Utilizing Television Sitcom to Foster
Intergroup Empathy Among Israeli Teachers

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ABSTRACT: This study examined a professional development program aimed at supporting Jewish civics teachers in their efforts to promote empathy among their students toward Israeli Arabs. Previous results indicated an increase in outgroup empathy among teachers who watched and reflected upon clips from a television sitcom. This article focuses on skills teachers developed and strategies they designed and implemented following their experience with empathy processes. Our findings underscore the educative potential of indirect mediated contact in segregated societies, and the importance of developing empathic processes among teachers before they embark on the challenge of supporting their students in such endeavors.

KEYWORDS: television sitcom, indirect contact, intergroup empathy, inclusive teaching, multicultural education

Civics teachers in Israel are required to teach about human rights and the gap between the Arab minority and Jewish majority as part of the civics curriculum.

However, Jewish teachers often try to avoid these issues by discussing only the formal aspects of a democratic government (Pedahzur, 2014). In cases where they do teach about Arab minority rights, teachers are often confronted with racist remarks from students and sometimes even referred to as traitors (Byrne, 1997; Ichilov, 2003; Sheps, 2016). These challenges are related to the ongoing conflict that arose between Jews and Arabs with the rise of the Zionist movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Following the establishment of the independent Jewish state in 1948, the Palestinian population spread into separate communities—Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and various refugee camps in neighboring Arab countries (Kriesburg, 2005). Consequently, the conflict is related both to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Maoz, 2011; Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002) and to the relations between the two national groups within Israel (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2000, 2001). These relations are often characterized by mutual negative attitudes, delegitimization, dehumanization, and prejudice toward the minority group (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2000, 2001). As a result, the Arab minority is often presented in Israeli television as being a hostile group who threatens the security of the state, in a stereotypic manner, or they are left out of the plot altogether as if symbolically 'extinct' (Adoni et al., 2006; Avraham & First, 2004; Gal-Ezer & Tidhar, 2012; Tsfati, 2007).

In this paper, we discuss findings from an innovative teacher professional development (TPD) program that was developed and to address these challenges by fostering intergroup empathy through indirect mediated contact. The educational approach we describe is based on the premise that empathy is necessary for improving relations between groups and reducing prejudice and discrimination toward minority groups (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). The TPD program is based on an educational website developed at the Center for Educational Technology (CET), which includes clips from a sitcom called *Arab Labor*. There are various ways in which sitcoms depict minority groups. Some perpetuate stereotypical depictions, while others use the soothing effect of humor to counter stereotypes and to offer a subversive outlook on intergroup relations (Shifman, 2008); the *Arab Labor* sitcom belongs to the latter category. The series was one of the first Arabic-language television shows in Israel that combined Arab and Jewish actors, was broadcast in prime time between the years 2007 and 2014, and which suggested an alternative to the media stories dealing with Arabs in Israel (Gal-Ezer & Tidhar, 2012; Shapira et al., 2016; Steir-Livny & Mendelson-Maoz, 2013). Kellner and Share (2005) claim that developing critical media literacy involves perceiving how media, such as film or video, can be used positively to teach a wide range of topics, like multicultural understanding and education. The role of alternative media is to create a healthy atmosphere of multiculturalism and diversity, and also has the potential to contribute to a more robust democracy (Kellner & Share, 2005).

The TPD program in the current study was a self-selected group of civics teachers who chose to participate in order to develop professionally in the field of civic education. The program was designed and developed as an online community endeavor with three phases: (1) 'Teachers as learners': Teachers were

required to watch selected clips from the series' episodes that appeared on the educational website, reflect upon them, and share their reflections; (2) 'Teachers as designers': Based on their experiences during the first phase, teachers were required to design a program to foster intergroup empathy among their students; (3) 'Teachers as implementers': Teachers implemented the learning environment they designed in their classrooms and shared their experiences with their fellow teachers. The program was conducted during three consecutive years (three iterations) with each iteration assimilating design changes following insights from the previous one. Two articles, which studied this program, provided empirical support regarding the value of design principles for promoting intergroup empathy among teachers (Shapira et al., 2016), and demonstrated how specific empathy processes may be invoked by planned mediated contact (Kupermintz et al., 2020). These two articles, which dealt with the first phase 'Teachers as learners', indicated that mediated contact may induce robust levels of empathy toward outgroup media characters, and that this process is associated with a meaningful generalization of empathy to the outgroup as a whole.

The main goal of the current study was to examine the impact and effectiveness of the TPD program, in the sense of the teaching skills that teachers developed, as well as the strategies they designed and implemented in the second and third phase, 'teachers as designers and implementers', following their personal experience with empathy processes through indirect mediated contact. Thus, two major questions guided our research: Following their personal experience with empathy processes, (a) to what extent did teachers develop teaching skills for coping with the intergroup relations in Israel? and (b) what strategies did teachers design and implement in their teaching in order to foster intergroup empathy among their students?

Theoretical Background

The impact of Jewish-Arab intergroup tensions and relations in the classroom setting

The implications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the majority-minority tension in Israel are reflected in everyday life in general and in schools in particular (Smooha, 2010). The culture of conflict and tension is reflected in the television news, media stories, and political speeches, and teachers find it difficult to effectively manage discussions about intergroup relations in the socio-political environment that surrounds and affects students (Rosen & Perkins, 2013). Researchers see the participation of students in junior high and high schools in discussions on controversial issues as important for preparing them for life in a democratic society (Hess, 2002; King, 2009). However, discussions about racism, diversity, and social justice are often sources of discomfort for teachers in general (Watt, 2007) and for Israeli civics teachers in particular. As a result, civics education in Israel, where little consensus exists on what should be the fundamental nature of society and what binds citizens together, is a particularly

difficult task (Byrne, 1997; Ichilov, 2003). In such a charged socio-political environment, we believe that intergroup empathy is necessary as it has potential to improve the relations between the groups and offer opportunities for discussions on issues related to the Arab minority in Israel.

Empathy: The Glue that Makes Social Life Possible

Empathy is a network of processes that comprises the psychological foundation of a well-functioning society. Hoffman (2001) refers to empathy as "…the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible" (p. 3). Empirical findings consistently demonstrate that empathy contributes to developing and maintaining positive, caring, meaningful, and supportive relationships; to understanding and attending to others' needs (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009); and to the quality of intergroup relations (Eisenberg et al., 2010). In a wider, more socially oriented view, empathy has been argued to have the power to overcome intolerance, inequality, and human rights abuse (Krznaric, 2014).

While there is no consensus among scholars as to the definition and the precise constituent elements of empathy, three distinct strands regularly emerge in conceptual and empirical accounts. The first of these, empathic resonance, the emotional aspect of empathy, is a spontaneous, often unconscious emotional mirroring of another's somatic and affective experiences, such as pain or joy. Empathic reasoning, the cognitive element of empathy, is a conscious perspective-taking effort whereby an individual imagines himself 'in the other's shoes' while taking contextual considerations into account. Empathic response, the behavioral aspect of empathy, is an internal cognitive and affective mobilization process that produces motivation to act on behalf of the other's needs. The complete and successful empathic process begins with an emotional resonance between two individuals, followed by the empathizer taking perspective on the other's situation, and culminates in a helping or care-taking gesture (De Waal, 2009). Empathy is considered one of the main social-emotional competencies (Bar-On, 2006), and one that can undergo significant development. Empathy is a necessary skill in both interpersonal and intergroup relations. Intergroup empathy refers to the ability to feel empathy for a person or persons from a different group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Suleiman et al., 2018; Vanman, 2016).

Fostering Intergroup Empathy

Studies conducted in recent years reveal how empathy plays a role in improving intergroup relations and how empathic skills can be fostered to improve relationships (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Under the appropriate conditions, intergroup contact may improve intergroup relations; increase positive intergroup emotions, enhance empathy, and reduce negative emotions such as hatred, fear, and anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2008; Tam et al., 2008). The four conditions for optimal intergroup contact are equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from authorities (Allport, 1954). However, these methods and conditions for fostering empathy are difficult to

achieve in a context of conflict, separation between groups, and strong negative emotions, such as the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Israel. In a study that explicitly primed social categories in Israelis and Palestinians, empathic pain evaluations for both Jews and Arabs were higher for ingroup than for outgroup members (Suleiman et al., 2018). In the context of the intergroup tension in Israel, many of the contact attributes are missing, so indirect mediated contact may be useful in fostering intergroup empathic processes (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Stathi & Crisp, 2008).

Fostering intergroup empathy through indirect mediated contact

The term 'indirect contact' can be used as an umbrella term for various forms of contact that do not include face-to-face encounters between the ingroup and the outgroup. These include (a) extended contact: knowing that an ingroup member is friends with an outgroup member and (b) vicarious contact: observing an ingroup member interacting with an outgroup member (Vezzali et al., 2014). Imagined contact is a third form of indirect contact and is defined as "the mental simulation of a social interaction with a member or members of an out-group category" (Crisp & Turner, 2009, 234). Research indicates that indirect contact can elicit positive intergroup attitudes (Paluck, 2009; Stathi & Crisp, 2008; Steinberg & Bar-On, 2002; Zillman, 2006), reduce prejudice, encourage positive behavior toward the outgroup, reduce barriers to future encounters, and improve the likelihood of successful direct contact (Miles & Crisp, 2014).

Popular media can play an important role in shaping intergroup relations through what is termed mediated contact, that is, the exposure to the outgroup through media (Joyce, 2017). Horton and Wohl (1956) suggested that "para-social interaction … [through media constitutes] … an apparently intimate, face-to-face association with a performer" (p. 228) such that mediated contact with an outgroup member has the potential to create a powerful intergroup experience (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Schiappa et al., 2005). Investigators have also explored the potential positive effects of mediated intergroup contact. For example, after watching a series of episodes portraying positive relations between Palestinian and Israeli characters in an Israeli version of Sesame Street, children from both groups used more prosocial justifications to resolve conflicts and employed more positive attributes to describe members of the outgroup (Cole et al., 2003). In addition to improving intergroup attitudes, indirect mediated contact can promote empathic processes. For example, a year-long field experiment in Rwanda showed that a specially designed radio soap opera elicited listeners' emotional reactions in order to foster more intergroup trust, empathy, and cooperation (Paluck, 2009).

From a contact theory perspective, several features rendered the television series *Arab Labor* suitable for the study of mediated contact. First, throughout its four seasons, the series received several industry awards and enjoyed very high ratings among a Jewish-Israeli audience (Steir-Livny & Mendelson-Maoz, 2013). Sayed Kashua, a successful novelist and the program's chief writer, based Amjad's character on his own experiences as an Arab in Israel. He explained how he strived to establish para-social contact between the audience and his characters.

Slowly, using a lot of humor and stereotypes to assure and convince the viewer that I'm with him, that I'm talking to him face-to-face. Everything I did was thought-out, and in full awareness of prime time. I had to develop characters that the average Jewish viewers would see and love (Kashua, 2007 as cited in Zoabi, 2007).

At the same time, the program attempted to reflect the complexities of Arab life in Israel, highlighting both personal and collective aspects, and did not shy away from addressing the controversial issues of identity, prejudice, and discrimination. The routine encounters between Arabs and Jews, provided viewers with ample opportunities for both extended and vicarious contact (Dovidio et al., 2011; Vezzali et al., 2014). The present study is based on the assumption that the series can be used as an educational tool for teachers interested in becoming agents of change and fostering intergroup empathy in their classrooms.

Teachers as agents of change

There is a growing movement linked to multicultural education, inclusive teaching, and social-justice agendas wherein educators have been encouraged to prepare teachers as so-called agents of change (Gay, 2010; Pantić & Florian, 2015). When teachers are prepared from a social justice and multicultural perspective, they are more able to cultivate beliefs and practices that they need to act as agents of change in their classrooms (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2007).

In the current study, our aim was to develop teachers as agents of change in the field of social justice, multicultural education and especially intergroup empathy, based on the following assumptions:

(1) Teachers should develop their own social and emotional competencies and experience empathic processes themselves before supporting their students in such an endeavor. A teacher who is aware of his or her emotions and emotional responses and is able to empathize with students' emotional responses in the classroom can design and implement programs that promote social and emotional learning and serve as a role model for students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Thus, teachers must go through a stage of personal development (Zins et al., 2004) and develop their own emotional and social skills before being able to cultivate these in the classroom (Brackett, 2008; Shapira at al., 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Dolev & Leshem, 2017). Accordingly, we sought to provide teachers in Israel with a meaningful personal experience of intergroup empathy.

(2) Involving teachers in designing a learning environment for their students might help them adapt the program to their specific classrooms with particular learners, increase ownership and commitment for implementation, and motivate them to engage in the practices they designed (Kali et al., 2015).

Teachers make many design decisions during classroom instruction, such as choosing how to organize the teaching environment, and deciding what norms and practices to cultivate in the classroom (Bielaczyc, 2013). Teaching practice is

in many ways a design activity: choosing between existing resources, using resources as they are, adapting or improvising on learning materials (Brown & Edelson, 2003). The 'Teachers as Designers' approach extends this view and deals with the involvement of teachers as partners in the design and development of learning materials (Kali, 2008; Kali et al., 2015; Matuk et al., 2015). This approach views teaching as a creative process and contributes to the professional development of teachers (Brown & Edelson, 2003). We assumed that engaging teachers in designing their own learning materials would assist them in coping with the implementation of new and complex content such as promoting empathy between groups in conflict.

Method

This study employed a design-based research (DBR) methodology in which elements of learning environments are systematically explored in terms of their effects on learning, thus contributing to the development of theory and design practice (Barab & Squire, 2004; Cobb et al., 2003; Design-Based Research Collective, 2003; Kupermintz et al., 2020; Sandoval, 2014). DBR systematically explores iterative refinements of learning environments enacted in naturalistic and local contexts. Changes in desired outcomes as a result of these iterations are used as evidence for the viability of the theory that underlies the design principles and serve to advance fundamental knowledge about learning or teaching in general (Kali, 2008; Shapira et al., 2016; Sandoval, 2014). The present study was conducted in three iterations. Refinements were made in the second and third iteration to provide teachers with explicit definitions of empathy, specific instructions for reflection, and guidelines to better design learning environments for their students.

Description of the intervention

All phases of the program were designed to support teachers' participation as part of an online community of practice whose members share and reflect upon the processes they have undergone.

'Teachers as learners'*:* Teachers watched selected clips from the series, reflected on their thoughts and feelings, and shared their experiences with their fellow teachers in the online forum (for a detailed description, see Shapira et al., 2016; Kupermintz et al., 2020).

'Teachers as designers'*:* In order to guide the teachers in their design process, we designed an assignment based on Bielaczyc's (2013) social infrastructure framework. This framework explicates four elements of classroom social structures that might influence the design: (1) the cultural beliefs dimension, which refers to the mindset that shapes the way of life of the classroom; (2) the practices dimension, which concerns the ways in which teachers and students engage in both online and offline learning activities relating to the technology-based tool; (3) the socio-techno-spatial relations dimension, which refers to the organization of physical space and cyberspace as they relate to teacher and

student interactions with technology-based tools; and (4) the interaction with the "Outside World" dimension, which refers to the ways in which students interact with people outside of their immediate classroom context, both online and offline.

'Teachers as implementers'*:* Instructions in the online forum (see Figure 1.) encourage the teachers to implement the newly designed learning environment that they designed in the second phase in their classrooms.

Describe a lesson from the program you designed and write:
· Which lesson did you implement?
· How did the students react?
· Write two quotes indicating what processes the students have undergone, for example, expressions of emotion toward the other, or understanding of the other.
Write:
· To what extent did the lesson match your expectations?
· Specify what you would preserve and what you would improve in the lesson for the next time.
Consider response of one peer and write:
· What did you learn from her or him?
· If your colleague brought up a problem, offer a solution based on your experience.

Figure 1. The instructions in the online forum

Components of the Program

The TPD program was designed to promote intergroup empathy by means of four main design principles derived from the theoretical background. Shapira et al. (2016) describe three design principles for promoting intergroup empathy in online environments: (1) Design Principle 1: Using the viewing of media content as a preliminary phase in promoting empathic processes through indirect mediated contact; (2) Design Principle 2: Providing explicit prompts for empathic reflection; (3) Design Principle 3: Fostering the development of a community of practice that embraces empathy as a shared value and is a source of mutual support and learning (See Shapira et al., 2016). The current article examines the effect of a fourth design principle: Supporting teachers as designers of learning environments that promote intergroup empathy, and with their ability to implement the newly designed learning environment in their classrooms.

As indicated above, the program was conducted in three iterations. It consisted of three repetitions of the same basic structure, with focused design modifications of empathy instructions between each iteration and more accurate guidelines on supporting teachers as designers of learning environments that promote intergroup empathy. The four final design principles expressed as components of the TPD program are presented below (see Table 1.):

Table 1*. The relations between the components of the program and the design principles (from Shapira et al., 2016)*

Components of the program	Design Principles
Online TPD environment	**Design Principle 3:** Foster the development of a community of practice that embraces empathy as a shared value and is a source of mutual support and learning.
All stages of the program	**Design Principle 3:** Foster the development of a community of practice that embraces empathy as a shared value and is a source of mutual support and learning.
'Teachers as learners'	**Design principle 1:** Use the viewing of media content as a preliminary phase in promoting empathic processes through indirect mediated contact. **Design principle 2:** Provide explicit prompts for empathic reflection.
'Teachers as designers'	**Design principle 4**: Supporting teachers as designers of learning environments that promote intergroup empathy.
'Teachers as implementers'	**Design principle 4**: Supporting teachers as designers of learning environments that promote intergroup empathy.
***Arab Labor* educational website**	**Design principle 1:** Use the viewing of media content as a preliminary phase in promoting empathic processes through indirect mediated contact. **Design principle 2:** Provide explicit prompts for empathic reflection.

In the current study, three groups of teachers participated in three iterations of the TPD program. In the first phase, teachers watched and then reflected upon selected clips and shared their experiences with other participants in the community of practice (See Shapira et al., 2016; Kupermintz et al., 2020). In the second and third phases (i.e., 'teachers as designers and implementers'), we focused on the teaching skills developed by the teachers, and the strategies they designed and implemented following the first phase.

Participants: Ninety-one Jewish secondary school teachers, 78% of whom were women; 60% Civics teachers [others taught various language arts and humanities subjects]; equally divided between geographical periphery and center; and 95% secular, participated in the study. 29 participants in the first iteration and 31 participants in each of the second and third iterations. Most of the participants were Jewish civics teachers.

Tools

Questionnaires: Empathy Toward the Media Character (iterations 2 and 3); Empathy Toward the Outgroup (iterations 2 and 3) (for a detailed description, See Shapira et al., 2016; Kupermintz et al., 2020).

Transcripts of class reflections: The transcripts of class reflections were analyzed using verbal data quantification (Chi, 1997) according to the following

frameworks: (1) Bielaczyc (2013) – the classroom as a social infrastructure and (2) Kali., et al. (2015), Brown and Edelson (2003) – the ways in which teaching resources were used and adapted to the students. During the content analysis, some of the categories that appeared frequently were derived from the data. The teaching skills developed by the teachers, as well as the strategies they designed and implemented, are presented in the results section.

Interviews: Twenty-one participants, who represented the various groups in Jewish society and actively participated in the online discussions, were interviewed individually for approximately 40 minutes each—three participants in the first iteration, nine in the second, and nine in the third. The goal of the interviews was to explore in a detailed manner the empathic processes that took place among the teachers, to determine to what extent the teachers developed skills to appropriately teach the subject, to explore how they perceived the effect of the learning environment's design features on their own learning, and to reveal how they believed the process they went through might impact their students' learning. In order to identify major themes in the interviews, a content analysis was conducted according to the research questions.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Office of the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education, and letters of informed consent were used in this study.

Results

Teaching skills for dealing with the intergroup relations in Israel

The interviews with the teachers in the three iterations revealed difficulties they experienced in dealing with the issue of intergroup relations: racism and extremist opinions, the challenge of discussing controversial issues, and the fact that for some students talking positively about Arabs is considered treasonous (Table 2.).

Table 2*. Examples for teachers' difficulties in dealing with intergroup relations in Israel*

Category	An example
Racism and extreme opinions toward Arabs	*[The teacher explains]: "Looking at the other [Arabs]… as a human ... Leads to very, very, very sharp reactions."*
Negative reactions toward teachers	*"When you say ... not all Arabs are terrorists ... [the students say] you are a leftist."*
teachers who don't dare to speak about Arabs in the classroom	*[The teacher says]: "... in 99 percent of the classes and also in the civics classes we do not talk about Arabs."*

The implementation phase examined teachers' reflections, which included a description of the lesson they implemented. Student reactions and reflections about that process revealed changes in the teachers' ability to deal with intergroup relations in Israel.

Following an indicator based on theoretical frameworks (Bielaczyc, 2013; Brown and Edelson, 2003), a chi-square test presents the frequency of categories that appear in each iteration (See table 3.).

Table 3. *The frequency of categories that appear in the reflections following a classroom lesson: Iterations 1, 2, and 3*

	Iteration 1 (n=30)	Iteration2 (n=31)	Iteration3 (n=31)	
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	$\chi2(df=2)$
Dealing with concepts such as identity, coexistence and pluralism	38.90%	59.00%	50.00%	1.62
Adding relevant questions to the discussion	44.40%	36.40%	59.00%	2.33
Descriptions of how to run the program	72.20%	68.20%	68.20%	0.98
Description of the use of video clips from the series	50.00%	39.00%	54.00%	1.57
Satisfaction with the lesson and achievement of its goals	16.70%b	54.50%a	59.00%a	8.41*
Suggestions for lesson improvement	05.60%b	31.80%a	50.00%b	9.22*
Reference to students' difficulties in dealing with the subject matter	11.10%b	50.00%b	36.40%a	6.78*
Connecting to the personal experience of students	55.60%	31.80%	50.00%	2.56
Suggestions for dealing with the students' needs	11.10%	27.30%	40.90%	4.42

*p<0.5

The category frequencies reveal the skills that teachers developed and used during a classroom lesson in the three iterations. About half of them dealt with shared life concepts, adding questions for discussion, describing how to implement video clips, and connecting to their student's personal stories. About 70% of them described how to run the program, and about 25% referred to their students' needs. Also, teachers in the second and third iterations expressed

satisfaction with the lesson, noting that they achieved the lesson's goals. Teachers in the third iteration added suggestions for improvement in a way that was significantly different from the first iteration. Teachers in the second iteration referred to students' difficulties significantly more than those in the first and third iteration.

During the interviews, teachers also mentioned how the TPD program and the 'Teachers as learners' phase prepared them for working with the students:

> First of all, to see what you feel... on the subject of empathy… When I become empathetic, I am more attentive too; I am willing to listen ... it helped me to approach the children that way."; "[The TPD program] just helped me be more professional, which was great."; "... After the TPD program, when I talked about Israeli Arabs... and explain the conflict they have, I have a lot more tools to do it ...

The strategies designed and implemented by the teachers

The interviews with the teachers in the three iterations also revealed the various strategies that the teachers designed and used in their classrooms (Table 4.).

Table 4. *Examples of the various strategies developed by the teachers that appear in the reflections*

The strategy	An example
Using the alternative media content provided in the program to cultivate empathic responses and discuss discrimination	*[Following episodes that demonstrate discrimination toward the Arab minority]* "We watched the…episode … The reactions were surprisingly good… the children … responded with moderation and talked about the need to belong… the difference in living conditions between sectors. 'It's tough to live with such a stream of water,' or 'It's not fair that they do not bring the newspaper to the door and humiliate him like that.'"
Conversations about identity	*[Following episode in which Amjad deals with the complex identity of Israeli Arabs]* I will summarize: the identity of each of us is complex ... I will write the subject of the lesson: identity and belonging. I'll ask the students what he [Amjad] does to feel that he belongs"
Guidelines for empathy	"*[A teacher asks the students about an episode that presents humiliation of Amjad]* how would you feel, how do you think he felt in this situation?"
Role playing	*[Following an episode in which Amjad tells of a painful experience he went through as an Arab boy on a bus full of Jews]* "We had a role-play exercise so it really helped. I made them even write from the

	perspective of the other side. How are you, as an Arab child... what your feelings are".
Knowledge about the Arab citizens of Israel	*"To provide them with a great deal of information and knowledge that they do not get from home, to show them all the sides, all the layers ...[about the Arab minority in Israel]"*
Using personal stories and presenting situations of injustice	*"I tell them a lot of personal stories… during the period of all the stabbings and terror attacks ... She [an Arab woman the teacher knew personally] told me that she did not come to the interview because she was afraid to walk around Jerusalem. I told them… she just wears a hijab and she does not dare go around like that in Jerusalem."*
Promoting the status of the Arabic language	*[Following an episode that deals with the importance of the Arabic language] "Watching the video strengthened my opinion that teaching Arabic should be compulsory from elementary school in the lower grades."*
Using humor	*"I think it's a funny series [Arab Labor] that talks about difficult subjects, that it's a great way to deal with such issues ... I think it makes things easier, and it also gives them a view of someone else, specifically Arab."*
Empathy toward their students	*"When you show the students that you understand them, and you understand their distress, they are more willing to open up to other things ... I do not blame them ... because what we experience in certain periods is stoning and terror attacks in the neighborhood ...".*

Discussion

In mainstream Israeli television, Arab minority characters and points of views are generally severely underrepresented or presented in a negative, stereotypical manner (Gal-Ezer & Tidhar, 2012). The series *Arab Labor* pioneered a radical departure from this norm, by authentically presenting the struggles and dilemmas of Arab life in Israel. In the series, intergroup interactions are portrayed through the eyes of the Arab minority, rendering it a promising vehicle for fostering the majority's empathy toward that group (Mendelson-Maoz & Steir-Livny, 2011). In the current study, clips from *Arab Labor* were integrated into an educational website, which served as a part of a TPD program, with the aim of fostering intergroup empathy through indirect mediated contact.

The current study demonstrates that the teachers who participated in the TPD program developed teaching skills that enable them to deal with the intergroup relations in Israel. When teachers are prepared from a social justice and multicultural perspective, they are more able to cultivate beliefs and practices that they need in order to act as agents of change in their classrooms (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Gay, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2007). The current study extends that insight and

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demonstrates how the process that the teachers have undergone, as learners, designers and implementers, influenced their ability to deal with controversial issues; to discuss the situation of the Arab minority in Israel; and to foster empathy toward the outgroup despite the socio-political environment that surrounds and affects the students. The teachers' abilities even improved from the first iteration to the second and third iterations, due to the iterative refinements of the learning environment (See Shapira et al., 2016).

It is important to note that the study participants, many of them civics teachers, were likely relatively highly aware of issues of national and ethnic inequalities in the Israeli society. It is therefore possible that the mediated contact allowed them to concretize their previously abstract understanding and thereby gain a new appreciation of the outgroup's plight. The training that civics teachers receive often lacks a focus on personal skills such as empathy, which is highly important at both the cognitive level and the emotional one. The current Israeli civics curriculum is characterized by an inherent tension between universal democratic values and an ethno-national agenda (Pedahzur, 2014) and in recent years there has been a tendency to emphasize the latter (Sheps, 2016). The mediated contact experience in the current study may have restored some balance to these competing concepts, requiring both teachers and students to pay closer attention to general democratic values of equality and inclusion.

In a previous study (Dolev & Leshem, 2017) it was found that teachers pass on to their students that which they experienced and appreciated. The current study demonstrates how the strategies the teachers developed and used in the implementation phase were based on their personal experience in empathic processes. The teachers used clips from *Arab Labor* to foster empathy among their students after they themselves experienced empathic processes through indirect mediated contact. They used instructions and guidelines for eliciting empathy in parallel to their experiences using an online forum that included guidelines for writing and sharing reflections after watching the video clips (Shapira et al., 2016; Stephan & Finlay, 1999). It is also interesting to note that the teachers, who referred to the complexities of Arab identity in the reflections they shared over the course of the TPD program (Kupermintz et al., 2020), also discussed the complex situation of the characters and the Arab minority group as a whole with their students. While teachers tend to avoid discussions on controversial issues (Hess, 2002), the teachers in the current study did not avoid discussing situations of discrimination against the Arab minority with their students.

Some strategies were not explicitly related to the first phase of the TPD program, but it is possible to draw connections to the processes undergone by the teachers. For example, some teachers used the extended contact strategy (Vezzali et al., 2014) and relayed personal stories about a friend from the outgroup; this was likely a subconscious use of an empathy-developing strategies. Other teachers attempted to understand the students' emotions or difficulties in dealing with the subject matter (as suggested by Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and were empathetic toward them. Others discussed and dealt with controversial issues (Hess, 2002). The accentuated realization of societal inequalities can lead

participants to reconsider ingroup norms and become more inclusive toward the minority outgroup (Gómez et al., 2011). For example, the absence of the Arabic language from the Hebrew-dominated public sphere contributes to the exclusion of the Arab minority (Abu-Saad, 2006). Indeed, many teachers involved in the current study said that they promoted the status of the Arabic language in their classrooms. It is possible that being required to explicitly process their own emotions related to conflict and to injustices experienced by the minority group in phase 1 of the program affected teachers' ability to implement these strategies in their curriculum designs (phase 2) and implementation (phase 3).

Conclusions

There is a need for a clarity about the kinds of teaching skills, strategies and competencies which are needed to bring about change in the field of multicultural education, inclusive teaching and social justice agendas, as well as further study of professional development of teachers working in this field. The current study proposes the following teaching skills, strategies, and competencies in the field, particularly in terms of intergroup empathy: the ability to feel empathy toward outgroup members, understanding the role of media in improving intergroup relations, using appropriate strategies such as role-playing, humor or prompts to elicit empathy, and the ability to express empathy toward students. Our approach to fostering intergroup empathy in the Jewish majority toward the Arab minority in Israel is predicated on the premise that the professional development of teachers as agents of change in the field of intergroup empathy involves: (1) personal experience in empathic processes through indirect mediated contact; (2) designing learning environments for the students aimed at fostering intergroup empathy based on their own experiences; (3) and implementing the learning environment in their classrooms. Interestingly, there is a similarity between the three dimensions of empathy and these three phases; the personal experience resembles the emotional dimension; designing learning environments resembles the cognitive aspect; and the implementation in the classroom resembles the behavioral aspect.

A limitation of the research is that from the onset, civics teachers are required to teach about the Arab minority and human rights, and thus are probably more aware than others of the relations that exist between the groups. In addition, all teachers voluntarily chose to participate in the program, and it may be that they were initially sympathetic toward the goal of promoting intergroup empathy. Future studies should include teachers of other subjects and teachers who are skeptical about the potential or even desirability of improving relations among rival groups. It also would be interesting to conduct a longer-term investigation of teacher's self-reported experience with empathic processes while living in a divided society, since empathy is a skill that requires significant introspection and reflection, and more generally examine the sustainability of the current training. Further research should also examine students' attitudes following the experience of such a program that aims to foster intergroup empathy.

Based on the teachers' teaching skills, strategies, and competencies we can also offer effective ways to foster intergroup empathy among students and enhance implementation:

- Reflect on your own emotions and perceptions toward the outgroup members.

- Carefully choose media that presents the outgroup's narrative and point of view in order to foster empathy through indirect mediated contact.

- Add instructions and guidelines as specific prompts to elicit empathy.

- Use strategies such as role playing or stories about an outgroup friend.

- Have empathy toward the students and allow them to speak openly about emotions.

- Present factual information about the other group.

- Encourage conversations between the students and the teacher about social injustice and other controversial issues, based on the knowledge and empathic skills they have developed.

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