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On the state of literacy in Israel

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On the condition of literacy in Israel

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Sources: Research literature, reports of academic and government research institutes, internal government reports, circulars of the Executive Director of the Ministry of Education and of the coordinating supervisor for teaching language, publications by the Central Bureau of Statistics, written and electronic media, Internet sites, academic interpretations, newspaper editorials, philosophical writings, literature, poetry, and songs, radio and television programs and interviews with key figures in the world of literacy in Israel.

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Chapter 1 Israel’s uniqueness in the literacy arena: roots, reflections and diverse approaches to teaching literacy

1.1 Israel’s uniqueness in the literacy arena

The state of literacy in Israel reveals that it is both developed and developing. There is a high level of literacy as well as diversity, tension and polarity. Literacy in Israel is the result of both the lengthy history of the Jewish people dating from their original habitation in the land of Israel and including the years in the Diaspora. Today, consideration of the state of literacy in Israel must take into account both the Jewish and Arab populations as well as the administration and official government policy that directs it. Experts, writers, poets and critics and consumers also influence literacy in Israel.

Language changes, literacy skills changes, and perceptions of the concept of literacy are many and changing, pedagogic approaches to literacy are changing. The state of literacy in Israel takes place in an arena in which political interests wrestle with ethnic-social representation, different experts, as well as policy-makers, and developers of curricula

The complex image will be presented in this chapter from two opposing perspectives

1.2 Prologue

The history of literacy amongst Israelis, Jews and Arabs is ancient and glorious. The Bible, completed by the Jewish people in the 2nd century C.E. and the Koran written and completed in 650 C.E., introduced a culture of reading, writing, speech, listening and learning that provide a source of inspiration until today. The people of Israel are proud to be known as the "People of the Book". This section will deal with the roots of literacy of the Jewish people (with the roots of literacy in Muslim education presented in section 1.5).

Involvement with canonical texts, their repeated reading, distribution, interpretation, and development were all accompanied by messages that encouraged ceaseless devotion: "Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night" (Joshua, 1:8), "From the Bible let not your hand rest".

These writings helped develop a people, a nation, and its morals, wisdom, knowledge and education. Generations of young people were able to read and write in ancient times as a result of the requirement to be familiar with the ancient texts "That a child might write them down" (Isaiah 10:19). The *Bar Mitzva* ceremony, a rite of passage experienced by every male reaching the age of 13, shows basic literacy. The boy reads a section of the *Torah* before the community and guests and makes a speech, known as the *drasha*.

The ancient rabbis instructed all boys from the age of 5 to study the Bible, at the age of 10 to study the *Mishna*, at the age 13 the commandments and at the age of 15 the *Talmud* (according to *Chazal*, the Sages, in the *Avot* Tractate 5:21). This sets a precedent a culture of Jewish literacy throughout history.

During the period of the Second Temple and the *Talmud*, from the 5th century BCE until the end of the first millennium, youngsters were educated by their parents at home and by teachers in schools in the towns, and in synagogue in small settlements. Children studied from age 5 till they were 13, from morning to night, every day of the week, including *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) and the festivals. Other languages spoken in Israel during the first centuries of the Common Era, and other sciences such as mathematics ('geometry') and astronomy, were taught to a few adults. The students mastered reading but not writing. The material studied (apart from the Bible) was learned by rote; the girls received a more limited education than the boys, although some were learned, versed in the *Torah* and even spoke Greek (Safrai, 1969: 678-680). In fact,

Almog (2004: 1175) notes the existence in early times of a "Type of education system for boys that had not been customary amongst other nations and that apparently underlies the intellectual excellence of Jews throughout the generations".

Most of the Diaspora Jewish community in the Middle Ages could read and write, and were familiar with the *Torah* commandments and its key sections. Children from the age of 3 studied from morning till night in the synagogue, in the adjacent *Cheder* (literally "room" which became a synonym for school), in central institutions or at home. The method customary in teaching reading was to learn the letters and

their diverse combinations, but there were also attempts to teach reading words and sentences by repetition, with great emphasis on learning by rote.

In Europe, study was accompanied by translation into the Western European, *Ashkenazi* Jewish language. The learners had only a basic knowledge of Hebrew, the center of learning was the *Talmud*. In the East religious law and legends were taught, in Spain study was expanded to “non-religious wisdom” – philosophy, arithmetic, Arabic, logic, and medicine. In the course of time these secular subjects penetrated the Jewish communities in Europe, and vocational education was added. Education for girls focused mainly on “home manners”, commandments and reading popular religious literature in Yiddish, the spoken language. Formal education was forbidden to girls in Europe; however, the East there is evidence of women who attained the status of female teachers (Breuer, 1969: 680-684).

Between the 16th and the 18th centuries there were a few changes in Jewish and language education, as a result of the impact of European education. Systematic teaching of the Hebrew language and its grammar began as a means of understanding religious law, as well as the sciences when they encouraged belief in God. The humanities, such as literature and Greek philosophy were forbidden. Textbooks in the Hebrew language suitable for children were compiled on Hebrew grammar, as well as translations of the Bible to help the study the *Torah*. Due to deterioration in the economic condition of European Jewry, the number of students dropped and the number of years of study decreased. The Jews studied the languages of the countries in which they lived as well as general studies.

With the strengthening of the *Haskala* (enlightenment) in the second half of the 18th century, Jewish studies split into ultra-orthodox studies and secular studies. Amongst Jews who had distanced themselves from the religious world the idea of a “*Talmid Chacham*”, a person steeped in and familiar with the *Torah*, the *Talmud*, and books of Jewish Wisdom, was replaced by a new ideal of the erudite, scholarly Jew whose connection to Judaism was to the Jewish nation and religion alone. With regard to secular studies, new schools took the place of the *Cheder* and *Yeshiva*, and became science-oriented high schools for girls and boys. During the 19th century, the number of girls attending the various types of general school increased continuously. “The inferior status of women in Jewish religious and spiritual life afforded them an advantage over the males in arenas important in the transition to modernity. Supervision of their education and of their reading material was weak, prohibitions imposed on males were not imposed on females and they enjoyed the ‘advantage of marginality’” (Parush, 2001: 242).

The language of instruction in the general schools was the local language. In most of these schools, the oral religious law was not taught, and the emphasis on Jewish studies shifted to the Hebrew language and the Bible, and thence to biblical history and the foundations of religion. The number of Jewish students attracted to general education, both in secret and openly, increased throughout the 19th century, as Bialik, the modern Jewish poet wrote: “There they sat, our sons, apparently studying but secretly thinking about other” (“*Hamatmid*” - The Diligent One). Many students studied in general modern Christian schools. They acquired their Jewish education – a little Hebrew and some Jewish culture – in special frameworks. At the end of the 19th century, under the influence of the National Revival Movement, the *Haskala* (The Enlightenment) movement restored the Hebrew language as a national spoken language (see below) and the occupation with Jewish literary sources enjoyed cultural and national, rather than religious, significance. In Warsaw, Odessa, and Berlin, book publishers were founded and magazines and newspaper were published (Klingberger: 1969, 684-689).

Changes also occurred in the ultra-orthodox Jewish world in Europe. New *Yeshivot* (institutions for *Torah* and *Talmud* study for males) were opened similar in format to *Yeshivot* in Israel today, intended to teach Torah for its own sake and for studying the Talmudic sources in depth, rather than training teaching staff for the Rabbinate, as was customary in the old *Yeshivot*. In these new *Yeshivot*, other methods of learning were introduced, such as learning in pairs (*Chevruta*), gradually doing away with the need for a Rabbi in order to understand the Talmudic text, giving *Chavurot* – short talks on the subject matter by groups of peers to each other and so on. The intellectual elite of the ultra orthodox studied in these *Yeshivot* (according to Ta-Shma, 1969: 689).

The mediaeval tradition of learning continued amongst the North African, Middle Eastern and Asian communities until the 19th and even the 20th centuries. The 17th and 18th centuries "saw a serious spiritual depletion there, reflected also in the decline in the scale and quality of education. In many diverse Jewish communities secular education did not even replace, or take its place alongside *Torah* education, as a result of which mass illiteracy spread." (Ta-Shma, 1969: 690). In countries such as Morocco, where institutionalized Jewish education existed only in the cities, and in countries such as Algeria where people lived under French rule, or under strong European influence, as well as in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece, Jewish education was almost completely forced out and replaced by general education. Jewish schools were closed in Egypt due to lack of resources and the children of the wealthy attended Christian missionary schools. Only in 1860 was a Jewish girls' school opened, up until then their education had been totally ignored. In other countries, such as Kurdistan, limited Jewish education was provided. Many could not read or write, some learned a few prayers by heart. The girls learned nothing apart from the *Shma Yisrael* ("Hear O Israel") prayer. In Persia (Iran) they studied only prayers, *piyutim* (holy poems), and the weekly *Torah* portion. They did not study the *Talmud*, and the *Mishna* was known only by a few sages. Jewish education in the Yemen was unique in its substance and teaching methods. Writing was taught only in the first year of studies; study focused on mechanical repetition of the texts leading to a decline in the level of teachers and students. Strong public pressure was brought to bear on every father to provide his sons with some Jewish education. For this reason the number of Jews in the Yemen who were uneducated was extremely small. The women in the Yemen were usually illiterate, not even knowing how to pray; neither did they receive formal education. (Ta-Shma, 1969: 692).

1.3 The Jew and the *Sabra* (native Israeli) – literacy amongst Jews in the world and in *Eretz Israel* in the early 20th century

The intensity of nationalism in many places around the world and the feelings of many Jews that they were not wanted in the social and cultural world surrounding them, led to the return of Jews and the search for solutions, the most prominent of which, alongside mass immigration from eastern Europe to America and Western Europe, was "to return to the natural condition of a nation living in its country" (Ben- Sasson, 1974: 954). The learning tradition and assessing the intellectual activity of the immigrants to North and South America and to Western Europe continued. Expanding higher education was the ladder for social improvement and for working in the free professions - as lecturers in the humanities (Bergson, Herman Cohen and Horsal), the social sciences (Zimmel, Durkheim Mannehim, Levi-Strauss) and the exact sciences (Einstein, Cantor, Eisenstein, Manikovski, Oppenheimer, Soldar Lev and Landau), political activists, writers, philosophers, journalists and artists.

Young nationalists immigrated to Israel, They were known as Zionists, who viewed Zion (Israel) as a refuge and strove to establish a national homeland. Immigrants between 1904-1914, some 40,000 members of the Second *Aliya* (The Second Wave of Immigration) most of whom left the country after a brief stay in *Eretz Israel*, had a strong Jewish and general culture that would "Realize the ideals of social collectivism and productivity of the Jewish people" (Ben- Sasson, 1974: 954). In the spirit of the ideals that they absorbed in Russia, where the winds of revolution were blowing, they wished to establish "A new nation, a new country, a new generation, a new ethic, a new culture, an agricultural nation, an enlightened nation" (from a letter by Yechiam Vaitz to Yizhar Smilanski, his cousin, 25.5.1939, edited by Yizhar, 1948). These Jews, considered pioneers ennobled the concept of working in agriculture, paving roads, construction and defense and trying to create a new educated Jew who would work on the land.

The book *Mikdamot* (Prologue) by S. Yizhar, considered by Almog (1997: 385) to be the greatest *Sabra* writer, expresses the meta-narrative, the great ideology that was formulated here. He describes the dramatic change and the two powers of attraction: "The new Jew in a new country [...] a small theater now presenting the greatest of world plays. The spectacle of the birth of the new Jew in a new country. A play whose essence is the Jew who works the land as a free man and as an independent person not exploiting people and not being exploited [...] and this deed so arouses and so stimulates and so throbs to the point that people far away hear and arise and leave their homeland, parents and home and

studies, wealthy and with a light backpack, with only the two books making it heavy, the Bible on the one hand and Tolstoy on the other [...] till they land singing on the Jaffa beach [...] here, 2000 dunams (500 acres) of Zionist renewal. Land of the Jews. *A small island, rich and green and scientific and new and surrounded by a sea of ignorance and backwardness and retardation* (Yizhar, 1992:15-20; italics – SBV). His father's description covers the new duality of the literate working man: "When all are asleep the night's work begins [...] sitting and writing [...] books and newspapers that arrive by boat and are passed from hand to hand [...] in Russian and German, and in French and English that he cannot understand, never having studied them. Simply because he arose and went to *Eretz Yisrael* [...] and he was only 16½ and only had time to learn in *Cheder*, in private lessons and thirstily reading everything he could lay his hands on [...] and he has organized knowledge in his head of everything he comes across, including chapters of chemistry, biology, history and mainly economics [...] what are you actually, a farmer working the land or a learned person wearing books, building the country with a hoe in his hands or a pen, learning the lifestyles of man and society [...] both a farmer and a learned man. [...] and who did not write. Everyone who was a farmer during the day was a writer at night (ibid: 21-25).

The generation of children born to these immigrants to Israel was considered in the national Israeli historiography to be the first *Sabra* generation (named after the fruit – prickly on the outside and sweet inside), "Representing the new Israeli identity", Jews-Arabs-Israelis (Almog, 1997: 127, 388). "The creators of walking Hebrew", whose predecessors' developed literacy was no longer attractive to them. The *Sabra* generation established an anti-intellectual, "wild kid" literacy ethos, "exhibitionist ignoramuses" (as the poet Shlonski called them, cf. Almog, 1997: 218). Farmer and soldier, inarticulate, direct and purposeful in his speech, but on the other hand demonstrating a developed culture of group discussion, reading books, and a developed writing ability (ibid: 383). His cultural-spiritual horizons were ethnocentric: narrow, "Israeli", isolated, "No longer learned students, and not yet wise in any new knowledge" (Yizhar, Days of the *Ziklag*, cf. Almog, 1997: 246). The learning curriculum is gleaned and operates from the national, secular perspective. Language, literature, Bible, nature, geography, arithmetic and even drawing – all were studied from an ethnocentric approach connected to the Zionist, socialist, pioneering notion (Almog, 1997: 57-63).

The written media, fiction and poetry are recruited ("The Artists' Army", "The Sages of the Tribe" - Almog, 2004: 633, 766). Their creators are the "Pillar of Cloud" before the "Children of Israel", important as priests in the religious world, charismatic spiritual leaders who stood at the center of national cultural consciousness and enjoyed status, prestige, and splendor.

One of the reasons for the *Sabra* being a phenomenal success story, claims Almog (ibid: 242, 383-384), lies in the great importance attached to educating the youth. Everyone was involved in education, and much of the shared resources of the young State were allocated to education and instruction. Teachers and kindergarten teachers also enjoyed high prestige. *Sabraim* benefited from high-quality, formal education from outstanding teachers and rich informal education. The intellectual awareness of this generation is manifested in the many writers, poets, journalists, academics, and military personnel innovative in the domain of military thought and strategy, as well as in the many tools of expression: Pamphlets, journals, weeklies, literature, etc. (ibid: 249-251).

In the following years, the "People of the Book" hoped to survive by means of "the sword", and this goal empowered the anti-intellectual ethos, which preferred the "Fighting man to the thinking man" (ibid: 225).

1.4 From the people of the book to the people who live by the sword – literacy in the military discourse

The heroes of that period of national revival, prior to, and after, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, were soldiers and military commanders, "The protective wall of the Jewish people", according to Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, on the Holocaust Day ceremony on May 4th 2005. . For years, the pictures of the IDF senior officers were displayed on Independence Day "on almost every balcony. Their

posters were distributed in the national newspapers [...] and thus it was until the 1973 Yom Kippur War” (Levi, 2005). The army became the main focus of power, an object of glorification, of imitation, of admiration. Senior officers retiring to this day fill key positions in civil government as heads of government, ministers, executive officers and managers of companies.

Israel's military culture gave rise to a unique literacy that is empowering, militant and physical, which moves away from the spiritual culture of the old Judaism that was believed to have led to profound disasters for the Jewish people. The military culture broadcasts a perception that the army is anti-intellectual by its very nature, rejects critical writing for fear of demoralization, glorifies the ability to perform over other abilities such as public speaking, sitting in libraries and writing at a desk (Brosh, 1998: 131-133) and does not encourage professional writing by offering suitable compensation. The military culture has a tense relationship with the media and with the academic world. The army would like to be an independent, authoritarian body, criticism of itself remaining within (ibid: 133). “The pen is used as if it were a weapon ” - is the opposite of the essence of military culture.

Some of the key attributes of military literacy are presented below: One must find a solution, arrive at a plan and give orders; the command authority is that which validates writers and speakers; texts have power and influence on their receivers; linguistic uniformity is necessary as a condition for effective functioning; language is functional, professional, brief and concise; sentences are short; the writing structure is simple and based on sectioning units of ideas (“6. Thanks” – a common joke about an overall custom in military writing); texts are written as in PowerPoint – a few words on the page, very big letters, graphic, colorful with a frame around the words (ibid: 135-136).

Derision of improving literacy amongst the military was harshly criticized in the Agranat Report, 1975 that investigated the events of the first days of the *Yom Kippur* war (October 1973). Committee members wrote of the decline in military terminology and command language into unclear, hazy jargon and fuzzy thought (pp.1358-1359, 1261; full quotes in Brosh, 1998: 131).

At the same time, and apparently paradoxically, the IDF also has made a significant contribution to advancing literacy in Israel. This topic will be discussed in Section 6.2.2 on adult education.

1.5 Education and literacy in Islam

From the start, during the 6th century C.E., Islamic education was intended to “Impart the knowledge of truths of belief and familiarity with the religious commandments and instruction on a religious lifestyle” (Landau, 1969: 673). The identification of State and religion led to a clear lack of differentiation between religious studies and secular studies. Study had a religious character. Three types of study existed: 1) Religious – the *Koran*, oral tradition and language studies necessary for in-depth study of the Koran and its interpretation; 2) Intellectual – the theory of logic and nature that also aided the religious studies; 3) Technical – arts and agriculture, that enjoyed limited appreciation and were studied by the children of the poor as a part of their minimal involvement with religious studies.

From the historical perspective there were three stages in the development of education in Islam: 1) The Ommayad Dynasty and conquests – expanding education in elementary schools for boys on the basis of private initiative. Teaching was conducted in the mosques. The children of the wealthy were tutored at home. 2) The Abassid Dynasty – during which elementary and higher education, especially in cities, were developed and flourished. Ignorance prevailed outside of the towns. The masses received limited education from a perspective of scope and quality. The Koran, tradition and language were taught in elementary school, the *Kutab*, similar to the Jewish *Cheder*. Higher studies revolved around Islamic Law, literature and linguistics. High quality libraries were established adjacent to some of the mosques where research works were written. Higher studies were common in towns, such as Baghdad, Basra and Fostat in Iraq, in towns in Spain and Egypt (Al Azhar, in Cairo is a famous institution which continues to function to this day). 3) During the crumbling of the Khalif Dynasty, in the days of the Seljuks and Mamelukes after them, when the authorities encouraged learning and established a new type of learning institution – the *Madrassa*, an institution of higher education that trained teachers,

judges, government clerks and doctors. Islamic law, linguistics and history, arithmetic, geometry, zoology, botany and medicine were taught in the *Madrassas*. Teaching children in the schools was mechanical and focused on repetition and dictation, on the students' reading and the teachers' explanations.

Erudition and exact memory were emphasized until the 19th century. With the onset of westernization in the 19th and the 20th centuries, Islamic education responded with fanaticism, zealotry, and exclusivity (Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), and with corrections and alterations on the other. The changes were manifested in the learning substance, in adding secular studies, and in methods of teaching. In Turkey, for example, the secular substance prevailed. In the 20th century, the main thrust of religious education was in the villages and the dominance of modern education was recognized in the large towns (Landau, 1969: 673-675).

1.6 Reflections: Interim summary

The deeds of the Fathers are a symbol for a particular type of son, and a question mark for another type. What did the heritage of the past bequeath to literacy in the Israel of the 21st century?

The history of Jewish and Arab literacy dwells amongst us, imprinted on the Israeli reality and serving as a source of understanding. This history brings to the present: an echo and reflection of a literacy saturated with substance and significance; a strong feeling of the uniqueness and the desire for preservation and seclusion combined with openness and liberalism to separatist and multiple literacies, sometimes reluctantly. ("Plurality that is hard to translate into pluralism" - Calderon, 2000: 14); a strong tradition of religious literacy amongst the masses along with learned (secular) literacy common amongst the elites and socio-economic middle and upper classes; split and separation between two key literacies – religious and secular; differences, disparity and tension between western and eastern literacy; powers of attraction and rejection; rapprochement, interaction, new combinations and even solidarity between (and within) Jewish literacy, Muslim literacy and Christian literacy; deprivation and exclusion of a large group within the population – the women; literacy the center of which is reading and speech, with margins, writing and active listening at the margins; literacy that gradually seeks the democratic dimension embedded in participating in its creation and acquisition.

These poles and the discourse between them afforded and affords a source for the flourishing of literature, poetry, song writing, playwriting, articles, reference books, academic research, Internet sites and journals, as well as the plastic arts, cinema, architecture, and fashion.

Sami Shalom Shitrit's poem, "After the Opera", briefly illustrates this: "After the opera he will unravel his tie / And enrobe himself in a Jalabia / A work of art / (From Morocco, by order) / Thereafter / He will rinse his ears with a trickle / Sweet trickles of the *oud*" ("Openings", p. 43).

1.7 The condition of literacy in Israel at the start of the 21st century: White Bird/Black Fish

Two converse perspectives (inspired by M.C. Escher, artist)) exemplify the status of literacy and the Hebrew language in Israel.

Let us start with the *white bird*, with the vision and the dream that came true. First: the impressive rebirth of the Hebrew language. Only in 1880, did Eliezer Ben Yehuda ("the reviver of the Hebrew language") publish two articles entitled, "On the question of education" in the *Chavazelet* weekly, in which he called for adopting Hebrew as the language of teaching in schools in *Eretz Israel*. In 1890, Hebrew was taught in Hebrew in the Galilee villages and it became the language of speech. In 1914, the "language war" over the question of the language of learning was solved, and Hebrew became the language for teaching all sciences in Jewish schools and the academic world in Israel. In 1948, with the declaration of the State of Israel, Hebrew, (*Ivrit*) was declared the official language of the State

(<http://www.Hasaphahivrit.co.il>). Millions of immigrants to Israel, speaking dozens of languages, learned one new language symbolizing, and creating a national rebirth. The education system was the stronghold of this renaissance and the language became that of the social elite and the entire public. Teachers, linguists, the Hebrew Language Academy, authors, poets, journalists, the media and all those speaking the language, who created a living, spoken, written Hebrew, contributed to its regeneration based on the influence of 4000 years of biblical Hebrew - the language of the Jewish sages, of the Middle Ages and of a massive enrichment project of modern inventions, that has continued to this very day. At the hub of the language-national project are the *Ulpanim* (the intensive Hebrew learning courses). Their location and method of teaching are intended for adults and aim to teach Hebrew-Israeli literacy that will facilitate social and cultural (Israeli, western, and mainly modern) integration at work, the ability to read a newspaper and fulfill writing needs. Lines from a song by Dan Almagor optimistically express the difficulty and overcoming it: "Hebrew difficult language / Tough Israel new / Perhaps live not more alone? / You with I? / Also I with you? / Alone not live more tomorrow". (The language contortions follow those in the Hebrew original). Such innovative and constructive experience influenced language education for many years (see Chapter 3 and section 6.2.1).

Another national and mass undertaking in the world of literacy dealt with eradicating ignorance through teaching reading and writing to thousands of people lacking this ability who arrived in Israel from North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In places where there is now a large concentration of immigrants from those countries and a large number of new immigrants, the national effort continues as educational projects the focus of which is literacy. An example of this is the "30-settlement projects": An educational campaign to reduce disparity that focused on increasing the number of those attaining a high school matriculation certificate and reducing the drop-out rate, in cooperation with several government, municipal, academic organizations and private educators.

Finally, although Israel is located in Western Asia, a geographic area included in the list of areas afflicted by illiteracy, the number of those able to read and write approaches 100%. The thousands of immigrants who brought many and diverse literacy cultures create an interesting multi-literate society. With respect to historical changes, Israel is connected at all levels to the digital revolution – research, development and application.

In contrast to Escher's white bird is the *Black Fish*. More than 120 years after the rebirth of the Hebrew language there is still room for criticism of its miserable condition and of the literacy culture. One may well censure the inability of statesmen and politicians to express themselves coherently and speak correct Hebrew in the media. One may well criticize the students' ability to express themselves in writing. The status of Hebrew as an academic language should be strengthened. One should be concerned over the closing of *Ulpanim*, reduction in their budgets and the length of studies there. One should be saddened that most of the Israeli public does not yet speak correct Hebrew, that students deride language lessons and teachers (Alon, 2002: 78- 81). The digital revolution in the education system should be continued, intensified and deepened, with software and pedagogical programs adapted to literacy in the knowledge era; one should take responsibility for the low achievements in language education within the Arab sector. One should solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, make peace with the Arab states and come to terms with the obligation to teach Arabic as a second language (Peace starts with language). One may talk of "The right to normalcy" (to quote the Israeli author A.B. Yehoshua) but not to strive for its realization in the realm of literacy.

1.8 The formation of the semantic field: Literacy and illiteracy

In the last 35 years, literacy has become an area of knowledge with a "Body of professional and theoretical research" (Bridwell-Bowles, 1995: 52). It is fed by many areas of knowledge, such as education, linguistics, language, rhetoric, literature, psychology, psycho-linguistics, anthropology, history, and cultural studies, etc. The fringes that have converged, i.e., theories, now intersect with feminism, multi-culturalism, criticism, post-modernism. Thus a multi-disciplinary, non-homogeneous

domain of knowledge is broad, dynamic and lacking rigid disciplinary boundaries. These facts impinge on the many definitions and the changing terminology afforded this concept, and they justify the term "New literacy" that differentiates between that and the old, traditional literacy.

The word literacy is derived from the Latin word *litteratus*, meaning "a learning man" (Wohl and Shalev, 1989: 84). The Hebrew word chosen for this term is "*oryanut*", taken from the Aramaic *orayta* (*Torah*), and the Aramaic adjective "*bar oryan*", whose meaning is similar to the Latin word *litteratus*: a person knowledgeable in the *Torah*, in books, a learned person knowledgeable in the religious literature. The origins of Abraham from Ur (Kasdim), the father of the Hebrew nation and founder of monotheistic religion, adds a touch of early meaning and a distant echo of religious significance to the word. The word "*or*" (light) and its connotation with the word *Haskala* (Enlightenment), strongly reverberates in the Hebrew word. The creative invention of the word *oryanut* was proposed by Ze'ev Smilansky, a mathematician and expert in computer sciences, a person with linguistic sensitivity fed by the linguistic genius of his father, the writer S. Yizhar. It was first used by the Ministry of Education in 1986, with the increased involvement in reading comprehension, writing and other language skills. The word is common amongst researchers and educators, but has not yet won a place in the education system, (see Section 5) or in spoken language. The question arises again and again: "Tell me, what's literacy?" At the same time, googling the word *oryanut* in Hebrew produces 14,200 results (as of 14.3.04) and indicates its assimilation into the language. Definitions of the term cross the confines of written language and link the concept of literacy to almost every domain.

Together with the word *oryanut*, the word *boryanut* has been proposed by Tsvia Walden, in parallel to the English word "illiteracy" and based on the Hebrew word *boor*, meaning someone lacking education or knowledge, someone who has learned nothing, who cannot read or write, alphabetic, (<http://www.ravmilim.co.il>). The term did not catch on in Hebrew, producing only 6 results in Google and not appearing in the on-line version of the above dictionary, neither did the word *horyanut* (invented by Shoshan Brosh-Vaitz, as a combination of the words *horim* –parents - and *oryanut*) to denote natural literacy taught by parents to their children.

1.9 Diverse approaches to nurturing literacy

The concept of literacy enjoys diverse definitions resulting in sundry pedagogic and practical approaches. The education systems officially adopted Unesco's definition of the term. People are considered literate when they acquire the essential knowledge and skills that enable them to intervene in all the activities for which reading and writing are needed. This is in order to function effectively in a group and in the community (Harrison, 1983: 148), but it has been adapted to the broader concept that developed over the years and also to the local culture. Chapters 4 and 6 of this report present the processes of change. This chapter will offer several leading approaches: The skills approach, the communicative approach, the cognitive approach, the whole language approach, the constructivist approach, the social-reflective/critical approach and the contextual approach. Each has a different focus of interest, be it society, the text, the learner, the context or the means.

1.9.1 The skills approach separates teaching reading and writing into the individual handling of skills such as decoding, spelling, learning vocabulary, learning rules for the correct use of language, identifying the main idea in a text, locating information, differentiating between fact and knowledge, presenting the order of tenses and so on. This approach was, and still is, common in Israel.

1.9.2 The communicative approach stresses the four modalities of language - reading, writing, speaking and listening - as acts of communication, since the function of language is to create communication. The language of communication is created through a system of communication norms, the sum of values, ideologies, mentalities, methods of behavior and rhetoric ("ways of community discourse" - Sarig, 2000: 22). The communications alignment of the participants in an act of communication considers addressees and is influenced by such diverse attributes as age, education, linguistic competence, cognitive skills, origin, gender, and other diverse factors. Given these reasons,

the choice of discourse strategies determines the level of givenness (the degree of consideration of previous knowledge as a given, needing no explanation and expansion), the degree of elaboration of superfluous linguistic expansion of a particular idea, the degree of directness and indirectness, transparency, diverse levels of explicitness, structuring and organization of information, concreteness, choice of language register (high, regular, low), expressions of manners, etc., (Widdoson, 1983; Blum-Kulka, 1987; Brosh and Weinbach, 1986; Follman, 1989: 30-37).

This approach was expanded after general agreement on the success of communications as discussed by Grice (1975) in the "Principle of cooperation between addresser and addressee", that insists on four conditions: relevance, quality, quantity and textual clarity. The communicative approach reinforced the status of the spoken and written language, and located the central hub of learning subjects such as rhetorical structures, coherence, prepositions, language registers, speech activities and so on. Its first impact was on language education of Hebrew as a second language that recognized the need to impart communicative language competence and only thereafter on language education of Hebrew as a first language.

1.9.3 The cognitive approach (the "process movement") focuses on concepts such as scheme, scenario, deriving meaning in the framework of the dialogue between the learners and the texts they compose in reading and writing. Such an approach exploits experts' knowledge of processing learning through reading, writing, speaking and listening strategies (recruiting knowledge, raising hypotheses, planning, meaning composing, drafting, reviewing, rewriting) and meta-cognitive abilities (self-control and monitoring). The aim is to impart this knowledge to novices, to students at the specialization stages. This approach was used in Israel throughout most of the 90s but focused on reading and writing alone. It focused teaching on processes of structuring significance connected to reading and writing and less on the product. In view of this, a pedagogy developed of working together with colleagues, teachers and tools (software, computerized writing facilitators, discussion groups at Internet-supported courses and so on).

1.9.4 The whole language approach is, in fact, a movement rather than a teaching method whose philosophical, pedagogic perception reached Israel from the USA, and gained strength in Israel as of the late 1980s. The holistic, global approach that focuses on learning, spotlights the natural learning of literacy in the neo-Vigotskyean spirit. It is founded in learning in a process of socially-supportive reciprocal relations, on arousing emotional and intellectual motivation on the part of the learners, on developing independent learning procedure through independent and guided discovery, on the use of authentic reading materials and on writing in a "literacy-rich" environment. Its extreme manifestation would seem to be invalidating the phonetic-analytical approach to teaching reading, invalidating a textbook used by all the students in the class, and canceling separate lessons in reading comprehension in favor of inclusion in diverse realms of knowledge. (For more on the approach, its place and rejection see section 5).

1.9.5 The constructivist approach strengthened in parallel with the whole language approach and assumed that "Learning is a subjective process of structuring new knowledge from existing knowledge through dialogue with the social environment" (Zellermayer, 1996: 97). This approach intensified the disparity with traditional approaches, expanded the insights regarding learning to all subjects, and offered support to educators who worked in the magnetic field of whole language. According to this approach (Brooks and Brooks, 1994, cf. Zellermayer, 1996: 99) the curriculum is presented from the whole to the parts, with an emphasis on key concepts and subjects: The relevance of the curriculum for the students, relying on primary sources of information and authentic materials that can be interpreted, is that the students are perceived as thinking people with their own theories regarding the world, teachers interact and summon the environment to the students, assessment is interwoven in the teaching process and is conducted by the teachers' observation of the students while working, the students presenting their work portfolios and working mainly in a cooperative framework. Lecturers in departments of education in Israeli universities were mainly involved in this approach, applying it to academic research in a few schools. This approach/paradigm filtered down only somewhat to the entire

education system, although it was suitable in mood to the knowledge era that exploded with the introduction of computers and Internet to the education system. The absence of this approach in the education system is presented by Nachmias and Miodusser (2000), who investigate the assimilation of new technology in schools: A big step forward for technology: two steps back for pedagogy.

1.9.6 The critical approach views literacy as a means to raise personal and social awareness which will produce personal and social change, in the spirit of Paulo Freire's perception and that of his partner, Ira Shor (1990). Literacy is capable of helping its agents to empower its owners, to liberate, to change ways of thought and communications. This approach has no institutionalized expression in Israel.

1.9.7 The contextual approach is the current institutionalized approach in language education. It focuses on four areas: The word, collocation (word combination), the sentence and the text, and emphasis on the textual, cultural and social context between and within them (Ministry of Education, 2003b: 15). (See sections 3 and 5 below).

1.10 Approaches to teaching early reading in Israel

The development of teaching reading Hebrew and Arabic underwent several stages, similar to teaching reading in most countries. Despite the similarities between the two Semitic languages there are no comparative studies on the development of teaching early reading in Hebrew and Arabic. (Gillis and Schiff, 1999: 346). This section will present the topic of Hebrew education. Methods of teaching Arabic reading have not yet been published in Israel although research has been performed (Nashef, 1980: 357, cf. Gillis and Schiff, 1999: 378).

In spite of the fact that methods of reading Hebrew are western, they have a Jewish and Israeli uniqueness stemming from the lengthy Jewish tradition, from the revival of the Hebrew language and the existence of independent sectors (the ultra-orthodox and the *kibbutz*) who enjoyed a less centralized language policy (Gillis and Schiff, 1999: 378). The methods are summarized below.

The aleph bet (abc) method: This is the traditional *Cheder* method that emphasizes visual principles and naming letters. The Hebrew letters are considered holy: One learns to read in order to study Torah. This method, incorporating minor changes, is still taught today in ultra orthodox society. (ibid: 347)

The vocal methods received a special Israeli nuance following the "Hebrew in Hebrew" movement that underlined speaking and listening in a natural discourse. The pronunciation of the pure consonant was given little significance, and due to the difficulty in pronouncing consonants and the unique status of vowels in the Hebrew language (that are not considered independent symbols) combinations based on a concrete, spoken and understood Hebrew word were usually taught (ibid: 347).

The analytical methods were taught in Israel prior to the 1930s - in schools belonging to the worker movement, having a particular pedagogic and value-oriented character and in the *kibbutz* education system. Teaching reading was combined with teaching a key topic and humanistic pedagogy, in which reading materials were created by the children, the material was relevant to their daily lives and the atmosphere was open to slower rates of learning reading till the age of 10. Learning was based on developing the visual, whole word approach (ibid: 347-348).

Methods adapted to the attributes of the Hebrew language: The hybrid combination of two foreign methods - the Montessori method, a phonetic, vocal method, and the Belgian Dickrullian, predominantly visual method according to which one starts with whole sentences. Such a combination of methods is known as the Zipporah Katz method, which determines the need to teach reading Hebrew in a global manner, starting with words very different from each other in length, vowels, morphology, and meaning, and teaching the sounds of letters separate from any association. Her method was not widely adopted by the regular education system (ibid: 349-350).

Methods combining old traditions with new approaches: These evolved when thousands of children joined the education system following the large waves of immigration to Israel. They merged the

traditional *cheder* methods, introduced to Israel from countries with very different cultures such as Yemen, *Sephardi* and *Ashkenazi* approaches, (Levanon's, Smilanski's and Feitelson's methods) (ibid: 350-351).

Eclectic methods: A combination of approaches based on an educated and mindful choice made from those already in existence and which originated in the past. The choice is motivated by avoiding those methods which had failed and by applying effective experience. The choice incorporates both analytical and synthetic methods. The "No Secrets" method declared itself to be an eclectic method that added innovation in the form of incorporating television as one of its significant auxiliary means (ibid: 351).

Methods anchored in theoretical models: A mixture of diverse areas and adaptation of American and European principles illustrated the spiral development within diverse learning methods such as 'No Secrets', '*Litaf*', 'Reading Without Reading Textbook', '*Alfori*', 'Our *Alfori*' and 'A New Page'. The unsatisfactory level of achievement added to the confusion and perplexity and led to a continued search for models outlining processes of teaching reading. The approaches that were developed were "Bottom Up" (focusing on language units that comprise the complete language unit and thus stress decoding), and "Top Down" (a global view that observes the whole language unit and thereby emphasizes comprehension). Another tactic was combining the two models in an interactive learning process functioning simultaneously or alternately, this approach was proposed in the "Learning to Read by Experience" method (ibid: 351-355). These techniques stressed learning reading strategies and actively tracking the processes of identifying and composing meanings, such as applying previous knowledge, predicting, independent study, drawing conclusions, reflection and so on. In other words, "learning the accepted literacy behaviors" (Hanauer, 2003: 66-71).

The above approaches indicate, the various ways of nurturing literacy and teaching reading which represent the Israeli and global cultural ambience in which they are embedded. Most also have some presence, in an eclectic array, in the new curriculum (2003). It is surprising that literacy/language education is termed "Hebrew" by the Ministry of Education, since this term is not used "in the field", in high schools. There is no such subject in the curriculum; there is no "Hebrew teacher". The term describes an *Ulpan* Hebrew teacher. In fact, the term "*Ivrit*" (Hebrew) includes calculation of, and a weighted score (in the high school matriculation examination), for Hebrew language (morphology and syntax), comprehension and expression. This could be called, in one word, literacy, but the term did not permeate from the academic world to the education system.

The subject boasts various names in the education system: Hebrew language, language, grammar and composition, language knowledge, comprehension and expression, language education and so on (see chapter 5.2). The term "literacy" was not officially used in the system as a subject of study. It was perceived in a broader context and in association with other subjects: scientific literacy, mathematical literacy, computer literacy and so on, meaning basic knowledge, a necessary level of familiarity with every subject. Therefore, if the intention is language specialization, the terms language literacy, reading literacy and so on should be used (Shiniak, 2005).

Chapter 2 A profile of Israel

This chapter offers national background data and data on the literate context. It is based on the annual report of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2004), on the CBS website and on findings from the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy) study in Israel (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004).

2.1 Population

The announcement to the media by the CBS in honor of Israel's 57th day of Independence, dated May 10, 2005, announced that Israel's population was 6.9 million people. Some 5,260,000 Jews live in Israel (76% of the entire population of Israel), about 1,350,000 Arabs (20% of the population of Israel) and approximately 290,000 people (4%) defined as "others" (immigrants and their children who are not registered as Jews by the Ministry of the Interior). Israel's population is now larger by a factor of 8.5 than

in 1948, when it numbered about 806,000 . The natural birthrate in the last year reached 149,000; the number of immigrants was 26,000 of whom 9,500 came from the former Soviet Union and 4,400 from Ethiopia.

According to data for 2003, 63.5% of non-Arab citizens of Israel were Israeli-born and 36.5% were born abroad. The percentage of those of Asian origin was 13%, of African origin, 15.9%, of European and American origin 40.7%, (of the latter 30.4% were Israeli born.)

2.2 The social-religious structure in Israel

Israel's population is divided into Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druse and those having no religious classification. The data from 2003 show the following: Jews (secular, traditional and ultra-orthodox) - 5,165,400 (76.54%); Muslims - 1,072,500 (15.89%); Druse - 110,800 (1.64%); Christians (Arabs and others) - 142,400 (2.11%); no religious classification, 257,300 (3.81%). Religious identification divides into secular, traditional and orthodox (or even ultra-orthodox) Jews. These social-religious groups support diverse literacies, goals, approaches, pedagogies, means and so on.

2.3 Students in educational institutions

The number of students in educational institutions in 2004 stood at 2,068,726. 310,000 children were enrolled in kindergarten, 567,558 in elementary school, 474,526 in middle school, and high schools had a registration of 285,520 students. Post high school institutions registered 52,655 students and non-university institutions of higher education had 71,761 students. University enrollment was 124,805 students with 49,500 students at other institutions (CBS, 2004).

2.4 The number of people per student household

A higher proportion of small families (up to four persons) is to be found in Hebrew-speaking households, while more Arabic-speaking students are from large families (7 persons or more). The disparity in achievement amongst students from large families (10 persons or more) and small families is 135 points (national average – 56 points) (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 95).

2.5 Languages

Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages of the State of Israel, although many others are taught in educational institutions.

In elementary schools English is compulsory from 4th grade, although some schools start teaching the language from 3rd or even 1st grade. The homeroom staff teach oral English for 15 minutes daily. Some schools specialize in teaching other languages in accordance with demand, such as Spanish. The latter is due to the influence of the telenovellas (Reuter, 2005).

In high schools English and a second foreign language – French or Arabic – are taught from 7th grade. Until the end of the 2005 school year many other foreign languages could be studied from 10th grade up and students could sit the high school matriculation examination in French, German, Spanish, Russian, Amharic, Romanian, Portuguese, Hungarian, Persian, Bulgarian, Italian, Turkish, Polish and Georgian. French, Russian, and Amharic may be studied from 7th grade. As of summer 2006, there will be no high school matriculation examinations in most of those languages apart from French, German, Spanish, Russian and Amharic (Pas, 2005).

In the Arabic education system English is studied from 4th–12th grade. French is taught in recognized, non-official schools. Hebrew is compulsory in Arab schools from 4th grade (with some starting in 1st or 2nd grades) till the end of high school. Hebrew is studied as a second language, as “another first language” (Abu-Fane, 2005).

In ultra-orthodox schools English is studied as a foreign language from 4th (or even 3rd) grade through 12th grade. In some schools belonging to the independent education system Yiddish is studied as a second language in 3rd and 4th grades, while in a very few schools it is the first language (Erlich, 2005).

English, it should be noted, is studied more and more as a second, rather than a foreign, language. Hebrew education is far from symmetrical regarding the study of Arabic, which is taught as a foreign, and not as a second language, in the Hebrew education system, despite being an official language. There are some who are demanding the abolition of its status as an official language.

Language spoken at home: The 2001 PIRLS study finds partial compatibility (80%) between the language spoken at home, in school and used in tests (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 86).

2.6 The political and national situation

Israel is the first and only democracy in the Middle East. Absolute attributes of a democracy may be recognized as those entailing freedom of the press, freedom of speech, the independence and power of the legislative arm of government and so on. At the same time, democracy in Israel is more limited than that in Europe and in English speaking countries with regard to three important parameters: There is no unconditional separation between state and religion, Israeli Arabs are discriminated against in various ways and are kept from the main foci of power, and Israel controls some 3 million Arabs who live in disputed territories taken in the war with Egypt and Jordan in 1967.

Israel has been involved in an ongoing political conflict since the beginning of the 20th century and which has continued throughout her existence. The conflict with the Arab States and with the Palestinians living in the occupied territories (Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip) since the 1967 war with Egypt and Jordan, has varied in degrees of intensity. Peace agreements have been signed with two neighbors - Egypt and Jordan - but peace has not yet been achieved with other neighboring countries (Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and many other countries). The bitter and bloody struggle with the Palestinians is reflected by the relations between Jews and Arabs (or Palestinians) living in Israel.

2.7 The economy

The GNP for 2002 was \$128 billion – \$19,530 per person, of which 2.3% has been earmarked for state education and 6% for public health. In 1997, the International Monetary Fund added Israel to its list of industrialized countries. The decision was explained by the rapid developments in the Israeli economy and the growth in per capita income (Almog, 2004: 27). The country now manages an open, competitive market economy in which the gap between the highest and lowest incomes is growing. Inequality in gross income has become one of the highest in the west with inequality increasing constantly since the 1970s.

The poverty scenario: The poverty line in Israel is defined as the level of income equal to 50% of the external available income. The average salary in January 2005 was 7,439 NIS (about \$1650). 25% of employees in Israel make less than half the national average wage. More than a third of families in Israel live below the poverty line (Ben-David, 2005). The percentage of unemployed reached 9.9% in January 2005 (CBS, 2005). The deeper poverty amongst Arabs and ultra-orthodox Jews (populations with large families) compared to the international average finds Israel placed 6th lowest on the scale of social expenditure for the 30 member countries of the OECD

2.8 Life expectancy

Amongst the Jewish population: Females – 81.9 years, males – 78.1 years; amongst the Arab population, females – 77.9 years and males – 74.7 years (Data correct for 2002).

2.9 Level of human development and urbanization

Israel holds 22nd place in the world for health, education and standard of living weighting. 91.6% of the population lives in cities. 45% live in towns with more than 100,000 residents. 25% live in the four large cities, 8% in rural locations including kibbutzim.

2.10 Knowledge of reading and writing

95.3% of the population can read and write. Substantial analphabetism may be observed in towns whose socio-economic condition is low – in the peripheral areas and the Negev - or amongst those who arrived in Israel from rural areas of countries with a low literacy rate. It is more common amongst female Bedouins and females who arrived here from Georgia and Ethiopia.

2.11 Higher education

13.2% of the population are graduates of institutions of higher education (of whom 11.7% are male and 14.6% are female); 24.9% are graduates of academic institutions (of whom 24.1% are male and 25.6% female). Jews account for 14% and Arabs for 7.6% of the students in post high school institutions, while at academic institutions 27.3% were Jews and 11% were Arabs (as of 2003). The PIRLS study finds that 35% of Israeli students have at least one parent who has completed an academic degree (international average 23%). 45% of them are Hebrew speakers and 11% are Arabic speakers (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 91). The percentage of Arabs receiving a B.A degree in Israel in 2002 was 6.4%; 3.3% received an M.A degree, 3.3%.

2.12 High school education

56.3% of 12th grade Jewish students tested in 2002 were entitled to a high school matriculation certificate, as were 51.1% of the Arab students and 6.8% of students from the ultra-orthodox sector.

2.13 Public policy concerning literacy

Public policy promotes the status of literacy in many ways, such as in the requirement to complete 12 years of schooling, passing high school matriculation examinations, further academic education, mastery of the Hebrew language (and in many cases mastery of the English language) as a condition for finding work. Salaries are related to the type of education as well as additional training courses.

2.14 Communications

955/1000 persons have a mobile phone; 301/1000 have an Internet connection (Fuchs and Gralesmer, 2004).

2.15 Educational resources in the learners' home

This index refers to parameters such as, the number of books in the parents' home, the number of children's books at home, the level of higher education of one of the parents, a computer at home, a writing desk and personal books that are not textbooks or daily newspapers. The proportion of students in Israel enjoying a high index of educational resources at home is greater than the international average. Significant disparity exists between the Hebrew-speaking and the Arabic-speaking sectors as regards the percentage of students positioned high and low on the index (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 92).

The data regarding book-ownership in the homes of the Hebrew-speaking population in Israel is similar to the international data, although that pertaining to the Arabic-speaking population indicates a higher percentage of homes with few books and a lower percentage of homes with many books. According to international averages, the disparity in achievement amongst students from homes rich in books (more than 200 books) and homes poor in books (less than 10 books) is 72 points. The disparity in achievement in Israel reaches 101 points (ibid: 88-89).

To conclude this chapter, the general picture indicates a local cultural uniqueness on the one hand, and a global similarity and common denominator on the other. As the sociologist, Oz Almog, writes in his monumental, 1,500 page treatise on Israeli society entitled 'Fairwell Srulik' (2004): "With the outward force of development, Israel has become similar and more and more connected to other countries, gradually losing its cultural uniqueness. It is important to emphasize that Israel's dominant culture is still very different from that of other countries and retains not a few national attributes which paint the typical Israeli in a very special color". (p. 32)

Chapter 3 The Ministry of Education official policy and targets

This section presents the meta-goals of Hebrew language education, the field in which the official designers of educational policy goals have operated since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the official, current Hebrew curriculum goals, the language educational policy for kindergarten, the curriculum principles and the national program for advancing education in Israel.

3.1 Meta-goals of language education

Language-literacy education in Israel entails eight fundamental objectives that guide central government policy. Despite the change in the centrality of each foundation, the eight goals are explicit or echo in all curricula published in Israel, starting from 1923 until the current 2003 curriculum.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Ministry of Education and Culture published four plans – in 1954, 1962, 1979/1986 and in 2003. Prior to the establishment of the State, four curricula were used, drawn up in 1923, 1932, 1936 and 1949, by a variety of organizations that operated before 1948: The Department of Education under the Zionist Administration of *Eretz Israel*, the Jewish Agency's Department of Education and the General Workers Union (*Histradrut*) of Hebrew Workers in *Eretz Israel* (Alon, 2002: 77-78).

The eight meta-goals were cultural, national, governmental, civilian, socio-economic, practical, humanitarian and intellectual. These objectives were understood as literacy areas of responsibility, the "sacred properties", as Ulmer (1998: x) terms them.

The cultural goals: The cultural objective strives to acculturate the younger generation in the language and cultural heritage of the of Israel. The emphases throughout the years were not uniform and were directed towards the language and culture that were common in early and modern Israel, and in the various countries of the Diaspora throughout Jewish history. This objective focuses on developing a common cultural denominator for the varied groups arriving in the country. Its force instigated a multi-language policy that, in the mid-90s, favored preserving the language of each group of immigrants (Ministry of Education, 1996) and tried to strike roots here as well. Thus, too, the definition that expands literacy as "The culture of reading, writing, listening and speaking" (Brosh-Vaitz, 1999: 9) did not take root. "Feasible multi-culturalism", according to Shiniak (2005), "In places where there is an established culture and a clear common denominator. In such places and under such conditions nuances are created. Our common denominator is problematic [...] there is no cultural spine as there is, for example, in the USA, where a common denominator already exists and where the problem is not excessive. Likewise in the USA, one receives citizenship only after successfully passing a language test, and shows knowledge of the national anthem and American history."

The *national goals* are related to the cultural target which has adapted language education to a nation in its formation and which is composed of a mixed multitude of immigrants speaking a variety of languages.

The governmental goal: Language is a means of control and of centrality. It is manifested through enforcing a Utopian and exemplary "proper Hebrew" ("the father tongue") which is the "estate of the ruling establishment" (Alon 2002: 81), a goal that encountered popular and belief-based opposition from many learners and artists.

The civilian goal recruits literacy to the civil ranks, in the desire to create a more just society, through social-political-critical study that prepares the graduates for daily life and for private civilian life. The texts and topics chosen for reading are the means to achieve this objective.

The socio-economic goal views literacy as a tool for upward economic and social mobility at the personal and the community level. Its successful acquisition interrupts inter-generational continuity and enables people from one profession and status, (such as academics, hi-tech employees, farmers, craftsmen, clerks and so on) to progress to one with higher status– each generation has its own professional pyramid.

The practical (pragmatic/functional) goal of literacy focuses on skills, on developing cognitive talents and on communications in inter-personal and social contexts. Specialization in learning using literacy practices such as the ability to convert information to knowledge, structuring a subject, analytical thought, familiarity with genre and rhetoric conventions, procedural work, cooperative dialogue work (with teachers and classroom colleagues), and developing critical and reflective thought. – All these offer a platform and a practical basis for "managing in life", (Alon's expression 2002: 76). In view of this

goal, the government objective also changed, adopting the authentic and standard "Israeli Hebrew" that was actually developing.

The humanistic goal works in the service of general humanistic, rational (western), liberal education at whose center is man and his interaction with other people. At the private, individual level, literacy is perceived as generating self-knowledge, affording a value to life (as literature offers us values) and shaping identity or even identities. All this in view of the individualist ethic that emphasizes the originator of the text, originality and a personal voice (represented by the approach in which the "child is the center"). At the inter-personal level, the importance of interaction with colleagues, teachers and society at large is emphasized in consideration of their values and needs.

The intellectual goal, academic in spirit, testifies to literacy being an end in itself, something to be studied and understood (for example, meta-linguistic knowledge of a language, and the connection between language and politics, etc.)

3.2 The official goals of language education in Israel

The official goals of language education are derived from the changes and developments occurring in both the close and distant circles of the discipline which influence the local perception of a profession, the emphasis in content, and the methods of teaching (Hebrew Curriculum for High School (2003: 6). Changes in the academic world in the field of linguistics, in the field of the Hebrew language and the area of education as well as historic, social, cultural and technological changes affect the way goals are formulated.

Two extremes that mark the official goals of language education in Israel may be discerned:

First, formal study of language as a discipline whose learning involves recognizing the strict rules of the Hebrew language. This is studied systematically from textbooks. The basic assumptions of this approach are two: a) Students must study historical grammatical Hebrew; b) The written language of our sources is the language that should be learned and studied (Shalom, 1999: 421). Students who show excellency in the use of this method become "language trustees", and the zealous guardians and teachers of the language

Second, functional learning, the useful and practical use of the language, which is an essential part of oral and written communications among Hebrew speakers in Israel. At this pole textbooks hold a secondary place, and one can even learn without books. The emphasis is on furthering socio-linguistic and cognitive skills.

A third aspect was added in recent years with the growth of the scientific research approach, a new approach in teaching language. It is also known as the theoretical (explanatory) approach, since teaching shifted from learning language to learning about language. The theoretical approach focuses on the New Hebrew, noting language phenomena, their discovery and their explanation (not repetition), in the national, social, cultural and psychological context (Ravid, 1992).

The eight goals described in the previous section guided the fluctuations between these extremes. The first and formal extreme represents the cultural, national, governmental, and intellectual goals and even social-economical goals. The second and functional extreme represents the civil, practical and humanitarian goals. The third and theoretical approach answers the intellectual goals and also other goals. The official objectives thus move between the three circles of the language roles: the cultural circle, the social circle and the personal circle (Alon, 2002: 77). The goals are present in every curriculum, but the emphases vary. In the first years of the State of Israel, the 1954 and the 1962 curricula stressed the national-cultural facet, while later on, the personal and social facets were stressed, as in the curricula of 1979 and after. The change that occurred in naming the subject in the most recent 2003 curriculum stems from this: From "Language" to "Language education". With the awakening of Israel's need to compete in the global knowledge economy and the launching of an education system for post-industrial developing countries, such as the PISA tests (see below), the weight of the second facet increases. However, it is hard to stabilize a linear line of the transition from the formal extreme to the functional extreme as long as the country's population finds itself in noticeable

processes of change stemming from the waves of immigration. In fact, for more than 50 years the goals of language education have adopted both formal and functional learning on the assumption that language skills in Israel are acquired both as the first (the parents') language and as a second language.

3.3 The official goals of language education at the time of writing this report

As noted in the latest curriculum, the meta-goal of language education is "to nurture a literate person, who can use language for his/her needs, according to his/her choice and areas of interest, and according to circumstance". In view of this, the booklet entitled "The Curriculum: Language Education for Elementary Schools" details the following objectives (Ministry of Education, 2003a: 11):

- To master correct Hebrew and know how to use it both in writing and orally under suitable circumstances, i.e., acquire written and oral language competence
- To use spoken and written language to realize their communications needs: To converse, to understand and to convey information in Hebrew even without being native speakers of the language
- To understand spoken and written texts in a variety of genres, and to produce texts suitable for the subject, the addressee, the communications channels, the communications purpose and the genre conventions
- To improve the linguistic functioning according to convention and the norms desired in the discourse communities in which they function and will function in the future
- To enjoy reading books, enjoying both original and translated literary texts
- To have the ability for informed reading of literary texts; to be able to identify with generations of Hebrew creativity and maintain a dialogue with Jewish sources. In the state religious education system, they will derive meaning from reading the *Torah* (the Pentateuch) and prayers and observe a lifestyle in accordance with Jewish religious law
- To use language to express their inner world and to develop self-awareness
- To employ language to develop a world perspective and to make autonomous decisions in a critical and conscious manner
- To develop linguistic awareness and expand their linguistic knowledge; to be able to observe language, understand its foundations and use it in thought (Ministry of Education, 2004)
- To enjoy experimenting with language and understanding its underlying principles.

In order to verify their achievement, teaching is accompanied by a detailed system of the acquired achievement (standards) and benchmarks (Ministry of Education, Bulletin of the Coordinating Supervisor, 2004 (4)).

Unesco's definition of literacy - "Nurturing a literate person who can use language for his needs, according to his choice, according to his areas of interest and according to situation" These official goals for language education would seem, at first glance, to have been overlaid with many additional interpretations, and to have incorporated components that were simply not a part of the clear and original declaration.

In order to adapt the phraseology to the curriculum's meta-goal for the above stated targets, a local Israeli definition of the concept of literacy is necessary but has not yet been clarified.

3.4 Educational language policy in the process of growth: Emergent literacy in kindergarten

The new policy was also applied to emergent literacy at the diverse levels of pre-nursery school through compulsory kindergarten. Emergent literacy is defined as the abilities that develop from an early age and that pave the way for acquiring literacy (Levin, 2001). The Committee on Reading and Writing in Kindergarten, established by the Curricula Department and the Early Education Department in the Ministry of Education, recommended introducing activities that would nurture emergent literacy in kindergarten, with the aim of preparing all children to learn reading and writing in school.

The recommendations are in the spirit of the “balanced approach” as published in the 1996 California Department of Education Experts Report, and follow those of the Snow Committee and the National Reading Panel (Olshtain and Cohen, 2001: 30, 34-37).

The innovations in the Committee’s recommendations (Levin, 2001) are:

- Nurturing emergent literacy as an essential component of the kindergarten curriculum
- Nurturing literacy in the entire age range – starting from day care centers for 3 year-olds through compulsory kindergarten for 6-year olds
- Emphasizing alphabetical skills – letter recognition, phonological awareness and connections between the letters and sounds
- Continuing emphasis on linguistic nurturing through reading books and so on
- Defining essential components in nurturing literacy in kindergarten
- Proposing a developmental hierarchy for each aspect for children aged 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6
- Continuing insistence on the “kindergarten spirit” – teaching adapted to development, kindergarten teachers’ autonomy in pedagogic design and consideration of the differences between children during tracking and monitoring
- Increasing cooperation between kindergarten teachers and parents in nurturing their children’s literacy.

3.5 Language education policy in view of the principles of the official curriculum

The principles of the official curriculum were presented in an interview with the coordinating supervisor, Mazal Shiniak (2005) with some of them to be found in the booklet entitled, “Curriculum: Hebrew for High Schools” (pp.11-13). Language education in the education system is based on 15 principles:

- Student’s language knowledge and knowledge of the world are the starting point for linguistic discussions and for reading and writing texts
- The Hebrew language bears the burden for the Hebrew textual heritage and as such is the agent of the Hebrew language. Thus the cultural sequence manifested therein is emphasized.
- Emphasis on the communications aspect
- More central placement of diverse types of speech skills (reporting, discussion and lectures) with the aim of introducing this topic as a high school matriculation examination topic
- The socio-linguistic perspective.
- The text as the center
- The context, i.e., the social and cultural environment at the center
- Integrated observation of the branches of language: The lexicon, morphology, syntax and discourse; the connection between style and content and vice versa
- The spiral curriculum. Each of these areas is studied over the years with varying emphases and at different levels
- The differentiation between genres in view of the basic assumption that each genre also demands diverse linguistic means in order to decipher or convey information
- Relevance, for example stress on the language of study (a practiced genre that answers the learner’s needs such as summarizing, verbalizing information presented as a chart, answering questions, phrasing a topic)
- Including literacy in the various realms of knowledge

- Expectation of realizing the standards (expected achievements)
- Combining awareness (theoretical knowledge regarding language) and mastery (the ability to use language), termed by linguists as “linguistic competence” as soon as school starts or even in kindergarten.

3.6 The national program for advancing education in Israel

The National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel published its recommendations in 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2005, known more commonly as the Dovrat Report, after the Chairman of the Committee). The task force was appointed by the Government of Israel in 2003 with the mandate to conduct a comprehensive study of the education system in Israel, to recommend a program for exhaustive change - pedagogic, structural and organizational - as well as to chart a path for its implementation. The Committee noted the fact that the “Education system is at a crisis point that is liable to have worrying implications for the future of Israeli society and the national economy”. It proposes “A general and comprehensive plan with a series of pedagogic, organizational, structural and budgetary recommendations, intended to lead to the recovery and advance of the education system so that it is equal, and even superior to, the progressive educational systems around the world”. One of the recommendations pertaining to literacy is known as the “core plan”: “A basic core, common to, and unifying, the diverse educational streams in Israel [...] that will define the subjects that all students must study and for each subject study the necessary basic terminology, concepts, values and skills ”(pp. 85-87). The mother tongue is included in the compulsory, basic core subjects. The committee also advocates including literacy in all realms of knowledge and the possible allocation of hours to study languages in the various age groups.

Thus, the goals and targets of language education in Israel suggest dynamism, in which there is development, renewal and change but in which there is a repetition of old ways and a swinging back and forth of the pendulum. The changes are grounded in three key causes: Altered paradigms, power struggles between those active in the domain and historical-social processes. Section 6 will discuss the significance of this situation.

Chapter 4 Diverse methodologies for measuring and monitoring literacy: a selection of the findings

The various methodologies for measuring and monitoring literacy create a distinction between school tests and external tests, and between national and international examinations. This section will deal with external, national examinations that the central government requires from its students and also with external, international examinations. The survey also offers a picture of the situation in Israel relative to other countries.

4.1 External national examinations

A brief historical review: In the past, only one external examination was held in 8th grade, an examination known as the “*Seker*” (survey) which was, in fact, an intelligence test. There was no external examination in language until the high school matriculation examination at the end of high school. The 1990's saw the introduction of the “National Feedback” examinations in the 4th grade of elementary school, repeated in the 8th grade of middle school. The public criticized these tests as being a “classification system” rather than a “nurturing system”. The criticism was not focused on the essence of the examinations and their format, but rather on their objectives and the use of the findings. As a result of this criticism, and in order to employ assessment as a tool to improve teaching and learning, alternative professional tools to appraise “National Feedback” were developed.

4.1.1 The ISEG examinations – (Indices of School Efficiency and Growth) were developed and applied by the Department for Assessment and Measurement in the Ministry of Education, under the

supervision of the Chief Coordinating Supervisor (CCS) together with an examination committee for each subject headed by the relevant coordinating supervisor. The examinations test mother tongue (as well as mathematics, science and technology and English) and are compiled according to the curriculum for each grade. The parameters explored are reading comprehension, written expression, meta-linguistic knowledge, understanding of the explicit textual tier, interpretation and drawing conclusions for three types of text: narrative, informative and a text containing instructions.

These examinations are held in every elementary school or junior high school in 5th and 8th grades once every two years. In 2002, 1,026 schools participated in the ISEG tests, showing a sample of 50% of the official schools in Israel. The ISEG information is based on information received from 200,000 students, 16,000 teachers and 1,023 principals in secular and religious state schools, and in the Arab and Druse education systems.

The ISEG is not a score for the student. It provides a class score, in order to provide a key work tool for the school principal and staff for planning and for the effective exploitation of resources in order to improve the school work. It is also a basis for school guidance. It has reflected for example, situations in which the students have mastered a text with instructions less well than a narrative text, or have read better than they were able to write.

A report on the ISEG tests held in 2002 (Shild and Assulin, 2002) presents the average score for mother tongue. In the Hebrew-speaking education system the 5th grade score was 74, and in 8th grade, 64. The achievements in the Hebrew speaking sector were 31 points higher than those of the Arab and Druse sectors for 5th grade, and the gap shrank to 16 points in 8th grade. In addition, the disparity between "regular" students and "included" students and new immigrants was greater in middle school than in elementary school.

The 2004 ISEG examination findings show an average score of 56 for 5th grade immigrant students in state (secular) schools and average score of 50 in the state religious system. 290 students in state schools (2% of all the students) and 82 students (also 2% of all the students) in state religious schools were tested.

The score for the entire Jewish population (excluding immigrants and mainstreamed students) was 70. The average score for 8th grade immigrants in state schools (who numbered 13 students and whose percentage amongst all the other examinees was not noted) was 47. In state religious schools (where there were 9 students) the average was 36. The average score for all Jewish students in this year grade was 68, excluding immigrants and mainstreamed students. 8th graders in state high school education (265 in number, 2% of the examinees) received a score of 41 in the state religious system. 48 students in the state religious framework (1% of all the examinees) received a score of 31. The average score for the entire Jewish population in this year grade in high school, excluding immigrants and mainstreamed students, was 65.

4.1.2 The national test at the end of 2nd grade: In addition to the ISEG, an experimental national test at the end of 2nd grade is currently being assessed, due to changes in the method of teaching reading method, in order to check the students' achievements at this stage.

4.1.3 High school matriculation examinations in 10th, 11th and 12th grades: These examinations are the continuation of the external national examinations. A new format was introduced this year to high school matriculation examinations, derived from the new curriculum. The examinations include four sections dealing with words, collocations, sentences and texts. The "spiral" method is used in these examinations. All four sections appear in questionnaires as tier upon tier. A lexical chapter is included, as well as lexicography that replaces phonetics now used only in morphology and with an emphasis on functionality. The old format of high school matriculation examinations was linear, testing the chapters the students had studied. The text is now the starting point on which all the questions, including grammar, are based. The curriculum is manifested in these examinations since the tests in 10th, 11th and 12th grades entail spiral learning and accrual. The first questionnaire tests verbs (regular verbs), the second again tests verbs but this time also irregular verbs. This is correct also for syntax together with

syntactical rewriting. The guiding principle in all is to link the text to the meaning, as noted in the publication, "The context at the center – a curriculum for high school Hebrew" (Ministry of Education, 2003b:11). The national average in high school matriculation examinations ranges from 6.9 – 7.2 (out of a maximum score of 10). Analysis of the findings indicates that the average score for the section dealing with writing and reading comprehension is lower than that for the section testing grammatical knowledge, verbs and syntax.

Indices for assessing the tests: All the external tests set by the Ministry of Education are accompanied by a voluminous tome that provides an assessment scale and a very exact appraisal kit. The criteria for assessing academic writing are content (including the personal voice), structure (also including coherence, cohesion), expression (including correct spelling, correct punctuation, legible writing, page layout and order) (Ministry of Education, 2003b: 84). Information about high school matriculation examinations is published on the 'Lashonet' ('Languagenet') site.

4.1.4 Bank of performance assignments: "Banks" of assignments, written by professionals, exist for elementary and middle schools to use as they see fit. Their purpose is to provide teachers of language and writing, as well as teachers of other subjects (geography, literature, biology and so on) with practical, theory-based, tools to test the students' linguistic and literacy knowledge. It is based on principles of alternative appraisal that adopt a constructivist approach to learning and assessment, such as authenticity of assignments significant for everyday life, varied formats for items of assessment, assessment indices that take into consideration various aspects of performance, time, team-making and place of performance (from an hour to days and weeks, in class and at home, independently or in a team). The bank provides students and teachers with indicators that reflect the declared targets in a given context and their rate of implementation by those assessed. The indicators include criteria for assessment in a manner that reflects the knowledge characteristic of the age of those performing the assignments and describes four different levels of performance expected of the students according to these criteria, each of which is sampled and authentically represents the "field".

Three main methodological principles guide its authors. The first is founded on the insight that linguistic-literacy knowledge in a particular field should not be tested according to one method only due to the considerable variance in the students' abilities and learning. The second principle relates to the diverse facets of linguistic-literacy knowledge on a sequence from understanding a linguistic topic to the point of production (active expression). The third principle is based on the fact that a learning process occurs while the students work on all items of the assignment (Ravid, Brosh-Vaitz and Lazerson, in: Ministry of Education; 2002: 1-16). The new bank for middle schools has been used this year in 51 schools in central Israel and in 16 schools in Jerusalem. (Ben-Har, 2005).

4.1.5 Assessment using a portfolio of work. For a number of years assessment employed a portfolio that replaced high school matriculation examinations in written expression, and also included assessment of oral expression. However, assessment of this type ceased, apart from a minor project administered in five schools, in which writing final papers in biology ("Biotope") was combined with the subject of Hebrew expression. The teacher for the latter subject, like the biology teacher, monitors the process of writing and presenting the project, and the students receives a score for biology and also for written expression. In elementary school the portfolios afford a complementary, rather than a main, source when checking the students' reading progress (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004:158).

4.2 Expected achievements (standards)

Although the official policy of the Pedagogic Secretariat and of the Department of Planning and Learning in the Ministry of Education declared the importance of the output and the expected achievements, only the elementary school curriculum relates to this explicitly and in detail (pp. 81-95). This curriculum cites eight achievements and presents milestones for each, in consideration of the literacy functioning expected of the students in written and spoken language for three points in time: at the end of the 2nd, the 4th and the 6th grades. The eight achievements required are: 1) Listening and speaking for diverse purposes; 2) Writing texts for assorted purposes and to a variety of addressees; 3)

Producing written texts, correct from the language perspective and suitable from the communications perspective; 4) Reading texts of various types and for differing purposes; 5) Producing information and learning from written texts of diverse types in a variety of subject matters; 6) Reading literary works from a range of periods and genres, with interpretive reference to their emotional, values and social-cultural aspects; 7) Reading texts from the Jewish sources as an inseparable part of the Jewish cultural heritage while considering their linguistic uniqueness; 8) Recognizing and understanding the linguistic system – structures, phenomena and processes in language.

4.3 International examinations

The Israeli education system participates in two international studies (formulated as tests).

4.3.1 The PIRLS study (*Progress in International Reading Literacy*): An international study on reading literacy, administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), of which Israel is one of 34 member countries. The study explores the achievements of 9-10 year old (4th grade) Israeli students, a crucial point in time in the development of reading literacy. This is investigated for the mother tongue (Hebrew or Arabic) as well as for the contextual data of school and home and the direction of change in students' achievements in five-year cycles (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004). The test focuses on four reading skills: focusing and recalling specific information, direct drawing of conclusions, interpreting and merging of ideas and information, examining and assessing texts (ibid: 14-15). Indices were developed in Israel and the achievements were segmented according to secondary populations: Hebrew speakers and Arabic speakers, state secular and state religious supervision, as well as boys compared to girls. The 2001 research population embraced 90,000 students (excluding those from the ultra-orthodox sector, special education students from schools or special classes and students in small schools) and sampled 3,973 students.

According to Olshtain and Zuzovsky (2004), the research finds are as follows: Israel positioned in 23rd place out of 35 countries participating in the study. A separate calculation of the achievements of the two populations speaking different languages places Hebrew speakers in 12th place (and thus theoretically included in the group of leading countries), and Arabic speakers 31st in the country ranking. However, their achievements are superior to those of other Arabic-speaking countries. Achievement suffered from social-cultural polarization; a high level of early reading activity was found in a large percentage of Israeli homes; the parents of about 25% of the students are not Israeli-born. The percentage of students who have a computer at home is prominent. A clear connection was found between the learning environment in the student's home in which there is a writing desk, computer and books and scholastic achievement in reading literacy. In Israel more than in other countries, several high level reading skills, such as prediction, drawing conclusions, generalization and describing the textual structure and style are stressed (in the spirit of "Whole language" teaching). A high percentage of schools stress teaching reading more than speech and attention; there were 1,074 hours of teaching per annum, and Israel is the country that placed second with respect to the number of hours that 4th grade students spend annually in school. The amount of time devoted to teaching the Hebrew language is 17%, with reading taught for more than 6 hours weekly. The average number of students in the classroom is 30 (with 26 the international average). There is no connection between achievement and the classroom size. The basic, most common reading material used to teach reading is textbooks, with children's books providing complementary material. Students read stories and informative texts. The most common activity is the teacher reading aloud to the class, this is also the most effective activity from the perspective of scholastic achievements in reading literacy. The most common activity after reading is providing answers in writing. The percentage of students having difficulty in answering questions in writing pertaining to the material read is twice the international average (32%). The proportion of students whose teachers hold tests or examinations once or twice a month is 66%, and is twice the international average. The percentage of students who hold positive attitudes towards reading is lower than the international average and positions Israel in the lower third of countries that participated in the study. The percentage of Israeli students with a high level for the "Reading as part of homework" index is 50% (the international average being 44%) while the proportion of students in Israel

who very often read for pleasure is high (44%) and similar to the international average (about 40%). About half the students borrow books from the library once a week; computer games compete with reading as a pastime. Computer games and watching television have a positive connection to scholastic achievement in reading literacy amongst 4th grade students.

The findings of the international study, it should be noted, are similar to those of the national feedback, as are the recommendations formulated in their wake (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 183).

4.3.2 PISA tests (*Program for International Student Assessment*): PISA is a test/study used by 41 countries that organized themselves under the auspices of the OECD in order to study student literacy for three domains: reading, mathematics and sciences. The study investigated how 15-year old students apply their knowledge and skills to tasks relevant to their functioning in modern society. Apart from information on literacy, PISA also provides information on the connection between educational achievement and educational policy, school attributes and organization, on student and parent attributes, on the students' learning methods, on communications between parents and other variables that contribute to scholastic achievement. The test does not classify or categorize the students, and the teachers do not know the results. The first test was held in 2002. 4,498 students from 165 schools participated, 138 from the Jewish (state secular, state religious and ultra-orthodox) sector, and 27 schools from the non-Jewish (Arab, Druse and Bedouin) sectors. The study on reading literacy relates to the students' ability to extract information from a text, to interpret it, to assess the content and apply personal discretion (reflection). Israel ranks 30th out of the 41 participating countries (Kramersky and Mevarech, 2004: 13). Analysis of the findings indicates several facts: about 33% of the students in Israel are of the lowest level or below with only 4% at the highest level; Israel is ranked second in the depth of the disparity in reading achievement. In addition, the average score of the upper decile is almost twice that of the lowest decile, with similar findings noted for each of the reading skills – extracting information, interpretation, assessing and expressing an opinion. For the index for reading activities (the time devoted to reading for pleasure, the variety of reading material and interest in reading) is higher than the OECD average. The average student feeling of belonging to school is higher than the international average. Israeli students are frequently absent, are tardy and when in school often do not enter lessons. There is a strong positive connection between familial socio-economic background and reading literacy. Educational policy and the students' socio-economic background afford a notable contribution to inequality in educational achievement. The teacher-student ratio index is lower than average and indicates an unstable teacher-student relationship. Extreme differences were found, for all areas studied, between the Jewish and the non-Jewish sector (see Chapter 7). The average score for reading was higher in the state religious schools than in the state secular and ultra-orthodox schools (see Chapter 7). The harsh findings, conclude Kramersky and Mevarech (2004), indicate the need for considerable improvement in the Israeli education system and can afford a basis for designing educational policy based on academic information.

The next test will be held in 2006 and the education system is readying itself. This is a long, difficult and unfamiliar test. The PISA tests conflict with the Israeli curriculum that emphasizes the expository discourse and the traditional linear text. They include "real life" test assignments, such as an order form for equipment and work, the transition from a continuous text to a non-continuous, collage-style text, with emphasis on para-verbal texts such as tables to which the approach is as to a text unto itself.

4.4 Cause and effect (or implications)

The methodologies discussed above indicate perceptions and policy with educational, social and national implications.

1. *Emphasis on output, achievement and success* – assessment methods in the education system reflect the decision to assign responsibility for the output to schools. From the perception of the input, such as additional teaching hours, instructing teachers, in-service training courses or developing a library intended to improve the situation, the approach shifted to focusing on output. This came in the wake of an international approach that diverts the emphasis from the learning

method, from training teachers and developing textbooks, to the importance of “what the student knows in the end”.(Shiniak, 2005) This approach demands defining standards alongside the curriculum. The new curricula that appeared in the last year are the first to do so. This is a very significant change from the policy perspective. One of the messages conveyed by this approach is the centrality of success and the “wisdom of winning” together with the “testing wisdom”.

2. *Affirmative assessment* – the importance of the output induces a sequence of tests in 2nd, 5th, 8th, 10th 11th and 12th grades that serve as stages (“stations” in Hebrew). The possibility exists at every “station” to check and construct a work plan. Assessment and its targets aim towards improvement, not judgment. This is true also of the 10th grade high school matriculation examinations. In fact, only those examinations held in 11th and 12th grade are final examinations. All the rest are affirmative.
3. *Control and centrality* – the multiplicity of national tests and the importance awarded in the media and the education system to international tests strengthen the control and centrality of the Ministry of Education, of the supervision of teaching the subject and of the curricula department. “One ring to rule them all”, as Tolkien states in the Lord of the Rings. This situation deposes other curricula that developed from below or from the fringes which were up-to-date, and incorporated innovation and local-cultural authenticity in the mood of decentralized, pluralistic and liberal culture.

In the television program, “What Happens in School”, broadcast for two hours on Channel 2 (5.5.2005) teachers raised the claim that, “Instead of being a tool they (the tests), and mainly the ISEG tests, have become the be all and end all”.

Shiniak (2005) refers in an interview to the plurality of tests and to centrality: “Tension and paradox exist over this issue in the Ministry of Education, in the Israeli education system. On the one hand, there is a fear of the profusion of examinations, on the other one wants the students to study. ISEG tests were thus set for only half the population, and the Executive Director of the Ministry announced there would be no outside examinations such as the district tests set by the local administration or any other factor. However, when a new supervisor arrives, or when department managers wish to plan a test of their own volition, they do so without having to consult headquarters and order the tests in addition to other tests.

4. The importance of *academic school education* - the tests and the indices testify to the nurturing of an axis from elementary school to high school. There does not seem to be sufficient compatibility with the next stage of academic education with its unique attributes of academic literacy (blending sources of information, bibliographical referencing and so on).
5. *Dismissing alternative assessment* – efforts to introduce broad alternative methods of assessment that expanded, for example, the community of assessors (colleague assessment, self-assessment), the assessment results (procedural and not only the final product), as well as the inclusion of the learners’ social and personal indices have been dismissed (Birenbaum, 1997: 24).
6. Strengthening of the functional dimension in the perception of literacy – the perception of literacy at the common, general level is observed, in keeping with UNESCO’s definition, i.e. a functional-instrumental approach. The humanist perception of the new literacy has been eliminated from the education system but has survived in institutions of higher education, in colleges (not colleges of education) and in universities (Brosh-Vaitz, 1999).
7. *A system that is obsessively tracked* – the academic quality of tests-research that embrace the entire system is decisive and overpowering, showing signs of a system hounded by the terror of tests. “Lessons taught in school in which the reading curriculum is influenced by national and other tests are more numerous in Israel than the international average” (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 109).
8. *Responsibility and dealing with the test results* – It is not customary in public state education in Israel to bear responsibility for the test results. They are not a reason to fire those responsible for failure (teachers, principals, supervisors and so on). In contrast to the private work world, and

particularly in contrast to the competitive and business world of hi-tech, the education system deals with problems that the tests reveal in other ways. Responsibility, according to Shiniak (2005) is not of one person. All are responsible, even the office staff, the district, the principals and the teachers. Thus all must deal with the problem through improvement, correction and change. Sometimes the curriculum and teaching methods are modified: The discovery of reading problems, for example, resulted in a change in the curriculum and teaching methods. Sometimes the test, the methods of instruction and so on are altered. Ironically, these words are written on a historical date (3.5.2005), the day when 4,500 teachers were fired following the recommendations of the Dovrat Committee. The approach presented above would seem to illustrate a world changing before our eyes.

9. *Private lessons* - The achievement-oriented learning climate and the many tests (a score factory, as it is known by high school students) push the students and their parents to turn to private teachers and courses. Chen (2004) reports that 35% of the elementary and high school students take private lessons. Prior to the high school matriculation examinations, the demand for private lessons peaks, mainly in mathematics, English and Hebrew language (the latter being the most expensive). The need for them has become a norm. In the past, the weaker students sought private lessons but now they are common amongst all groups. Private establishments, assisted by Internet sites, make a good profit from private teaching. The community centers (with more than 10,000 students) offer a cheaper solution, while in peripheral areas the Ministry of Education provides a solution to this phenomenon through a 30-hour, e-learning course for all the questionnaires (<http://learn.snunit.k12.il/snunit/lashon>). The Dovrat Committee (2005) is aware of the problem and proposes a systematic solution with specific lessons included in a long school day.
10. *The impact of international tests* - The findings of the PIRLS and PISA tests shook the system. From a country involved in itself, whose students compete amongst themselves over excellence that would enable them to be accepted to prestigious university faculties, Israel has become a country that competes in a global knowledge economy. This is a factor that accelerates learning by curriculum planners, teachers and students. One of the immediate results of this phenomenon is manifested in the Ministry of Education's new "Intervention Program" intended to strengthen the connection between the content of the PISA test and the new curriculum and to help to assimilate the Program (The Program for Nurturing Literacy in Reading, Mathematics, and Science: Nurturing Reading Comprehension, 2005). In this way the social implications will be taken care of before problems might occur and the fears of causing harm as a result of the impact of the "globalization of examinations" to those already in a weak position will not be realized.

To conclude this chapter, the comprehensive PISA, PIRLS and ISEG studies provide much data, but as Shild (2004:1) writes, "It should be emphasized that by the nature of things, the findings of the ISEG describe an existing reality, and do not indicate the causes of one phenomenon or another. Those responsible for the system in the district, familiar with the causes and conditions, will be able to interpret the facts presented here, to draw operative consequences and conclusions. The report is only intended to provide a solid basis for these conclusions".

And indeed, the findings themselves should be studied. It is interesting to examine the findings discovered that are unique to Israel. Why is teachers' reading aloud to the class the most effective activity from the perspective of the students' achievements in reading literacy? Or, why do students in Israel have difficulty providing written answers after reading texts? And indeed there are many other similar questions to be answered.

Chapter 5 From literacy to language education: conflicting trends and crises

5.1 High tide and low tide

The new literacy peaked in the early 1990's. In the winter of 1994 the Open University held a study day entitled "Light on Literacy". 400 teachers and researchers from around the country filled the hall. 300 could not gain entry. They did not come to hear about the new high school matriculation format, but about a new realm of knowledge. Many new textbooks and theories were published during those years in parallel with the appearance of other textbooks produced by the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education (Brosh, 1992, 1993, 1996, Brosh- Vaitz, 1999; Ezer, 1996, 1999; Folman, 1989, 1997, 2000; Lazerson, 2000; Peled-Elchanan, 1998; Peled-Elchanan and Walden, 1996; Sarig, 1989, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2000; Wohl, 1994; Walden, 1991; Zeiler, 1991 and others). Writing centers were established in teacher training colleges; new curricula were offered by universities. The Script Association (for the Advancement of Literacy in Israel) increased its membership many times and established interest groups; journals on literacy appeared and schools held institutional in-service training courses. There was a flux: Teachers, educators and researchers tried to answer the question, "What on earth is literacy?" The perception of whole language was accepted in an institutionalized manner by the education system, and mainly by elementary schools. Principals and teachers in middle schools introduced substance, teaching methods and textbooks - both pluralistically and from "bottom up" - that were not issued by the establishment. The procedural perception, that nurtures the learners' cognitive and communications skills, together with self-empowerment in the spirit of the constructivist and critical approach (Zellermayer, 1996) enjoyed momentum (Ministry of Education, 2000, #3.3). At the same time, Lazerson (2005) studied 31 random lessons in 1999 on Hebrew writing and found that they barely reflected the proposed theoretical and pedagogic changes. The findings in this limited study recognize the fixed conservative perception of teaching the subject, exemplified in the "product" approach, in imparting theoretical knowledge without processing it for strategic use in a small number of reading/writing events in the lesson framework and so on. Thus the phrase "Literacy – for sale only?" became clear to the researcher and her colleagues.

The vitality of the approaches fades with the awakening of public and academic criticism of the whole language method. Following the Shapira Committee, that explored the approaches to teaching reading, a letter from the Executive Director of the Ministry of Education was published in October 2001 ,instructing schools to emphasize the process of decoding based on familiarity with the letters, adapting phonemes to graphemes (writing symbols) and focusing on exactly identifying and reading words when teaching reading (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 183). At the same time, the Ministry of Education published a report in 2002 entitled "Towards Reading and Writing" on nurturing reading prior to starting school. One of its recommendations was to introduce the intervention program "Emergent Literacy" at that stage. One of the proposals of the PIRLS study was also "to prefer traditional teaching methods for teaching reading in class" (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 187).

The coordinating supervisor for teaching Hebrew in the Ministry of Education, Mazal Shiniak (2005), has an explanation for this. Several reasons converged for the failure of "The New Literacy". The first stemmed from the fact that experts handled it in an abstract, academic fashion. The second lies in approaching literacy as a new discipline, separate from the language and the language tradition that preceded it: "There was no language literacy for Hebrew. There were universal issues, but school teaches subjects and this did not fit in. It was not specific. It did not take into account the attributes of Hebrew and remained somewhat external for it was partial. The tradition of teaching Hebrew also includes other subjects with which literacy did not deal. Thus diverse camps were formed: Those favoring Hebrew and those favoring literacy [...]. This was true for a specific group in the academic world; other groups dealt separately with the study of Hebrew independent of this fashion. Matters needed mediation and translation, the ability of teachers to internalize and convey to teaching scenarios with a link to the learning material, to demands, to teaching tradition in school, to what they know from

the past [...] another stage had to be coped with [...] not to hope that it would happen anyway in the field [...] it doesn't work alone".

With the decline in the status of 'The New Literacy', the use of the word 'literacy' was substituted for 'language education'. The curriculum and pedagogy try to be balanced (Hanauer, 2003), that is to say to include the previous perceptions together with the new-old ones (since some of them were common in the 1970's and the 1980's), centering on texts and genres rather than on the learner.

Hundreds of teachers met in the spring of 2004 at a national conference of language teachers, this time to update themselves on the new high school matriculation examinations.

5.2 The story of a department

This cycle of changes that have occurred in the literacy arena in which name changes, theoretical changes and practical ideology changes takes place every few years is the story of the Department of Literacy, Society and Culture (LSC) at the CET (Center for Educational Technology). According to Miriam Posner, the director of the LSC Department:

"This was the department known as the 'Department of Language Studies', a program termed in its various publications, 'Hebrew Subjects'. From 'Reading, Reading Comprehension and Literature' the subject came to be known as 'Literacy' and now as 'Language Education' in the CET catalogue of new materials [...] The domain itself is really dynamic [...] but the most outstanding point is that this is an area with high exposure to fashion [...] we are doing what we believe is correct, but there is also an incidental agenda [...] CET's involvement in the world of language, language education, began on two parallel axes: one which involved– developing materials intended to contribute significantly to both teaching reading and to reading comprehension. Professor Arie Wohl developed the subject of reading comprehension, a domain not dealt with in Israel. From this point of view, CET's contribution, if not revolutionary, was at least innovative. The second axis was computerization [...] another effort was directed towards studying language in a consistent manner throughout school – in elementary school, in middle school and in high school. With hindsight, I see a unique development for elementary school that emphasized, like today, the study of language in the context of reading comprehension [...] the language themes were studied in connection to texts and sentences, relating to the implications of the linguistic phenomenon on reading, on communications and on writing...In other words, diverse aspects of the role of language. At one time, that was a most innovative combination, but when we advanced to middle school the development became more professional. We separated language from literacy. Following the developments in the research field, we abandoned this separation when shifting to developing material for high school [...] In 1995 the Department for Language Subjects became the Department of Literacy, Society and Culture [...] we wanted to see Israel as a pluralistic, multi-cultural society. This was not only a description but also a statement. Not everyone accepted the thesis; it was a vision. A vision is also a target, in other words, the reality exists but one does not know how to contend with it. The aim is to enable Israel to be a multi-cultural society, characterized by attention, dialogue, mutual respect, tolerance, shattering stereotypes of the other, accepting the other, making silenced voices heard and so on [...]. Once, we related to language as to a skill to be developed. We became wise and understood that one cannot relate to students' language as to a cold, alienated vessel that can be dismantled, trained and practiced. The approach of the new literacy is that literacy is culture, in that language shapes and reflects our consciousness; it is itself a cultural creation and the tool for creating culture. Its varied uses in interpersonal communications, for example in the classroom, create diverse cultures. The approach to teaching language revolves around this. It is more holistic and takes into consideration more aspects of the students' lives, a perception leading to the development of projects such as 'From Writer to Reader', 'With Five Voices', 'Pomegranate' and Others" (Brosh-Vaitz, 2002: 172-177).

Epilogue: The Department of Literacy, Society and Culture was closed in 2004. The ambitious, inclusive conception was reduced to the 'Encouraging Reading' project. Employees were fired, textbooks were

not reprinted, and educational sites were closed. The story of the department over the last 20 years is a symbolic microcosm.

5.3 "Literacy doesn't interest me"

This is but one example of many manifested by a series of departments which were involved in the optimistic momentum of introducing literacy and which have now closed down. Other academic institutions which suffered the same fate: Bar Ilan University, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Academic College, The Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center and Tel Aviv University, whose CEO made the above statement - "Literacy doesn't interest me" - when deciding on its closure. "The revolution of the rich" (Faigley, 1996) reverberates in the status of the subject and on those professionally involved in it.

5.4 "Plowmen plowed upon my back" (Psalms, 129:3) – The encounter between teachers and the new curriculum

An echo of the clash between teachers' perceptions, beliefs and abilities and the official voice of the subject matter can be found in the discussion group for high school language teachers at the Hebrew "Oach" (Owl) site of the Ministry of Education (<http://educationforums.cet.ac.il/forums>). The forum contains 170 postings by teachers, principals, the coordinating supervisor and the site administrator who replies to hits. 13,139 people used it as of 1.3.05. The interaction in discussion groups enables visitors to "go into" the site without needing to interview teachers and without needing to overcome conversational blocks. Despite the many visitors to the site, not many express themselves, and those who do write about: "The silence of the teachers", and "Whining under cover of anonymity". There are no comments praising the new curriculum: It is rather saturated with complaints and problems, such as comments on the absence of good, professional learning materials compatible with the entire program and its objectives, the absence of a teachers' guide that will help them ("Let the teachers go and break their heads"), the introduction of new substance and knowledge with which the teachers are unfamiliar, the profusion of concepts and ambiguity regarding the degree with which to teach them, unsatisfactory in-service training courses, 'unpaved' methods of teaching, difficulty in keeping pace with the rate of change ("The coordinating supervisor charges ahead and we cannot keep up with her") or exaggerated demands of the students' abilities. As the writers state: the teachers are expected to "Engineer solutions under pressure that will harm the students", "The territory feels lost and is therefore, in fact, paralyzed", the "Territory is rooted in a swamp of uncertainty". Their work is accompanied by a feeling of frustration: "There's no chance for us". The site administrator's answers offer a number of positive points, such as the proliferation of study days and in-service training courses, innovation and keeping up-to-date, compiling new work books and accelerated guidance.

5.5 Literacy – an open end

Thus literacy is like Poland's borders in the history of Europe (Ulmer, 1998). Approaches are modified, curricula oscillate, centers of gravity change. The current situation will not last long either.

The technological, social, cultural, national and international changes will demand endless adaptation in the near future. Computerized communications will necessitate, for example, focusing on a new connection approach, on acquiring inter-cultural communications skills, and on reading and writing texts that interactively incorporate words / graphics / voice / animation / pictures (=TECHST instead of text). Like reality, the literacy we will study and learn from now on will be more flexible and less static. Literacy and we – researchers and teachers - are open-ended.

Chapter 6 Literacy in adult education

In the not too distant past adult education dealt with teaching, reading, writing, and basic general education for people at all stages of their adult life. Today adult education refers to learning in any area and at any level. The connotation is constant study – Life Long Learning - in a broad variety of subjects: Alphabetization, completing education, broadening horizons, enrichment, ongoing academic learning, professional training, professional retraining, inter-cultural encounters and self-directed learning. At the same time, the project of imparting “low literacy” still formally continues, and is funded or subsidized by the state, the local authorities and public institutions from national budgets and budgets of organizations and foundations. It is run by government offices, the IDF, local authorities, public Israeli and Jewish institutions and organizations in North and South America, Europe and Australia (the Jewish Federation, the Joint and others), universities, regional colleges and institutes. In the last decade, a broad variety of programs were also developed in the private market (Tokatly, 1997: 199).

6.1 Roots: Adult education for the Jewish people

According to Lem (1969: 513-514) adult education was introduced to the Jewish people at an early stage. During the time of the *Talmud*, in the first centuries of the Common Era, *Yarchei Kala* were customary in Babylon (modern Iraq) – twice yearly assemblies to study *Torah* (in the spring, prior to the Passover festival, and the fall, prior to *Rosh Hashana*, the Jewish New Year) attended by thousands of people, not necessarily the well-learned. Throughout the Diaspora, the study of the *Torah* was considered to be a commandment, to which end various arrangements were made. In 15th century Spain, *Torah*, religious law, and legends (narrative texts) were studied. In *Ashkenaz* (Germany of today), in Poland and throughout Eastern Europe, Jews studied in groups following the daily prayers in the synagogues. In the Middle Ages and in modern times there were many groups studying *Torah* who met at fixed times in synagogues and study halls, usually after the evening “*Aravit*” prayers or on *Shabat* and festivals, to study together or individually under the guidance of the Rabbi or another learned person. Sermonizers and “*Maggids*” (preachers) fulfilled the role of teachers for adults.

In modern times, adult education accompanied all stages of Jewish immigration and settlement in *Eretz Israel*, through cultural activities, study days, seminars organized by the various movements, evening classes and so on. The Center for Culture of the General Federation of Labor, and the streams within it functioned prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and until today their permanent institutions, such as Givat Chaviva of the *Shomer Hazair* movement, Efal of the United Kibbutz Movement, Beit Berl, Ohalo and others are active in adult education.

6.2 Adult education in the framework of the Department of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education

According to Meir Peretz, Director of the above department, about 180,000 adults in 140 Jewish, Arab and Druse settlements are currently enrolled in educational frameworks under the auspices of the Department of Adult Education, in which 750,000 people studied over the last decade. The Department is mandated to impart education – from analphabetism to high school matriculation examinations, teaching Hebrew to new adult immigrants and specializing in profession-oriented language courses for engineers, doctors, university candidates and so on. It offers parenting groups, enrichment and broadening horizons for adults at the People's Universities and at academic facilities (about 70,000 adults are studying this year at 55 institutions, colleges for pensioners and the elderly) as well as pre-academic preparatory courses. The diverse student population ranges from scientists arriving from the FSU to illiterate immigrants from Ethiopia and the Asian countries of the FSU. The material is specially adapted to their needs, helping them to not only communicate but to also be absorbed in Israel (Peretz, 2005).

Comprehensive projects to advance mass literacy were instituted and still continue, such as the project to eradicate illiteracy in the 1950s with the large immigration from North Africa, or the *Tehila* project for adult education implemented at the end of the 1970s, a unique program for mature, mainly female, learners. The learners came to the education centers and “Found literacy as well as company and a

community” (ibid). Other projects include those such as completing education for those seeking employment (since 1996) and a “Good word”, for mothers of schoolchildren, who immigrated from Ethiopia, and whose objective is female empowerment by raising their level of education and combining activities with children in the school context. In the Arab and Druse sectors, the Department of Adult Education ran courses on alphabetization in the Arabic language. The Department also develops learning materials, such as readers, textbooks, audio tapes for *Ulpanim*, software and the *Sha’ar Lamatchil* (Gateway for the Beginner) Hebrew newspaper.

6.2.1 Ulpan and Ulpan methods

General background: The *Ulpan* institution is one of the most prominent and significant literacy projects in Israel. Its uniqueness and achievements have gained international recognition and the word *Ulpan* (and the plural, *Ulpanim*) have been assimilated in a variety of languages. The *Ulpan* serves as a national agent, responsible for teaching Hebrew to new immigrants (Aviad, 2005) and affords a learning framework intended to quickly and efficiently impart the Hebrew language to immigrants (Manzur, 1997: 23). The first *Ulpan* was *Ulpan Ezion*, opened in Jerusalem in 1949, immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel, when it was clear that there was an acute need to teach the Hebrew language to the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who arrived in Israel from all over the world in a brief period of time. Later, this framework provided a solution during the years when great waves of immigrants arrived in Israel (more than 1 million during the 1990s) and in years when the rate of immigration was lower. According to Aviad (2005) Director, sub-division of Hebrew Language Instruction (*Ulpanim*) at the Ministry of Education, the number of students who studied at the *Ulpanim* is estimated to be more than 1 million. 136 *Ulpanim* operate this year with 18,805 students in 954 classes (as of January 2005). In 1991, the peak of immigration to Israel, there were 5,944 classes with 138,152 students (Central Bureau of Statistics).

Objective: The origins of the word *Ulpan* lie in the *Talmudic* term *Beit Ulpana*, a house of learning, distinguishing it from a regular school. The Israeli *Ulpan*, in contrast to language schools, is not only intended to teach Hebrew, but also to enable cultural and social absorption (Manzur, 1997: 23). It serves as a place and framework for imparting national (nationalist in many senses), Jewish (Jewish history, literature, tradition, festivals, Bible), secular and even traditional and civic content (current events and public policy). The *Ulpan* enables the student to connect to daily life in Israel and is both democratic and western-modern in spirit. In sociological terms, this is an intensive framework, a melting pot, for adaptation, an agent and mechanism of national socialization (Almog, 1997: 57, 148).

Organization: Manzur (1997: 23) and Aviad (2005) assert that the basic model is the Ministry of Education’s *Ulpan*, under the supervision of, and financed by, that Ministry, the Ministry of Absorption and the Jewish Agency. This is a free 5-month course of 25-30 hours weekly (morning or evening, by choice). Every immigrant to Israel receives a grant for the first six months after his arrival, enabling him to learn Hebrew without having to make a living. The grant is 16,000 NIS for a single person rising to 55,000 NIS for a family with four people (\$3,500 - \$11,000); about 75-80% of the immigrants make use of it.

Ulpan students receive a certificate at the end of their studies, which is a pre-condition for their acceptance at a secondary Hebrew learning framework or for acceptance to a professional study framework, and credits the learner employed in the public service with six months of seniority at work. Since 2001, receipt of a certificate is conditional on fulfilling three conditions: 80% attendance at lessons; completing all the course assignments; participation in a final examination.

The final examination is divided into two parts, both oral and written. Until 2001, there was no official examination and the certificate did not assess the recipient. The certificate of today comprises two pages: the one shows participation and other the level of study reached at the end and the grade for the final exam.

Since many immigrants do not complete the *Ulpan* course, there are also evening *Ulpanim* funded with the aid of the local authorities, which immigrants attend 2-3 times weekly, as well as a further *Ulpan* that

serves the population in need of Hebrew to integrate at work. In recent years, retraining courses have been provided for professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers or social workers (Manzur, 1997: 23). In addition to the basic, mainly urban, model, additional *Ulpan* frameworks exist in Israel such as the *Kibbutz Ulpan*, where the students work half a day in the *kibbutz* and study for the other half. They are usually young, and many return later to their countries of origin having absorbed an authentic Israeli experience and learned basic Hebrew. Further different examples are the private *Ulpanim* are private ones, such as the *Ulpan Akiva* in Natanya, where the students board, whose rationale is "To create an atmosphere and an empowered input, as a catalyst for absorbing the language" (ibid) and those private *Ulpanim* which are taught by Hebrew teachers who have spent time abroad. All seven Israeli universities have established a unique type of *Ulpan* which is more academic and which is directed towards young students who are immigrants and who have been in Israel no longer than five years, and also for students from overseas universities who are studying for one or two semesters in the framework of the overseas program. A few adult faculty members joined them. Most of the students had impressive learning abilities, a fact that enables a "Far more intensive rate of progress" (ibid).

The curriculum and the learning method. Due to the variety of the students, due to the variety of students' countries of origin, and in view of the main objective of the framework, *Ulpanim* adopt the "Natural method for teaching language, i.e., teaching Hebrew in Hebrew, with emphasis on communication. The aim is to enable the students to express themselves as closely as possible to native speakers. The university *Ulpan*, apart from the beginner level, emphasizes literacy" (ibid). The teaching methods adopted in *Ulpanim* and the curricula are adapted to the age of the students (there are special curricula for the young and the elderly) as well as to the language-employment-professional needs of the learners. Doctors, nurses, veterinary surgeons, engineers, accountants, lawyers, hi-tech workers, journalists (as well as *ad hoc* programs such as for actors of the Geshen theater, study professional terms as well as relevant language skills).

For the illiterate world, mostly immigrants from Ethiopia, special programs and learning materials were developed. These people study in special *Ulpanim* for 1000 hours (instead of the regular 500 hours). In the search for a method that would produce success, the most effective system was found to have two teachers in each class, one of whom is a member of that community, and who has lived in Israel for a certain period of time and is fully familiar with the learning culture in the country of origin, and with the thinking, style and the mother tongue. For more than half of the period of *Ulpan* study the Ethiopian teacher is the primary classroom teacher (Aviad, 2005).

The *Ulpan* program is uniform and obligatory and is reflected in the final examination. The learning materials are textbooks, video cassettes, audio cassettes, computerized materials and a weekly newspaper in easy Hebrew.

The method used in the *Ulpanim* is known as *Ulpan* method. Six principles can be identified: 1) Emphasis on imparting the language in its cultural context; 2) Starting with the needs of the students; 3) The linguistic hierarchy is arranged from the more useful to less useful rather than from the easy to the more difficult; 4) The study unit is not based on a word or a sentence but on discourse, i.e. vocabulary, idioms, expressions and speech-acts which enable a natural discourse; 5) Emphasis is placed not on knowledge but on linguistic skills. Rather than focusing on one skill, the curriculum stresses the integration of the five skills taught in the *Ulpan*: Speech, writing, reading, listening comprehension and understanding a televised text; 6) Application – the ability to use the materials acquired in the *Ulpan* for personal needs outside of it. This is the overriding objective of the *Ulpan*. Application goes beyond the structured and graduated curricula and is tailored to the students' personal, cultural and professional/vocational needs (Aviad, 2005).

The teachers (mostly female) in all the *Ulpanim*, use and emphasize a humanistic pedagogic style. The intense learning, the feeling of a second childhood, the lengthy sessions with the permanent teacher (or two teachers) for months, the intimate contact with them, the agents of culture and 'representatives' of the Israeli reality, their help in solving problems of absorption and adaptation – all these create

interpersonal, close and warm connections between learners and teachers (sometimes at the expense of the professional quality of the teaching).

This pedagogic style was, perhaps one of the reasons for the absence of a final examination for 50 years. As noted above, as of 2001, an official national examination was introduced. A national summary of the results shows a failure rate of 7% of immigrants. It should be noted that Ethiopian immigrants, rarely sit the examination, while those who do tend to fail. Educated Ethiopian immigrants succeed as well as other immigrants. Special examinations (accessible on the Internet site) were compiled for students aged 65 and older, as well as for students attending a variety of advanced courses. A special examination has yet to be compiled for illiterate immigrants from Ethiopia (Aviad, 2005).

Information about the theory and especially about the practice encountered by the theory (Theory-practice) has been discussed in the *Hed HaUlpan* paper, published today in digital form - http://www.education.gov.il/adult-education/hed_haulpan86.htm with information on *Ulpanim* found at <http://www.education.gov.il/adult-education/alfonim.htm>

6.2.2 Adult education in the Israel Defense Forces

The IDF is a national organization financed by the Ministry of Defense, and also significant in the literacy arena. It plays an important role in educating adults aged 18 and older. It affords the "last stop" where those who have not integrated or who have failed in the state education system can "board". In personal and national terms, it operates in the world of literacy as a body that provides affirmative education (Spokesperson, Education Corps, 2005) by teaching the Hebrew language to new immigrants, imparting basic education to those lacking it, completing education for those who did not conclude their elementary schooling, and through providing information on subjects from all areas of life to soldiers and officers and those in training for the command staff.

Two goals guide the involvement of the IDF in the domain of education and literacy, according to Colonel (Res) Rony Kalinsky, (2005).

1. To help those serving in the army to perform better during their military service and better execute the professional tasks and demands in areas in which soldiers serve. This goal answers the needs of the army aiming to improve its quality.
2. The IDF recognizes its responsibility to help out with social needs. Much is done, therefore, regarding knowing the language and functioning in Israeli society under the heading of "A nation building an army building a nation". This is the vision the Education Corps defined for itself seven years ago, and formulated by Elazar Stern, then its Commander. The social objective is anchored in Ben Gurion's vision, with the establishment of the IDF's social role as the people's army.

"The army must also serve as a pioneering educational center for both native and immigrant Israeli youth [...] impart a minimum knowledge of language and Jewish history to every recruit who does not know the language and has not received a Jewish and general education [...] a rise in rank will not take place without an examination that, apart from military knowledge, will also include a minimum of cultural knowledge" (Ben Gurion, 1955: 140).

Language-literacy education is applied in the IDF at six key places.

1. *Hebrew appraisal test*: All 17-year olds, embarking on the draft procedure, sit for Hebrew tests that check their mastery of understanding words, reading comprehension, speech and writing. The tests are known as "Hebrew appraisal". The test has not been altered for at least 10 years nor was it adapted to the changes in the Ministry of Education's curriculum. These tests indicate a trend towards a steady decline in the examinees' scores. Most *Sabarim* who have completed their high school matriculation examination in Hebrew language scored 9 in the past, the highest possible score; today, some only score 8.
2. *Courses on teaching the Hebrew language*: Soldiers who attain a particularly low score (lower than 5) must participate in a Hebrew language course at the start of their service. The course lasts about

3 months, according to the level of the soldier. Participating in it are new immigrant soldiers and members of Israel's minorities – Bedouins, Druse, and a few Circassians. On its conclusion an examination is held that enables them to improve their grade in Hebrew and thereby open a track to a better military service framework. (The IDF offers courses, acceptance to which is conditional on diverse scores such as 6+, 8+ and so on).

3. *Completing education*: The IDF offers formal literacy tuition in courses to complete education, consistent with the official curriculum of the Ministry of Education. The students sit for external examinations given by the Ministry according to the level of study (10th – 12th grade). In addition, they receive assistance in completing high school matriculation examinations in the subject of Hebrew, English, Mathematics and Social Studies". The rates of success in these frameworks are exceptionally high: More than 90-95% of the courses are taught by trained female soldier teachers and officers, themselves high school graduates who participate in special training courses at the start of their military service. All are highly motivated and asked to serve in this framework.
4. *The "Rafal boys" project*, or as it is now known, "The Center for Advancing Exceptional Populations" (CAP): Some 1,700 youngsters should be drafted each year whose recruitment data however prevent them from serving in the IDF. The project population is 2nd and 3rd generation native Israelis, "Some of whom have no idea how to read and write. They are incapable of connecting letters to make words" (ibid). The IDF nevertheless drafts them "To help them to become part of Israeli society" (ibid). For 12-18 months of their military service they acquire education and a profession through a variety of courses. They study in small groups and with a particularly devoted staff ("with an astounding level of commitment and of whom 60-70% are religious" – ibid). The special treatment reinforces their self-confidence (known in the army as "empowering basic training"), and contributes to their coping with difficulties and to their success. Within three months they sit for tests to complete 10th grade. The IDF measures their greatest success in their joining the combat units, such as paratroopers.
5. *Creating and disseminating literacy*: Newspapers, weeklies, journals, instructional books and professional literature are written and distributed by the IDF. The most popular is the *Bamachane* (In the Camp) weekly, with 40,000 copies a week. Other publications widely read are the *Skira Chodshit* (Monthly Review), *Ma'arachot* (Campaigns), *Biton Cheyl Ha'Avir* (Air Force Newspaper), *Biton Ha'Agaf LeTechnologiya VeLogistica* (Paper of the Technology and Logistics Wing). IDF sites, such as that of the IDF spokesperson, are active and include material in Hebrew and English, as well as sites aimed towards special populations: reserve soldiers, candidates for the security service, soldiers participating in delegations to Poland and so on. Two other important sites intended for the entire population are the very popular military radio stations, *Galey Zahal* and *Galgalaz*. The site of the IDF spokesperson (<http://www1.idf.il/DOVER>) includes links to all the sites that the IDF develops.
6. *Training the command staff*: Training the command staff includes civil education, information on the current problems of the State of Israel and her people, as well as areas of diverse sciences (Lem 1969: 514). From the end of the 1980s till 2003 "Academic and military literacy" were taught at the Command and General Staff College ("*Barak*"), as part of striving to "academize" the military profession (Brosh, 1988: 137-138). For the last two years academic literacy has only been taught at the Tactical Command Division of that College (known as the "Academy").

Chapter 7 Literacy in other sectors: Arab education and ultra-orthodox education

7.1 Arab education

This section will discuss language education in the Arab sector (including the Druse and Bedouin sectors). It will present findings and data on the level of achievement of Arab students, the disparity between the Arab and Jewish sectors as well as the language and extra-language factors influencing them. Data for the Arab sector are divided according to the Arab sector (without differentiating between Muslims and Christians), the Bedouin sector and the Druse sector. The general average for the Jewish sector is comprised of state and state religious education (without new immigrants or mainstreamed special education students).

7.1.1 Students' achievements – findings and data

The Arab sector was not researched until the mid 1990s, except for the study conducted by Bashi, Cahan and Davies in 1981. The first national studies in which the Arab sector was included in a sampling framework and which explored its mother tongue, were in the framework of a national feedback test in 1996, but there, too, the possibilities for comparison were restricted: Only four questions on reading comprehension afforded any comparison. The findings showed: an average disparity of 33 points in favor of the Jewish sector (in the general test for the Jewish sector, Jews scored 72, Arabs, 52.4). It should be noted that, despite its diversity, the Arab sector was for test purposes and due to constraints included Arabs, Bedouin, Druse and Circassians as one group (Shild, 2004).

The 2001 PIRLS test was the first international test that also sampled the Arab sector. It included 10-year old 4th grade students (except for those in East Jerusalem who follow the Palestinian Authority curriculum) and the general Arab population in Israel. Its findings reveal to both Israelis and to the world the low level of achievement for reading literacy in the Arab sector, and the disparity therein between the Arab and the Jewish sectors.

As mentioned in chapter 4, Israel was placed 23rd out of 35 countries. The international average score was 500. Israel's average was 509. However, the results reveal that the Jewish sector placed 12th amongst the group of countries leading in reading literacy, with an average score of 538 while the Arab sector placed 31st, with an average of 425 and a standard deviation of 6.95. The researchers saw the importance of noting that the achievements of students in the Arab sector in Israel were higher than those of students in other Arabic-speaking countries such as Kuwait and Morocco (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004: 39, 44-45, 54-55).

The findings of the national test present a similar picture. One of the main findings of the 2002 ISEG test is that achievements in the Jewish sector are higher than in the Arab and Druse sectors (Shild, 2003: 20). The average score for mother tongue in Arab and Druse 5th grade classes was 43 (compared to an average of 74 for the Jewish sector). The average score in 8th grade was 48 (64 in the Jewish sector). The students' achievements do not distribute uniformly: There is a high concentration of low scores for the Arab and Druse sectors, while the Jewish sector finds a relative concentration of high scores (especially for 5th graders). For all sectors, achievements in reading comprehension (in elementary school) and in understanding texts (in middle school) are better than for written expression (ibid: 28-29).

ISEG 2004 shows some reduction in the disparity. In 5th grade classes the average score for Hebrew as the mother tongue was 70, and for Arabic, 54 - a difference of 16 points. The table of distribution that notes the degree of students' ability to meet the learning demands in Arabic indicates a very slight improvement, but still some 50% remain under-achievers and do not attain a score of 55 (only 16-20% of Jewish students are under-achievers). Only 8-10% of Arab students attain a score of 86-100. Amongst 8th grade middle school students the average score for language is similar for all sectors. In Jewish education the average is 65 points and in the Arab sector 64, detailed as follows: the average for Arab students is 66; for Druse students 70 and for Bedouin students – 53. The table of distribution

nonetheless continues to show that the degree with which Arab students meet the learning demands of language indicates that 35% are under-achievers (Shild, 2004).

Below is a table of the scores appearing on the site of the Department for Assessment and Measurement of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture <http://cms.education.gov/educationcms/units/haaracha/odothagaf/default.htm>.

Table 1: Average score for ISEG mother tongue tests, 2002-2004

	Jewish (general)	Arab (general)	Arab	Druse	Bedouin
2002	5 th – 70 8 th elementary – 61 8 th middle school – 64	5 th – 43 8 th elementary – 61 8 th middle school - 48	5 th – 43 5 th elementary – 64 8 th middle school - 48	5 th – 46 5 th elementary - 52	5 th – 43 5 th elementary – 58 8 th middle school - 48
2003	P5 th –8 th - 71 8 th middle school - 68	5 th –8 th – 46 8 th middle school - 49	5 th –8 th – 46 8 th middle school - 49	5 th –8 th – 49 8 th middle school - 49	5 th –8 th – 46 8 th middle school -49
2004	5 th – 70 8 th elementary – 65 8 th middle school - 65	5 th – 54 8 th elementary - 64 8 th middle school - 64	5 th – 55 8 th elementary – 66 8 th middle school - 66	5 th – 56 5 th middle school - 70	5 th – 51 8 th elementary – 53 8 th middle school - 53

The PISA 2002 test also reveals very great disparity between the Jewish and the non-Jewish sectors for all subjects. The reading achievements in the Jewish sector were 50 points lower than the OECD average, while those of the non-Jewish sector were 125 points lower (Kramersky and Mevarech, 2004: 74). About 62% of the Arab students could read at level 1 (the lowest of five levels) or worse, compared to some 30% within the Jewish sector. Similarly, no Arab students were found who could cope at level 5 for any of the reading skills (ibid: 28; Mei-Ami, 2003: 4).

Alhiv (2005) summarizes the mother tongue literacy situation within the Bedouin sector as “not good” and the ISEG data as “a miserable scenario”. More than 70% of 5th grade students and 60% of 8th graders received a score ranging from 0–40 for reading comprehension. The improvement demonstrated by the results of the five-year program test (see below) is to be taken with reservations, since, he maintains, this is a “less sterile” test than the ISEG, during which there was slight teacher intervention. The Bedouin sector was not deciphered separately in the PISA test and there are therefore no specific data. *The overt drop out rate amongst Arab youth is far higher (12%) than amongst Jews (6%) (Mei-Ami, 2003: 6).*

The percentage of those entitled to a high school matriculation certificate in the Arab sector is still lower than in the Jewish sector despite the improvement in learning achievement. The percentage of Druse entitled to such a certificate was 37% amongst 17-year olds; amongst Arabs it stood at 34% and amongst Negev Bedouins at 26%. The percentage of those meeting university entry requirements was higher in the Jewish sector - 87% - compared to 73% for Arab students, 47% for Negev Bedouins and 69% for the Druse sector (Mei-Ami, 2003: 4).

7.1.2 Factors influencing language education in the Arab sector and their implications

A. Language reality

Diglossia and the extensive use of Hebrew negatively influence imparting Arabic as the national mother tongue of Arab students (Meree and Amara, 2002: 109).

Diglossia: Arabic has two simultaneous language systems: written language (both classical and - literary) and the spoken language (which also has many and diverse dialects). Children acquire spoken language in childhood, but in school they must learn the literary language, frequently encountering many difficulties (ibid: 108). Hadad, writing the PISA test report on the Arab sector, sees this as one of the reasons for the poor results (Mei-Ami, 2003: 4). This phenomenon is manifested in tests in Israel and in Arab countries, and makes comparison through global, uniform tests difficult.

Alhiv (2005) asserts that the problem is far more serious and complex in the Bedouin sector: "Not only diglossia, but also the many dialects - within the tribe (due to mixed marriages), between tribes and between north and south exacerbate the problem. Students start their literacy path in a formal classroom framework (in the town or regional school), accustomed to their personal dialects and are forced to adapt to that of the teacher, to dialects of their peers and to the literary language.

The impact of Hebrew. Hebrew enjoys a respectable place for pragmatic reasons: It is an essential tool for all Arab residents of the State of Israel for communicating with the establishment, with the Jewish environment, and at work. Thus despite the richness of the Arabic language for expressing every message and utterance, the Arab population reveals a growing tendency to adopt words from the Hebrew language and integrate them into spoken, fluent Arabic. Thus a mixed Hebrew-Arab or "Hebrab" language develops in the minority language and this is at the expense of the mother tongue (Meree and Amara, 2002: 109).

The two factors - diglossia and the impact of Hebrew - have direct implications for the status of the mother tongue amongst its speakers: on their attitude towards language, on their identification with it, and on their degree of relevance to their lives and experience. The comments below indicate the inner conflict accompanying the use of language on the one hand, and on the critical role of teachers in language education on the other hand. According to the Coordinating Supervisor for the Center for Arabic as the Mother Tongue, Dr. Mahmud Abu-Fane (2005), "Difficulty exists in speaking in the literary style. The transition is not natural, and it inhibits expression". Dr. Abu-Fane, who teaches at the Arabic College of Education, tells of a student who excitedly described a children's book her father had written. He gently asked her to switch to speaking correct language (as literary language is known, in contrast to spoken language). She obeyed, unenthusiastically added several sentences and concluded by saying, "That's it. I've got nothing more to say".

Such comments indicate that spoken language is considered inferior and incorrect compared to correct language, but correct/literary language, under conditions of natural conversation, creates alienation, blocks and limitations. And it damages expression. It is a goal hard to achieve.

The supervisor for Bedouin education, Dr. Alhiv (2005) is also worried about the status of the literary language and hopes for its internalization and for strengthening its prestige. He lays responsibility for the hoped-for improvement at the teachers' doorstep. "I would like teachers to improve their language, develop a respectful attitude towards literary language, of pride amongst their students, that they know it's prestigious. I would like them to know to express themselves in literary language. And it's possible: One can bridge the gap, dissipate the strangeness, provide a supportive atmosphere, and help them not to be embarrassed to speak. But this must start already in kindergarten."

Mr. Salman Faraj (2005), the coordinating supervisor for teaching Arabic in the Druse sector, also sees teachers as the main factor for assimilating (or not assimilating) correct language: "The transition from spoken language to literary language is not supposed to be so difficult, especially if we take into consideration the exposure to literary Arabic on television, theater and film. The root of the problem lies with the teachers, who use spoken language as the language of teaching.

Up-dating: Language in a changing world. There is no language institute, such as the Hebrew Language Academy, that can serve as the agreed address for absorbing and disseminating linguistic innovations that will answer the needs of a modern progressive society. Admittedly, a supreme committee for Arab

language affairs has been established by the curricular department of the Ministry of Education which deals with translating terms from Hebrew to Arabic (Abu-Fane, 2005). But meanwhile, conventions are flexible.

The ideological-political reality. The aims of the curricula for the Arab sector recommend intensifying the connection between students and their national language and strengthening the learners' historic connection with their homeland and heritage although realization is problematic. The national issue is studied selectively: Writings are disqualified with the claim that they are nationalistic or arouse national emotions (Meree and Amara, 2002: 101, 118-119).

B. *Allocating resources*

Mei-Ami (2003: 3) notes the meager allocation of resources as one of the main causes of the low level of achievement amongst Arab students. This is manifested in the number of hours of study, in the infrastructures, the quality of professional teaching personnel, and in the curricula and the enrichment programs as detailed below.

Hours of study. According to data from the 2002 ISEG, many (7-11) hours weekly are allocated to teaching the mother tongue in 1st – 3rd grades, but as of the 4th grade this drops to 5-6 hours. At the same time, for all grades and particularly in middle school, more hours are allocated to teaching the mother tongue in the Arab and Druse education systems than in the Jewish education framework (Shild, 2003).

Physical infrastructure. The level of infrastructure and the investment in it in schools in Arab towns is lower than in the Jewish sector. The Bedouin education system suffers the worst infrastructure, especially in unrecognized townships. Classrooms are lacking, resulting in overcrowding; many school buildings are in need of basic renovation and correction of safety hazards; some of the schools lack regular electricity and water supplies; in the unrecognized townships there are no high schools and the students must travel to schools far from their homes (Mei-Ami, 2003: 15).

Access to learning resources: books and libraries. More homes in the Arab sector have fewer books and fewer libraries or reading corners. 56% of Israeli students use libraries or reading corners, of whom 66% are Jewish and only 22% are Arab. According to ISEG 2004 (Shild, 2005), 72% of the Arab elementary schools, 72% of the Druse schools and 57% of the Bedouin schools have a library. In the Jewish education framework libraries are found in 86% of the state schools and in 92% of the state religious schools. In middle schools, 74% of Arab schools have libraries, 83% in the Druse sector and 55% in the Bedouin sector. 93% of the state Jewish schools and 86% of the state religious schools have a library.

Computer access: 40% of the elementary schools in the Jewish sector have a computer in the classroom compared to 14% in the Arab sector. There are hardly any computers in middle school classrooms of any sector. 80-90% of the Jewish students have a computer at home and some 60% have an Internet connection. The percentage is about 33% in the Arab and Druse sectors (Shild, 2003).

Pedagogic input

The quality of the professional teaching personnel. The disparity in education and training between Jewish and Arab elementary school teachers expanded between 1994 - 2001. In 1994, the percentage of unqualified teachers was identical for the Jewish and the Arab sectors, standing at 12%. However, as of 1998, there has been a considerable decline in the percentage of unqualified teachers in the Jewish sector (to 6% in 2001) but this has been slower in the Arab sector, standing at 10% in 2001. The percentage of academically qualified teachers rose consistently in Jewish, and in Arab, elementary education during those years, but was higher in the Jewish sector (Mei-Ami, 2003: 16). Supervisors in the Arab sectors also mentioned in interviews that the level of teaching is a key factor for success and failure. There are high achievements in schools which defeat the overwhelming combination of being , "Both a minority and poor", in schools where there is an exceptional principal of stature (Livnat, 2005).

Educational programs and pedagogic tools. Meree and Amara (2002: 118) claim that high school (1981), middle school (1985) and elementary school curricula (1989) pertain, according to the

phraseology of their objectives, to all domains of the functional roles played by the mother tongue. They are spiral, locating the students at the hub of educational activity, and connecting them, through graded didactic readers, with the social and human environment. But nevertheless (Mei-Ami, 2003: 16), curricula adapted to the Arab society are lacking. They are sometimes translated from the Hebrew language curricula, but are deficient in the content that would help Arab children integrate into society. According to Livnat (2005), “A curriculum irrelevant to the students’ life experiences and an insult to their history and culture”.

Enrichment programs and the socio-economic conditions. Those determining educational budgets ignore the fact that, in the absence of state funding, the parents’ payments for enrichment programs in “gray education” are becoming a key factor in determining the quality of education provided in school. Since the Arab-Muslim population in Israel is usually poor, it is the main group harmed by the cutback in government funding for school enrichment programs, since it cannot keep up with the payments necessary for such programs (ibid: 16).

The findings regarding language education in the Arab sector indicate a vulnerable area. The disparity in achievement, in the allocation of resources, in understanding the unique needs and adapting to them, is notable. Arab schools, claims Mazoi (1997: 172) lie at the heart of the fierce community and political conflicts that cloud their functioning at the institutional, the structural, and the educational-value level. The problematic functioning of the language education exists within a reality in which there is no Arab University in Israel, exacerbating the issue of the professional absorption and integration of Arabs in the broad Israeli labor market. As Mazoi writes, some view the state Arab education system as “A framework demanding to memorialize the political-economic dependence of the Arab population on the Jewish-Zionist institution, while blurring the Arab-Palestinian identity” (p. 173). At the same time, the Arab community is not blind to the fact that there have been remarkable positive changes in the literacy arena since 1948, such as a sharp decline in the rates of illiteracy, an impressive rise (of about a factor of 20) in the number of students (from 12,000 to about 220,000 students between 1948-1990 while the Arab population in Israel grew only five-fold), a most remarkable increase in the number of years of learning and higher achievements of students in the Arab education framework in Israel compared to their peers in Arabic speaking countries (Egypt, Morocco, Kuwait and others). Chapter 9, which concludes this report, discusses further the expected changes in language education for the Arab sector.

7.2 The ultra-orthodox Jewish sector

7.2.1 Background

The ultra-orthodox education system is characterized by the separation of this sector of its own volition and by; its decentralization. This is clear, for example, when reading the Yellow Pages of the phone directory of the predominantly religious town of Bnei Brak, under the entry for “educational institutions”. This section is divided into 1) “Recognized unofficial ultra-orthodox education”, and which includes mainly the independent institutions such as *Beit Ya’akov* and *El Hama’ayan* targeting primarily 1st–8th grade females although young boys also study in these institutions. One may thence continue to high school, to teachers training colleges (for females) or to *Yeshiva* –for males; 2) Private (unrecognized) education with its many streams in which most of the students are male. For ideological reasons, defined as a “Waste of time”, subjects such as English, geography, history and sciences are not studied, and only religious Jewish studies are taught. The boys, claim supervisors of the independent education system, may read science and nature books at home if they wish, as long as they do not waste their time in school (Ehrlich and Levi, 2005).

Table 2: Distribution of students in Jewish education according to type of institution (2004)

Educational institution	Number of students	Percentage
State	673,000	63.5

State religious	191,000	18.4
Independent education, <i>EI HaMa'ayan</i> , and other recognized institutions	144,000	14.4
<i>Torah</i> studies	37,000	3.7
Total	1,045,000	100

(Source: Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, Economics and budget authority)

<http://cms.education.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/DD9870CE-70CC-4DD1-BD04-0741C0549D7B/19927/HinuchTaktziv8.pdf>

The Ministry of Education recently tried to force recognized educational institutions of the independent school system to adopt the “National Core Program”, i.e., to add other subjects to the religious studies, such as Land of Israel studies, social studies, civics, sciences, physical education and arts (Ministry of Education, 2003). These institutions receive ever-increasing budgets from the Ministry of Education (Svirsky, 1999). But despite the veiled threats to cease funding, the principals of ultra-orthodox schools do not cooperate. Instructed by their rabbis, they are not prepared to commit themselves to a step that will increase supervision of them (Peper, 2003). An illustration of this can be seen on the sign hanging over the entrance to the “Center for Teacher Enrichment” in Bnei Brak: “The Center was established in order to [...] pour old wine into new vessels while maintaining and assuring, with God’s help, the spirit of the House of Jacob and the purity of independent education”. A supervisor for the system (Ehrlich and Levi, 2005) states this quite clearly: “Outside interference arouses fear [...] secular and non-Jewish literature, world literature – all these are sieved seven times, and still our students can barely differentiate.”

Another step that was rejected, according to media reports (such as YNET, 2005) was the attempt to include the ultra-orthodox sector in the 2005 ISEG, which included questions on one hundred years of Zionism, democracy and heritage. The reason for this rejection is due to the references to Zionist concepts. Prof. Katz, chairman of the Pedagogic Secretariat of the Ministry of Education (cited in that report) explains that despite the overlap of 60% in content, the concepts differ. Thus, for example, civics is termed “Respect and proper behavior”, and study of the Holocaust as the “Destruction of European Jewry” – further evidence that the emigration of the ultra-orthodox from *Eretz Israel* to the State of Israel is still developing.

7.2.2 Achievement and disparity

Due to the separation there is little official data on the students’ achievements, nevertheless, two interesting findings were recently published indicating a certain advantage to the ultra-orthodox sector for reading literacy: One was according to the PISA 2002 study that found greater involvement in reading (mainly for females in the independent education system), shown by a facility in remembering and monitoring, as compared to the other sectors (Kramersky and Mevarech, 2004). The other finding is from the most recent ISEG (2004), in which half of the 5th grade classes (from the entire ultra-orthodox sector) participated and received higher scores than students from other sectors. Their average score was 79%, 9 points above the average for the general sector. Furthermore, the average score for all the females was higher than that of the males: 81 compared to 73, with a particularly high score of 91 achieved by students of the independent school system for the category of “Evaluation and Criticism” (Shild, 2004).

It is interesting to compare the data on literacy in the ultra-orthodox sector with those for numeracy. The sectors can only be compared for whatever is pertinent to 5th grade (since only in that grade was the ISEG 2004 conducted in the ultra-orthodox sector). The results were as follows: In Jewish education – 72; in non-Jewish education, 57; in ultra-orthodox Jewish education a general score of 74 was realized. This may be broken down into the independent education system (represented by the interviewees) 76,

the *El HaMa'ayan* network, 70 and the ultra-orthodox from other networks – 66 (Shild, 2004, who has reservations: The tests held in the religious sector were not calibrated and one must therefore be careful when comparing them to the achievements of students in the official education system).

There are no official data on the drop out rate from ultra-orthodox institutions. Ehrlich (2005) discusses ultra-orthodox education and maintains this phenomenon is extremely limited amongst female students since they have a broad choice of extra-curricular activities within the educational framework, including dance, singing, drama, art and graphics. The drop out rate amongst the males is higher, mainly within the *Sephardi* community that favors oral culture. Not all manage to adapt to the demanding learning frameworks: The solutions offered include special *Yeshivot* for drop outs.

Ehrlich and Levy (2005) employ several factors to explain the relatively good achievements in reading and Hebrew. The first is the reading culture, the literate environment that accompanies ultra-orthodox youth from infancy at home, to kindergarten and school. “The children see their parents, older brothers and sisters reading all the time [...] the apartments are small but crammed full of books, there is even a library [...] when mother is reading a prayer book and asks the child for something, her speech is spiced with a quote from an approved book [...] the males do not have ‘screen time’ - no televisions or computers, females have some time [...] what makes us unique is the absolute commitment of adults and children to the same thing: To reading and writing. And here the teacher and child, the grandfather and grandson – all have one common interest and language.”

The second factor is the embedded habit of learning *Talmud* and explains the relatively high level of skill and involvement in reading (Kramersky, and Mevarech, 2002). According to Ehrlich and Levi (2005), the children study from the age of 9 with several books open simultaneously. Is it surprising that they transfer, blend, draw conclusions and are aware of linguistic precision? This is the embodiment of hypertext. “Turn it over and mull it over, everything’s there”.

The third factor is the perception of the Hebrew language as a value: “Hebrew is the holy language; its pronunciation must be exact. One does not pronounce a word “approximately”, as in global practice [...] it is learned thoroughly with grammar and vowels, and we are even tested on this in the entrance tests to teachers training college”.

According to one of the definitions (PISA: 7), literacy is considered essential for self-realization, for the ability to be a full member of society, of culture and of politics, and is a guarantee for success and security at work. Ehrlich and Levi (2005) respond to this definition: “Capability – yes. Our graduates can be anything – judges, doctors, hi-tech. But to guide them in this direction? Certainly not.”

In conclusion: literacy and education towards literacy play a central role in the belief-value, cultural, social and political domains. Thus rigid foundations of separatism, conservatism and totalitarianism may be observed in the substance and in structural and personal frameworks. Literacy, as religious literacy, is recruited to preserve the religious knowledge of the world, mankind, history, laws, norms, ritual customs and the primary and secondary narratives cast throughout Jewish religious history. This trend, which intensified under the State of Israel, cannot be isolated from its political purpose. Tensions and a political and cultural struggle exist over the preservation and escalation of their political power, over cultural hegemony and the right to participate, and whose echoes are manifested in the government, the *Knesset*, in assembling a coalition, in legislation, and in decisions over the national budget as well as in local government.

Chapter 8 Literacy and gender

8.1 The current scenario

Women are the educated public in Israeli society. The numerical data and social phenomena observed offer an optimistic picture: The proportion of females studying at institutions of higher education is higher

on all tracks (B.A., M.A. and Ph.D.) than that for males (slightly above 50%). The percentage of females obtaining a B.A. degree is constantly on the rise: In 1985 it was 49%; in 1995 – 55.3% and in 2002 – 58.9%. The percentage of those obtaining a Ph.D. rose from 32.6% in 1985, to 56.5% in 2002 (according to CBS). The percentage of female teachers in the Jewish and Arab education sectors is higher than that for males. This trend is more prominent in the Jewish sector than in the Arab sector (Olshtain and Zuzovsky, 2004:127). In 2000 percentage of female teachers reached 80% in the Jewish sector. In 2005 it would seem that females are those to introduce literacy. As writers and journalists equality has been achieved.

Their ever-increasing number in the world of literature is presented by Almog (2004: 928) as a drizzle that became a “real flood” in the 1990s. The status of Israeli female writers has never known such a blooming. The best seller lists include mostly women who are young and brilliant writers (Luzovsky, 1997, in *Tarbuyot Maariv*, cf. Almog, 2004: 929, , “On the female front”). In a random survey conducted by this writer of the best seller section of the *Haaretz* newspaper book supplement on 20.4.2005, she found an equal number of males and females topping the lists. Out of 31 best sellers in the literature, academic, children and youth, leisure and tourism categories, 18 were female writers and editors and 18 were males. “The Washington Population Action International” published a comparative study in early 1994 that claimed “Israel is one of the 20 leading countries regarding equal opportunities for women in education, and in fact there is no disparity between males and females in this domain [...] the higher education revolution of Israeli women serves as a catalyst for the feminist revolution (Almog, 2004: 900-901).

Nonetheless, according to Tamar El-Or, (Director of the Lafer Center for Women’s Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem). the link in the chain that separated males from females, the educational link, was easy to loosen in contrast to other links, such as politics, the army and science. The above data indicate that females have “crossed the lines”. They have managed to realize equality and have even gained an advantage over males. Women in all sectors identified with this. At the same time, claims El-Or, “The connection between power, prestige and status to these data, and also to their status in domains connected to the literacy industry, is not in their favor. They would seem not to benefit from this, and they only enjoy recognition to a very specific level. The journey to complete change in their status and place is not yet over. The female stereotype is still present in textbooks and in Hebrew literature, although the number of females who read and buy books is greater than the number of males. They must acquire less compartmentalized education and penetrate areas such as business, management, politics and hi-tech in greater numbers. The Hebrew language which differentiates between male and female still preserves the discrimination in the form of address in examinations (using the masculine) and in the language of instructions in textbooks (excluding some specific exceptions).

8.2 Female literacy in the modern orthodox and the ultra-orthodox Jewish communities

Religious women in the modern orthodox community have marked the knowledge station as the first in the change that they are creating in their status as believers and in performing the religious commandments. This is the reality in the modern orthodox community. The move to canonical traditional knowledge follows access to general education. It contributed to change in their synagogue and ceremonial lives, and in religious court procedures and decisions (El-Or, 2002). There is no numerical data regarding women who read from the *Torah* scroll in synagogue although this is an ever-increasing phenomenon, typical not only of conservative or reform communities. The “*Shira Chadasha*’ synagogue in Jerusalem is an example of an orthodox, egalitarian community, in which women read the *Torah* weekly, read the story of Esther on the festival of *Purim*, and are beginning to talk of female interpretation of texts, for example. They have now reached a new destination: the demand for greater command of their bodies and sexuality. Within ultra-orthodox society, too, women are expanding their literacy in non-canonical directions: to literature, to newspapers and to general education. It may well be that after obtaining control of these areas, they will also demand increasing access to traditional texts (El-Or, 2005).

The dramatic changes raise new problems and new questions: How do these changes affect their lives? Can learning help in later life, in married life and in family life? Can education work against them? Can they realize their literacy achievements? How does "Knowledge in action" (as it is termed by Emig, 1983) operate? What will a religious girl who studies religious law, but cannot make religious judgments, do with her knowledge? Will this go further?

The current reality points to a blockage and a second rate of exclusion, and thus the present struggle is being waged over its removal. This may be achieved through change in the ritual (such as women's activities in the "*Shira Chadasha*" synagogue), in the world of work and authority, and as *Halacha* (Jewish ritual law) consultants who offer counseling on religious commandments. They are currently focusing on the area of family purity and sexuality. This is a continuation of the process - it was not halted in the acquisition and proprietorship of knowledge. Women bring their knowledge to all life's textures: The synagogue, the ritual, religious decisions, public life, family and child education. The areas of study are also expanding: Women in ultra-orthodox society have been exposed to a world of general education that was closed to them (as it was to men) and they have begun to study mediation, health services, communication disorders, accountancy, law and hi-tech. New colleges have opened which provide women with a general education (such as the ultra-orthodox college founded by Adina Bar-Shalom, the daughter of Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, the most important rabbinical figure in the *Sephardic* community). In the USA, where these changes first occurred, later filtering into Israel and adopting a local flavor, the next step is already recognizable. Yeshiva University, (the University that produced religious Jewish academics and provided inspiration for the establishment of Bar Ilan University in Israel) established *Drisha* (Drisha, 2005), an institute for higher Jewish education that is at the spearhead of orthodox feminism in learning. Graduates of this institution work as rabbinical interns.

Women in general who find themselves in the midst of this development pay a price: a dialectic connection exists between acquiring education and the age of marriage and childbirth. A rise in the level of education goes along with postponing the age of marriage. However, within the orthodox Zionist society the situation is the opposite. The age of marriage has dropped together with the development in education. Girls marry younger (aged 21 rather than 23), and study for a first, second and even third degree as married women and mothers of babies and children. The universities learn to consider the students' special needs, allocating space to nurse, to express milk, to diaper babies and so on. Education has become legitimate and of value in the marriage industry. A Zionist, religious young man from the middle class will not marry a girl who has not engaged in Jewish studies at a women's college and who does not intend to complete her B.A.. In the early 1990s, women feared that studying would harm their chances of marriage, but today it is customary to study at college and university. Rabbis have also agreed that these studies contribute to greater resolve in preserving the religious character of family life. It is thus hard to object. Reality presents, however, a somewhat different process: Women have created change in these areas as well, such as change in the marriage ceremony customs (sometimes saying the ceremonial blessings themselves) and in raising children. Thus in the religious sector, acquiring high level literacy has no negative impact on their work or on the family life of those women. It is in the secular sector, in the world of advanced hi-tech, that women are meanwhile forced to make sacrifices in order to function in the family life. They are dismissed when they have children (El-Or, 2005).

A question raised by El-Or in her book, "Educated and ignorant: Ultra-orthodox Jewish women and their world" (1994) is whether one can educate to illiteracy, i.e., to adopt education as a tool for creating social, cultural, religious and political ignorance, education at whose conclusion "The woman doesn't know", and who, at the cultural level will say, "I'll ask my husband". This question still has a double answer. Ultra-orthodox women attend school from the age of 5 and continue mouthing this sentence, but at the same time they do new things: They read books (limited, of course), write books, write in ultra-orthodox newspapers and know more than they admit to in public. This tension will have to be resolved in the future. At present, it has not erupted since the women are expanding their general education, acquisition of which involves less conflict and limited opposition from the Rabbis.

8.3 Gender issues in Arab education

As noted in chapter 4, the achievements of females in Jewish education are similar, according to the ISEG 2002, to those of males, excluding achievements for mother tongue in middle school where those of females were higher. In contrast, the achievements of females in the non-Jewish education sector are higher by two class grades in both elementary and middle school than those of males for all subjects, with the greatest disparity for mother tongue and English (Shild, 2003). The coordinating supervisor for the Druse sector explains the gender disparity through the leisure created amongst females due to changes in lifestyle.

Livnat (2005) explains Arab females outstanding academic abilities as an instrumental means for social leverage through marriage (as she says, "It all revolves around marriage"). The outstanding students invest in studying not to continue in institutions of higher education, but in order to improve their value as desirable brides. Their excellence is interpreted in Arab society as evidence of their moral personality and their ability for self-control. They are blessed with "understanding" (intelligence, life skills and logical ability) as are males, which prevents them from behaving improperly. Educated males seek wives who were outstanding in high school.

In the Bedouin sector too, the achievements of females are higher than those of males, but the drop out rate is greater for the former, especially in southern Israel. "In the absence of a high school close to home, girls are prevented from continuing their schooling since their parents are not prepared for them to go far from home. A higher percentage of females than males who do continue studying receive a high school matriculation certificate, similarly a higher number of female students study at university" (Alhiv, 2005).

Srab Aburabiya-Koider (2005), a young Bedouin anthropologist who has studied educated Bedouin women living in the Negev, maintains that they "Function in a compound of opposition". The reason for the girls' excellence stems from the fact that the latter know this is the only option that enables them a richer life. Males who choose not to excel academically have the option of going out to work, of meeting friends in social encounters, of travelling the world. Girls are prevented from doing this. Their option, if they do not study, is only marriage. Girls can only meet other girls in order to study. Fathers who are economically established prefer to send their daughters to study in boarding schools in the Galilee, as long as they are not seen traveling back and forth to school. Those who have completed and who are completing their higher studies find it very difficult to be accepted back into Bedouin society. They are forced to break the traditional female role models, encounter criticism from the tribal supervision mechanisms, and they struggle to receive legitimacy for public visibility and their new status (which many often forgo). As Halevi writes (2002) in her study of educated Bedouin women living in the Negev: "The girls who return home from school encounter a difficult and even absurd situation: They have undergone a change that their families have not experienced and must behave according to codes that are often not easily accepted. This situation results in harassment and unfair treatment at home since they are perceived as rebels by their parents and they now see themselves as deprived [...] and for them the educational arena symbolizes a place in which they will never be really able to participate, and in which they would have been able to live and to realize their own choices. Education is thus discussed here as an opening to the world of knowledge that cannot become a world of activity in the lives of most women (p. 62). "The families do not believe that four years of academic study will change the daughters. They return home after completing their studies and it is as if nothing has changed. They (the girls) have no say at home. Decisions continue to be made for them and they are forbidden to speak. The surroundings do not help. She is observed, people feel sorry but do nothing" (as one of the women notes, *ibid*: 68).

The highest price paid by them is in the partnership, emotional and motherhood domains. "In cases where the educational and the partnership realm meet, Bedouin woman must demonstrate intelligent maneuvering. Her desire to maintain her education can damage the marriage or a future marriage" (*ibid*: 76). Halevi's study (2002) and that of Aburabiya-Koider (2005) indicate that most waived partnership and were divorced, spinsters or "Divorcees who were never married" (a woman who was engaged by

contract but did not marry and had to get divorced in order to cancel the contract) Those who do marry show their objections in non western and covert practices. They choose one of three options: 1) To marry not out of choice, to submit to the father's choice "In order to prevent the father from having another fight with the tribe, and thereby to reward him for the rare opportunity he gave them by letting them learn"; 2) Marriage to a supportive partner who loves her but who she does not love; 3) To marry from choice as the second wife. "Because the tribal boundaries are closed to them some prefer not to remain spinsters but to accept freedom in the framework of marriage. But because of their "advanced" age (pp. 26-28) their only option is to a married man. Such marriages afford them freedom and escape, the opportunity to go and come, freedom that they lack as spinsters". One of them (the interviewee) chose the unique practice (identified with involvement and modernity): She managed to breach the prohibition to marry outside the approved tribal boundaries and married a Bedouin from a "forbidden" Bedouin tribe whom she had met during her studies at Ben Gurion University in the Negev. At the same time, as Halevi (2002: 49) notes, one should not for a moment think of the two worlds in which they live as an oriental dichotomy between the traditional and the modern. These women live in cultural "areas of encounter", in "border areas" in which "conflicting" hybrid identities are which are feminist in spirit.

There is no doubt that the changes in the fabric of Arab, Bedouin and Druse society in Israel fascinate and challenge anthropologists, educators and citizens in Israel and globally. But these demand of all a further step that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 9 Literacy in Israel as explored by the six principles of "Education For All" (EFA)

Israel is a divided country, some citizens belonging partially among world leaders and others who are far from this ranking. On the one hand a developed country, while "Around us a third world is developing without us stopping to give it any thought" (Ben Simon, 2005). The book entitled, "Enlightenment – the incomplete project" (Bishara, 1997: 7) written following Abram's article, "The modern world – an incomplete project". The Dakar framework for action and its millennium development goals (EFA 2000) is being applied to Israel almost in its entirety. They should, however, be carefully examined without getting carried away by the encouraging data. The first objective, concerning an extensive expansion and improvement in the emergent literacy, has recently been meticulously dealt with due to the systemic changes

and is being tracked, as noted in chapter 3. The second goal, which assures compulsory, suitable education for all, access to education, particularly for females, for children with special needs and for minorities, is anchored in law and is obvious in Jewish society and is striking roots in Arabic speaking communities. At the same time, the social and personal price paid by women in the Arab, Druse and especially Bedouin sectors (as noted above) for realizing this basic democratic right, necessitates particular sensitivity in implementing this point and to the difficulties associated with it. This is also true of the quality of education. What seems to be of high quality to those developing curricula is not perceived as such by its consumers.

EFA's third objective calls for a flexible reaction and for offering materials with relevant content to all – to females, to bi-lingual students and to minorities. It would transpire that while such a flexible response is welcomed within the Arab sector (for example, through the five-year plan) the flexibility demanded of the central education system in the ultra-orthodox sector is that of avoidance and in delaying intervention.

The fourth objective is partially applied, assuring the learning needs of all people, whether young or old, through proper programs for acquiring life skills. Adults are generally neglected; most of the resources are allocated to the young. Their parents are perceived, in a certain sense, as the "Generation of the wilderness", despite knowing that school alone cannot answer the problem. There are currently no national programs or 5-year plans that will realize the fourth objective - achieving significant improvement (50%) in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially amongst women and adults. Israel, as regards the fifth goal, has reduced gender differences in elementary and high school education, and

the literacy achievements of females are higher than those of males. Objective Number Six, which is to improve all aspects of equality in education and assure excellence (success is the appropriate word) for all, mainly in literacy, numeracy skills and significant life skills, is on the public agenda.

To a large degree, this is thanks to the results of international tests (PIRLS and PISA) that do not differentiate between Jewish and Arab education; as well as between secular and religious education.

There have been profound changes in the last two years. The recommendations of the Dovrat committee, recognizing the vulnerable areas, one, the separation of the ultra orthodox community, is to minimize this separation through the Core Program", and, two, recognizing the low achievements of the Arabic Language Education System is to recommend a recognition of the "Arabic Collective Identity" in Israel, and the right of the minority to navigate its education and cultural system autonomously. are according to Horovitz (2005), revolutionary. The special 5-year plan for the Arab and Druse sectors leads to realizing the goal: improving all the aspects of equality in education and assuring excellence for all.

Chapter 10 Epilogue: So what is literacy?

Israel too, has no singular, agreed and satisfactory answer to this question. Everything discussed above offers a post-modern, changing answer, alternately expanding and contracting the area it embraces, evasive and difficult to define, certainly as a brief definition that will be possible to use freely and not academically in regular conversation.

The computerized *Rav Milim* dictionary, a remarkable literacy production, defines the Hebrew word "literacy" thus: 1) The ability to use language (especially written language) at its diverse levels; and 2) The ability to be well versed in a particular subject or domain (<http://ravmilim.co.il>). The semantic field covered by the dictionary includes the words knowledge, learning, education, information, proficiency, mastery, expertise, erudition, scholarship, reading skills and language skills. The English translation of the word offers literacy, reading skills, language skills, erudition and scholarship.

The efforts of Script's Interest Group for Academic Literacy have produced several definitions, published in the "Pages of the Forum on Academic Literacy" (1996): "Literacy is the ability to function in diverse situations, according to the causal demands, through language competence" (Hannah Ezar); "Literacy is the relationship between a persons ways of knowing and his ways of discourse" (Gissi Sarig); "Literacy is awareness of the standards of community discourse and the flexible ability to respond or to operate the standards for the inner needs of the 'I' (Rina Dudai); "Literacy is the culture of thought, writing, reading, listening, speech and observation" (Shosh Brosh).

The journal, *Mazav Ha'Inyanim* (State of Affairs), produced by Beit Berl College and dedicated to clarifying the concept of literacy, published an article entitled, "What (the heck) is literacy and what can be done with it in colleges of education" (Aloni and Sachs, 1994). Some of the definitions it proposes are: "Literacy is the summing up of knowledge, opinions, beliefs and attitudes the speakers have towards language, especially towards written language" (Tsvia Walden); "Knowledge and skills that enable intelligent and critical understanding of the discourse that characterizes the diverse areas of life, and the ability to function in them at a satisfactory level" (Emanuel Alon); Three more definitions may be added to the above, written in Israel by known activists in the domain: "The ability to understand diverse situations connected to the written language (reading and writing), and in language in general, and to react to them accordingly" (Wohl and Shalev, 1998: 85); "Literacy in the 21st century is interpreted as the ability to use artificial and virtual knowledge technologies, still valid in our society, for the individual's private and intellectual cognitive needs" (Yehoshafat Givon in a lecture at the Script conference, 3.7.1997); "An area of knowledge that enables participating in any social, cultural activity (El-Or, 1998: 319).

In other words, agreement exists that the issue is ability and activity in the language domain and in the personal, social and cultural context. We have still not managed to include literacy as a resource relevant for its users in a definition that can initiate democratization and equality of various types.

Literacy in Israel is ready for the renewed encounter with the updated definition that UNESCO will present in its 2006 report on literacy.

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