discipline we see **freedom of activity**. As opposed to learning from texts and teachers we present **learning from experience**. As opposed to acquiring separate skills and techniques through drill we present their acquisition as a means to achieve a goal on which they have a vital and direct bearing. As opposed to preparation for the distant future they present full fulfillment of the maximum opportunities of life in the present. As opposed to materials and static goals they present familiarization with **a changing world**."<sup>1</sup>

Democratic education is the current form of progressive education. The roots of progressive education are found in the theories of thinkers such as Rousseau and Pastoluzzi and expressed comprehensively in the writings of John Dewey. Following Dewey, the Association of Progressive Education was established in 1919, and its influence was mainly expressed in kindergartens and elementary schools in Europe and the USA. This blossoming of new education in the 1920's was the first broad wave of progressive education activity in the world. The Summerhill boarding school, founded by A.S. Neil in England, was of course the most famous educational experiment of the first wave, and it still is going strong today, led by Neil's daughter Zoey.

Progressive education also had substantial impact, although later, on educational philosophers in Israel. Its ideas were welcomed and realized by such educators and philosophers as Ron-Polani, Idelson, Golan, Segal, Zohar and others. The ideas were expressed mainly in the schools of the labor groups, and in the cooperative educational institutions and children's societies of the rural

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<sup>1</sup> Dewey, J. (1997), Experience and Education, NY: Touchstone Book, pp.17-20.

settlements. Kritz claims that the ideological influence of these founders, particularly Idelson, were expressed first in Europe, and then received a more Israeli color of Kibbutz life and work.<sup>2</sup>

The second wave of progressive schools occurred in the 1960's and 70's throughout the world, parallel to the American and European freedom movements which grew out of the resistance to the Vietnam War, the struggle of blacks for human rights, and the students' uprising. This time the schools appeared under other names (free education, open education) and were ideologically based on the world of humanist psychology. Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers were among the central figures writing about man's self-fulfillment as the goal of the education process. The Sudbury Valley School, founded by Daniel Greenberg in Massachusetts, was one of the better-known schools of this period, and it still exists today, serving as a model for dozens of schools throughout the world. This ideological and practical wave had its impact on Israel as well, again later, and by the end of the 1970's seven open schools could be found in the country (Haifa, Maagan Michael, Rishon-Letziyon, Rehovoth, Bat Yam, and two in Jerusalem – Lifta and the Experimental School.) The central figures in their founding

Were Moshe Kaspi and Eliezer Marcus<sup>3</sup>, and in parallel a course was developed for training teachers for these schools, called "Hofen", operating today at the David Yellin College.

The two waves, from the 1920's and from the 60's and 70's, were based on several similar ideas and were characterized by an educational atmosphere of partnership, different from that of the traditional education system.<sup>4</sup>

1. Dialogue as a central concept – mutual exchange of knowledge and evaluation.
2. A peidocentric approach, with the child in the center
3. Childhood is not a preparation for adulthood, but rather a life substance in itself.
4. A holistic view of the "whole" child and his emotional, physical and spiritual needs are met.

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<sup>2</sup> Kritz, M. (2001) "The New Education in America and Europe and its Influence on Education in Israel" *About Education*, 23, Tel Aviv: Seminar HaKibbutzim Yearbook, pp. 139-141.

<sup>3</sup> Kaspi, M.(1979). *Education Tomorrow*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishing

<sup>4</sup> Summary of Principles from: Levin, G. (2000) "The Fate of progressive education" , *About Education*, 22, Tel Aviv: Seminar Ha Kibbutzim Yearbook, p. 8; Levin, G. (1997), *Thoughts on the Past of Kibbutz Education*, Haifa University, pp. 68-80, and: Kreitz, 2001.

5. The child is an active partner in decisions regarding his education, and freely chooses his areas of learning.
6. Self-learning, guided learning and fostering of intrinsic discipline. Children learn how to think, not what to think.
7. Evaluation focused on the individual, and fostering internal discipline.
8. Determining the teacher's role as one of guide and assistant – a role which facilitates a true student-educator relationship, characterized by openness and sincerity.
9. A members' assembly based on a measure of independence.
10. An open schedule, opposition to a structured routine.
11. Emphasis on active learning, and a bond with the environment, with nature and physical labor.

The ideology of progressive education, particularly in the wave of the open schools, wished to liberate the individual from the rigidity of society, seeing it as depressing and technocratic. Learning seemed to them a natural part of growth, with no need for adult intervention. These progressive educators expressed deep faith in the individual human and a lack of faith in public institutions, and were therefore identified as radicals, despite their claim that their principles were a more correct reflection of preferred principles for society.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond the progressive schools themselves, it is clear that the ideas of progressive education affected the public system and traditional education, and some of the principles were even applied in one form or other, such as individualized education, learning centers, interdisciplinary lessons, and the idea of an open class. But despite these many attempts to implement progressive education through the years, it was not widespread and did not last long. Levin claims that one reason for this was that education is always connected to what goes on in society, and whenever a charismatic leader no longer has the power to create change at a specific point, the forces of society dominate the educational spirit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Miller, R. (2007), "What is Democratic Education", in: The Directory of Democratic Education, Bennis, D.M. and Graves I., 2nd ed., AERO, pp.14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Levin, 1997, pp.69-70.

The main oppositions to progressive education came from both the right and the left. On the right, conservative movements saw it as anarchistic and subversive and therefore harmful to the stability of the system, which ensures the continuing existence of social truths passed on by the mechanisms of society through school – truths regarding what knowledge is necessary to society, regarding child development and the shaping of social consciousness. On the left, there was protest from supporters of public education, who claimed that all islands of separatism<sup>7</sup> and free schools created by progressive schools over the years, under an individualistic, capitalist society, did not encourage participatory democracy, but rather a private democracy, which did not give all citizens equal opportunities, including those with different points of view, to negotiate on the common social goals they hoped to achieve through education.<sup>8</sup> They claimed that dialogue going on in a private school, with no interaction with certain populations and not open to change through meeting with the other, was not the dialogue desired.

An additional argument against progressive education was made by Benjamin Barber.<sup>9</sup> Barber claimed that in order for the individual to grow into a member and citizen in a democratic society, he must first learn several important things, as one is not born democratic. According to Barber, it is wrong to treat a child as an adult equal. At this point, it should be mentioned that Dewey himself opposed the removal of the educator's responsibility for the education process, and often openly opposed progressive educators who saw "freedom" as all: "Instruction provided by a teacher to train a child's intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a cancellation"<sup>10</sup>. Thus, in the context of the dialogue that the educator is to conduct with his students, Dewey claims that despite the partnership in determining learning materials, the responsibility of the educator is greater: "As the older friend he has the special responsibility to conduct the interaction and the mutual contexts, which are the substance of the group itself."<sup>11</sup>

Dewey's critique of streams in progressive education which believed in giving absolute freedom to the student, is reinforced by post-modernistic and critical concepts, particularly those who see the individual as a product of society. If a person, with all his physical features, perceptions and ideas, is a product of social, psychological and political conditioning, he will not be able to liberate himself from them at all, and certainly not by ignoring questions of identity, from awareness of history and

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<sup>7</sup> The term "islands of separatism" is taken from Kuel, A. (2003). "Classifying Education: Democratic Schools, Protected Reservations of Separatism and Distance", Society, a Socialist Periodical of Social, Economic, Political and Cultural Issues, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Gutman, A. (2002), Democratic Education, translated by A. Zuckerman, Tel Aviv: Sifriat HaPoalim.

<sup>9</sup> Barber, B.R., (1988). *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Dewey, J., (1963). *Experience and Nature*, Collier/Macmillan, N.Y., p.71.

<sup>11</sup> Dewey, J. (1960), *Trial and Education*, translated by R. Kleinberger, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, p. 55.

culture and from understanding shaping forces, hidden effectively from the eye. Freedom in "free education", then, can only be an illusion.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these criticisms, and despite the fact that the waves of progressive education waned several times, a myth was created, which according to Levin expresses human, personal and social hopes. This myth continues to generate various schools of thought, not long after its disappearance. These schools move and change their contents and forms together with changes in society.<sup>13</sup> Progressive education in its new version, therefore, appears today in a form more suited to ideas and changes which have occurred in society, and, we believe, in keeping with what today is called "Democratic Education". But just before we present the principles of the dialogue characteristic of this kind of education, we will in a few words describe relevant central developments which have occurred in society and their impact on the field of education.

### 3. World Influences on the Field of Education

Our education system today is in crisis – an essential crisis and not a financial one, despite the impression we get from the struggles between the Ministry of Finance and the teachers' unions. The crisis stems from a number of reasons, and this is not the proper place to discuss them all comprehensively; however, several main new factors should be presented, which have influenced both traditional and progressive educational discourse, abroad as well as in Israel. These factors are unique in that they require a different response from the one usually given by the public education system to educational questions, but not only different from it. In the last 30 years there have been significant social developments which were not present so powerfully in the former waves of progressive education, and which therefore require a different response from progressive education as well, to suit it to the times:

The labor market is changing – on the assumption that the education system is supposed to prepare students for the labor market and for life outside school; the schools which were founded in the framework of preparation and training for factory work during the Industrial Revolution cannot adjust to ongoing and expected changes in the labor market. The traditional schools did not change significantly and therefore cannot easily find solutions for education towards initiative, creativity, development of imagination, thinking and creation, which are the present and future needs of the labor market<sup>14</sup> and enable more social mobility than in the past.

The Children's Rights Revolution – Traditional schools were founded in a world in which human rights were manifest in an essentially different way. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by increasing recognition of the rights of women and minorities, and recently the recognition of the child's rights

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<sup>12</sup> Ram, E. (2006). Between Despair and Hope, A Critique of Democratic education in the Concepts of Michel Foucaud, Masters' Thesis under the guidance of A. Gur-Zeev and A. Ben Amos, School of Education, Tel Aviv University.

<sup>13</sup> Levin, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> Hecht, Y. (2005), Democratic Education – A Story with a Beginning, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, p. 28.

has come to the forefront. These rights were recognized only in 1989 as distinct rights in the framework of the declaration of children's rights in the UN (approved in Israel in 1991), and in 2001 they entered the education system through the law of Students' rights which states that "every student has the right to study in health and security and to enjoy freedom, dignity and equality"<sup>15</sup>. It is still unclear how this law is actually implemented.

The Information and Computerization Revolution – New technological advances, Internet, Google, social networks, enable us to obtain information in more efficient and improved ways than those commonly used in a traditional school, which sees the impartation of information as its primary goal. Today's goal can no longer be the learning of information but rather the teaching of tools to cope with the plethora of information, to organize it and examine it critically.

The loss of absolute truths – schools which were founded parallel to modern states, and in Israel expressed themselves, among other things, in passing on the Zionist idea, are now facing a post-modern reality, in which knowledge is becoming relative and multidimensional. The crisis in values of the education system stems from the dissonance between what is said and taught and the complex reality. This reality requires constant ability to change and adapt, to hear other voices and views and grow with their help, and to build a complex set of values from the encounter with this variety.

Awareness of environmental problems – In recent years, awareness has increased of environmental problems and the destructive effects of humans on the environment. Al Gore's receiving the Nobel Prize symbolizes this increasing awareness.

Processes of privatization – since the 1980's we have witnessed processes of privatization spreading through the world and in Israel, in the public sector in general and in the education system in particular. The education system is relinquishing its responsibility for public education and leaving room for outside groups to influence the educational field.

A multi-cultural population – the fall of the walls and the reinforcement of capitalism, and their contribution to the development of a global economy have created multi-cultural societies in many parts of the world. In Israel this is expressed in the great wave of immigration of the 1990's, and in the entrance of foreign workers. The immigrants and the worker's children have not received an appropriate education response or a place to bring their culture and uniqueness to the educational field.

## 4. Characteristics of the Third Wave – Dialogue in Democratic Education

Characteristics of the dialogue to be presented here, are based as said on the legacy of progressive education, but have been adapted in the light of various criticisms of progressive

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.education.gov.il/kav\\_patuach/hok.htm](http://www.education.gov.il/kav_patuach/hok.htm)

education mentioned earlier and in the light of world developments presented previously. The attempt is being made to implement these ideas today (if only partially) in over 20 schools in Israel and in some 800 schools throughout the world, in processes of democratization in hundreds of schools throughout the world and in Israel in several cities which are undergoing general processes of change in Israel, and in a program of academic training operating in Seminar HaKibbutzim.

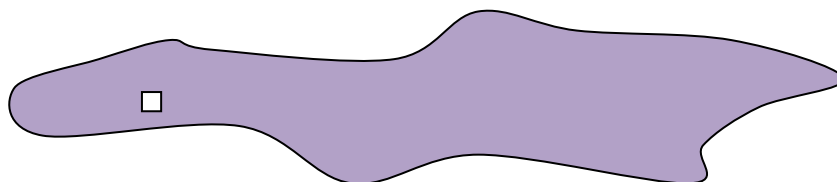
In order to characterize dialogue in Democratic Education, we will first present the fundamental principles of this dialogue and then the types of encounters in which it may be conducted, from the most concrete to the abstract. There is a dialogue between the individual and himself and his identity, a dialogue between the teacher-advisor and his student and between the teacher and his student, a dialogue between the facilitator and his group and between the teacher and his class, and later, dialogue between the individual and his friend, his group and the community of his school, ever broadening the circle to include dialogue with humanity and the environment. In presenting the various encounters we will include examples of conducting dialogue in the different frameworks in which it is attempting to operate.

### 5. Basic Principles

The first basic assumption of dialogue in Democratic Education is that there is no uniform field of knowledge required and no single model for learning to which the dialogue must lead. Every meeting invites learning for both parties and no one side in this encounter knows what is correct or right. Dialogue in Democratic Education is to doubt acquired knowledge constantly, seeing this as an opportunity for growth. It rests on the assumption that humans have natural curiosity which should not be hindered, but encourages, and that learning takes place in almost every encounter and every experience, including play and conversation.

We shall attempt to illustrate this with the following illustration.<sup>16</sup>

This abstract shape represents the world of knowledge known to us – what is unknown is far greater:



The square represents all that the education system has determined as required knowledge (generally knowledge appearing in Matriculation examination). The desired student in the

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed description of this basic assumption and model, see: Hecht, 2005, pp.68-88.



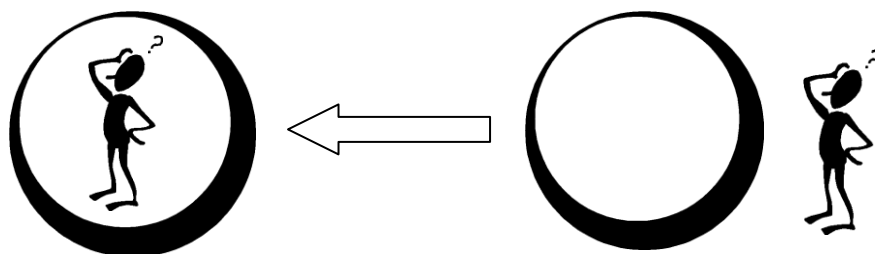
education system is one who succeeds in the world of knowledge contained in the square. The education system, through schools and university acceptance systems, puts enormous pressure on the individual to abandon all other possible realms of knowledge and compete with others for his place in the square, through a variety of quasi-objective examinations, which turn him into an object to be normalized.

The competition within the square is not an equal one. Different people have different talents, and one's economic situation and parents' education have considerable bearing on his success in the square. It should be mentioned that over half of the people complete the education system with no matriculation certificate, in other words with no success in the square. Life in the square is crowded and pressured, and it has competition to see "who is the best", as opposed to life in the world of knowledge in general, where there is room for everyone, where diversity is welcomed.

"The best in the square" is defined by tests and divisions which create reality more than examine it objectively, but the education system has succeeded in getting society to see "the best in the square" as the ideal model for the worthy student and individual. It has succeeded in turning us into "square bigots", by teaching us to categorize others according to their success in the square.

Dialogue in Democratic education attempts to enable the individual to move freely in the world of knowledge, to find his own uniqueness and his own way. This is a dialogue which holds up human dignity as a central value, to be implemented in giving every person legitimacy to examine his own way. Not only is there no single model, no square, the goal of the dialogue is to fight "square bigotry" through meetings with the other. A person who has found his uniqueness in the world of knowledge outside the square can also see the other and help him in the search for his uniqueness. This meeting with the other, the ability to see the other's uniqueness, culture and excellence, lessens the "square bigotry" in the person and helps liberate him from it. A person how has succeeded in liberating himself from "square bigotry" is more able to connect and cooperate with different people and cultures and to grow through his encounter with them.

The second basic assumption of dialogue in Democratic Education sees the individual, with all his choices and aspirations, as a person in the world and not as the person opposite. We can present this through the following illustration:



This basic assumption has two implications: first, the individual is deeply influenced by society and the environment, even if it is unconsciously. A person's choices and identity do not formulate only through his looking "inwards" but also by dialogue with "the outside": with the other, his culture, personal narrative, the social and cultural wealth of his childhood and life. Thus democratic

dialogue requires a complex dance of the inner with the outer world, between finding the inner sources from which learning and creation can spring and the gathering of outside sources of inspiration, textual and human.

Second, a person is not only nourished by society but also influences it. Every individual has responsibility for his actions and their consequences on society and on the world in general. No one operates in a vacuum, and freedom always exists within boundaries. To a great extent, this basic assumption which sees the individual in the world transfers the progressive weight from freedom to dialogue. Progressive education saw the child in the center, while Democratic Education sees the person in the center. When the child is in the center, each individual's freedom is the main thing. When the person is in the center (the child, but also the parent, the teacher, the residents of the country and humanity in general) there is an encounter between different desires, each individual's freedom depends on the freedom of the other and it is the dialogue which becomes the main thing.

The third basic assumption is that the individual needs a protected environment in order to grow. The goal of dialogue in Democratic Education is to provide support and protection that will enable growth. For growth, sometimes only drops of water, space, time and light are needed. But sometimes there is need to plant and fertilize, to take care to irrigate on time, to create pillars of support and sometimes even to prune. Dialogue in Democratic Education emphasizes not only freedom and equal rights, but also boundaries and fulfillment of cooperative responsibilities. Children, like adults, need clear boundaries to feel real freedom. The boundaries in Democratic Education are clearer, and their ways of change are also clear.

The fourth basic assumption is the dialogue in Democratic Education must be in a constant state of change and examination as part of the legacy of progressive education.

## 6. Types of Encounters in Which Dialogue is Conducted

Having generally characterized dialogue in Democratic Education, we will now attempt to describe possible encounters from various frameworks. Let us begin with dialogue between the individual and himself, and finish with dialogue between the individual and the world of knowledge and humanity in general. If we accept the second basic assumption presented here, by which a person is in the world, it is clear that there is no real difference between the individual's dialogue with himself and his dialogue with the world. Oppression, growth, change, learning, all take place both between man and himself and between man and his surroundings.

### a. The Individual with Himself

Dialogue in Democratic Education encourages each person to examine his life, beliefs and identity. This examination takes place on a daily basis as he faces his choices and deeds. In a democratic school the child, like the adult, does not have a clear-cut schedule, or a list of tasks, lessons and occupations determined for him. Each one must take responsibility for his life and main learning takes place from these copings. Every child in a democratic school determines his own daily schedule, his lessons, and the extent of his participation in decision making and in committees to

carry out decisions in the community. This experience in democratic education enables the individual to go on his life journey while constantly observing.

### **b. Advisor – Student**

On this complex journey, the student or advisee is helped by an adult serving as a kind of personal mentor. In democratic schools in Israel, there is a system of mentoring by which each child chooses his personal advisor from a list of all the advisors in the school, which consists of most of the adults on the staff that work full time (at least four days a week). The advisor meets with his advisee at a frequency that varies as necessary, and accompanies the child not only in his processes of choice, but also coordinates all his matters at school. The advisors undergo processes of training at the various schools, and today, in the training program at Seminar HaKibbutzim as well. In this program, each student receives a personal advisor, who provides modeling of the mentoring which he will perform in the future. The future advisor is first of all required to examine himself, his own choices and ways of learning, as Korczak wrote: "Know yourself before you wish to know the child."<sup>17</sup>

Dialogue in processes of advisor-student dialogue in Democratic Education is a sort of complex dance between giving the advisee freedom and opportunity to grow, become empowered, or not to do anything, and encouraging learning and activity. The democratic educator bears the responsibility not only to facilitate space for growth, but also to provide sources of inspiration. It must be a multi-disciplinary educator, who can stay within the child's field of interest with no fear, and has many learning abilities to help the child find his own way of learning and expression. This is an educator who is willing to move from a discipline he knows well and from his own characteristic ways of learning into the space of uncertainty, which enables learning in the part of the advisee and mainly new, cooperative learning. This is an educator who does not know in advance the outcome of the dialogue, and yet takes active part in it - an educator who is not afraid of his inability to give definite answers, but still tries to be present and ask clarifying questions. An educator who, like a therapist, is attentive to the advisee's words and situations, but unlike a therapist is not afraid to reveal his own weaknesses and give examples from his own life – to be himself a significant subject and participant in the dialogue and not an object for projection.

### **c. Teacher-Student**

The dialogue between an adult and a child takes place not only in the advisor-student meetings, but also in encounters in the classroom related to a particular field of knowledge. This subject is usually chosen both by the teacher and by the student, which helps the meeting take on a different learning character. In these meetings the teacher teaches subjects that interest him on the one hand, and is attentive to the needs of the students on the other. The teacher can pass on

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<sup>17</sup> Korczak, Y. (1976), *How to Love Children – Boarding School, Summer Settlements*. Translated from Polish by Y. Tzur, HaKibbutz HaMeuhad Publishing, p. 13.

information as well. But his goal is to make this discipline and its characteristic ways of learning accessible to the students.

This enabling of accessibility of knowledge and ways of learning is not quite the main learning goal in the encounter between teacher and child. The central goal is for the child to develop a broader recognition of educational goals – the development of respect for humans, for others and for his environment, and the acquisition of tools towards his independence. Thus, in democratic schools there is often a distinction made between a lesson and history and a lesson in history for matriculation. In a history lesson the teacher will choose the field that he wishes to make accessible to the students, or alternately, will teach material that the students are interested in learning. This learning can take place as a kind of ongoing dialogue between knowledge and interests, chiefly in order to examine the significance of the acquired knowledge for the social world in which we live today. A lesson in history for matriculation, on the other hand, will pass on the information required in order to pass the matriculation exams, and will impart the appropriate tools for passing the test itself.

Another dialogue between teacher and student may take place beyond the classroom walls. In democratic schools there are learning centers in various places where students can enter at any time, to study alone or to get help from a friend or a teacher for clarification, direction and consultation. In addition, a student who is interested in a particular area of knowledge which is not offered in the school schedule can approach a teacher in the school who is close to this area, and draw up a personal learning contract with him related to the subject. Thus a child at the school can study astronomy with the physics teacher, or cooking in the kitchen. The dialogue created between teacher and student enables them to engage in cooperative study of a common subject.

### **d. Facilitator – Group**

An adult in a school can serve as an advisor, and usually also a teacher, but in many meetings the adult also serves as a group facilitator. In some democratic schools it is customary for the child to be in a group of peers, led by an adult facilitator. The dialogue going on in the group in democratic education may remind us of a group in a youth movement, where some current issue or other is being discussed, but for the most part it functions as a dynamic-task oriented group, which helps each individual in it to develop in his own learning directions, reflecting for him and supporting him in his personal journey.

One of the tools adopted by democratic education is called SML (Self managed learning). The tool was developed by Professor Ian Cunningham in England, and is used in Israel in democratic schools, education cities being accompanied by the Institute for Democratic Education and in the Democratic Teacher training program at the Seminar HaKibbutzim College. SML is about creating a structured process for development of independent learning abilities of the individual within the group. Each participant draws up a personal learning contract about an area of learning with no limits. The contract consists of five questions: 1. Where did I come from? 2. Where am I today? 3. Where am I going? 4. How will I get there? 5. How will I know I have arrived?

After each participant has built his own contract, the group continues to accompany him in its realization. The length of time it takes to construct the contract varies from group to group and

from framework to framework, but the principle is preserved. Our areas of learning are in an ongoing dialogue with our past and with our personal, social and learning goals. A learner in an SML group is not a solitary independent learner but rather an independent learner in a group, who must be held accountable, and can also get advice, support and encouragement. The group helps the learner with a learning atmosphere, with brainstorming and with the required emotional support.

The facilitator of an SML group must have facilitation skills. His goal is to enable free and sincere dialogue among the participants. The subjects learned are determined by the group members and the facilitator preserves the framework, raises difficulties and dilemmas, and expands the ways of learning. The participants have the opportunity not only to get feedback on the knowledge they have acquired and on their learning, but also to give feedback to others and to observe their learning through others' stories.<sup>18</sup> As in most group processes, the dynamic encounter created among the participants can create situations of coping "in laboratory setting", can enable observation of them, and can aid the development of emotional and social intelligence.

As in mentoring processes, in order to train teachers to facilitate SML, they should undergo a learning process of this kind themselves. The teachers in democratic training experience a process of empowerment and learning like this in the framework of a group with a facilitator (who also serves as a personal advisor) for three years. The goal of this group, called a "greenhouse", is to help the educator recognize his own uniqueness and strengthen his professional identity in the education field. In the first year, the year of searching, they answer the first three questions (Where did I come from? Where am I today? What are my goals?), search for their points of strength – those abilities and talents characteristic of them – and follow the ways of learning that characterize them. At the end of the first year each student chooses a realm of knowledge, and at the beginning of the second year, the year of deepening, each student draws up a learning contract regarding the discipline he has chosen and the ways of learning that suit him (questions 4 and 5). The subjects vary and are not necessarily related to his future work. The goal is that the student, a teacher of the future, experience a sense of learning through natural curiosity, in other words, know how to cope with frustration and boredom in order to acquire a sense of flow in learning.<sup>19</sup> In this process the student also copes with difficulties of perseverance and with a variety of possibilities to learn his chosen subject. Different students may draft different contracts for the same subject. One will study through reading and another through experience in the field; one will study for two intensive months and another will study a little each week.

In the third year, the year of production, each student is required to produce an educational initiative related to his in-depth discipline. The more each student deepened his studies, the closer he came to the area that interested him, came to know the central people and organizations dealing with this area, the main questions asked and the relevant literature. Now he can produce an initiative product, which will express his own uniqueness and learning. The learning processes are complex and not linear, but the direction of learning is clear – from within outwards, from

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.selfmanagedlearning.org/>

<sup>19</sup> Mihaly, C., (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. 1st ed., N.Y.: Harper and Row

finding personal uniqueness till its outward expression, from intrinsic motivation to social contribution.

In facilitating groups for enabling personal learning, the teachers of Bat Yam also use the framework of "The Bat Yam Model of Personal Education", which was developed in the city accompanied by the Institute for Democratic Education and began to operate in 2005. Each education counselor, educator and subject teacher accompanies a group of about 20 students in drafting their personal learning contracts. The morning session, which deals with the process of work on the learning contract, is held every morning, and each student shares with the others his processes of progress in achieving his personal, social and learning goals. The learning contract could be in mathematics or in surfing. The dialogue between the education counselor and the student varies instantly as the counselor sees and knows the child's areas of interest, and does not judge him only by his test grades.

In order to train teachers in school for this facilitation, they themselves participate in a guided SML group, where they draft a learning contract for themselves, and experience a process that will help them guide the students in a similar but broader process.

### **e. The Individual and His Peer**

The meeting between peers in Democratic Education enables a dialogue whose essence is not competition over resources but rather mutual growth and learning. The form of learning in democratic schools and the democratic conduct of cooperative living enable many meetings among people with common interests. In lessons and learning centers, students of different ages of common interests meet (learning is generally divided into three age groups, each of three years). On the executive committees who carry out decisions of the parliament, people interested in cooperative activity for the whole community get together. The dialogue is characterized by sharing opinions, mutual learning and also mutual attempts to convince.

The dialogue between peers in Democratic Education is also characterized by spontaneous encounters among students. Beyond the lessons and different committees, the schoolyard is an opportunity for learning encounters. Cooperative play, in which the children determine their own rules, rules which include them all and enable free movement within the boundaries of the game, teach values of equality before the law, helping others and cooperation beyond competition.

### **f. The Individual and the Community**

The community in Democratic Education is conducted as a microcosm of a participatory democratic society with separated authorities. Decision making and legislation take place in the Parliament or General Meeting. School is conducted by the various executive committees (schedule committee, trips committee, etc.) and the court, which handles the complaints. Each person in the community has frameworks to express himself within clear and determined boundaries which he himself helped to design. The shaping of laws and culture in the school goes

on in a constant dialogue between members of the community and the cooperative school experience.

In the parliament, each individual, child or adult, is permitted to submit ideas and suggestions, listen to different opinions and conduct dialogue with others regarding the character of their cooperative life. The meetings are conducted by an elected figure, usually one of the children. Already in the second parliament meeting at the new Democratic school in Pardes Hanna (which began operation in 2007), some 60 of the 130 students participated and the question was raised: "What rules will there be for the pool table in the yard?" Many voices were heard. Students who found the table disturbing suggested illegalizing it, while others suggested giving each child a single weekly hour to play. Another student suggested registering for play hours, while another requested the presence of an adult there. Eventually it was decided that each child could register for an hour of play, but that between any two listings of the same child's name there had to be at least ten other names, to enable mobility. The outcome of the discussion is less important – the essence of it was the dialogue. The participants dealt with a significant dilemma from their cooperative lives and the need to make a decision. The students, like the adults in the community (teachers and parents) made suggestions, listened to their friends' suggestions and finally had to choose. A "Pool Table Committee" was determined to advertise and enforce the new rule. The rules defined will probably be discussed again in light of new experiences, but until then the students have taken upon themselves, democratically, rules which could be interpreted as limits to their freedom.

In another parliament, at the Democratic School of Hadera, a suggestion was made to replace the members of the Photography Room Committee. The committee members explained why they had not fulfilled the tasks they had undertaken, various opinions were heard from the community, and at last it was decided that the committee must be aided by an adult for the next two months, "like a new driver". The responsibility which a person in the community takes on himself, with the authority given him, is in dialogue with the community members. This dialogue takes place in the work of the committee, where students and adults cooperate in shared creation and in work "like in real life", and this work is accountable to the committee.

In the court (or the Discipline Committee) a more intimate dialogue takes place regarding deviation from the cooperative rules. Generally mediation is proposed between the parties, and if it is not successful, a student-teacher-parent committee makes a decision. The procedure is less important. In some schools the committee is made up of elected judges, while in other schools, every member of the community is obligated to sit on the Discipline Committee a few days a year. The significance of it is that a person must conduct dialogue between his deeds and the community in which he lives. He can present his side, appeal or apply to the Comptrolling Committee, but he is in a world with boundaries, his actions have significance and he must take responsibility for them.

In most of the schools, beyond the separation of authorities, there is a Committee of Investigation whose goal is to see that dialogue does take place in the various frameworks in a democratic form and that no adult, or other power, dominates the discourse. The very existence of this committee creates an ongoing examination of school conduct in all meetings and committees.

## **g. The Individual and the Outside Community, Society and Environment**

Opposers of Democratic Education claim that it deals entirely with inner dialogue between the person and himself and the school community, and that there is no structured concept in it of social involvement and responsibility for what happens in society. Oki Merushak of the Adam Academy claims that there is danger that inequalities and other disorders of democracy will be unconsciously copied into the school.<sup>20</sup> This criticism has great significance and it is very important that frameworks which conduct this kind of dialogue examine its implications in the arena of the school itself. The "democrats" cannot simply wave the flag of democratic culture; they must prove that they indeed strive for it and correct their mistakes.

The basic assumptions of democratic education claim that the dialogue that a person conducts with himself, with his peers and with his community, he will be able to apply outside the school as well. A person who grows within a concept of equality and protection of rights is more aware of the violation of rights outside, and the abilities he has developed to work for changes in points of view will help him in other political struggles as well. In terms of values, a person whose uniqueness has been protected can also see the uniqueness of the other, the uniqueness of the other's culture and his right to develop it. When a person sees this right, he can move from intrinsic motivation to action for the sake of humanity and the environment.

These ideas have received initial confirmation in research studies. Dafna Goldberg (1998) found that the attitudes of students from democratic schools towards democratic values and acceptance of the other (the Arab population, for example) were more stable, in other words less apt to change at a whim, than those of students in regular public schools, and that the democratic experience gives children a richer and deeper knowledge of democratic principles and their application, thus helping them form democratic positions in certain social subjects.<sup>21</sup> Avi Shilon's study (2003) implies a contribution to society when it states that there is a definite correlation between the extent of democracy in the school as perceived by its graduate and his testimony of satisfaction in his life as well as his willingness to contribute to others<sup>22</sup>; and Natalie Iskoff-Yaffe's study (2004) corroborates this claim. In a limited study which she conducted she discovered that 70% of the graduates of the Democratic School of Hadera continued volunteer work till age 30<sup>23</sup>. We will finally state that the experimental book summarizing the democratic training program at Seminar

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20 Merushak-Klarman, A. (1991), *There's No Partial Democracy: About Education Towards Democracy and Democracy in the Education System*, Ramat Gan: Kineret.

21 Goldberg, D. (1998), *The Influence of a Democratic School on the Knowledge and Attitudes of Its Students*, Master's Thesis guided by Prof. DS. Bar-Tal and Prof. A. Raviv, Department of Psychology, Tel Aviv University.

22 Shilon, A. (2003), *Quantitative Criteria in Assessing the Democratic Education System in Israel*, Master's Thesis guided by H. Tuval, Derby university, in the framework of MBA requirements.

23 Iskoff-Yaffe, N. (2004), *The Democratic School – Method and Realization, According to the Evaluations of Graduates of the Democratic school of Hadera*, Master's Thesis guided by A. Ben-Amos, School of Education at Tel Aviv University, p. 42.

HaKibbutzim is called "Democracy in Action"<sup>24</sup>, and in it one can find initial signs that out of focus on the individual and the attempt to provide a space for his world and his choices, individuals join together in groups for cooperative social action. A group of students who moved to Givat Olga and founded a Democratic School in a disadvantaged neighborhood, the Shoug Group (acronym for environment, society and also us), which raises ecological-environmental awareness among other students at the college, and many other educational ventures. One can show reservations regarding the results of these studies with the claim that students who arrive at a Democratic school already have heightened social awareness, but it still appears that the democratic system enables and encourages them towards action, or at least provides them with a framework for action.

### **h. The Individual and the World of Knowledge**

Democratic Education encourages an additional dialogue the one between the individual and the world of knowledge in general. It is not only an internal dialogue regarding areas of strength and interest, personal choices and needs, but also a dialogue with the essence of knowledge in our world, as a shaper of awareness and a source of strength. Dialogue with the world of knowledge goes on both at the level of contents appearing in the educational framework and with contents outside it. To a great extent Democratic Education breaks down the walls of the familiar disciplines and learning space.

At the level of the educational framework, the school community deals with the contents suggested through a continuous dialogue between the contents suggested by the Ministry of Education and the contents that interest the specific community. In different democratic schools the curriculum is built differently. In some of them, mainly those that operate by the Sudbury Valley model<sup>25</sup>, the schedule is created spontaneously by the community. A child who wishes to learn Yiddish, for example, will ask for a class and invite friends to participate in shared learning. In democratic schools like Hadera and Kfar Saba, the curriculum is set together with the entire community, parents, teachers and students, in meetings that take place several times a year, or by an appointed curriculum committee. The chosen lessons will be derived from personal interest and through dialogue with the requirements of the Ministry of Education. Thus, alongside interdisciplinary lessons such as spices (history, geography, biology) or cooking (chemistry, history, mathematics) one can find Mathematics 1 or English, an indication of coping with matriculation contents. This is an ongoing dialogue between "desired" and "necessary" and between "special" and "regular".

In Democratic training at the Seminar HaKibbutzim College, most of the knowledge acquired is determined by the Council for Higher Education, but for part of the lessons the community takes

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24 Yuval, A. (2007), Democracy in Action – The Democratic Experimental Program at the Seminar HaKibbutzim College – The First Years, Seminar HaKibbutzim College Publishing.

25 Greenberg, D. (1985). The Sudbury Valley School Experience, M.A.: Sudbury Valley School Press.

part in constructing the contents. The course "community of learners", for example, is conducted in an Open Space, where the students and lecturers suggest varied workshops and sessions in advance and choose where they would like to participate. These sessions can be an ongoing lesson (such as the Torah portion of the week) or single meetings (a session discussing Ferrera's theories alongside a workshop in belly dancing). The subjects of these sessions can be derived from current events ( a meeting with a representative of the Teacher's Organization), experiences of the participants (what is Vipassana Meditation), or related to goings-on in the community (organizing a Shavuot activity). The meetings in the "community of learners" enable cooperative learning for people from different courses and from different years in the program to exchange knowledge, to meet regarding common interests, and to create cooperative social initiatives later on.

An additional example of dialogue between students and the world of knowledge is in the creation of the "Democratopedia" – a cooperative knowledge base in the style of Wikipedia, which the students write as part of their course summation papers. In the Democratopedia the students structure their knowledge cooperatively – each student can enter and correct another's entries, carry on a conversation regarding the changes he made, and publish the new edition on the Internet.

Dialogue in Democratic Education also takes place with the world of knowledge not found in the school. A student in a democratic school can choose an area of knowledge for which there is no teacher at the school, and ask to learn with an expert in the area, as an apprentice or assistant, during his school time. Thus a student may learn carpentry or jewelry making, windsurfing or library science. Apprenticeship is implemented not only in democratic schools but also in similar frameworks with this sort of dialogue. In the MET school network operated by The Big Picture Company in over 40 places in the USA<sup>26</sup> (most in disadvantaged areas) each student chooses, accompanied by his personal advisor and a group, an area of knowledge in which he wishes to develop, and the school helps him find someone in the community to be a personal teacher for him, once or twice a week. This method is beginning to be used this year in several high school classes in Ramat HaSharon.

## 7. The Development of Dialogue as Development of a Movement

Dialogue in Democratic Education continues, as we see, the ideas of progressive education, while adapting it according to various criticisms and changing times. The trend developing today around the concept of dialogue in democratic education puts more emphasis on the individual as a person in the world, on influence from one's surroundings and human influence on the environment, on the importance of encounter with the other and tolerance necessary for this. It is a dialogue which tries to fulfill human dignity and human rights in daily practice, and continues to develop while constantly examining itself as to its essences and various expressions in the test of time.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bigpicture.org> and also :<http://www.themetschool.org>

The various characteristics were presented on a developmental axis with expanding circles, in other words, from internal dialogue of the person with himself to external dialogue with community and culture. It is interesting to see that this development parallels the development of discourse in Progressive Education in general and Democratic education in particular.

Democratic Education began in Israel in a single school in the late 1980's in Hadera, and within a short time the school was helping found other schools (Jaffa and Teffen). Today there are over 20 active Democratic schools. In the early 1990's an international conference for democratic education was held, which was first called the Hadera conference and later its name was changed to IDEC (International Democratic Education Conference), which takes place every year in a different country. In time the Institute for Democratic Education was founded within the Democratic School of Hadera, and after the assassination of Rabin, we were asked by Amnon Rubinstein, then Minister of Education, to introduce some ideas into the public school system. Processes of school democratization signaled the beginning of a dialogue between Democratic Education and the public system. In recent years the main work of the Institute of Democratic Education focuses on change, including in municipal education systems. In every education system, characteristics of the dialogue presented above are expressed, though in varying expressions and extents. Democratic Education itself, carries on a relationship of dialogue with representatives of the Ministry of education, both regarding the governmental aspects of the schools and the different activities in the cities.

This expansion of the discourse in Democratic education into the city space requires it to deal with questions of occupations, culture and society and beyond them with questions raised by the discourse of the surroundings. The basic assumption which sees the person in the world requires the individual to observe his life environment in order to understand himself. Environmental education, as well as education for sustainability, deal with relevant contents and overlap contents that democratic education deals with. Several democratic schools in Israel call themselves community or environmental schools (Zichron Yaacov, Arad, Olga), and it appears that this trend should strengthen within the next few years.

In addition, in recent years the discourse on democratic education has entered the academic world. It began in teacher training at the Seminar HaKibbutzim College and continued with research groups. In its process of development, democratic education must undergo research, investigation and dialogue with other ideas. We shall conclude, then, with the presentation of a few examples of questions which those dealing in dialogue characterized here should continue to ask, not accepting readymade solutions:

What is the responsibility of the educator in conducting dialogue? Open education sees the freedom of the student as central and all responsibility for learning as his. Democratic education sees many partners in this responsibility for learning – teachers, parents, the school, the local authorities and the State. What is the student's responsibility as opposed to theirs? What means are at their disposal and when are they to make use of them?

Is there mandatory knowledge that every educator must pass on? Is it permitted to force this knowledge on others?

How can we learn to protect our environment? Does the protection of our environment justify forced learning?

Can full equality of rights be implemented in school at every age and for every population?

How can we avoid impairing the excellence of students who need feedback and clear boundaries?  
How do we encourage excellence which expresses uniqueness rather than competition?

What is a system of measures to examine the success of dialogue in democratic education, and can the education system change its measures of evaluation?

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