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AMITAI ETZIONI
Columbia University

Work: An Educational Technique in Israeli Schools

Educational techniques are closely related to the values and the structure of the society in which education takes place. As a society changes, techniques are altered or abandoned, and new techniques are introduced. Israel furnishes an illuminating example of the effect of social change on educational method (13).

In Israel, work is a technique widely used in the schools. Most educational systems use work to develop skills. In this new nation work has been used, not only to provide training in skills, but also to impart values and to influence personality and character.

The technique is not new here. It had an important place in education in the Jewish community in Palestine. However, since the establishment of Israel the technique has changed considerably. One Zionist belief had a strong influence on the adoption of work as an educational technique. Known as "normalization," this tenet has played a significant role in both Palestine and Israel. During the Diaspora, or Exile, Zionists point out, the normal course of Jewish life was disrupted. Scattered from their ancient homeland, the Jews became an ethnic minority in a gentile society. In their new life they concentrated in middle-class professions; few became factory workers, and fewer still farmers. The Zionists hoped that the Jews would build their own society in Palestine. In this new society, all functions would be performed by Jews. Many who had been accustomed to professional life would have to work in factories and farms. The

AMITAI ETZIONI is an instructor in the Department of Sociology at Columbia University. In December, 1957, *Enfance* published an article by him in French on work in Israeli schools.

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drastic shifts in occupation required by normalization ran counter to the trend in modern society, where hopes are likely to be aimed at the professions, not at factories and farms.

To fulfil the Zionist ideal of a new society, many Jews who immigrated to Palestine had to set aside old values. In the old life, such professions as medicine carried high prestige, while occupations like farming rated low. To idealize manual work, especially farm work, came to be one of the major goals of the Jewish community in Palestine. Since the pioneers wanted their children to share this ideal, it was stressed in youth movements (1) and schools (8:89). Naturally, educational methods felt the impact.

Describing Zionism and education in Palestine, Nardi wrote:

> Physical work is considered the basis of educational work in school. There are many branches of it—kitchen and household tasks, cultivating vegetables and flowers, the care of fowls and domestic animals, the care of bees, all sorts of carpentry, book-binding, cobbling, sewing, weaving. The intention is not to make children expert craftsmen in any one line but rather to develop their manual skill, to make them love labor and realize its importance and value [7: 40–41].

In most schools (14) gardening, pathetically called "working the land," was part of the curriculum. Some schools had workshops as well as gardens. A few had only a workshop and no garden; educators rated these schools second best. Boys and girls of almost all ages worked in school plots and shops. All children took part in the same projects and performed similar tasks, though the work was adapted to physical abilities. For example, younger children used small tools and older children wielded larger ones.

Usually there was no selection based on the child's possible future occupation. It should not be assumed, however, that teachers and educators were unaware of methods of selection or of vocational training. All children were included in work projects because of the belief that manual, and especially agricultural, work is good in itself. Everyone should "work with his hands." Everyone, regardless of his future calling, should "work the land."

To instil these ideas, schools in poor and middle-class areas as

..ll as schools in more wealthy residential areas scheduled work ...jects. Usually the children cultivated a small vegetable garden ..er the guidance of a teacher. Every class spent an hour or more .week working in the garden. The official curriculum drawn up in .32 provided for two hours of gardening a week for fourth, fifth, .th, and seventh grades, and one hour for eighth grade (7:33). If a .hool had ambitious plans, each class was assigned a little plot, and ..sses competed in cultivating their small patches of land. Students .ere encouraged to stay after school to plant and weed and water. .me classes met regularly on Friday afternoons, the beginning of .e Israeli week end, to work in the garden. In some schools Young .rmers Clubs were formed (9). Boy Scout units and other youth .oups planted and cared for gardens of their own.

Many high schools encouraged students to spend summer vaca-.ns in villages. There the young people worked as agricultural .borers, usually without pay. Their labor was considered a national .vice that combined an opportunity to work the land with an .portunity to benefit from an enriching experience. In the *Kibbut-.n,* or collective settlements, where this ideology is especially cher-.ed, even teachers have been expected to spend one year out of .e as manual workers, preferably in agriculture.

"Gardening is good." The belief prevailed in the *Kibbutzim,* in the .h schools, and in the primary schools, even those primary schools .ose graduates usually go on to technical, commercial, or academic .h schools. Gardening was a way of inculcating the religion of .k, a way of instilling values like pioneering, love of the land, and .e of nature.

Paradoxically, city schools were often much more concerned about .lening and agriculture than village schools were. Even today .ools in towns and cities stress gardening more than schools in out-.g areas do. In Tel Aviv, where the cost of cultivating a garden in small schoolyard in the middle of the city would be forbidding, .e schools send their students miles away to garden. In Jerusalem, .ents in a well-known and highly esteemed school that lacks

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grounds suitable for planting, cultivated vegetables in old ca rusty barrels, and broken jars. Schools that had elaborate carpent shops still felt that part of the time, at least, some grades shou "work the land."

The strong pressure in the cities to offer classes in agriculture c be explained in various ways. There was a need to move people fro the city to the country. The classes, it was hoped, might encour this movement. Moreover, in the villages, students get ideologi education and training in agriculture at home, while they help th parents on the farm. City children, on the other hand, have less portunity for comparable training in the family. Emotional fact too, were at work. In the city, many parents, teachers, and direct of schools were apparently impelled by a strong feeling of gu They felt that they themselves should be pioneering in the count One way of releasing their guilt feelings was to give more pioneer education to children.

The establishment of the state of Israel led to a deep change values, social needs, and social structure (2, 3). One major result been a decline in the commitment to pioneering values. Some gro still regard agriculture and manual work as the most important c ings, but the need for young people in the armed forces, adminis tion, science, and teaching is so urgent that vocations in these f compete strongly with agriculture. Occupational prestige follows needs of society. At one time the needs in Israel required ma work. Now needs are much more diffuse and call for many o occupations. Fewer young people want to "serve the nation" thro work in an agricultural pioneering settlement. Those who are clined to serve have new ways of doing so, ways that range f piloting jets to advising government agencies on economic issues

The change is reflected in the school system, the curriculum, educational techniques. Recently, the Ministry of Education Culture ordered work in gardens and workshops dropped from curriculum of the primary schools. In some schools the classes

discontinued completely. In others, the classes will be conducted as extra-curricular activities.

At the same time, a new subject called "Israeli Consciousness" has been introduced. Roughly comparable to lessons in citizenship in other countries, the subject has been allotted time formerly devoted to work. The classes are aimed not so much at imparting information on Israeli institutions as at fostering identification with certain values and with the young nation itself.

The change is symptomatic; the pioneering values of manual and agricultural work can no longer constitute the sole dominant focus of identification. New focuses are in order, loyalty to the state, for example, and brotherhood to thousands of new immigrants. At the same time, the technique for creating and encouraging identification has been changed from work to group discussion.

Work as an educational technique has by no means disappeared from high schools. There it is still part of the curriculum as in the old days, though some high schools now offer work as an extra-curricular activity only. There seems to be a tendency to retain the technique but to change its use and purpose. Formerly agricultural work had first place, while workshops, for carpentry mostly, had second place. Today the trend is toward more vocational training and less gardening; toward more practical purposes and away from ideological ends; toward selective education (10) and away from general education. We shall discuss each of these new directions.

The objectives of state education are defined by Israeli law: "To base primary education in the state on the values of Jewish culture and the achievements of science, on love of the country and loyalty to the State and the people of Israel, on training in agricultural and manual work, and on pioneering and striving for a just society" (5:127).

Work is still stressed in the definition of the school's mission, but Jewish culture, science, and loyalty to the state are listed first. In 1955, five hundred primary schools, 60 per cent of all such schools,

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cultivated gardens or conducted agricultural class... curriculum, introduced in 1955–57, is much more ... bringing pre-vocational training into primary sch... maintaining classes in gardening (5:130).

Two approaches to pre-vocational classes have ... first, these classes are regarded as practical train... taught to change a bulb, to replace a fuse, or to rep... chair. Girls learn to cook and sew. Boys and girls lea... ances and household tools. The purpose is to teach ... their parents at home and to become more skilful ...

Though many teachers may not be aware of it, ... class point of view. Girls are prepared to be good ... are seen as future professionals or businessmen. ... work with their hands, craft skills can serve as hob... can prove valuable in keeping household applia... order with only occasional assistance from repairme...

In the second approach, students are seen as futu... vocational classes provide training in carpentry, ... mechanics. Children are taught to recognize mater... simple tools, even to read blueprints. Many stude... will probably be workers. Only a few will continue ... high school, and fewer still will turn to higher st... vocational training, these students can become ... than unskilled workers.

Clearly, the technique of work still plays an ... Israeli schools, but that technique is changing in ... Work may still be used to impart values, but it is ... more a training method aimed at developing skills. ... eral skills are developed, skills that are considered ... one. Sometimes specific skills are the goal, skills se... of certain assumptions about the occupational futur...

Classes in agriculture are now often described ... The fact is being recognized that only a small fra... in the primary school and a very small fraction of stu...

ary school will turn to agriculture. This change reflects the new attitude toward working the land. Farming is becoming more and more one occupation among many, a way of earning a living, and less and less the symbol of pioneering and other sacred values.

In 1955 Hadassah, a women's organization that supports educational and welfare activities in Israel, conducted a survey among fourteen-year-olds. In all, 960 girls and 848 boys were asked to state their occupational preferences. The girls rated nursery-school teaching first, clerical work second, and agriculture twentieth, the last on the list. Most of the boys wanted to be mechanics; close behind were the aspiring electricians; agriculturists had tenth place.

There is no strictly comparable data for the period before the founding of Israel, but undoubtedly agriculture had more appeal then. Understandably manual work in Israeli schools is becoming less a method of education in the sense of character formation and indoctrination and more a method of developing skills.

The change in the purpose and use of this technique has raised a question that educators often prefer not to face: the question of selective education. By selective education, sometimes called differential education, we mean different education for various groups of children of the same age. The criteria for selection may be sex, abilities, parents' income. In the pioneering days, agricultural work was not offered as vocational training and therefore could include all students (6). In the old days, working the land had a place roughly comparable to sports, which are considered "good," not only for professional players, but for everyone. Or gardening might be compared with geometry, which is taught to prospective housewives as well as to prospective engineers because it "develops" the mind. So working the land, it was believed, builds personality and strengthens loyalty to pioneering.

But now the emphasis has shifted. Now schools are interested in preparing children for their future and contributing to the changing economy of the country. Clearly not all children have the same occu-

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pational future. Some will leave school to become farmers; others will become factory workers or clerks. To teach prospective factory workers how to cultivate vegetables is, from the new point of view, a waste of time, energy, and money. Prospective factory workers should be trained in skills that will be useful in factories.

It is, of course, impossible to predict the exact calling that a child will follow, and the school cannot always give every student training suited to his inclinations. But children can be divided into broad occupational groups, and appropriate training can be provided for each. The main alternatives seem to be gardening, pre-vocational training, or no vocational training (11).

Selective training assumes that children's occupations can roughly be predicted. Predictions are made on three bases: children's aptitudes and abilities; children's sociological background; the future needs of the economy. Those who criticize selective education point out that aptitude tests are neither reliable nor valid. Besides, it is hard to determine the occupational inclinations of a twelve-year-old.

Even if aptitudes could be reliably measured, it is well known that they are only one factor in determining a child's future occupation. A child who has high aptitude for academic work may lack the motivation (4) or the means (15) to continue his studies. Such drawbacks may well hamper children from the lower classes, sons and daughters of new immigrant families.

It is true that today Israel has an elaborate system of scholarships to help gifted children, especially the children of new immigrants. Still many boys and girls drop out of school in seventh or eighth grade at twelve to fourteen years of age, sometimes earlier, to go to work to help their families. The school-leaving age is legally set at fourteen, though the law is not always enforced. Accordingly, when selective training is introduced, a child's social class, as well as his aptitudes, have to be taken into account.

In effect, selective education gives children an education geared to their parents' social status (12). The sons and daughters of farmers get agricultural training. Children of clerks and workers get voca-

tional training. Children of middle-class families get commercial or academic training. Thanks to the scholarship system, boys and girls with exceptionally high talents and motivation, whatever their social level, can break through class lines. Even so, most children obtain education and training in line with their parents' status, aspirations, and means.

The pattern is reinforced through the primary schools. Parents are compelled by law to send their children to the nearest primary school. Residents of a certain area often have about the same social status. Therefore, in practice, selective education means more pre-vocational training in schools that are attended by children of new immigrants and lower-class families, that is, schools serving areas where these families live.

Opponents of selective education label the system reactionary. They charge that it tends to maintain the present class structure. Most farmers' sons remain farmers, and middle-class children follow middle-class professions. Scholarships open the way for a few children, too few, to move into other occupations, the critics charge. Children should not be predestined to a certain group of occupations, that is, to a certain social class, the critics contend. And they go on to conclude that all children should have pre-vocational training, with or without gardening.

The head of the handicraft teachers association stated the position succinctly in an interview with the press reported on October 1, 1956, in *Haaretz* (the word means *earth* or *land*), one of the leading Israeli newspapers. If pre-vocational training is good, this officer asserted, it is good for all children, not for the children of new immigrants only. Those who hold this position argue that students who later use these studies to earn a living will profit directly from them. For young people who do not engage in manual work, pre-vocational training will still confer benefits by developing character. Again, the old, declining values come into play.

Our role here is to present the problem, not to judge who is right or wrong. However, it is safe to say that, despite the belief in equal-

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ity and in the universal value of manual work, Israel is moving toward more selective education. Some fairly exclusive schools in the middle-class areas of Tel Aviv and Haifa still have elaborate gardens and fancy-work shops, but in schools located in lower-class areas and in districts where immigrants have settled, more and more classes in pre-vocational and vocational training are being offered. Most students in the Israeli printing school in Jerusalem, for example, are children of new immigrants. And in many agricultural boarding schools, the proportion of students who are children of new immigrants seems to be increasing.

In the new Israeli state, work as an educational technique has had still another use. Formerly it served as a way of creating and fostering identification with certain values like pioneering. Now work often serves as a way of fostering identification with the state and its goals (16).

To this end, thousands of students, most of them in high school, have taken part in many work projects. These boys and girls have helped cover the barren hills of Israel with trees. They have helped new immigrants battle flood waters in winter. They built a road in the desert next to the Dead Sea. They maintained an experimental farm in the Negeb Desert. The educational influence of these "operations," as they are called in Israel, has often been tremendous. Students benefited more from one day of such work, it was believed, than from hours of classroom lectures and discussions.

Lately the "operations" have been out of favor. They seem to have drawbacks that are proving hard to overcome. One difficulty is that the organizers of most of the operations rate their symbolic significance far above their economic significance. To many who planned the projects, the experience of working for the state on barren hillsides and in the blazing desert was the chief consideration. But trees planted by young children have had to be replanted by professional gardeners. And it is costly to send students to the desert

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NOTES

1. J. Ben David, "Rep
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2. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Th*
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4. J. E. Floud, A. H. Ha
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5. Government Yearboo
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6. David B. Hawk, "Sp

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support them there, and bring them back. In the end, it probably would have cost less to hire laborers to do the work.

But to look only at the cost of the operations is to miss the point. Costs have been written off as educational expense. More important than dollars and cents in the decline of the operations have been the responses of the children themselves to the work projects. The young people are not at all convinced of the significance of this service. They have come to feel that the operations are useless, meaningless, not a real contribution, but a false ritual (17). Faced with this response, the operations have suffered a setback.

Israeli society is changing. The ideals of a pioneering social movement are being adapted to meet the needs of a full-fledged state. The change is reflected in the objectives of the educational system and in the techniques used in the schools. As Israel enters a new stage, a conflict is emerging. The idea of equality—as important in Israel as in the United States—is clashing with the need to introduce selective education. The need is heightened by pressures exerted by rapid advances in other societies. It is likely that these pressures will lead to an increase in differential education and to a decline in the general use of such educational techniques as work.

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12. W. L. Warner, R. J. Havighurst, and M. B. Loeb, *Who Shall Be Educated?* New York: Harper & Bros., 1944.

13. For another study with a similar focus, see Burton R. Clark, *Adult Education in Transition*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956.

14. In Israel, primary schools have eight grades for children from six to fourteen years of age. Secondary schools have four grades for students from fourteen to eighteen years of age. Unless otherwise specified, the term *schools* will include primary as well as secondary schools. *High school* and *secondary school* will be used interchangeably.

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16. For a discussion of youth orientation to collectives, see S. N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation*. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1956, especially pp. 242 and 246.

17. This problem is discussed from another angle by Amitai Etzioni in "The Organizational Structure of 'Closed' Educational Institutions in Israel" *Harvard Educational Review*, XXVII (Spring, 1957), 107–25.

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