Gibush: The Rhetoric of Cohesion in Israeli School Culture

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This study explores the shared understandings that underlie the notion of the school class as a social grouping in mainstream Israeli school culture.[1] In Israel, as in many Western schooling systems, the school class is considered "the constituent cell of the school structure"[2] and tends to be treated as an organizational fixture rather than a culturally constituted phenomenon. It is therefore rather sobering to learn that in European education "this structure, without which it is hard to imagine school life, dates back no further than the sixteenth or late fifteenth century, and did not assume its final form until the beginning of the seventeenth."[3]

The modern school class, according to Aries, corresponds (*a*) to a stage in the progressive acquisition of knowledge (represented by the curriculum); (*b*) to an average age; (*c*) to a physical, spatial unit; and (*d*) to a period of time. Oddly enough, this account leaves out an additional sense of the term "class" as it is routinely employed both in everyday and in scholarly educational discourse: the "class" also corresponds (*e*) to a particular grouping of students. This understanding of the notion of the "class" as an emergent, transcendent social unit—that is, as a collective possessing properties that are not reducible to the properties of the individual students in it—is hinted at in Aries's observation that "each class acquires from its curriculum, its classroom and its master a distinctive complexion," but the idea of the class as a social grouping does not come in.[4] This discussion is of particular interest to us for what it both does and does not do. Our study, in a sense, begins where Aries's leaves off, making an essentially similar move, though in the direction of cultural rather than historical analysis. We likewise emphasize that the school class is a sociohistorical phenomenon shaped by and shaping the cultural world of which it is a part. In what follows we will undertake to demonstrate that an understanding of the school class as a socializing agent must take into account its nature as a social grouping, as articulated in the particular forms of sociation promoted in the classroom context.

[1] Our data come from public, nonreligious primary and secondary Jewish schools in predominantly middle-class areas.

[2] Philip Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1962), p. 176.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 177.

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Clearly, the nature of the school class and its role in the overall educative process is not the same for all school cultures. What exactly those differences are and how they can be used to enrich our understanding of both schooling and cultural processes is what our study seeks to explore. We will proceed by tracing the shared understandings that underlie the notion of the school class as a social grouping in Israeli school culture. The ethnographic example that we present is designed to provide an empirical anchor as well as a language of description with which members' interpretations of culturally situated school settings can be comprehended and, ultimately, compared across cultures.

We proceed by examining the "rhetoric of cohesion" in Israeli educational discourse, weaving our account around the study of the meanings and uses of the term *gibush* (which can be translated as "cohesion" or, literally, "crystallization") and its derivatives as they are routinely employed within and outside the classroom walls. This term is central to the talk about the school class and is most typically used in the context of everyday, evaluative talk—for example, in praising a school class for being "a cohesive class" (*kita megubeshet*) or, more typically, pointing to its "lack of cohesion" (*choser gibush*). It is also routinely used in the discussion of educational objectives, which often include reference to the goal of achieving "social cohesion in the class" (*gibush chevrati bakita*).

Although the term *gibush* is used extremely frequently in education-related discourse, it is not confined to that context alone. In fact, it is used with reference to a variety of other social groupings, including army units, the workplace, political parties, and even informal groupings such as the friendship circle. This suggests that the cultural meanings and expectations attending the school class as a social unit may point to a culturally distinctive conception of the nature of sociality in mainstream Israeli culture, one that the rhetoric of cohesion seeks to promote and for which the school class serves as a widely accepted practice ground.

Our account is organized as follows: Section I presents the research procedures; Section II describes typical uses of the notion of *gibush* as it relates to the Israeli school class; Section III explores the conceptual implications attending the use of the *gibush* metaphor as applied to the school class; Section IV traces the educational practices that have evolved for the purpose of promoting *gibush*; Section V brings out the analytic implications of our ethnographic account by juxtaposing and combining a symbolic interpretation (based on Victor Turner's cultural anthropological perspective) and a social-structural perspective that draws on Bernstein's work.[5] The general interest of the problematic involved and the potential

[5] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969); Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), vol. 3.

of in-depth studies of educational rhetorics for comparative research in education are underscored in Section V.

I. Research Procedures

The impetus for this study came from our involvement in the implementation of an innovative Individualized Instruction program in Israeli schools, part of whose requirements involved the restructuring and reorganization of classroom activities. We came to recognize that some of the resistance to change that we have encountered, as well as some of the teachers' ambivalent feelings toward instructional practices that they overtly endorsed, had their roots in deep-seated understandings of what a school class was all about. Our ongoing, usually weekly interactions with teachers, which lasted 2 consecutive years (1976–78), began to acquire a growing sense of puzzlement as subtle contradictions and wavering sentiments became more and more noticeable to us. Thus, for example, in a visit to an elementary classroom whose teacher had willingly adopted an Individualized Instruction program for her class, she first told us at length how pleased she was with the program and how much more time she could spend with each child, but then she added, somewhat apologetically, that she reverted to a traditional (frontal) mode of instruction once a week so that she could "feel the children, feel the class."

Having become attuned to the distinctive tonalities of talk about the school class, we began to collect anecdotal data that would shed light on its nature and role in Israeli schooling. Following the standard ethnographic procedures of participant and nonparticipant observation and informant interviewing,[6] the data were collected over a period of close to 4 years (1980–84) in a wide range of both chance and planned observations and exchanges with students, teachers, administrators, and parents, which centered on the social life of the school and related issues. Most of it was recorded in the form of field notes; some of the interviews were tape-recorded. In the final phase of the study, we deliberately focused our attention on the notion of *gibush* as it emerged as a rhetorical anchor and a central underlying metaphor in members' discussion of the school class. Several in-depth, unstructured interviews and group discussions with teachers and students were conducted in order to center on this notion, its meanings, and its uses. In addition, we gathered written explications of the notion of *kita megubeshet* by 22 ninth graders and 18 sixth graders attending two different middle-class schools in the city of Haifa. Finally, we collected written documents (e.g., school journals, Ministry of Education directives, teachers' published memoirs) in which a concern with "social

[6] James Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979), *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980).

value education" (*chinuch chevrati-erki*) was thematized in terms that echo our informants' discussion of *gibush*.

In this account we have used the data at our disposal in a cumulative fashion in an attempt to construct a reading of the Israeli school class as a cultural category, which is evaluated by cultural members by the extent to which it has or has not attained a state of *gibush*.

II. *Kita Megubeshet:* Portrait of a Cohesive School Class

As a first step, we will clarify the meanings and images that underlie the notion of a cohesive class in Israeli school culture. On many occasions we found ourselves silently wondering "What exactly do they mean?" as we heard the term *gibush* used as part of the unquestioned vocabulary of participants in Israeli school culture.

For example, we wondered about the image of the school class that impelled a student teacher to shout with obvious agitation after one of us presented the principles of Individualized Instruction in an invited lecture on campus, "Where is the class? Where is the social cohesion?" ("Eifo kan hakita? Eifo hagibush hachevrati?") Similarly, what were the cultural understandings behind the words of a senior high school teacher who said in private conversation, "I have thought about these things a lot. Senior high school students nowadays often resent the pressure to make the class a social grouping [*chevra*]. They say they come to school to learn, that's all. But I don't agree. I think if we give up the goal of social cohesion in the class [*gibush chevrati bakita*], the state will fall apart [*hamedina titporer*]. We can't afford it, the way things are." Similarly, we asked ourselves what was meant by the mother of a seventh grader who, in the first teacher-parents meeting of the year, responded to a query about her expectations for her daughter's new school by saying, "There should be social cohesion in the class [*gibush chevrati bakita*]." Conversely, what were the unmet expectations behind a seventh grader's statement, "We have a lousy class. There's no cohesion at all [*ein gibush bichlal*]," or behind a teacher's self-deprecation when, on evaluating a year's educational work, he declared it a total failure since the class of which he was the homeroom teacher was not *megubeshet* ("cohesive").[7]

Clearly, the attainment of social cohesion in the class is a generally recognized educational goal, shared to different degrees by the various participants in the educational enterprise on the Israeli scene. We will now turn to an interpretive reading of several cultural texts, both written and spoken, in order to explicate in as systematic a fashion as we can the cultural understandings and emotive coloring that ground the ethic of

[7] The term "homeroom" teacher is a best-possible approximation to the Hebrew notion of *mechanech* ("educator"). See David Gordon and Walter Ackerman, "The Mechanech: Role Function and Myth in Israeli Secondary School," *Comparative Education Review* 28 (1984): 105–15.

gibush in the universe of discourse under investigation.[8] The texts cited here were selected from the large amount of data that we have collected as typical and representative of a variety of participants in the educational scene.

Text 1 is the "classroom contract" (*heskem kitati*) found on the wall of a seventh-grade classroom in the junior high school of a small, predominantly middle-class town in the greater Haifa area. It was composed in the first days of September 1984 by the children as their first collective activity in their new school. This text reflects, in an authentically scrambled fashion, the discursive and ideational domain of which *gibush* forms a part: "Expectations: To get to know the school and its surroundings/ To get to know teachers and new friends/ That there will be sports and fun activities/ Mutual acquaintance/ That they will be nice and cohesive [*megubashim*]/ That there will be discussions and parties/ That there will be friendly relations/ That there will be cooperation/ That there will be fairness to friends and teachers/ That there will be no fights. How shall we do it? In theory: To be good friends/ That there will be no inner divisions in the class/ Cooperation/ Understanding between teachers and students/ No fighting, mutual respect, fairness, cohesion [*gibush*], equal treatment. In practice: That there will be trips on foot and on bike/ Parties, class evenings [*arvei kita*], which are parties held at the homes of the students on Friday nights, bonfires [*kumzitsim*]/ No fighting/ Sports contests/ Not much homework/ Not taking advantage of other kids/ Regular committees and activities/ No fighting during the break."

Note that in articulating their expectations of school life, the children (as well as their teacher) naturally assumed the class to be the social arena in which their hopes, desires, and moral ideals could be acted out and that no expectations concerning academic matters (with the exception of a plea for little homework) were mentioned. The expectations articulated in this document involved a range of issues and levels of abstraction: moral issues such as fairness and equality were mentioned alongside interpersonal issues such as friendliness and cooperation or organizational issues such as the establishment of committees, as well as leisure activities such as sports and parties.

The same issues and expectations were articulated in children's written and spoken accounts of what a cohesive class (*kita megubeshet*) was like, as the following texts, written by ninth graders in a junior high school in the city of Haifa, illustrate:

Text 2: "A cohesive class, in my opinion, is a class where everybody is part of the society, is active in it, and contributes to it. The whole class

[8] Harve Varenne, "Culture-as-Rhetoric," *American Ethnologist* 5 (1978): 635–50.

is a single and cohesive body [*guf echad umegubash*] and not several groups. A class should be cohesive. Cohesion is an advantage, not a disadvantage."

Text 3: "In my opinion a cohesive class is one in which every individual has a feeling of belonging to the class as a whole [*shajachut el klal hakita*]. Each child has to feel a sense of closeness, even to the smallest degree, to every other child in the class and to avoid forming separate groups or associations within the body of the class. It is pleasant to learn and live in a friendly, agreeable, and warm class."

Text 4: "A cohesive class, in my opinion, is a class in which relations among students are as good as that among citizens: relations of consideration understanding, help, etc. The class is not divided into different subclasses (economic, social, and all that this implies) but there is understanding and liking among the students. There are joint social activities such as parties, class evenings, or just shared activities in the afternoons. In such a class no cliques form as a result of engaging in separate social activities."

Text 5: "A cohesive class is in my opinion a class that holds extracurricular activities. All the students in it are equal and there is no group of students that holds itself above the other students. Such a class has its own private framework and its own rules."

These descriptions were typical and could be multiplied many times; although each child had his or her own way of expressing the idea of a "cohesive class," emphasizing the elements that he or she felt were salient, our cumulative data suggest that these formulations are indeed variations on a common theme. The youngsters' accounts of *gibush* in the classroom were basically congruent with those given by the adults that we had interviewed. They similarly stressed the elements of togetherness (*hajachad*), involvement (*meoravut*), or caring (*ichpatijut*), all terms carrying highly positive connotations in Israeli discourse. Intragroup harmony, as measured by little fighting and group pride, was also considered a concomitant of a cohesive class.

Both teachers and students, however, suggested that this image of a cohesive class was an idealized one, not to be found in real-life school situations. "This is, of course, an ideal," one teacher concluded her account of what a cohesive class would be like, "but we can talk of degrees of cohesiveness, a class can be more or less cohesive." One of the ninth graders followed his account of a cohesive class with the following comment: "But to my mind this is a utopia that cannot be put into effect." Similarly, in a written note that was brought to our attention, an eleventh-grade student, leader of a school-sponsored social group of ninth graders, responded to one of the girls' complaints about lack of cohesion in the group, saying, "You are right, but you must remember that ultimate cohesion is not something that can be attained, but something we must strive for all the time."

The above descriptions bring out central elements of the "ethnosociology" and value system that are enshrined in the notion of *gibush*. Three points emerge most clearly: the emphasis on group solidarity; the strong egalitarian orientation; and the issue of inclusion versus exclusion, the emphasis on group boundaries. Given these characteristics, the ethic of *gibush* can be safely said to trace its historical roots to the communal utopia of socialist Zionism, which has been an important strand in the formation of mainstream Israeli culture and whose traces can be found in dominant educational and social ideologies to this day. Thus, the rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli school culture is both an outgrowth of a particular cultural view of social being and a contributing factor in its sustainment. This vision of sociality is encapsulated in the underlying metaphor of "crystallization" (*gibush*), which, like the fundamental metaphorical concepts discussed by Lakoff and Johnson, has become so much a part of everyday discourse that it has lost its metaphorical luster yet is a metaphor that participants in mainstream Israeli school culture live by.[9] The portrait of a cohesive school class that we have drawn in this section has suggested some of what is entailed by this concept. The next section is devoted to a further elaboration of the implications of the *gibush* metaphor as it relates to the social reality of the school class.

III. Metaphorical Implications

The metaphor of *gibush* is used to describe both a process and a product: both the process of attaining crystallization and the ideal of cohesion in the school class as a social state are thematized in Israeli educational discourse. In what follows we attempt to point out the educational implications of the metaphor, relating them to the nature of the Israeli school class as a sociocultural context. Four features of the crystal metaphor seem to have defining value for the property of *gibush* (cohesion) in the school class. A highly cohesive class thus (*a*) has clearly demarcated boundaries, (*b*) has a high degree of integration and hence inner strength, (*c*) is internally undifferentiated, and (*d*) presupposes particular conditions under which it can form. In the remainder of this section, we discuss each of these properties in turn, noting the ways in which they are manifested in the reality of school life.

Clear Boundaries

Like a crystal, a social unit such as a school class that enjoys a high degree of *gibush* has well-demarcated, highly contoured boundaries that mark a concern with matters of inclusion versus exclusion. There are two

[9] See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

problematic areas repeatedly mentioned by our informants, which derive from the strong-boundaries orientation implied by the *gibush* metaphor:

1. *Defining the external boundaries of the group so that membership is a clear-cut matter and ambiguity around the group boundaries is not well tolerated.*—This is manifested in the anxiety occasioned by any transfer from one educational context to another, expressed as a concern for the newcomer child's "social adaptation" and his or her degree of "integration within" the new class community, natively referred to as *hishtalvut bakita*. Indeed, one of the measures of social cohesion mentioned by some of the teachers interviewed is the degree to which it can accommodate the arrival of newcomers. In this, again, a cohesive school class is ideally like a crystal, which grows by attaching to itself new, unattached elements in its immediate environment. In fact, however, transfers to a new class are highly problematic, dreaded and avoided as far as possible by students and parents alike, because of the difficulty of penetrating the social boundaries of the group. Indeed, we recorded a few cases that involved the extreme exclusionary measure of a *cherem* ("excommunication") declared by the whole class against a newly arrived child. These were the subjects of much reproach and consternation by both teachers and parents, but adult intervention was needed to put a stop to them and save the newcomer child. These cases were cited as examples of *gibush shlili* ("negative gibush"), an expression whose emergence attests to the awareness of the moral problematics attending the cohesion potential of the class as a social grouping. More generally, it suggests that presenting *gibush* as an ultimate value, "an end in itself," as one teacher put it, may leave children peculiarly vulnerable in responding to issues of right and wrong.

2. *The ever-present threat from within to the integrity of the class unit by children's tendency to form cliques within it.*—Although it is grudgingly recognized that these cliques represent the students' spontaneous, self-guided, highly absorbing involvements, their formation is deplored by students, teachers, and parents alike as they refer to the problem of *chavurot bakita* ("cliques within the class"). Cliques, which are based on voluntary association rather than on ascribed membership in the school class as a whole, were cited as the major impediment to attaining *gibush*, whereas "best friend" dyadic or triadic relationships are encouraged as a source of social support and are considered too fragmentary to be detrimental to *gibush* in the class. It is not that an ingroup/outgroup orientation is rejected; rather, it is promoted as long as the boundaries coincide with those of the formal school class.

Thus, any attempt to extend the class boundaries—for example, by socializing extensively with nonmembers of the class, or inviting a nonmember to a class function, including one's own birthday party—is interpreted as denying the preferentiality and validity of one's school class

as a unit of sociation. Similarly, any attempt to reduce them by forming cliques within the class is taken to undercut the hold and validity of the school class unit as formally defined, eroding it from within. Both disloyalty and cliquishness are negatively sanctioned.

Integration and Inner Strength

The *gibush* metaphor implies the stable integration of the constituent elements that make up the crystal. In the social analogue, it is the internal strength and solidity of both the individual and the group that flows from the unifying sense of belonging, of being securely "in place." As we have seen, the social ideal of *gibush* involves an emphasis on the undifferentiated collectivity—on joint endeavors, on cooperation and shared sentiments, on solidarity and a sense of togetherness. Indeed, discussions of *gibush* invariably invoked this image in the use of such locutions as *bejachad*/*hajachad* ("together"/"togetherness"), *keguf echad* ("as one body"), *kegush echad* ("as one block"), all of which suggest the idea of a well-demarcated, strongly held together social unit.

The attainment of *gibush*, as a ninth grader put it, is predicated on "the ability to overcome individual differences." This ability is seen as developing with age and school experience so that expectations for *gibush* grow as the children ascend the educational ladder: it is usually only in the fourth or fifth grade that it becomes an explicitly stated educational goal. With the move to senior high school, *gibush* becomes less problematic. As a tenth grader who responded to our query about *gibush* efforts in the first days of the school year put it, "Not much, really. We are programmed to it. In a week our class will be cohesive [*megubeshet*]." The school-sponsored ethic of *gibush* is gradually internalized by the students to a greater or lesser degree and is incorporated into the fabric of their social life so that it is not necessarily experienced as a pressure to conform. Some of the informants, however, expressed their irritation at the school's unrelenting efforts to shape the students' social life and the demands for participation involved. A refusal of participation (e.g., not attending a Friday night class party) is interpreted as a refusal to sustain the collectivity.

Indeed, the often-expressed concern with the class becoming *meforeret* ("disintegrated") marks another metaphorical link to the language of crystals. It testifies to an awareness of the inherent precariousness of cohesive social units, which, like a crystal, can be broken up by external forces whose impact would be most keenly felt at points of internal imperfections. Thus, *gibush* can never be taken for granted, and its sustainment requires a continual investment in social energy to promote the conditions that favor the emergence of *gibush*.

Lack of Internal Differentiation

Like the equally distanced constituent elements of the crystal, members of a cohesive school class are ideally undifferentiated in terms of their

social value or standing, and none is subject to preferential treatment. Also, having "overcome individual differences," they are effectively undifferentiated in terms of their personalities and interests. This strong egalitarian orientation was expressed by both teachers and students, who claimed that in a cohesive class all are equal (*kulam shavim*) and that nobody is left "on the side" (*batsad*). More indirectly, this egalitarian orientation found its expression in a pronounced ideological concern for "the exceptional" (*hacharig*), that is, children whose life circumstances set them apart, whether due to physical handicaps or personal background.

Further support for the reality of the equalizing implications of the *gibush* metaphor is found in a recent study comparing conceptions of open education in Israel, Britain, and the United States. Notably, Israeli definitions of the aims of open education—unlike their British and American counterparts—did not at all include the three goals relevant to our present concern: "expand individual differences," "develop originality," and "develop self-awareness."[10] At the same time, developing the whole child was considered a goal of open education by many. This relative lack of concern for uniqueness or originality is congruent with the homogeneity and lack of differentiation implied by the *gibush* metaphor.

All this is not to say that Israeli teachers and students who would undertake to promote *gibush* do not recognize individual differences. Such differences in talent and personality indeed form the basis of academic differentiation and selection on the one hand and of informal peer grouping on the other. Our point is that the ethic of *gibush* marks the Israeli school class as a ritual context, in which an idealized image of social order as well-demarcated, solidly integrated, and internally undifferentiated is played out. We believe that it is to this image of order and to the sense of communal participation that it implies that an Israeli child is socialized as his or her bonds of commitment are forged and reforged in the interest of *gibush*.

Particular Conditions

Particular initial conditions must be obtained for the separate constituent elements of a crystal to form a solidified unit, although the presence of these conditions cannot fully determine that a single, cohesive crystal will form. Similarly, in the social domain, there must be an initial impetus for the formation of a cohesive unit. In the case of the school class, the most explicitly recognized condition for *gibush* is charismatic leadership of the homeroom teacher or of some of the students. A second set of conditions relates to shared experiences, concerns, and goals, which can mobilize the students' sense of involvement. These conditions can facilitate, though

[10] Jo-Ann Harrison and Rivkah Glaubman, "Open Education in Three Societies," *Comparative Education Review* 26 (1982): 352–73.

not guarantee, the emergence of a state of *gibush*. Thus, many institutionalized efforts are made to promote *gibush*, and these disclose the general feeling that in the absence of such efforts *gibush* would not arise. Charismatic leadership may not be an ever-present condition of classroom life, but shared academic experiences, concerns, and goal-directed activities are certainly a defining element of it. These, however, are considered insufficient for the generation of *gibush*, even irrelevant to it, as *gibush* is relegated to the expressive domain that is considered to be independent of the academic aspects of the school. Insofar as links were mentioned between the socially desirable state of *gibush* and learning as an educational goal, *gibush* was said to enhance children's willingness and motivation to engage in instructional tasks. Learning itself is rarely considered involving and engaging enough to serve as an impetus for *gibush*. Therefore, a concerted effort has to be made to devise educational procedures that can meet the rather elusive task of promoting *gibush*.

IV. Promoting *Gibush*

The uses of the slogan of *gibush* in the rhetoric of Israeli schools reveals that it is interpreted in terms of other, lower-level slogans, all of which form a slogan system that serves to unify a range of different proposals for the domain of social education in Israeli schooling.[11] Among the major subslogans that interpret the umbrella notion are cooperation, mutual understanding, belonging, respect, acceptance, and tolerance—in brief, all things that are socially good. These subslogans are further interpreted and formulated as a set of proposals for the design of "social value education," which is usually entrusted to the homeroom teacher.

Such a specification of *gibush*-related educational practices can be found in a special Ministry of Education directive issued by the head of the national Social Education Department in October 1983. In this document, the goals and means of social education are reiterated and to some extent codified in the form of specific recommendations.[12] It lists "the frameworks and activity contents which can contribute to social cohesion in the class." These include: (1) party games; (2) group and class discussions about social problems within the class (e.g., cliques in the class, parent-child relations, academic failure); (3) teacher-student encounters to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as honorary examinations, student evaluation needs, politeness and mutual relations, and verbal violence; (4) encouraging student self-government through the formulation of consensual classroom rules; (5) encouraging mutual help among students; (6) initiating special

[11] See Paul Komisar and James McClellan, "The Logic of Slogans," in *Language and Concepts in Education*, ed. Othanel B. Smith and Robert E. Ennis (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961).

[12] Similar advice appears in books on social education, e.g., Yosef Oren, *The Theory of Social Education* (Tel-Aviv: Yachad, 1984, in Hebrew).

projects centered on extracurricular interests; and (7) organizing class trips, excursions, and parties.

All the educational procedures recommended in this document involve the intentional production of shared activities and experiences that are designed to promote *gibush*. *Gibush* can be generated, it is suggested, either indirectly—as a by-product of intensive engagement in sociable, extracurricular activities such as trips and parties and in cooperative enterprises involving students, teachers, and parents—or directly—by explicitly attending to the quality of social relations in the class, through engagement in "relational talk," or through the formulation of publicly shared rules of conduct codified in the form of explicit "social contracts."

Whatever technique is employed in promoting *gibush*, the very need to devise, recommend, and continually use such indirect techniques is an indication that a state of *gibush* cannot be willed into existence. We would like to argue that *gibush* belongs to the family of social states that Elster has called "states that are essentially by-products."[13] Although it is experientially identifiable and linguistically marked, the state of *gibush*, like other by-product states, cannot be intentionally produced in a direct way. Any attempt to do so would involve an "intentional fallacy" and would thus be self-defeating (much in the way that trying to be spontaneous would be). Elster talks of two kinds of fallacies associated with states that are essentially by-products: "Since some of these states are useful or desirable, it is often tempting to try and bring them about—even though the attempt is certain to fail. This is the moral fallacy of by-products. Moreover, whenever we observe that some such state is in fact present, it is tempting to explain it as the result of action designed to bring it about—even though it is rather a sign that no such action was undertaken. This is the intellectual fallacy of by-products."[14]

As Elster points out, however, and as Israeli educators have discovered for themselves, "indirect" technologies can be devised to generate by-product states, that is, create the conditions that would facilitate their emergence. "It is true that one cannot will love, but one can nevertheless put oneself in the way of love, i.e., place oneself in the kind of situation where one is liable to fall in love."[15] We would argue, therefore, that many of the *gibush*-promoting mechanisms that we have identified seek to—and can only hope to—put students in the way of *gibush*. Indeed, paradoxically, the more vocal and explicit the rhetoric of *gibush*, the stronger the sense of frustration it generates. *Gibush*—like other human ideals—is most typically thematized in its absence, so direct efforts to promote it work to intensify the sense of unattainability attached to it as a utopian

[13] Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 43.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 53.

state in the first place. Examples of such efforts would be class discussions devoted to the question of "what can be done to promote *gibush* in our class," which are reported to have taken place at the beginning of the school year; teachers' pep talks about the virtues of *gibush,* which often follow incidents of social discord; or even casual comments, such as the one made by a seventh-grade homeroom teacher to her class in preparing them for a trip ("There will be a lot of walking in this trip. There will be difficult moments that will require cooperation that will be good for our *gibush.*"). Even though such direct practices can be routinely observed, most of our teacher informants said that they would not recommend explicitly preaching *gibush* but would rather opt for more subtle, indirect ways to promote it.

Notably, the *gibush*-promoting techniques recommended in the above document and mentioned by our informants are highly reminiscent of the "commitment mechanisms" discussed by Kanter in her sociological analysis of American utopian communes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kanter's phenomenological description of the committed member of a utopian community seems to us to capture the experience of members of a school class marked by a high degree of cohesion. She says, "A committed person is loyal and involved; he has a sense of belonging, a feeling that the group is an extension of himself and he is an extension of the group. Through commitment, person and group are inextricably linked. . . . Commitment thus refers to the willingness of people to do what will maintain the group because it provides what they need. In sociological terms, commitment means the attachment of the self to the requirements of social relations that are seen as self-expressive."[16]

The relevance of this account to the form of sociality espoused in a cohesive class seems straightforward enough. In a class that enjoys a high degree of *gibush,* children's attachment to the social requirements are, indeed, seen as self-expressive; at the same time, expressive activities such as creative drama are valued—even justified—as promoting *gibush.* In this perspective, self-expression and communal expression become inextricably intertwined. The prime behavioral indicators of *gibush* thus involve the suggestion that a group of children who have been arbitrarily put together in the same class do in fact want to be together. They have come to cherish their "togetherness," as is indicated, for example, by their choosing to spend time together of their own free will, in parties and in after-school activities.

The particular form of students' "social career" in the Israeli school is interesting to consider in relation to the educational goal of achieving

[16] Rosabeth Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 66.

gibush. A child who enters first grade is arbitrarily ascribed to a class that will go together as one group till the end of the sixth grade, when they graduate from elementary school. Usually the same teacher accompanies an elementary school class for 2 or 3 years. Changing a teacher every year is considered educationally undesirable and detrimental to the attainment of children's emotional stability.

After transfer to junior high school, where students from several elementary schools come together, new classes are formed and care is taken to mix students from different schools. This point of transition, as we have seen, is marked by concerted efforts to promote *gibush* in the newly formed class, and the initial period is filled with conflicts over competing loyalties between the current and the previous class, conflicts that have been known to embroil not only the children but also their homeroom teacher. The breaking up and reforming of the class unit is repeated at entry to senior high school, although at this stage the increased emphasis on academic matters serves to attenuate the social strain accompanying the transition.

From the point of view of this study, this organizational arrangement serves a two-pronged socializing function. On the one hand, the school class provides a context for the promulgation of a long-term, stable social structure. On the other hand, the inevitable transitions from one institution to another, as well as the quasi-utopian ideal of *gibush*, suggest that social life is not a given but something that must be made and remade. By actively participating in the social constitution of their school class—not only in its informal but also in its formal aspects—children learn that the form and quality of group life are a product of an ongoing social dynamic rather than a preestablished pattern.

V. The School Class as a Sociocultural Setting: Ideology and Social Integration

While the foregoing ethnographic account concerns itself with some of the specifics of Israeli schooling, the questions that we have asked inevitably point in the direction of comparative analysis. For such an analysis to be attempted, however, comparable ethnographies of other educational cultures must be available. We conclude, therefore, by pointing out the kind of interest that such an orientation could serve and some of the theoretical concerns it would engage.

We have noted that the *gibush* metaphor discloses a particular model of sociality, that is, of what society is like and of the individual's relation to it. Whether in explicit or implicit terms, this is an aspect of cultural knowledge that must be transmitted to the young in all cultural groups. The role of the school in this process will be different in different cultures, and other socializing agencies, such as the family, the kin group, and the peer group, will partake in it in a variety of ways. What these ways are,

and the differential weight that the various socializing agencies carry in imparting these fundamental aspects of social learning to the young, is an intriguing question for comparative educational research.

Let us conclude, then, by turning to two theoretical frameworks that seem to us to provide a conceptual language that can eventually become useful in comparative accounts: Victor Turner's cultural-anthropological approach and Basil Bernstein's social-structural approach.[17] Turner's discussion of the social modalities of *societas* and *communitas* and Bernstein's discussion of the shift from "mechanical solidarity" to "organic solidarity" seem to highlight different, though complementary, dimensions of the Israeli school class as a ritualized social context.

In the light of the foregoing description of the ethic of *gibush,* we might say that the kind of social modality that is promoted by the school as part of the educational expectations from the school class is the spontaneous, egalitarian, immediate, holistic modality of *communitas,* which has been ideologized and then routinized in many revolutionary contexts, including the early Zionist revolution.[18] The emergence of *communitas* is predicated on the suspension of the differentiating features characteristic of the rules, roles, and statuses associated with the social-structural relations of *societas.* The latter define the mainstream, productive engagements of social life rather than those ritualized pockets or peripheral margins, where the normative order loses its hold. The spirit of *communitas,* with its element of spontaneity, can emerge as an essential by-product of social and interactional conditions that can arise as a result of intensive mutual engagements in joint endeavors or affectively loaded, shared experiences (which thereby become a transformed expression of self and relationship), or it can be ritually produced in specialized contexts. These contexts manifest their own social-structural properties, notably equality and nondifferentiation along the dimensions of status and role.

Durkheim's concepts of "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity can be used in an attempt to specify more closely the ideal structural features of a cohesive Israeli school class,[19] as Bernstein has done with reference to some aspects of British education. In mechanical solidarity, social integration is mediated by a shared system of beliefs and common sentiments that produce a detailed regulation of conduct. Under this form of social integration, social roles are ascribed and clear distinctions are made between inside and outside. Most important, social commitment is unproblematic because it is characterized by minimal tension between private beliefs and role obligations. Clearly, this is the principle of social integration ideally

[17] Turner; Bernstein.

[18] Tamar Katriel, *Talking Straight: "Dugri" Speech in Israeli "Sabra" Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[19] Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1964).

grounding the cohesive Israeli school class. Organic solidarity, on the other hand, is a form of social integration achieved at the level of individualized, specialized, interdependent (achieved rather than ascribed) social roles and not at the level of shared beliefs and sentiments. Under this form of social integration, boundaries become blurred and the tensions between private beliefs and role obligations can be severe.

Bernstein interprets changes in British schooling as a shift from mechanical to organic solidarity, as evidenced in a "mixing of categories" at several levels, including a relaxation of the boundaries of the school class so that differentiated sets of pupils can emerge. This shift in the context of schooling is said to be responsive to the shift in social conditions and can be historically traced to changing patterns in the division of labor in the modern industrial society. Our account of the symbolic dimensions of the Israeli school class, however, suggests that schooling systems may respond to cultural shifts in a variety of ways. Modern Israeli society is an industrialized, highly differentiated society whose form of integration is clearly that of organic solidarity. Yet this highly centralized educational system is infused with a social ideology that mediates and serves to counteract the force of this shift. The features of mechanical solidarity become idealized as they provide a model of unproblematic commitment on the one hand and the social-structural conditions that are hoped will generate *communitas* as a by-product state. Although rarely successful in attaining this goal, the efforts to promote *gibush* are functional in a way not captured by social-structural notions related to the division of labor: they produce a pattern of sentiment that supports the utopian mythology that still animates Israeli official rhetoric, however dissociated it is from its social reality that manifests the far-reaching social changes that Israeli society has undergone since its national myths were originally spun.

We propose, therefore, that both the structural and the symbolic dimensions of school life, and their potentially complex interplay, should be taken fully into consideration in our efforts to comprehend and fruitfully compare the rhetorics and practices of schooling. In line with accepted, though not always remembered, conceptions of ethnography, this study locates itself at the "interface between specific inquiry and comparative generalization."[20] The rhetoric of cohesion in Israeli schooling gives expression to a universal cultural concern; it is a fact of Israeli culture that its educational system is entrusted with the task of impressing on the young a particular, utopian image of sociality. Clearly, other rhetorics and other guiding ideals will be found in other cultures, not necessarily in the context of schooling. What these are and the ways in which they are deployed seem to us worthwhile concerns for comparative research.

[20] Dell Hymes, "Educational Ethnology," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 11 (1980): 3–8, esp. 5.