

Citizenship as Utopia

Rhona Burns

This essay seeks to advance the discussion of citizenship as a key political concept in Israeli society and as a concept that may provide a utopian horizon for practical political hope and broad-based political action. It proposes ways of examining the concept of citizenship, particularly the model of republican citizenship, as part of the collective aspirations for a better Israeli society. The essay argues that citizenship should not be regarded merely as an administrative category, nor should it be understood simply as a technical definition for political rights within the state. At its core, the idea of citizenship should be cultivated as a mythic concept: an ideal toward which people strive in the pursuit of a good social life – a life worth living both as individuals and as members of a human community. In this sense, it is a foundational concept upon which Western civilization itself rests. As I argue, a political path that emphasizes the heroism of the civic ideal and the utopian horizon embedded in the concept of citizenship may, through sustained effort and determination, offer new national goals for Israel's highly diverse and conflict-ridden Israeli society. This approach does not deny the centrality or importance of national identity and its loaded histories. On the contrary, a focus on citizenship recognizes nationalism as a critical force in modern politics while complementing it with a civic-political vision that has always been part of modern nationalism and must continue to serve as its necessary counterpart.

“Hineni” (“Here I Am”): Exploring Contemplative Practices in Secondary School Bible Teaching

Raquel Shaoul, Naomi Lossin, Shacham Geva

The article examines the potential of using contemplative education to enrich the curricular teaching of the Hebrew Bible in Israel’s public education system. The discussed approach complements the intellectual dimension of learning by introducing experiential components that promise to help students develop a more reflective engagement with biblical texts and with the existential and moral questions they evoke. The integration of principles such as embodied awareness, inner listening, and contemplative reflection creates a learning environment in which the biblical text may serve not only as an object of study but also as a source of reflection and the development of personal and social meaning.

Insights drawn from the described process indicate that in some cases, contemplative practices support students’ learning engagement, foster a sense of belonging, and encourage ethical–emotional exploration of the text. Although the impact of these practices on academic achievement was not examined, the patterns identified suggest a pedagogical direction worthy of further empirical inquiry. The article’s main contribution lies in demonstrating how contemplative practices can be integrated into existing curricular frameworks, enriching learning with emotional depth and personal relevance without requiring system-wide reforms.

“Here You Can Breathe”: An Encounter Between the Rigidity of Israeli Schooling and the Informal Norms of the “Day in the Woods” Phenomenon

Gidi Tal, Gideon Dishon, Dana Vedder-Weiss

In recent years, the phenomenon of “days in the woods” has been gaining momentum in Israel. These are weekly outdoor learning days during which elementary school students study in a natural environment near their school. This phenomenon, part of the global spread of forest education, has not yet been thoroughly researched in the Israeli context. The present study examines the characteristics of “days in the woods” through participant observation in eleven elementary schools across Israel. Drawing on this fieldwork, the study describes the practices prevalent in days in the woods, analyzes their pedagogical characteristics, and examines them in light of international models of forest education. To this end, two complementary theoretical frameworks were used: Tyack and Tobin’s (1994) “Grammar of Schooling,” which describes the deep-rooted structures of traditional schooling, and Kahane’s (2007) “Code of Informality,” which identifies the characteristic principles of informal education. Combined, these theoretical frameworks made it possible to demonstrate how the flexible pedagogical features of forest education, including flexible time management, dynamic use of space, a less hierarchical teacher-student relationship, an emphasis on social-emotional and embodied learning, and independent exploration with minimal guidance, challenge key elements of the conventional schooling routines.

Accordingly, we suggest that forest days serve as regular institutional pauses, allowing teachers and schools to experiment with alternative pedagogical approaches and pursue educational ideals that are difficult to implement in formal settings. This perspective sheds light on the dual nature of forest days as both a site of institutional exploration and a space that stands apart from the school’s everyday routine.

Abstracts

Exploring Intergenerational Experiences in the Course Musical Roots: Effects on Students and Their Older Family Members

Efrat Barth

Intergenerational relationships are known to promote psychological well-being. They strengthen personal identity and foster family and cultural values in both younger and older generations. However, most studies in this field have focused on shared activities involving children or adolescents and older adults, rather than on the experiences of adult students participating in an intergenerational learning and research encounter with an older family member. This study explores how interviewing an older family member and presenting a song from that relative's childhood within an academic course affects both students and their family members. It also reviews the memories and emotional, identity-related, and family associations that these activities evoke. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventeen course participants. Analysis of the interviews indicated that the encounter deepened family connections, heightened awareness of cultural and musical heritage, and fostered an emotional dialogue across generations.

Older relatives reported feeling valued and motivated to share life stories, while students described a reflective process that deepened their sense of identity and strengthened their connection to their roots. Presenting the song in the classroom created a supportive and inclusive environment that enhanced participants' sense of self-efficacy and self-worth. Overall, the findings suggest that exploring family songs within an academic setting can serve as a pedagogical tool for promoting intergenerational connection in higher education. The study expands the existing body of knowledge about intergenerational programs and highlights their potential for implementation in teacher education and higher education more broadly.



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