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## Fostering Teachers' Empathy and Inclusion in Israeli Society

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**ABSTRACT:** In this study that draws from the fields of social psychology and multicultural education, 45 Arab and Jewish pre-service and 108 Arab and Jewish in-service teachers were presented with a program designed to foster intergroup empathy and inclusive views. The two groups went through a similar process: choosing their outgroup, finding media that presented their outgroup's narratives, and reflecting on the experience. This study used mixed methods, including content analysis of the teacher's reflections. The findings indicate that mediated contact is an essential element of the empathy-enhancing process and that the narrative approach evokes expressions of empathy and inclusion. Differential outcomes between teachers were observed, which can clarify the process effects and how they foster empathy and inclusion.

**KEYWORDS:** Multicultural education, inclusive teaching, empathy, teachers

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The nation-state of Israel has a diverse and multifaceted society, and its public education system reflects these divisions. The educational system is divided into several sectors, with separated schools that rarely interact with one another (Sabbagh & Resh, 2014). One system is the Jewish system, which is further divided into several subsystems, including secular schools, religious schools, and independent ultra-religious schools. The other is the Arab system, which is divided into private Christian schools and public, primarily Muslim, schools (Abu-Saad, 2019; Agbaria, 2018). Consequently, teachers and students of different cultures, religions, and levels of religiosity do not interact in school settings. Low familiarity with other groups has been

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associated with negative attitudes toward their members (Al-Haj, 2003; Ari & Laron, 2014; Redlich, 2020).

Unlike K-12 schools, Israeli higher education institutions do not feature such segregation; consequently, they often represent a first meeting point for many Arab and Jewish students and for Jewish students of different levels of religiosity (Bekerman, 2002; Shapira & Mola, 2022). Even though the Israeli Higher Education Council has long suggested programs and action directives to foster respect for diversity and enhance the sense of belonging of students in its various institutions, there is no clear policy regarding how to promote social pluralism and multiculturalism at most institutions in Israel, especially regarding Palestinian and Arab peoples (Binhas, 2019; Lev Ari & Mula 2017; Paul-Binyamin & Haj-Yehia, 2019). Studies conducted at academic institutions in Israel have produced different findings. Some show that Jewish and Arab students generally perceived social relations between the groups as positive. However, due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the strained relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel (Bar-Tal, 2007; Rosen & Perkins, 2013), Arab students often do not feel a sense of belonging to the institution. Rather, they feel alienated due to their social, linguistic, cultural, and religious characteristics. At the same time, Jewish students often experience fear, anger, or animosity toward Arab people (Halperin, 2011; Sternberg et al., 2018). Intergroup interaction can provoke tensions and conflicts (Rosen & Perkins, 2013; Shapira & Mola, 2022), while the desire to avoid conflict and confrontation or refrain from discussion of controversial or complicated issues may result in complete avoidance of interaction with one another (Firer et al., 2021). Thus, it is essential to improve intergroup relations in the Israeli education system, from pre-kindergarten to higher education. A potential means of achieving this is by helping in-service and pre-service teachers foster greater intergroup empathy and inclusion in their classrooms.

One of the most promising methods of improving intergroup relations is face-to-face contact between an ingroup and an outgroup (to be defined in the coming pages) under appropriate conditions based on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew et al., 2011). However, indirect mediated contact between groups (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2019) can also improve intergroup relations. Mediated contact is defined as exposing audiences to people from other social groups through media that positively influences these social groups and can improve intergroup relations in terms of affective, cognitive, and normative outcomes (Joyce, 2017). Moreover, exposure to the outgroup's narrative about their life experiences and struggles can foster empathy and inclusion toward the outgroup (Ron & Maoz, 2013; Rosen & Perkins, 2013; Shapira & Mola, 2022; Von Wright, 2002). This study assumes that encouraging people to choose their own outgroup and subsequently asking them to choose media expressing this outgroup's narrative and viewpoint, rather than the stereotypical viewpoint they have of that outgroup, may foster positive emotions and cognition toward the outgroup. Most existing training in this regard has focused on a specific outgroup, media type, and target audience (e.g., using a sitcom or the Israeli version of Sesame Street to influence Jewish attitudes toward Arabs; using a soap opera to foster empathy among tribes in Rwanda) (Cole et al., 2003; Paluck & Green, 2009; Shapira et al., 2016, 2020).

Two mixed groups participated in the current study: Jewish and Arab in-service teachers, and Jewish and Arab pre-service teachers. Both groups experienced a similar process, which began with an explanation of ingroup–outgroup division and its

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influence on intergroup relations (Robbins & Krueger, 2005; Turner et al., 1979). Next, both groups received the same **C**hose, **F**ind and **W**rite (CFW) process instructions:

- 1) **C**hose an outgroup and explain why you chose it.
- 2) **F**ind a media type (film, story, or video) that presents the narrative and perspective of the outgroup through their eyes or in a favorable way.
- 3) **W**rite whether your perspective of the outgroup has changed following your exposure to your chosen outgroup in the media you chose and, if so, describe the element(s) of the media that fostered this change.

The study's primary goal was to examine the implications of the CFW process on different groups and settings; to learn which outgroup and which media the in-service and pre-service teachers would choose and reflect on; and to determine the effect of such a process on their point of view toward their outgroup. The findings are expected to contribute to the design of effective processes that will promote more empathetic and inclusive intergroup relations among teachers and students in Israel and other diverse countries worldwide.

### Theoretical Background

Individuals tend to form social categories that help them maintain positive self-images; this is performed by comparing their ingroups to various outgroups<sup>1</sup> favorably. Such comparison is labeled ingroup favoritism or ethnocentrism and outgroup derogation is known as stereotyping, racism, and attribution (Leonardelli & Toh, 2015; Turner et al., 1979). However, the ingroup–outgroup split can be complicated and multifaceted. We can use multiple diverse, overlapping, and interwoven categorizations to describe ourselves and others, allowing us to identify ourselves and others based on combinations of group memberships (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Prati et al., 2021).

### Ingroups and Outgroups in Israeli Society

The central ingroup–outgroup separation and alienation in Israel exists between the Arab minority and the Jewish majority. Their relations are influenced by the ongoing, intractable Israeli–Palestinian conflict.<sup>2</sup> During intractable conflicts, most society members hold beliefs typical to their own societal groups; this includes collective narratives, delegitimization of the rival, glorification of the ingroup, and a collective self-perception as the victims of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007; Hameiri et al., 2014). Consequently, intergroup relations are characterized by mistrust, separation,

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<sup>1</sup>This study is informed by terminology utilized in the field of social psychology.

<sup>2</sup>A discussion regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes beyond the scope of this paper. Please see Tessler (2009), *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Second Edition* and Smith (2020), *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents Tenth Edition*.

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and division, and these sentiments become widespread throughout society in schools, government institutions, and in the home (Lev Ari & Mula, 2017; Smooha, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

### **In-service and Pre-service Teachers' Roles in a Divided Society**

Classrooms in Israel are becoming increasingly diverse, and teachers should initiate the task of fostering intergroup empathy among their students. There is a growing movement advocating the implementation of multicultural education, inclusive teaching, and social-justice agendas in schools, with teachers being requested to act as agents of change (Gay, 2010; Pantić & Florian, 2015; Sleeter, 2001). These expectations pose challenges for many teachers, who often feel underequipped owing to a lack of intercultural and democratic competence (IDC) and knowledge of associated pedagogies (Figueredo-Canosa et al., 2020).

When teachers have a multicultural and inclusive perspective, they acknowledge diversity as an asset to society (Figueredo-Canosa et al., 2020) and are more likely to acquire the beliefs and practices required to act as agents of change in their classrooms (Gay, 2010; Shapira & Mola, 2022). However, in-service teachers often do not confront their biases and prejudices and do not know how to cultivate inclusion and acceptance (Shapira & Mola, 2022). In contrast, pre-service teachers in Israel tend to be more diverse, having studied in more diverse academic settings than previous generations and having undergone compulsory IDC education in their higher education studies (Binhas, 2019; Lev Ari & Mula, 2017; Paul-Binyamin & Haj-Yehia, 2019). Concurrently, however, they are inexperienced, which makes IDC reflection and practice more challenging (Figueredo-Canosa et al., 2020).

### **Fostering Empathy and Inclusion toward the Outgroup Narrative through Mediated Contact**

Empathy is comprised of three distinct strands. The first, empathic resonance, the emotional aspect of empathy, is the spontaneous, often unconscious, emotional mirroring of another's somatic and affective experiences, such as pain or joy (Decety & Meyer, 2008). The second, empathic reasoning, the cognitive element of empathy, is a conscious perspective-taking effort in which individuals imagine themselves in the other's shoes while considering contextual considerations (Von Wright, 2002). The third, an empathic response, is an internal cognitive and affective mobilization process

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<sup>3</sup>Other tensions and separations between ingroups and outgroups in Israel include those that exist between religious and secular Jews, between the political right and left, between Mizrahim (Jews who have arrived from Arab countries) and Ashkenazim (Jews who have arrived from Europe), and between socioeconomic classes. There are also tensions regarding Jewish immigrants who have arrived from Ethiopia or the former Soviet Union, ultra-Orthodox Jews, Jewish settlers in the West Bank, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community (Hasson et al., 2017). Tensions also exist among the Arab population in Israel, such as the tension between Muslim, Christian and Druze (Shdema et al., 2022). The tensions, biases, and mistrusts between these groups are expressed in the Israeli education system and negotiating such issues is a daily challenge for teachers.

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that produces motivation to act on behalf of the other and a heightened concern for the other's welfare (Decety & Meyer, 2008; Zaki & Ochsner, 2012). Empirical findings consistently demonstrate that intergroup empathy and inclusion contribute to improving intergroup relations (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Wart et al., 2023). Empathy can overcome intolerance, inequality, and human rights abuses (Eisenberg et al., 2010). The integration of ingroups and outgroups leads to the expectation of equality or agreement between the groups despite their differences. Consequently, social inclusion theory encourages bridging groups by focusing on specialized group values, even those with values outside the mainstream or different from the local ingroup (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wart et al., 2023).

Under the appropriate conditions, intergroup contact may improve intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Tam et al., 2008). The four conditions for optimal intergroup contact are equal status in society, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from authorities (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew et al., 2011). However, in the context of intergroup tensions in Israel, many of the above conditions are absent; thus, indirect contact may be useful for fostering positive intergroup understanding (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Stathi & Crisp, 2008). The term "indirect contact" can be an umbrella term for various forms of contact that do not include face-to-face encounters between the ingroup and the outgroup (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Stathi & Crisp, 2008). An effective form of indirect contact is extended contact, where simply knowing that ingroup members have outgroup friends (extended contact) or observing those friendships vicariously (vicarious contact) can improve intergroup relations (Vezzali et al., 2014). Media can provide a sense of having an intimate, face-to-face encounter with another, as people tend to react to televised characters as real people (Schiappa et al., 2005).

The current study examines how empathy and inclusion towards the outgroup can be fostered through indirect contact, including watching, reading, or listening to the other's point of view without a face-to-face meeting between these groups. In particular, the para-social contact hypothesis suggests that television can influence viewers' attitudes toward minority group members, thereby increasing or decreasing prejudice (Schiappa et al., 2005). Mass media represents a significant source of information about social groups and can shape intergroup images, attitudes, and norms (Browne Graves, 1999; Schiappa et al., 2005). For example, imagining positive encounters with outgroup members (Dovidio et al., 2017; Vezzali et al., 2012; White et al., 2021); becoming aware that an ingroup member has a close relationship with an outgroup member (Dovidio et al., 2017; de Melo et al., 2014); and observing an ingroup member interacting with an outgroup member in films, television, or stories, are all associated with improvements in intergroup inclusion and lower levels of prejudice (Vezzali et al., 2014).

The narrative approach, through direct and indirect contact, may also improve intergroup relations. Listening to a personal story helps rehumanize and legitimize outgroup narratives (Ron & Maoz, 2013; Rosen & Perkins, 2013; Shapira & Mola, 2022). Narrative imagination means the ability to think about what it might be like to live the life of a person different from oneself (Von Wright, 2002). For example, Moyer-Gusé et al. (2019) found that exposure of Muslims and non-Muslims to one another's narratives improved their attitudes and willingness to engage in contact. Further, two

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studies among Turkish Cypriot children<sup>4</sup> have investigated the effectiveness of intergroup contact through storytelling. In the first study, which examined a group of 6 to 12-year-old Turkish Cypriots, stories of positive contact between ingroup and Greek Cypriot outgroup families were associated with more positive attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups. In the second study, Turkish Cypriot children aged 6–11 years participated in a three-week intervention that involved reading stories of solidarity between Turkish and Greek Cypriot children; the results showed that the intervention contributed to improving intergroup attitudes (Husnu et al., 2018). In the current study, the CFW process was performed to understand whether such an approach can foster greater empathy and inclusion between groups.

## Methods

This study used mixed methods within a mainly qualitative framework to provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Cohen et al., 2018). Two data collection tools were used, including content analysis (Harwood & Garry, 2003) and quantifying qualitative analyses (Chi, 1997) of the participants' reflections on the CFW process; these approaches enabled the triangulation of findings and consequently strengthened the validity of the results (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

This study was conducted as part of an online 30-hour eight-week in-service TPD course for Jewish and Arab teachers called "Teachers Face Racism." The course was conducted over the summer vacation in 2022 and was promoted and delivered to teachers across Israel by the Center for Educational Technology (CET) through the CET website. The entire program was conducted online using the Moodle platform. It was facilitated by the present authors, one a Jewish lecturer in higher education and a program developer and the other a Jewish teacher trainer and an expert in the field of shared life education (Shapira & Amzalag, 2021; Shapira & Mola, 2022). The course was likewise formatted as a 26-hour, 13-week, face-to-face course in spring 2022 for Jewish and Arab pre-service teachers called "Culture and Multiculturalism." It focused on inclusive, anti-racism education, and was conducted by the same facilitator as the in-service course.

The inclusion of two groups in the study afforded an investigation of how indirect contact impacts both in-service and pre-service teachers. Within their respective courses, either in Zoom sessions or face-to-face, both groups underwent a similar process: First, lectures explained the theory of inclusion and shared life, social categorization, the division of society into ingroups (the group you belong to) and outgroups (groups you do not belong to), and the impact of social categorization processes on intergroup relations (Robbins & Krueger, 2005; Turner et al., 1979). Next, both sets of teachers underwent the same process requesting them to: Choose

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<sup>4</sup> The "Cyprus problem" (1955–2017) arose from communal differences between Greek and Turkish Cypriots that were politicized by foreign interests. Specifically, a rise in nationalism led to Greek Cypriots' aspirations for union with Greece, which was countered by Turkish Cypriots' desire to partition the island between Greece and Turkey (Husnu et al., 2018).

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their own outgroup; Find media that can present their outgroup's narrative in a positive or complex way; and Write (CFW):

- Who is the selected outgroup? Why is this your chosen outgroup?
- What media source did you choose (movie/series/story/song/picture)?
- What changed in your point of view towards the outgroup due to reading or watching its story?

It must be noted that, prior to the choice of media, the facilitator explained and emphasized that the task was to choose media that show the outgroup from their own perspective or in a favorable way. Their choices were, however, not controlled or scrutinized, as the ability to find a source that depicts the outgroup in a positive, complex or nuanced way, even if participants disagree with them, was part of the task itself and was expected to result from the theoretical segment of the training. First, the in-service teachers shared their responses in an online forum and responded to each other. The preservice teachers shared their answers face-to-face in mixed groups. At the end of the courses, in-service and pre-service teachers wrote a concluding reflection describing their experiences during the course. The specific question was: "Describe the process you experienced in the course, referring to its various components."

Note that the two groups did not constitute an experimental group and a control group; rather, they were two study groups with different characteristics (in-service and pre-service teachers) and settings (online vs. face-to-face learning), which afforded an examination of the implications of the CFW process on different groups and settings. The questions that guided our study were:

- 1) What characterized the outgroups and media that in-service and pre-service teachers chose, and were there differences between the two groups in their choices?
- 2) To what extent did the CFW process evoke empathy and inclusion among in-service and pre-service teachers and were there differences between the two groups in this regard?

## Participants

A total of 108 in-service teachers participated in this study; 71% were secular Jews, 13% were religious Jews, and 16% were Arabs. All in-service teachers learned about the study from the CET educational website and voluntarily participated in the online TPD program. They all had a goal of gaining skills to help them address racism in their classrooms and, during the program, had online intergroup contact with each other (Shapira & Amzalag, 2021). However, they did not know each other prior to the training and did not meet after the program ended.

A total of 43 pre-service teachers participated in the study; 16% were Jews (most of them secular) and 84% were Arabs. All students studied together in a mixed Hebrew-speaking college. Participation in this study was mandatory for these pre-service teachers and was held in the second semester of the students' third academic year, a point at which the students had known each other for almost three years.

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## Data Collection and Analysis

This study implemented a qualitative phenomenological approach to collect the views of the participants and learn about the in-service and pre-service teachers' experiences (Creswell et al., 2007) while participating in the online "Teachers Face Racism" course and the face-to-face "Culture and Multiculturalism" course. We collected data from the TPD program and academic course; the answers to the CFW exercise and the participants' reflections appeared on the Moodle platform, using a username and password to protect their privacy.

We analyzed the texts, applying an inductive process to identify key themes described in the following pages (Creswell et al., 2007) and relied, through a deductive process, on theoretical concepts of ingroup, outgroup, intergroup empathy, and intergroup relations (Batson & Ahmad, 2009; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). We also objectively analyzed the qualitative data in a quantifiable way (Chi, 1997) to determine the general kinds of outgroups each participant chose and whether their choices accorded with the choices of the other members of their group. We further analyzed the amount of empathic, inclusive, non-empathic, and non-inclusive expressions included in their reflections. The two researchers analyzed the data separately to enhance the reliability of interpretation. The researchers then met and discussed their respective analyses. The level of agreement was found to be 90%, and minor adjustments were subsequently made.

## Ethics

The College's Ethics Committee approved the study. All the answers that appear in the study were provided anonymously and the participants confirmed their voluntary participation in the study. Moreover, all reflections appeared in a closed online environment (Moodle platform) with a username and password.

## Findings for Research Question 1

The findings presented below attend to the first research question: What characterized the outgroups and media that in-service and pre-service teachers chose, and were there differences between the two groups in their choices?

### Outgroup Choices: In-service Teachers

Most of the in-service teachers who were secular Jews chose ultra-Orthodox<sup>5</sup> Jews (48%) as their outgroup; the secular Jews also chose Arabs, people with different

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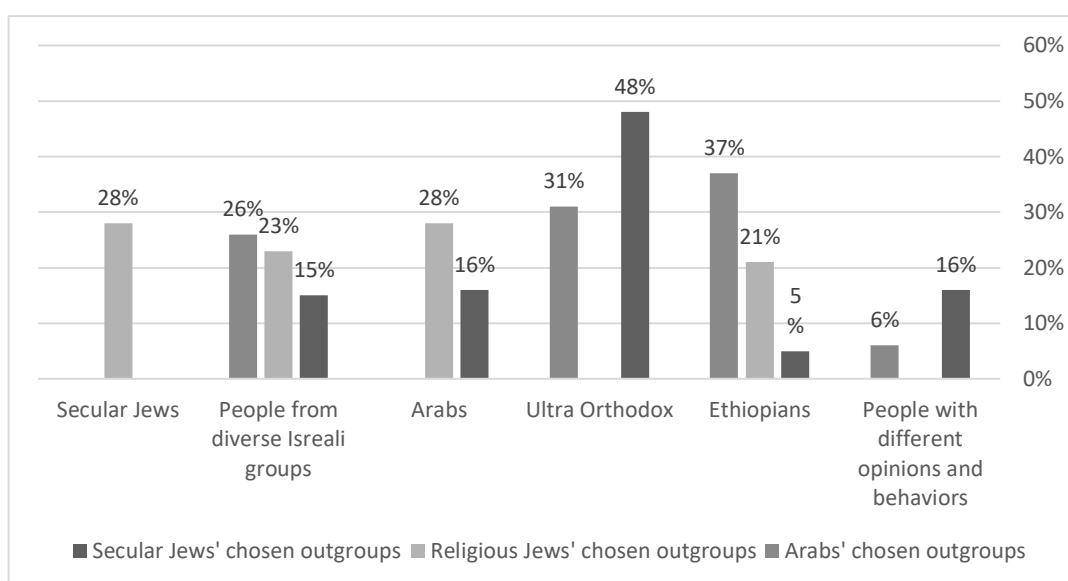
<sup>5</sup> Jewish society in Israel is divided in a religious sense into secular Jews, religious Jews with an orthodox, reform, or conservative view, and ultra-Orthodox Jews.



opinions and behaviors, and people different from their outgroups, such as Jews from the radical left or right (16% each). A small number of secular Jews (5%) chose Jews of Ethiopian origin as their outgroup. Religious Jews showed an almost equal distribution between secular Jews (28%), Arabs (28%), Ethiopians (21%), and people from other groups (23%) as their outgroup choice. Finally, 37% of Arab in-service teachers chose Ethiopian Jews, followed by ultra-Orthodox Jews (31%), people from other groups (26%), and people with different opinions and behaviors, such as racists or terrorists (6%), respectively (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*In-Service Teachers' Outgroups Choices*



**Reasons for Choices of Specific Outgroups: In-Service Teachers**

The reasons provided by the secular Jewish teachers for their choices were anger toward that outgroup or a feeling that the outgroup was trying to revoke their freedoms or violate their rights, for example, because of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish leaders' attempts to transform the country into a religious state. Religious Jewish teachers chose Arabs because they considered them part of the Palestinian people who carried out terrorist attacks against Jews.

Meanwhile, the Arab teachers chose Jews of Ethiopian origin either because of a perceived shared position of being targeted with discrimination<sup>6</sup> or because of the perception that discrimination against Ethiopians received more attention than discrimination against Arabs. However, some Arab teachers also expressed

<sup>6</sup> In Israeli society, both the Arab and Ethiopian people suffer from discrimination and racism.

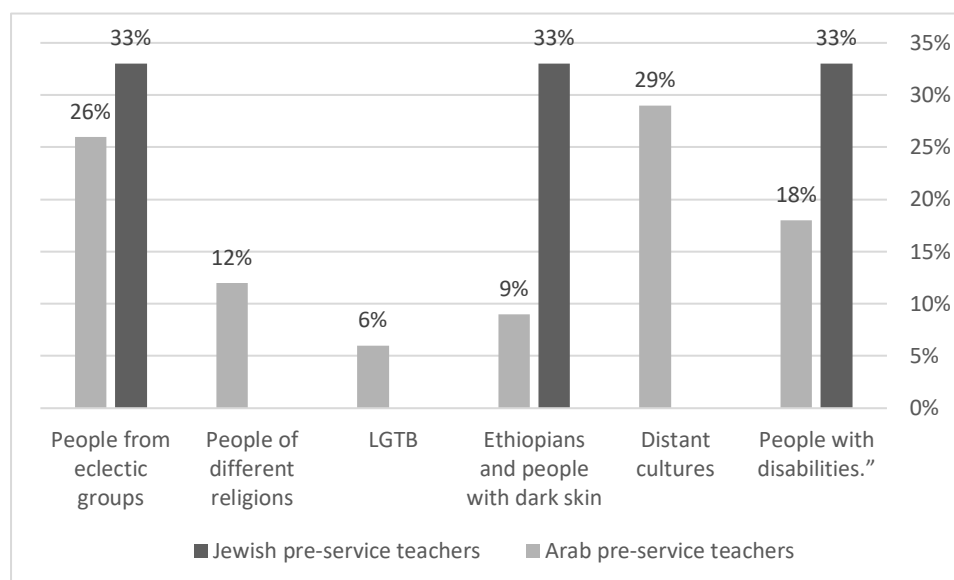
frustration with the ultra-Orthodox Jews who, according to them, “use”<sup>7</sup> the country to financially support their religious studies.

### Outgroup Choices: Pre-service Teachers

Unlike the in-service teachers, both the Arab and the Jewish pre-service teachers chose remote, mainly foreign groups that were mostly unrelated to multiculturalism in Israeli society. Thus, Jewish students did not choose Arabs as an outgroup and vice versa, and secular Jews did not choose Orthodox Jews as an outgroup (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

#### *Pre-service Teachers' Chosen Outgroups*



Most of the Arab pre-service teachers chose distant cultures, such as Chinese, Yazidis, and Indians (29%), non-ethnic groups, such as people with disabilities (18%), or eclectic groups, such as older adults, released prisoners, and people living in poverty (26%). Only 9% chose Ethiopian Jews or other Black people, such as Eritrean refugees living in Israel. Another 12% of the Arab pre-service teachers chose people of different religions, such as Jews (one student), Christians (one student), and Circassians (one student). Similarly, Jewish students' choices spanned Ethiopian Jews, people with disabilities, and people from different groups (such as homeless and polyamorous) to an equal extent (33%).

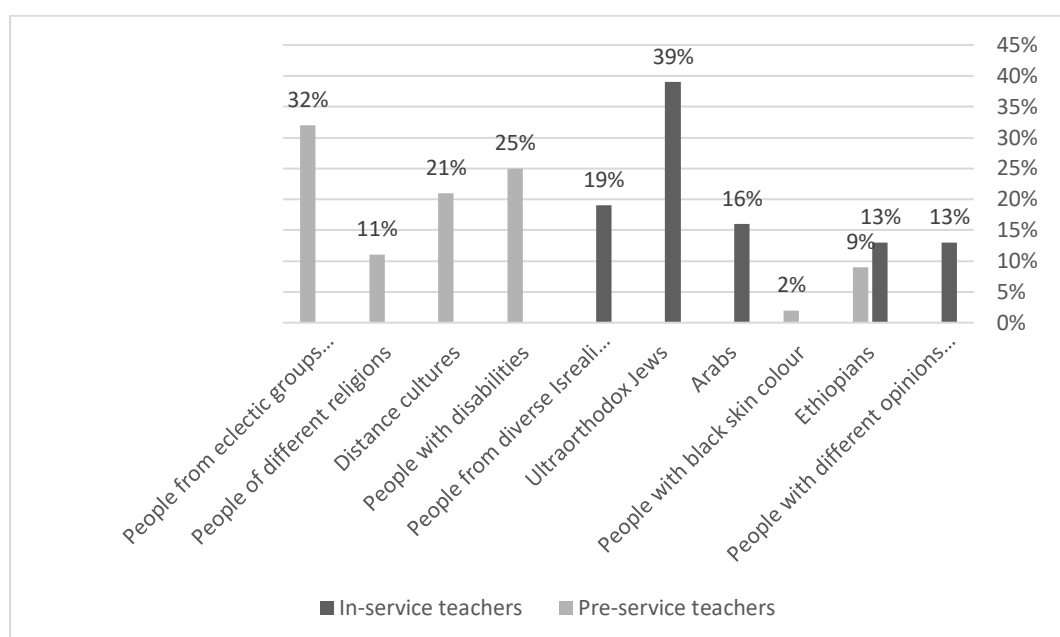
<sup>7</sup> Most ultra-orthodox men spend their days immersed in religious study, are not gainfully employed, and receive a stipend from the State.

## Reasons for Choices of Specific Outgroups: Pre-service Teachers

As emerged from the participants' responses within the CFW process, the pre-service teachers chose their outgroups mainly because they considered the groups in question to be suffering, weak, or different/distant from themselves. Figure 3 shows the general differences between the in-service and pre-service teachers regarding their choices of outgroups (for clarity, subgroups are not presented).

**Figure 3**

*Differences Between the In-Service and Pre-Service Teachers' Outgroup Choices*



It can be gleaned from Figure 3 that the in-service teachers chose groups that are part of Israeli society, such as ultra-Orthodox Jews (39%), Arabs (16%), people from other diverse Israeli groups (foreign workers, Eritrean refugees living in Israel, Jewish immigrants, Mizrahi [i.e., of Middle-Eastern/North African origin] Jews) (19%), and Ethiopian Jews (13%). In contrast, the pre-service teachers mostly chose groups that were not part of the different cultures in Israeli society, but rather people from distant cultures (e.g., Indian, and Chinese) (21%), people with disabilities (25%), and people from eclectic groups (such as homeless and polyamorous) (32%).

## Media Choices

Regarding the chosen media, most in-service and pre-service teachers chose clips from a TV series called *Sorry for the Question*, based on the Australian series, *You Can't Ask That*. In the Israeli version, Israelis from different groups answer viewers' questions, providing intimate and honest responses. Most pre-service

teachers chose episodes of *Sorry for the Question* that presented the perspectives of their chosen outgroups (such as people with disabilities, prisoners, or mental illness). Most in-service teachers used the same program but chose clips concerning Ethiopians, Orthodox Jews, or Arabs. Teachers who did not choose the series chose other videos, such as news reports on Ethiopian Jews victimized by racism, an article about ultra-orthodox feminists, and an article with a story of an Eritrean boy.

## Findings for Research Question 2

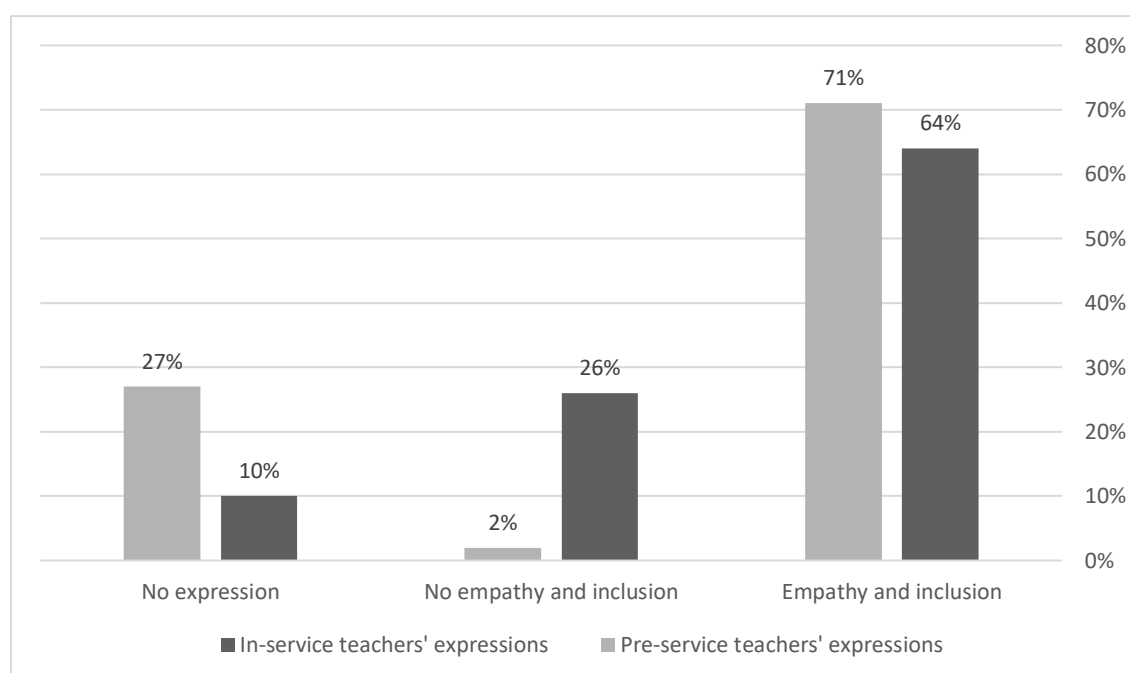
The findings presented below attend to the second research question: To what extent did the CFW process evoke empathy and inclusion among in-service and pre-service teachers, and were there differences between the two groups in this regard?

### Impact of the Program on Empathy and Inclusion

In general, the analysis of the amount of empathic, inclusive, non-empathic, and non-inclusive expressions included in the reflections of both groups of participants revealed that, after the program, both the in-service and pre-service teachers displayed empathy and inclusive sentiments toward their chosen outgroups. Figure 4 compares the in-service and pre-service teachers' expressions of empathy and inclusion.

**Figure 4**

*In-Service and Pre-Service Teachers' Expressions of Empathy and Inclusion Toward their Outgroup*



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### ***Expressions of Empathy and Inclusion***

Regarding expressions of empathy and inclusion, most in-service teachers (64%) expressed empathy and inclusion toward their outgroups. However, some expressed no empathy or inclusion (26%), or no statements in that regard (10%). A religious-Jewish teacher who chose Arabs as an outgroup stated the following:

I was sad to hear that a person is judged according to his origin and not according to his skills or abilities [...]. I put myself in the other person's shoes, and it hurt me to think what would have happened if I had been the one from the outgroup.

In this statement, the teacher expressed an empathetic emotional response, sadness, and hurt, and tried to place herself in the position of the "other" (empathic reasoning).

A secular Jewish teacher's expression toward ultra-Orthodox Jews demonstrated an ability to understand the outgroup's perspective (reasoning): "I was able to understand, through Dina (an ultra-Orthodox woman she watched), that my main acquaintance with the ultra-Orthodox group is through the news [which portrays a bad image of them]." Some teachers included non-empathic references towards their chosen outgroup or reflected on their difficulty to feel empathy towards them. For example, a secular Jewish teacher expressed the following regarding Arabs: "I know this group is difficult for me to develop empathy for. It is not that I think the violence they experience is justified, but it is hard for me to empathize and agree with them." Empathy levels were often linked to or expressed by the choice of media. Teachers who expressed a lack of empathy and inclusion often chose media that presented the outgroup as a hostile group, such as pictures of violent Arabs or large ultra-Orthodox demonstrations.

### ***Perceived Underlying Process and Its Impacts***

At the end of the TPD program, the in-service teachers described their experiences of the CFW process in their final reflections. Several main themes emerged from the data analysis, including awareness of "my" outgroup, embracing complexity, and making connections with the profession. Each will be discussed below.

A relatively large number of teachers admitted that it was only through the training that they realized that they had an outgroup, and that this encouraged them to begin examining their personal biases and racist tendencies towards this specific group and in a broader sense. A secular Jewish in-service teacher, whose choice of outgroup was ultra-Orthodox Jews, said, "I first thought to myself that, because I do not have any outgroups, I am not racist. However [...] I realized that I am no different from others and that I too have an outgroup." Another secular Jewish in-service teacher, whose outgroup also was ultra-Orthodox Jews, stated, "With all my enlightenment and my self-conception as an open and pluralistic person, I am guilty of racism toward a group that I do not know."

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Similarly, a secular Jewish in-service teacher, whose outgroup was Arabs, mentioned, "I am very sad about the mother in the article who lost her son, and I hear about many cases of murder and violence in the sector." And a religious Jewish in-service teacher, whose outgroup was Arabs, said, "I put myself in the other's shoes, and it pains me to think what would have happened if I had been the one on someone's out-group and this was the treatment I would have received."

Some of the teachers mentioned that the training encouraged them to consider human complexities rather than to adopt stereotypical, black-and-white views of groups. For example, a religious in-service teacher discussing LGBTs stated the following:

It was [...] difficult to see the video of the gay guy [...], but as soon as the phenomenon has a face and a name, [...] there is a person behind it, generalizations lose their power, and suddenly there is complexity and conflicts [inside me].

In embracing complexity, the teacher was able to express inclusion toward his chosen outgroup. Although he still disagreed with his perceptions of LGBT ways of life, he now regarded LGBT people as human beings.

Some in-service teachers connected their own personal biases with their professional task of cultivating empathy and inclusion toward others among their students. A secular Jewish teacher, whose outgroup was ultra-Orthodox Jews, stated, for example,

It was interesting [...] to learn about them in a way that is a little more inclusive and less judgmental. [...] I discovered that I have a more racist side than I would like and that I must get rid of this prejudice in myself or else I will pass it on to my students.

As can be seen, this teacher also described a more inclusive attitude toward a way of life that is very different from hers.

### ***Pre-service Teachers***

Regarding expressions of empathy and inclusion among pre-service teachers, 71% expressed empathy and inclusion toward the groups they chose, while one female Arab pre-service teacher said she remained unempathetic toward her chosen group, and 29% made no statements. For example, a secular Jewish student who chose homeless people as an outgroup stated that she had gained a better understanding of homeless people (reasoning) and more strongly identified with them (empathy response), saying, "Through the video, I became more aware of the different personal life circumstances that can lead people to live on the streets. This increased my ability to empathize with them and to understand this population more deeply." An Arab student whose chosen outgroup was Jews of Ethiopian origin stated,

My attitude toward the Ethiopian community became pro-social. The sad thing is that they encounter discrimination and racism just because of the color of

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their skin [...]. I identified with their feelings and pain because I have encountered similar prejudice [...]. I am an Arab. My empathy [...] increased.

The student felt sadness and identified with the Ethiopians (empathy response). She also reported feeling like them (empathy resonance). This student identified with the Ethiopians because she felt the Arab group was in a similar situation.

Unlike the in-service teachers, few pre-service teachers included references to the CFW process in their end-of-course reflections. An Arab student who did reflect upon the process demonstrated awareness and understanding of the process, and noted its importance:

I chose the Ethiopian community, and it was fascinating! A lot has changed for me. I learned never to generalize, and to seek to understand and respect differences. I learned to try to learn about the “other” and not to let stigma or stereotypes affect me. My point of view changed because I realized that I have many things in common with the outgroup. This program [...] taught us to be empathetic and tolerant; it showed me how intolerance or prejudices [...] can affect different groups [...]. I saw [...] their suffering and pain.

This student also expressed tolerance toward a group that was considerably different from her. Another Arab student who chose the Ethiopian group demonstrated empathic reasoning while trying to imagine herself in the other’s shoes.

I was very moved by the film I chose, and when I put myself in their place, I asked myself some questions like: How would I feel? What would I do? And the most powerful question is, what would I expect of the people around me?

The student clearly expressed an empathetic response.

## Discussion

This study focused on a program designed to foster empathy and inclusive views toward outgroups in Israeli society, divided into many different respects. This process, which relied on mediated contact (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2008) and the narrative approach (Ben Hagai et al., 2013; Von Wright, 2002), relying upon a voluntary choice of outgroup and media, typically evoked expressions of empathy and inclusion for the outgroup. Moreover, many nuances and differences between the choices, subgroups, and the settings in which the program was implemented require particular attention.

### In-service and Pre-service Teachers’ Outgroup Choices

Many secular, religious, and Arab in-service teachers chose different outgroups, reflecting Israeli society’s fissures. Their main reasons for their choices were anger and alienation, which reflect the perceived level of disturbance they attributed to their chosen groups. Secular Jewish in-service teachers who chose ultra-Orthodox Jews as their main outgroup perceived them as the group that most

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interferes with the lifestyle of secular Jews. Other commonly mentioned disparities were those between Arabs and Jews and between religious Jews and secular Jews or Jews of Ethiopian origin, according to the choices of religious Jewish teachers. Among Arab teachers, the most prominent disparity was perceived to be between them and ultra-Orthodox Jews. They also chose another minority group, Jews of Ethiopian origin, people they either identified as a minority or as a source of frustration in society.

Indeed, Israeli society is both diverse and divided into cultures and subcultures (Hasson et al., 2017); the division between ingroups and outgroups is complicated and multifaceted. There are diverse, overlapping, interwoven, multiple, and/or crossed categorizations through which we can describe ourselves and others (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Prati et al., 2021). This study demonstrates how our situations and cultures affect our choices. The teachers' choices reflect these divisions, separations, and even accusations of outgroups and the different positions majority and minority groups hold within this diversity. Most pre-service teachers, on the other hand, many of whom belonged to the Arab minority group and studied in a Hebrew-speaking mixed college, chose groups that are not part of the diverse Israeli society but distant cultures or those with different needs/lifestyles, such as people with disabilities. A possible reason for the differences between the two groups' outgroup choices is that the in-service teachers were older, more experienced, and more confident, making them comfortable to openly express their real choices and negative feelings (such as anger and frustration) toward outgroups. Concurrently, at the end of the course, they were more reflective than the pre-service teachers about their prejudices and drew more meaning from the process.

Furthermore, it can be tempting to think that participating students, who study together, do not perceive each other as an outgroup. However, they may have preferred to choose "safe" outgroups, removed from the divided Israeli society, to distance themselves from conflictual groups and issues. This might have affected their ability to speak openly about their feelings or to raise complex subjects, especially when sharing them face to face, practices that are prone to social desirability. Moreover, perhaps the pre-service teachers, Jews and Arabs, who studied together, did not want to evoke any conflict with their de-facto colleagues and consequently sought to avoid raising conflictual subjects. Indeed, learning together in a mixed college does not necessarily promote closeness and trust between Arab and Jewish students (Halperin, 2011; Rosen & Perkins, 2013; Shapira & Mola, 2022; Sternberg et al., 2018), and this premise may support the explanation of alternative outgroup choices among the pre-service teachers. The students in the current study had known each other for three years and, although the college had made great efforts to bring students closer together, it seems students were shying away from engaging with a topic that might confront them with their own prejudice or racism, a subject they may have preferred to avoid (Firer et al., 2021).



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## Empathy and Inclusive Expressions towards the Outgroup among In-service and Pre-service Teachers

Gaining an understanding of the split between ingroups and outgroups, choosing an outgroup, and searching for media that presents the outgroup's narrative and reflecting upon it can foster empathy and inclusive expressions toward the other, regardless of the group selected. This occurred among both the in-service and pre-service teachers. A total of 64% of the in-service teachers and 72% of the pre-service teachers expressed empathy and inclusiveness toward their outgroups, with the in-service group overcoming the initial feelings of anger and resentment that caused them to choose their outgroups and the pre-service group exercising greater general empathy. Merely reading, listening to, or watching outgroup narratives through mediated contact can elicit intergroup empathy and inclusion (Ron & Maoz, 2013; Husnu et al., 2018; Shapira et al., 2016, 2020). This study demonstrates how positive emotions can be fostered by simply presenting the topic and allowing the participants to choose their outgroup. The method allowed participants to address their own specific prejudices toward diverse outgroups. At the same time, more pre-service than in-service teachers did not refer to empathy and inclusion in their reflections, suggesting that engaging with a remote outgroup may not evoke the same feelings of regret for one's biases as one's feelings for a group that shares their daily reality.

Moreover, 92% of the in-service teachers and 100% of the pre-service teachers sought and managed to find media that challenged existing narratives and accurately portrayed the perspectives of their outgroups rather than conform to a pre-conceived, narrow view of the "other." Notably, there was a connection between the choice of media and the expressions of empathy and inclusiveness; teachers who chose media that accurately depicted the outgroup's story and lived experience expressed empathy and inclusiveness toward the group. Conversely, the more empathetic and inclusive teachers may be more likely to choose appropriate media. Thus, in future applications of this program, perhaps some guidance on the choice of media should be given to maximize the program's impact.

Importantly, the process helped the in-service teachers recognize their racial and religious biases and blind spots. Indeed, awareness and the ability to reflect on one's own perceptions are essential skills for teachers in the diverse Israeli society, as many are or will be managing heterogeneous classrooms (Shapira & Mola, 2022). The current study demonstrates the potential of the CFW process for fostering teachers' self-awareness. The pre-service teachers expressed greater empathy and inclusion than the in-service teachers. However, their chosen outgroups were typically not part of Israeli society or other commonly conflictual groups. In a diverse society with a divided educational system, choosing a well-known outgroup, especially as a minority, is probably quite difficult, especially if such a process is a new experience. The pre-service teachers from minority and majority groups might have felt more comfortable expressing empathy toward distant or less threatening cultures. Israel's dichotomous social categorization fosters intergroup differentiation and alienation (Prati et al., 2021), and the pre-service students tried to distance themselves from this reality. However, the process was found to increase empathy and inclusion levels toward outgroups; therefore, such a process can be a potential first step in addressing intergroup relations in Israel. Examining a distant case can help students practice

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empathy and inclusion and gain confidence in the process, which may help them choose outgroups from Israeli society in the next phase (Murphy et al., 2011).

Indeed, there was contact between the Arab and Jewish pre-service teachers who share equal status as students, support from the college for multiculturalism, and sometimes cooperate and share the same goals (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew et al., 2011). However, language and school background inequalities exist between the Arab minority and the Jewish majority (Al-Haj, 2003). In addition, we cannot ignore the realities surrounding the students (Rosen & Perkins, 2013): They are members of the most prominent rift in Israeli society between the Arab and Jewish peoples (Rosen & Perkins, 2013). Thus, the current process should be regarded as a first step, and as a following step, pre-service teachers should be encouraged to consider the opinions of more conflictual outgroups. Similarly, as not all in-service teachers and only a small number of pre-service teachers discussed connections between the process they had undergone and their practice, a segment should be integrated that guides teachers to make such contacts.

In sum, the findings deepen knowledge about indirect mediated contact, the narrative approach, and their roles in fostering empathy and inclusiveness toward outgroup members. The results provide evidence of the utility of the CFW process, the potential influence of reflectivity on our outgroup choices, and the importance of sensitivity toward the target audience and their needs when delivering such training. These insights can help teachers teach inclusion and empathy in their classrooms.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Although there were similarities between the in-service and pre-service teachers, such as addressing a similar issue (outgroup), in a similar content area (education for inclusion), within a similar discipline (teaching), and experiencing a similar process, differences cannot be ignored. The in-service teachers met online, while the pre-service teachers met face-to-face. The in-service teachers did not know each other, while the pre-service teachers did. The group of in-service teachers was balanced regarding diversity (similar to the division of population groups found in Israeli society); in contrast, the group of pre-service teachers had a majority of Arabs. The in-service teachers had a choice of whether to participate in the course, while the course was mandatory for pre-service teachers. Additionally, the name of the in-service course implies an active stance ("Teachers Face Racism") rather than a more general name ("Culture and Multiculturalism"). As a result, significant differences make it challenging to draw a meaningful comparison.

Therefore, while the current study provides meaningful data regarding the impact of the process in different contexts, similar studies should be conducted that feature other types of groups and comparisons (e.g., an entirely face-to-face or entirely online program, different groups of pre-service teachers, or equal Arab and Jewish subgroups). This may afford an in-depth examination of the proposed process. Furthermore, this process could be tested among cultures outside Israel. Future studies could also include a pre- and post-participant survey that examines attitudes, biases, and blind spots toward other categories such as socioeconomic status, gender

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and sexual identity, ability, and nationality, and examine the impact of these attributes, as well as other background characteristics, such as living in a shared city neighborhood and attending an Arab college instead of one that integrates Jews and Arabs, on the choice of outgroups and changes in empathy following such a process. Finally, while blending quantifying methods, the present study was qualitative. The study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions and processes, and content analysis was performed, but other methods of analysis could be used in further studies.

### Implications

The current study suggests that all teachers, in-service and pre-service, could benefit from a process of seeking to understand the concept of "othering" and endeavor to connect it to various aspects of their work: both to themselves as educators and as role models, and to educating children to become inclusive and tolerant members of society. Facilitators, educators, and community leaders who wish to foster empathy and inclusiveness among diverse groups through mediated contact could consider the following questions: Who is the target group? Is it a mixed group? Do they know each other? Are they a minority group or a majority group? Are they in-service or pre-service teachers? Do they meet online or face-to-face? We also assume that searching for the appropriate media can affect one's empathy and inclusive view.

If a facilitator works with a group of students who learn together in a diverse educational setting, we recommend endeavoring to create a safe space to implement the CFW process. It is also possible to conduct the exercise twice, first with distant cultures outside society and later with cultures that are part of society. By examining distant groups, the students may be better able to consider the closer situation of Israeli society (Murphy et al., 2011).

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