Cultivating Empathy Through Bilingual Education: How Experiencing the Other Through Their Language Builds Perspective-taking Skills, And Why It Matters

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Abstract

In my initial research on the topic of bilingual education and empathy I encountered the work of Zvi Bekerman, and his book, *The Promise of Multicultural and Bilingual Education: Inclusive Palestinian-Arab and Jewish Schools in Israel* (2016). This book immediately captured my attention, as I, like Bekerman, found myself hopeful that bilingual schools in conflict regions could be a tool in resolving regional conflict. Bekerman concludes that while these schools build tolerance and understanding, this outcome is not enough to change the socio-political landscape. His extensive research allows me to reformulate the question: If bilingual schools in conflict regions cannot change the socio-political landscape on their own, can they at least cultivate perspective-taking and empathy among students? Further, is this goal worthwhile on its own terms?

This paper aims to demonstrate how bilingual education trains the habit of perspective-taking and how this skill is linked to empathy. In light of Bekerman's book and the larger project of conflict resolution, I believe that cultivating empathy between populations in conflict can contribute to tolerance and understanding, and potentially empathy. I will use Bekerman's own interviews with students to illustrate this point.

Introduction

> "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in *his* language, that goes to his heart."
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> — Nelson Mandela

Research demonstrates that bilingual students have perspective-taking skills that surpass their monolingual peers, skills that correlate to affective and cognitive empathy. Perspective-taking is a topic of existing scholarship and refers here to the ability to recognize and appreciate another person's point of view, whether it is the same or different from our own.[1] Much of the research on perspective-taking has only examined the relationship between bilingualism and executive functioning (perspective-taking being among the executive function skills) or the relationship between executive functioning (such as perspective-taking) and empathy, but not all three of them.[2] I want to connect the research on bilingualism and perspective-taking skills with the research on perspective-taking and empathy. My aim is to explain how learning in two languages builds the cognitive tool of perspective-taking, and how perspective-taking can foster empathy.

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[1] Meghan L. Healey and Murray Grossman, "Cognitive and Affective Perspective-Taking: Evidence for Shared and Dissociable Anatomical Substrates," *Frontiers in neurology* 9 (2018): 491.

[1] Bruneau and Saxe, "The Power of Being Heard: The Benefits of Perspective Giving in the Context of Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 4 (2012): 855-866.

[1] V. Slaughter, V., Dennis, M. J., & Pritchard, M. (2002). "Theory of mind and peer acceptance in preschool children," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 20, no. 4 (2002): 545–564.

[1] Caitlyn M. M. Gallant, "Developing an understanding of others' emotional states: Relations among affective theory of mind and empathy measures in early childhood," British journal of developmental psychology 38, no. 2 (2020): 151-166.

[2] Rebeka Javor. "Bilingualism, Theory of Mind and Perspective-Taking: The Effect of Early Bilingual Exposure." *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 6 (2001): 143-148.

One place to examine as well as cultivate bilingualism and perspective-taking is in a dual language immersion classroom, particularly in schools located in global conflict regions. As students learn in a second language, they learn to understand the world through another cultural perspective or viewpoint, also affording them the opportunity to strengthen the muscles that expand their perspective-taking skills, which positively impacts their ability to empathize.

Research on bilingual education and peace building in conflict regions is prolific, particularly in Israel.[3] Researcher Zvi Bekerman has spent over twenty years studying bilingual Hebrew-Arabic schools in Israel and Palestine, which he details in his book: *The Promise of Multicultural and Bilingual Education: Inclusive Palestinian-Arab and Jewish Schools in Israel* (2016). The book is the outcome of an expansive longitudinal ethnographic study of Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools in Israel. Bekerman details the tremendous effort afforded to create equal representation of Arabic and Hebrew language and Palestinian and Jewish perspectives in the classrooms, and the bilingual classroom as a space of tolerance and peace education. What makes this book stand out are the rich ethnographic accounts and the complexity of the contexts — socio-political, educational, and linguistic — which Bekerman has interwoven with his multilayered analyses. Because there is more at stake in these classrooms, divergent viewpoints provide a window into the potential effects of perspective-taking on the overall tolerance that develops (or does not, as the case may be). Bekerman's ethnographic accounts provide an opportunity to examine these divergent viewpoints first-hand.

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[3] Alan Smith. "The influence of education on conflict and peace building, Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011 The Hidden Crisis: Armed conflict and education, Paris: UNESCO." (2010).rt. 2011.

For my purposes, this paper supports the theory that bilingual and multilingual education can bridge gaps between ethnic, religious, or language communities. Additionally, the research points to a need to engage identity in a way that promotes and builds equality between the two communities in the educational setting. Schools are presented as places of identity formation that can be used to legitimate particular knowledge and culture.

Bekerman's stated aim is to further our knowledge, "regarding the possibility of shaping, through the promotion of linguistic and cultural pluralism, societal resources capable of achieving peaceful sociopolitical goals while introducing a multilingual, multicultural educational framework that allows culture to act as a boundary solvent, bringing together two previously alienated groups."[4] Bekerman approaches his study in hopes that these classrooms will change the socio-political climate in Israel, but interestingly his book never mentions empathy as a tool or foundation for the ultimate goal of political change. Bekerman's claim is that while these schools cultivate tolerance and understanding, this goal is not enough alone to change the political climate in Israel.

However, Bekerman's exhaustive studies, particularly the personal interviews, demonstrate that the students in the bilingual Hebrew-Arabic schools have developed deep and complex understandings of each other's cultures and viewpoints, often reaching far beyond the viewpoints of their peers from monolingual schools regionally. Bekerman's extensive research allows me to pose the questions: what if the existence of the classrooms and schools is enough — what if the actual practice of speaking both languages (Hebrew and Arabic) in these classrooms is cultivating the habits which promote empathy? I use his research and his interviews, alongside research on perspective-taking, empathy, and bilingual education to reframe the question from: "Can bilingual schools in conflict regions change the socio-political climate?" to: "Can bilingual schools in conflict regions cultivate perspective-taking and empathy among students, and is this a sufficient goal in and of itself, with implications for socio-political change?"

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[4] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), xi.

This paper aims to explain how learning in two languages builds tools—specifically the cognitive tool of perspective-taking—that foster empathy. I will examine definitions of empathy and consider scholarship in applied ethics regarding why empathy is desirable to cultivate. I will review the research on the role of perspective-taking, its positive correlation with empathy, and how the bilingual classroom can train learners to take other perspectives. This discussion revisits Bekerman's own research interviews in order to show how students' experiences in bilingual learning environments have contributed to their perspective-taking capabilities.

It is not my claim that bilingual education is the only way to teach empathy. Nor is it my aim to convince you that bilingual education will always result in empathetic thinking. Bilingual education is simply one method of training perspective-taking skills which positively affect the habit of empathetic inference, and which in turn can contribute to socio-political change.

First I will provide a background on bilingual education, its connection to perspective-taking skills, and how these skills contribute to empathetic thinking. Next, I turn to some definitions of empathy and explain how empathy can be taught as a habit or way of thinking, as has been demonstrated in teaching empathy through literature. Finally, I connect the skill of perspective-taking with the practice of empathy in bilingual schools, particularly the Hebrew-Arabic bilingual schools of Zvi Bekerman's study.

I approach the key terms of this study in the following ways. "Perspective-taking" is a socio-cognitive process that enables us to recognize and appreciate another person's point of view, whether it is the same or different from our own. In my treatment of empathy, I rely on Amy Coplan's definition of empathy as "a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states [both cognitive and affective] while

maintaining clear self-other differentiations."[5] I chose this definition because it combines elements of cognitive and affective empathy as well as the notion that an observer must both take on the emotions of the other, to some degree, while simultaneously remaining distinct. These elements are crucial in understanding how empathy relates to perspective-taking. Bilingual education is a general term with a broad range of meanings. For the purposes of this paper, a bilingual classroom is defined as one where two languages are being taught in immersion, either concurrently (with two teachers speaking each of the languages), or with the day divided 50-50 with both languages having equal time and attention.

Bilingual Education and Regional Conflict

> "It is difficult to precisely measure the degree and variety of ways in which languages influence human thought; … Becoming bilingual enables a person to relate on subtle levels of perception, cognition, and emotion to people who live within a different linguistic system. Carrying that reasoning forward, becoming multilingual may support the development of multidimensional, metalevel linguistic, and cultural competences; the basis of what may be called a truly 'global' awareness."[6]
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> — Cyrus Robin Bruno Della Chiesa

Bilingual schools are not all alike — there are various methodologies for teaching multiple languages in a single classroom. Schools, by design, have complex agendas which rarely hold bilingualism as their sole aim. As a result, a multitude of factors affect outcomes in second language acquisition. A key reason why wider public and policy debates on bilingual/ immersion education continue to be so contested rests with the widely different understandings of what bilingual education actually constitutes. At one end of the continuum are those who

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[5] Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

[6] Cyrus Robin Bruno Della Chiesa, "We Share the Same Biology… Cultivating Cross-Cultural Empathy and Global Ethics Through Multilingualism," *Mind, Brain, and Education* 4, vol. 4 (2010): 196-207.

would classify as bilingual *any* educational approach adopted for, or directed at bilingual students. At the other end are schools whose aim is to foster true bilingualism (proficiency in two languages).[7] For the purposes of this paper I use the term bilingual schools to refer to a classroom environment where two languages are used for instruction, either concurrently (with two teachers speaking each of the languages) or with the day divided into separate portions for each language. In the second situation, the class or the day would be split 50-50 with both languages having equal time and attention.

Bilingual schools incorporating minority languages have additional societal politics with which to contend, often both inside and outside the school. If a political element of regional conflict is added, the complexities multiply exponentially. The two-way model (instruction in two languages, and including two groups of children, who each speak one of the languages as their first language) is commended for its potential to equalize power relations between the minority-language and dominant-language groups, and to instill pride in the students' native languages and culture alongside respect for other cultures.[8] For these reasons, bilingual schools in these environments might appear to be the most challenging schools to examine. However, they also provide the most fertile ground for observing perspective changes among groups within the classroom environment.

Zvi Bekerman has studied and written extensively on bilingual (Hebrew-Arabic) and multicultural schools in Israel since the late 1990s, and he addresses many of these questions in his latest book, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education*. The schools of

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[7] May, S, "Bilingual/Immersion Education: What the Research Tells Us," in *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (Boston: Springer, 2008).

[8] Assaf Meshulam, "Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools in Israel: unravelling the educational model," *International Journal of Educational Development* 70 (2019): 3.

Bekerman's study are what he describes as "Palestinian-Jewish integrated schools," including students from both Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli backgrounds. These schools follow the two-way model of instruction; students are fully immersed in both Arabic and Hebrew, with teachers of both languages in every classroom and an even number of student speakers of each language also present.[9]

Historically, schools that are segregated by nationality, ethnicity, or religion are the norm. An alternative educational model in conflict-ridden areas is integrated schools in which children who are customarily educated separately are deliberately educated together.[10] Intergroup contact, under conditions of status equality (such as in a bilingual program) can help to alleviate conflict between groups and to overcome societal and cultural tensions.[11]. Studies also demonstrate that members of communities in conflict who are educated together develop more fluid, culturally-complex identities and tolerance. Some researchers have questioned the efficacy of contact encounters in integrated schools when the rest of society is deeply segregated (whether by race, religion, language, or other minority/majority factors).[12] However at present there is a great deal

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[9] Zvi Bekerman, "Complex Contexts and Ideologies: Bilingual Education in Conflict-Ridden Areas," *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 4, no. 1 (2005): 1-20.

[10] Michalinos Zembylas and Zvi Bekerman, "Integrated Education in Conflicted Societies: Is There a Need for New Theoretical Language?" *European Educational Research Journal* 12, no. 3 (2013): 403–15.

[11] R. E. Slavin and R. Cooper, "Improving intergroup relations: Lessons learned from cooperative learning programs," *Journal of Social Issues 55,* no. 4 (1999): 647–663.

[12] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), xi.
(Allport, 1954) Allport's "contact hypothesis" stands as the basis for educational efforts towards integration. This hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact, under conditions of equality and cooperation, allow for the formation of friendships, might help alleviate conflict between groups, and might encourage change in negative attitudes (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1976; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

of consensus regarding the positive impact of bilingualism on children's cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth.[13]

The schools in Israel of Bekerman's scholarship are a specific example and a test case for a broader notion of why and how bilingual education can enhance perspective-taking, and cultivate empathy. While Bekerman's research burdens these programs with the task of solving problems at a national level, I contend that the continued existence of the schools themselves is a worthwhile accomplishment. The bilingual environments in these schools may not bring about social change immediately or directly, but they do create habits of perspective-taking, a precursor to empathy, which is a necessary foundation for social change.

Here I will engage more deeply with some of the research connected to these positive outcomes. I will examine what is meant by perspective-taking and empathy. Finally I will return to Bekerman's specific study and the bilingual Palestinian-Jewish schools in Israel to examine real-life examples of this perspective-taking in action.

What is Perspective-taking?

> "Roman Jakobson pointed out a crucial fact about differences between languages in a pithy maxim: 'Languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey.' This maxim offers us the key to unlocking the real force of the mother tongue: if different languages influence our minds in different ways, this is not because of what our language *allows* us to think but rather because of what it habitually *obliges* us to think *about*."[14]
>
> — Guy Deutscher

Perspective-taking is a socio-cognitive process that enables us to recognize and appreciate another person's point of view, whether it is the same or different from our own.

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[13] Mark Lefkin, "The effect of bilingualism on creativity: Developmental and educational perspectives," *International Journal of Bilingualism* 17 (2013): 431.

[14] Guy Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages* (Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Company, 2010).

Perspective-taking can be characterized along two dimensions: cognitive and affective. Cognitive perspective-taking is defined as the ability to infer the thoughts or beliefs of another person, while affective perspective-taking is the ability to infer the emotions or feelings of another person. This second ability is similar to cognitive empathy.[15]

Looking at something or someone from another perspective involves a process/skill termed Theory of Mind (ToM). ToM allows the individual to understand that other people have differing beliefs, moods, and knowledge than one's own, and additionally realize how these mental states may affect their behavior. It also enhances our ability to anticipate another person's behavior and promotes cooperation and interpersonal sensitivity, beginning in early childhood.[16]

ToM consists of cognitive and affective components; however, few studies have evaluated ToM measures and their associations with empathy.[17] One researcher, Caitlyn Gallant, proposes in a study published last year that children rely on their own emotional states to mimic emotions. Accordingly, she notes that a highly developed ToM ability is associated with cooperation and a high degree of empathy in children.[18]

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[15] Meghan L. Healey & Murray Grossman, "Cognitive and Affective Perspective-Taking: Evidence for Shared and Dissociable Anatomical Substrates," *Frontiers in neurology* 9 (2018): 491.

[16] V. Slaughter, M. J. Dennis, & M. Pritchard, "Theory of mind and peer acceptance in preschool children," *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 20, no. 4 (2002) 545–564.

[17] Caitlyn M. M. Gallant, "Developing an understanding of others' emotional states: Relations among affective theory of mind and empathy measures in early childhood," British journal of developmental psychology 38, no. 2 (2020).

[18] Caitlyn M. M. Gallant, "Developing an understanding of others' emotional states: Relations among affective theory of mind and empathy measures in early childhood," *British journal of developmental psychology* 38, no. 2 (2020).

How is Perspective-taking Linked to Bilingual Learning?

Bilinguals' representations of people's different mental states are often associated with more sophisticated ToM and perspective-taking, since they understand that every concept has two verbal labels. Research in this field demonstrates that as speakers switch between two languages, they develop the ability to attend to others' perspectives. Their pragmatic experience with these labels aids them in recognizing the same reality within different mental representations.[19] Some studies demonstrate that bilingual children surpass monolingual children in these abilities as early as 3 years of age.[20]

One such study evaluated the ability of children to take a perspective other than their own in order to interpret a speaker's intended meaning. In this study, three cars were visible to the child but only two were visible to the adult researcher. The researcher then asked the child to point to the smallest car. Bilingual children pointed to the smallest car that the researcher could see 75% of the time, while the monolingual children identified that car only half the time. Monolingual children failed to interpret the speaker's meaning dramatically more often than bilingual children as well as children who were exposed to a multilingual environment but were not bilingual themselves.[21]

To understand a speaker's intention, the listener must recognize the speaker's perspective. All communication involves some amount of perspective-taking and empathetic inference to

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[19] A. M. Kovács, "Early bilingualism enhances mechanisms of false-belief reasoning," *Developmental Science* 12, no. 1 (2009): 48–54.

[20] P. J. Goetz, "The effects of bilingualism on theory of mind development," *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition 6, no.* 1 (2003): 1–15.

[21] Samantha P. Fan, et al., "The Exposure Advantage: Early Exposure to a Multilingual Environment Promotes Effective Communication," *Psychological Science* 26, no. 7 (2015): 1090–1097.

intuit meaning and express it in words.[22] Language forces us to make choices about the words we use to express thoughts and feelings. Various languages handle the expression of meaning differently, expanding our ability to express ourselves by multiplying the possible utterances of our ideas. Communication in a second language enhances the practice of this empathetic inference by taking the learner outside their habitual methods of inference (using their first language) and into a less proficient method (using their second language). Research demonstrates that bilinguals develop expanded abilities to intuit the meaning of others through mental flexibility, attention control, working memory, and representation, "thus they can quickly notice changes in their environment, and they can quickly adapt to these changes as well."[23]

This adaptability translates to flexibility in perception. Bilingual children have more opportunities to practice figuring out context clues. In the bilingual classroom not only are students exposed to more words, giving them more possible pathways to explain an idea, they are also exposed to the underlying cultural identity attached to particular words in each language. This exposure leads them to understand that the same idea may be expressed differently in another language, and gives them a window into the culture of that language.

Using language as a vehicle, students are able to experience their own culture juxtaposed against that of another group. This experience allows students to adopt perspectives different from their own cultural experience through the everyday need to make meaning from two disparate cultural perspectives in two languages. They are able to see the perspective of another as different from their own through the use of shared languages in the classroom. In a dual

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[22] Samantha P. Fan, et al, "The Exposure Advantage: Early Exposure to a Multilingual Environment Promotes Effective Communication," *Psychological Science* 26, no. 7 (2015): 1090–1097.

[23] Rebeka Javor, "Bilingualism, Theory of Mind and Perspective-Taking: The Effect of Early Bilingual Exposure," *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 6 (2016): 143-148.

language immersion program, this practice affords children the opportunity to see from *each other's* perspective through the lens of *each other's* language.

When we communicate, often we are listening for what the other person means to say, and not only to what they are actually saying. Perspective-taking and empathy are thus critical in guiding successful social interactions, effective communication, and prosocial behavior. Previous work has shown that perspective-taking is closely related to and a key aspect of human empathy.[24] Other studies show the effectiveness of intergroup interaction where the non-dominant group is asked to articulate the difficulties in their lives (perspective-giving), and the dominant group is asked to translate that description into their own words (perspective-taking), even when the positive effects of such interaction is relatively short-lived.[25]

It appears that ToM ability, then, has a mediating role to play in increased empathic skills in bilinguals.[26] Before examining perspective-taking in the context of bilingual education, I consider empathy itself and the role it plays in human communication. Empathy has a complex scholarship attached to it, crossing disciplines and ideologies. Questions arise regarding the measurement and observation of empathy, particularly as it is often self-reported, as well as the negative aspects of empathy. These questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but necessary to acknowledge. A closer look at what exactly is meant by empathy and how I will use the concept here follows.

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[24] Meghan L, Healey and Murray Grossman, "Cognitive and Affective Perspective-Taking: Evidence for Shared and Dissociable Anatomical Substrates," *Frontiers in neurology* 9 (2018): 491.

[25] Bruneau and Saxe, "The Power of Being Heard: The Benefits of Perspective Giving in the Context of Intergroup Conflict," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2002): 855-866.

[26] Rebeka Javor, "Bilingualism, Theory of Mind and Perspective-Taking: The Effect of Early Bilingual Exposure," *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* 5, no. 6 (2016): 143-148.

What is Empathy and Why is it Desirable?

> "Empathetic inference is everyday mind reading… It may be the second greatest achievement of which the mind is capable, consciousness itself being the first."[27]
>
> — William Ickes

Empathy refers to a wide range of psychological capacities and is believed to be central to our understanding of humans as social creatures, specifically: the ability to recognize what other people are thinking and feeling, and the ability to engage with other people socially by attending to and matching the other's verbal and nonverbal cues. Accordingly, empathy refers to our ability to know another person's state of mind and our ability to be emotionally affected by how others feel and think about their situation, allowing us to "feel like them, to feel with them, to care for them, and to be concerned about them."[28]

The subject of empathy has been addressed from a variety of perspectives, often owing to the philosophical or scientific interests of the researchers who used the term. Some contend that empathy is the primary epistemic means of knowing other minds. Others view empathy as the fundamental social glue. Still others see empathy as an innate disposition for motor mimicry.[29]

Historically empathy is a recent and complex construct.[30] Edward Titchener (1867-1927) introduced the term empathy into the English language in 1809 as the translation of the German term "Einfuhlung" (feeling into). David Hume (1711–1776) invoked the concept of sympathy to

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[27] William Ickes, *Empathetic Accuracy* (Guildford Press, 1997), intro.

[28] Karsten Stueber, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), "Empathy," (Fall 2019 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/empathy/.

[29] Karsten Stueber, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), "Empathy," (Fall 2019 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/empathy/.

[30] Jean Decety and William Ickes, *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2009), intro vii.

explain a variety of psychological phenomena, including the transmission of emotion from one person to another, the formation of moral responses and desires, and aesthetic responses.[31] The many perspectives taken by scholars since on the potential role of empathy basically fall into two camps. The one says that empathy is too bound to human flaws, as when it drives violent behavior. The other takes hope in empathy's potential to positively contribute to social relationships and human behavior.

In the first camp we find critiques of empathy and questions regarding its benefit. Psychologist Paul Bloom in his book, *Against Empathy*, provides a penetrating criticism of empathy. He points to the dark side of empathy's role in constituting us as moral agents, which sometimes leading to violent and immoral behavior.[32] Empathy seen in this negative light gives pause. As with other human inclinations, there are extremes and potential negative outcomes. However, in the end, empathy alone appears insufficient to keep us on or take us off the path of morality. And yet, empathy appears to be central to our ability to relate to one another for the purpose of mutual understanding.

The second camp is represented by those who find empathy's potential to be not only positive, but also key to human relationship and even morality.[33] Here we find scholars across disciplines from literature, philosophy, and psychology, to name a few. Empathy in this camp has been engaged to address morality and social behavior. The philosopher Habermas acknowledges that: "Empathy, the capacity to transport oneself by means of feeling across cultural distance into

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[31] Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), x.

[32] Karsten Stueber, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), "Empathy," (Fall 2019 Edition), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/empathy/.

[33] Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Perception, Empathy, and Judgment: An Inquiry into the Preconditions of Moral Performance* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), Intro.

alien and prima facie incomprehensible life conditions, patterns of reaction, and interpretive perspectives – is an emotional precondition for the ideal taking over of roles, which requires each person to adopt the standpoint of all the others."[34] Habermas coined the term "communicative action" which connotes engaging for the purpose of adopting the standpoint of the other for mutual understanding. He emphasizes that empathy tends to be more accessible when the objects of our attention can be easily identified in terms of language, culture, social norms, class, gender, nationality or race. Across disciplines, Habermas reminds us that the obstacles imposed by spatial distance, time, and lack of familiarity or identification have been recognized as blocks to empathy.[35] This scholarship on empathy provides a philosophical foundation for more critical definitions, which prove instructive in analyzing the cultivation of empathy in pedagogical settings.

Critical Elements of a Definition of Empathy

While both camps see empathy as fundamentally connected to human behavior, I favor the second camp with its emphasis on the positive possibilities for empathetic inference. Still in question is exactly how to define empathy itself. One critical element of a definition of empathy delineates self-focus and other-focus. When empathy is "switched off," we think only about our own interests. When empathy is "switched on," we focus on other people's interests as well.[36] In "The Ethics of Empathy" Richard Miller adds an additional element to the definition of empathy:

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[34] Naomi Head, "Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 42.

[35] Naomi Head, "Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 41.

[36] Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty* (Philadelphia: Perseus Books, 2011), 18.

the element of attunement. One is aware that 'I' am empathizing and I am mindful of that fact. This is an ethical dimension, insofar as it is something I can regulate for good or ill.[37] Psychologist Daniel Batson noted eight conceptually distinct phenomena that have all been labeled "empathy," and formulated the: 'empathy-altruism hypothesis': "If we feel empathy towards a person, we are likely to help them (in proportion to the empathy felt) without any selfish thoughts. Otherwise, we will help them only if the rewards of helping them outweigh the costs."[38] Empathy, in this view, potentially overrides our own selfish viewpoints.

Acknowledging the need for a model of empathy which embraces its complexity, psychologist Mark H. Davis has also argued for a multidimensional approach. Instead of defining empathy, "solely as affective responses or cognitive reactions, the multidimensional approach recognizes that affect and cognition are intertwined in empathy."[39] The resulting model seeks to articulate a conception of empathy that speaks across the various disciplines in which it plays a role and embraces a range of components ascribed to empathy. What emerges out of Davis' model is awareness of empathy as a process rather than an emotion in and of itself.[40] Davis' model allows us to consider empathy as a practice or habit to be cultivated, rather than simply as an emotion. This model also helps to clarify the concept of empathy as well as focusing on the empathetic dispositions of perspective-taking and empathetic concern as candidates for inclusion in a system of empathetic education.

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[37] Richard B. Miller, "The Ethics of Empathy," in *Friends and Other Strangers: Studies in Religion, Ethics and Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 114.

[38] Jean Decety and William Ickes, editors, *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2009), intro p. vii-viii.

[39] Michael E. Morrell. 2010. *Empathy and Democracy: Feeling, Thinking and Deliberation* (Penn State University Press, 2010), 55.

[40] Naomi Head, "Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 40.

Davis' study, like Batson's empathy-altruism hypothesis, also highlights the important empirical findings that people with these dispositions are likely to exhibit greater concern for others in need, more tolerance towards those with whom they disagree, and judgments of others' behavior more similar to the judgments they make of their own behavior.[41] Davis found that empathetic reactions can be based on the ease with which people can imagine themselves in the other person's position, taking the other person's perspective. The results of four experiments demonstrated that, "observers often use their own imagined experiences in the target's situation as a heuristic for gauging their empathic reactions to the target, such that they will be more empathic if they can easily imagine themselves in that situation and less empathic if they cannot."[42]

A study by business professors Pavlovich and Keiko takes this a step further, arguing that empathy enhances connectedness through the actual unconscious sharing of neuro-pathways that dissolves the barriers between self and other. They conclude that, "when we feel another's pain [through mirror neurons], we become connected in a shared reality."[43] This shared reality facilitates the ability to find common ground for solution building. Empathy, in this view, bridges the gap between self and other, and represents the mechanism through which one is able to expand one's conception of self to encapsulate all entities within one's moral sphere. The goals of others become relevant in a way that could not be possible without this instrument of "self-other

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[41] Michael Morell, "Empathy and Democratic Education," in *Public Affairs Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2007): 388. "When observers empathize, they tend to judge others similar to the way judge themselves (see Archer, Foushee, Davis, and Aderman 1979; Betancourt 1990; Galper 1976; Gould and Sigall 1977; Regan and Totten 1975 and Finstuen 1977." (p. 387)

[42] Mark H. Davis and John R. Chambers, "The Role of the Self in Perspective-Taking and Empathy: Ease of Self-Simulation as a Heuristic for Inferring Empathic Feelings," *Social Cognition* 30, no. 2 (2012): 153-180.

[43] Kathryn Pavlovich, Keiko Krahnke, editors, *Organizing through Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2014) 1-2.

boundary dissolution."[44]

Philosopher Amy Coplan combines many of these elements of empathy in her definition of empathy as, "a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states [both cognitive and affective] while maintaining clear self-other differentiations."[45] Coplan's definition provides us with a three-pronged approach to empathy. "Good" empathy involves three elements: (1) "affective matching," (2) perspective-taking must be other-oriented and (3) Self-other differentiation (The empathizer must remain conscious of the clear boundary between the self and other.)[46]

This scholarship on empathy, particularly that of Coplan and Davis, highlights the importance of perspective-taking as a skill linked to empathy and demonstrates that empathy is linked to tolerance and understanding of outgroups, a stated goal of bilingual Palestinian-Jewish schools in Zvi Bekerman's study. From this section I gather the following ideas regarding empathy to create a working definition for this paper: While empathy is multidimensional and complex, it remains central to our humanity and at the heart of social relationships. Empathy is best defined as a multidimensional process, per Mark Davis, and per Amy Coplan, a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states (both cognitive and affective) while maintaining clear self-other differentiations. Simulating another's psychological states enables affective matching along with perspective-

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[44] Caitlyn M. M. Gallant, "Developing an understanding of others' emotional states: Relations among affective theory of mind and empathy measures in early childhood," *British journal of developmental psychology* 38, no. 2 (2020), 133-4.

[45] Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

[46] Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxxiv - xxxv.

taking that enhances communication.

While the multi-disciplinary studies on empathy assumes that empathy plays a critical role in human interaction, they do not tend to theorize what such interaction might look like. How can empathy be turned-on or turned-off in dialogue or interactions among people? Little attention has been paid to the kinds of practices through which empathy may be enabled or blocked.[47] There is, however, research that supports teaching empathy through reading literature. This scholarship has demonstrated in compelling ways that books enable one to imagine what it is to be another, perhaps not perfectly, but at least a glimpse into another person's experience. Reading cultivates the imagination and perspective-taking skills by inviting you to imagine yourself in another world, inside the reality of different characters. This experience invites the reader to suspend what they think they know and to explore another reality, presented to them from another point of view. In a similar way bilingual education offers a framework, a practice ground, for increasing empathetic understanding by giving students an opportunity to experience another person's view point through their language.

Philosophers and ethicists Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty both argue that literature helps to cultivate the imagination and create a more compassionate society. Rorty maintains that reading literature can train the imagination to understand others despite our differences, and in consequence, train the habit of perspective-taking.[48]In Nussbaum's view, empathic imagining is an invaluable way of extending our ethical awareness.[49] She asserts that narrative imagination is

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[47] Naomi Head, "Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 41.

[48] Ann Juracic, "Empathy and the Critic," *College English,* 74, no. 1 (2011): 14.

[49] Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.

essential preparation for moral interaction. Habits of empathy cultivate a sympathetic responsiveness to another's needs and an understanding of the way circumstances shape those needs. Like Habermas and Davis, empathy, in her argument, is not a spontaneous reaction, but a habitual practice. In the same way that reading literature invites you to view a different world from a perspective that is unknown to you, so too learning in two languages requires and cultivates these same skills, skills that contribute to perspective-taking and empathetic inference. In order to explore how a novel perspective can be cultivated in the bilingual classroom, I turn now to the schools of Bekerman's study.

The Bilingual Schools of Bekerman's Study

Currently (as of 2019), eight schools (seven elementary schools and one high school) and at least 15 kindergartens in Israel defined themselves as bilingual. As of 2019 there are 2480 students in these P-J schools, pre-k through 12th grade.[50] Six of these schools figure in Bekerman's study (2016).The schools are what he describes as Palestinian-Jewish bilingual integrated schools (hereafter referred to as P-J schools). These schools serve Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel.[51]

P-J education began in 1984 with the opening of a primary school in Wahat el-Salam/Neve Shalom—which means "Oasis of Peace" west of Jerusalem.[52] This school was the first of its kind in Israel. The school, and the village of the same name, had as its aim to serve as an example of

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[50] Assaf Meshulam, "Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools in Israel: unravelling the educational model," *International Journal of Educational Development* 70 (2019): 1.

[51] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Intro, See Footnote.
The terms used here reflect Bekerman's usage (Palestinian and Jewish). I am following the rubric set by Bekerman.

[52] "Wahat al-Salam — Neve Shalom," http://wasns.org/-children-s-educational-system

coexistence for groups living in intractable conflict.[53] In 2019 the school had 236 students enrolled from first to sixth grades.

In 1998, the second bilingual school was founded by the NGO Hand in Hand in Misgav Regional Council — The Galil Jewish–Arab School (in 2019 served 232 students from first to ninth grades). A year later the organization opened a Hand in Hand school in Jerusalem. This school is the only one to date that educates children in grades K-12, and currently (2019) enrolls over 500 students. The first class graduated in 2011.

In 2004, the bilingual Bridge over the Wadi school was founded in Wadi Ara, the only bilingual school in a Palestinian town (247 students in elementary grades in 2019). In 2007, Hagar (Degania) was opened in Beer Sheva (with 178 students in grades 1-5 in 2019, planning to expand through 12th grade).[54] And, finally, the newest school in Bekerman's study opened with a preschool class in Haifa in 2012.[55].

In recent years, two existing schools were converted into bilingual schools: Kulna-Yahad in Jaffa (since 2016) and Ahmadiyya Kababir School in Haifa (since 2017). In addition, a framework for first graders was opened this year in Beit Berl. As these schools appeared more recently they are not a part of Bekerman's study. I mention them here to emphasize the growing nature of this bilingual school movement. Additionally, recently-proposed Israeli legislation (December 2020) has approached the subject of teaching Arabic from elementary school on a

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[53] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 80.

[54] "Bilingual Institutions (Hebrew–Arabic) in the Education System," The Knesset Research and Information Center, January 2019. https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/mmm/Bilingual_Educational_Institutions.pdf

[55] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 81.

national level.[56] These developments suggest that bilingual educational models are garnering nation-wide attention.

One of the key features of all the schools is their commitment to co-teaching; classes are taught simultaneously in Hebrew and Arabic by teachers representing each language. Although bilingualism is the ultimate goal of the six schools, in practice the classrooms are sometimes monolingual, with children organized into first-language classrooms to facilitate their learning. As Bekerman notes, there is a delicate balance between the commitment to bilingualism and co-existence, and the state requirements for proof of academic progress.[57] Thus, monolingual classrooms are the result of competing educational priorities rather than the effectiveness of bilingual education in producing bilingual students.

The ideological framework of the P-J schools is to educate Palestinian-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli children together for social equality and justice, so that inequalities and tensions between the two communities can be addressed and challenged in a school setting. The schools seek balanced representation: both languages used simultaneously in all classrooms, with teachers who are native speakers of Arabic and Hebrew present at all times. Teaching is characterized by interdisciplinary, thematic, and hands-on approaches, incorporating both the open school model and the kibbutz model. The open school model typically refers to Democratic schools. While

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[56] Andrew Warner, "Israeli Policy to promote Arabic Language Education," *Language Magazine*, January 14, 2021, https://www.languagemagazine.com/2021/01/14/israeli-policy-to-promote-arabic-language-education/
The legislation, proposed by International lawyer, human rights activist, and Israeli Member of Knesset Michal Cotler-Wunsh, would make it mandatory for Israeli children to begin Arabic studies in elementary school all the way through the end of their schooling. She is quoted as saying, "I am hopeful that this will provide the path forward to mutual recognition, enhanced conversation, coexistence and sustainable peace with additional peoples and countries in our region and beyond."

[57] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 83.

there is no single definition of democratic education or democratic schools, the term generally indicates an environment where students have freedom to organize their daily activities and to have a say in the administrative regulation of the school.[58] The kibbutz model, by contrast, refers to a Socialist model in which communal values, rather than individual choice, structure classroom practices and priorities. The second stage of development of the schools was marked by the Wahat el-Salam/Neve Shalom school's transition to official public school status and the accompanying incorporation of aspects of the two-way bilingual education model. The two-way bilingual education model involves the use of two languages of instruction in the classroom as well as two groups of students from two distinct language backgrounds. All subsequent PJ schools took a similar path, operating within the formal public education framework for a broader impact in society.[59]

There is no single model that applies in the Palestinian-Jewish schools consistently. However, all remain bilingual. Classes comprise students from both language groups, ideally in equal numbers. Instruction is conducted in the minority and the majority language, and most of the curriculum is taught in both languages. Challenges to two-way bilingualism include the blurring of boundaries between the two languages (switching between languages and allowing students to respond in their first language) In the two-way model, switching between languages is common.[60] Hebrew remains the dominant language in the classroom, although course content

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[58] https://www.educationrevolution.org/store/findaschool/democraticschools/ and https://eudec.org/democratic-education/what-is-democratic-education/
"The diverse participants in Democratic Education are united in upholding the spirit of the Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and implementing this as the primary framework for the day-to-day practices in all learning environments."

[59] Assaf Meshulam, "Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools in Israel: unravelling the educational model," *International Journal of Educational Development* 70 (2019): 3.

[60] Colin Baker, *Foundations of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism, 5th ed.* (2011), ch 10.

is presented in both languages. However, the two-way model, with its emphasis on instilling pride in students' native languages and cultures, is also a fundamental element of the P-J bilingual model and approach, which has been described as "critical education that seeks to both expose and actively challenge unequal power relations in Israeli society."[61]

One of the scholars whose research Bekerman engages, Grace Feuerverger, remarks in her own study on the bilingual school in Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, that the school is, "an example of a moral community evolving within conflict-ridden conditions and showing a growing awareness of the power of language (bilingualism)… to assuage the binational tensions ingrained in the wider sociopolitical context."[62] Grace Feuerverger was one of the first researchers to examine in-depth the role of language in bilingual education in the school of a Jewish–Palestinian village, Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam. She explored, "how language awareness plays a major role in this school in its overriding commitment to fostering an emancipatory discourse of education based on conflict resolution and peacemaking." She viewed bilingual education in this case as reconstructing Arab–Jewish relations and as challenging the dominant subordinate power structures in the wider society. Feuerverger argues that bilingual education in Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salamis a kind of training ground for perspective-taking

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[61] Assaf Meshulam, "Palestinian-Jewish bilingual schools in Israel: unravelling the educational model," *International Journal of Educational Development* 70 (2019): 4-5.

"Valdés (1997) notes, developing and supporting bilingualism is not in itself sufficient to prevent reproduction of power inequalities and contribute to meaningful social change. Rather, in pursuing their ideological aspirations, two-way programs must be implemented with awareness of their inherent limitations (Valdés, 1997; Palmer, 2007) and an explicit agenda to produce new power relations (Nieto, 1999,2004). This stands at the heart of critical educational studies, which strives to expose the manifestations, in education, of the various forms and combinations of power relations in society and to generate educational action towards an egalitarian, just, and democratic society(Apple et al., 2011; Darder et al., 2017).

[62] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education: Inclusive Palestinian-Arab and Jewish Schools in Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 35.

and conflict resolution.[63]Further, Feuerverger notes that Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam has enabled its participants, including students and teachers, to become "border crossers" who challenge current socio-political limitations with a discourse of cultural and linguistic equality. The idea of crossing borders is a powerful image of the underlying shift that occurs in the bilingual, multicultural school setting. Feuerverger speaks of the school as, "a microsociety and as a moral community that can be used as a role model for conflict resolution and peace making."[64]

Bilingual Hebrew-Arabic Schools in Israel — Students Become Border Crossers

Zvi Bekerman's study began in 1998, involving the six bilingual, integrated P-J schools in Israel at that time. The goal of the integrated schools initiative, in Bekerman's words, "is to create egalitarian bilingual multicultural environments that will facilitate the growth of Israeli youth who can acknowledge and respect 'others' while maintaining loyalty to their respective cultural traditions."[65] Explaining further, Bekerman writes that using peace education as a "test case" he hopes to expand solutions and to suggest integrative education approaches, such as bilingual, multicultural schools, to resolve particular conflicts in the world. His vision for the book, is as follows:

> It should further our knowledge regarding the possibility of shaping, through the promotion of linguistic and cultural pluralism, societal resources capable of achieving

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[63] Grace Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel* (RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 52.

[64] Grace Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel* (RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 24.

[65] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix.

> peaceful sociopolitical goals while introducing a multilingual, multicultural educational framework that allows culture to act as a boundary solvent, bringing together two previously alienated groups. It will also contribute to the scanty collection of longitudinal research on multicultural peace education initiatives, especially in areas of conflict.[66]

As Bekerman presents the research, scholars are in agreement that these programs build tolerance and empathy. Because they succeed in building empathy, bilingual and multicultural schools are a necessary foundation for bringing peace and reconciliation to a community that has experienced conflict.[67] On the other hand, there is disagreement regarding whether or not the cultivation of empathy has a lasting positive impact on a global geopolitical scale. Some research contends that these educational endeavors do not affect social and cultural change on a broader scale within the larger community or in the society torn by conflict.

Bekerman acknowledges that, "although the full picture of bilingual education is complex and rests on future contextual developments, its value as a dynamic manifestation of an ideology of coexistence and tolerance is indisputable."[68] Still, Bekerman does not appear to value this evidence as sufficient to change the larger socio-political dynamic. He concludes that bilingual schools hold more complexity than promise. He believes that what must be addressed are the, "paradigmatic perspectives that support the nation-state ideology…unless dialogue about the

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[66] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix.

[67] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18.
Allport's "contact hypothesis" stands as the basis for educational efforts towards integrated education. This hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact, under conditions of equality and cooperation, allow for the formation of friendships, might help alleviate conflict between groups, and might encourage change in negative attitudes. Several studies examine these phenomena. Members of conflicting communities who are educated together develop more fluid, culturally layered identities and tolerance.
(Harrison, O'Connor-Bones, & McCord, 2013; Hayes, McAllister, & Dowds, 2007). Finally, the nation of Israel has had success mediating national narratives, creating opportunities to talk about the conflict, and recognizing ethnic, religious, and other differences through integrated education (Bekerman 2012; Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004).

[68] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 185.

epistemological bases that substantiate these attitudes is initiated, no bilingual educational initiative will achieve an equality that acknowledges sociocultural differences as affirmed in multicultural discourse."[69]

Bekerman appears to view the bilingual program as less than a success because it has not (yet) changed social and political organizations in Israel. Bekerman argues that while real and lasting change in behaviors and attitudes among students, teachers, and parents have been achieved at the school community level, this change cannot hold up in the face of opposition from the larger social and political structures. His conclusion suggests that without change on the national and political level, the changes in behaviors and attitudes of school participants are irrelevant. While I acknowledge the complexity of Bekerman's goals, I argue that Bekerman's own research demonstrates that perspective-taking skills are being constructed in these bilingual classrooms, and that this contributes to more expansive mutual understanding among students. These changes are valuable and contribute to potential improvement in understanding between groups, whether or not the effects change the broader socio-political climate.

I contend that the strongest measure of the success of bilingual schools and similar programs is the one element that Bekerman notes yet dismisses:

> The strong sense of self-identity among the bilingual school students and the active recognition they bestowed on other groups is connected to one of the most salient differences between the children at the bilingual schools and the monolingual State schools; the ability of the former group to perceive and articulate the viewpoints of other groups, even when they conflicted with their own. While the data suggest that the children at the bilingual schools were aware of and uncomfortable with the tension that permeated discussions related to the national conflict, they were able to participate in these discussions and recount them afterward, with full recognition of alternative perspectives. Most students at both the Arabic- and Hebrew-language State schools

[69] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 295.

> could not even acknowledge the existence of other points of view, and the few who could were unable to express them… Clearly the children in the bilingual schools were more positive, knowledgeable, and articulate about "the other" than their peers in the monolingual schools.[70]

Bekerman's own conclusions show that children in the bilingual schools are able to take other viewpoints and articulate them, as compared to students at the monolingual schools, who are sometimes unable to acknowledge the very existence of other viewpoints or perspectives. He goes on to note that the students in the bilingual schools have developed the complex ability to manage tensions between other viewpoints and their own, even when those other views are related to national conflict. Per the definition of perspective-taking used in this paper, the students have developed an ability to hold contradictory views simultaneously, as well as the ability to recognize and appreciate a perspective different from their own. As evidenced in the research on both perspective-taking and on empathy, this is a key skill that is common to both. Evidence of students' abilities to engage in this way is proof of their enhanced perspective-taking skills. Zvi Bekerman's interviews with students from the P-J schools on a variety of topics provide just such evidence.

How Bilingual Education Builds Empathy: Interviews of Students:

> "They (the Jews) think something and we think something different. On the day of the Nakba, they are happy because for them it is their day of Independence, but we are sad… but now… last year after we talked and I saw that their views had changed since first grade, that they sense how we feel. This is very important… Let us say that if they had learned in a different school, they would have not understood this… only in our school."
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> — Palestinian Student[71]

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[70] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 185.

[71] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 171-2.

Bekerman's conclusions about the children in his study are compelling. He reports that they have a greater ability to articulate their point of view than their peers in monolingual schools, they are more aware of the points of view of their classmates, and they held fewer stereotypical views than their peers from monolingual schools.[72] When asked about the conflict in Israel, all the children had arguments which were complex and accounted for multiple perspectives, demonstrating more complex perspective-taking capabilities. Students affirmed that it was important to discuss the conflict, even if it created tension because, "there is value in knowing the views of others"[73] In general the students had well-developed and complex views of the conflict and were open to each other's viewpoints.

I return here to a definition of perspective-taking as "a socio-cognitive process that enables us to recognize and appreciate another person's point of view, whether it is the same or different from our own. Cognitive perspective taking is defined as the ability to infer the thoughts or beliefs of another person, while affective perspective taking is the ability to infer the emotions or feelings of another person. This second ability is similar to cognitive empathy".[74] In examining Bekerman's interviews with students in the bilingual schools, these are the criteria I will use to illustrate how the students in the bilingual schools of Bekerman's research are demonstrating these skills.

Eleven of the 16 Palestinian children who were interviewed expressed feelings like, 'We can live together… in spite of the fact that there is not yet peace. We are the proof that

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[72] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 162.

[73] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 172.

[74] Meghan L. Healey and Murray Grossman, "Cognitive and Affective Perspective-Taking: Evidence for Shared and Dissociable Anatomical Substrates," *Frontiers in neurology* 9 (2018): 491.

coexistence is possible”[75] The expanded perspective-taking capabilities of these students allowed them in equal measure to expand categories of identity, to redefine their in-groups, to alternate between categories, and to create new categories of inclusion, such as the statement by some students that neither Jews nor Arabs eat pork.[76] Others noted, ‘“we are all human, we love trips, we like our social activities, we are a united class.”[77] The children identify themselves as a united group with a shared identity, using "we" to characterize themselves as a unit.

By contrast, students from monolingual schools did not demonstrate such creative redefinitions of social categories; they did not demonstrate an ability to expand their perspective-taking to include ideas outside their experience or field of view. For example, when children from the monolingual, Hebrew-speaking State schools were asked about Arab students, they referred only to Arabs living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and failed to mention Arab citizens of Israel at all.[78] Moreover, in the two monolingual schools Bekerman interviewed students, “the relative complexity and open-mindedness with which the bilingual school students were able to discuss the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were almost wholly lacking.”[79] By contrast, students from the P-J schools were able to discuss the conflict from complex viewpoints, seeing the experiences of both sides.

Students were able to understand the emotions of one another. For example, the students understood that the Jewish Israeli children felt connected to and excited about Independence

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[75] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 167.

[76] Zvi Bekerman, (2016), 168.

[77] Zvi Bekerman, *(*2016), 167.

[78] Zvi Bekerman, *(*2016), 168.

[79] Zvi Bekerman, *(* 2016), 173.

Day, while this was a day of mourning for Arab Israelis and Palestinian youth. Both groups of children in the P-J schools were able to acknowledge both their own feelings and viewpoints, as well as that of the other side, while holding space for the divergent views to coexist. Bekerman records that both Jewish and Palestinian children understood that intergroup friendships facilitated this empathy. In his evaluation, the students came to the realization that, "there is another side, and I understand this side."[80] This statement realization acknowledges both the other, and their perspective.[81] These interviews demonstrate that children were able to match the feelings and verbal emotions of their peers as well as take on their view points.

According to Bekerman's research, the children in the bilingual schools had a heightened awareness of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and an increased understanding of its complexities. Bekerman explains that even more remarkable was, "their tolerance for differences in narratives and their willingness (albeit reluctant at times) to air topics about which it was known in advance there were serious disagreements, which stood in sharp contrast to students in monolingual state schools."[82] When asked about the conflict, the students from the bilingual school pointed out complexities including historical, religious, and land-related factors. They used complex arguments and took account of multiple perspectives. Not only do students label themselves as having an ability to understand the other side's perspective, they are actively demonstrating their perspective-taking skills in these interactions.

Bekerman notes that the children themselves notice that their views are radically different

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[80] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 176.

[81] Meghan L. Healey and Murray Grossman, "Cognitive and Affective Perspective-Taking: Evidence for Shared and Dissociable Anatomical Substrates," *Frontiers in neurology* 9 (2018): 491.

[82] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 169.

from people outside the school; the children label themselves as more tolerant and understanding. They also describe themselves as being able to account for the views of both sides and to honor the views of both sides in discussions; “I’m very happy I get to know the other side… it teaches you and gives you coexistence.”[83] Bekerman notes that many students view the school as a haven, and a place where coexistence is real; “Because we have the school… it is to prove Jews and Arabs can live together.” The students view the school as an example of “how things should be… the school is an example that we can live together,” “We all play together, we are all friends.” They themselves view the schools as a place of educating for peace: “[The school] is the place where we get to know each other as a way of finding solutions to the problems in Israel.”[84]

Conclusions

> “Neuroscience is beginning to detect subtle differences in the human brain related to how people think, feel, and empathize with others according to the languages they speak… Becoming proficient in another language brings about, in Dewey's words, the ‘expansion of our own being’ that makes cross−cultural empathy possible. We posit that becoming multilingual, in turn, enables a person to empathize with multiple linguistic and cultural perspectives and begin to triangulate metalevel linguistic and cultural awareness, a key element of what may be called ‘Global Ethics’”
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> — Kung, 1993

As Bekerman and others rightly suggest, more research is needed to track the long-term effects of these findings, but the initial research on immediate changes in behavior and capacity for taking the perspective of the other are abundant. Bekerman laments, among other things, that numerous studies about intergroup contact have tried to assess its effectiveness by focusing on

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[83] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 172.

[84] Zvi Bekerman, *(* 2016), 172.

attitudinal change, but that among these is limited data regarding sustained contact over a longer period of time.[85] When Bekerman laments that though the children seem poised to see a future differently, he is not sure that the adults are ready, I urge him to remember that these children will soon enough be the adults.

Zvi Bekerman's extensive research shows promise for using bilingual and multicultural education as a vehicle for teaching perspective-taking skills and empathetic responses, which are the foundations for communities of peace. Although these schools might never directly change the political reality, for all the reasons that Bekerman so carefully articulates, these schools do play an important role. These schools are training grounds for developing the perspective-taking skills and empathetic inference that makes dialogue between opposing groups possible and gives it the potential to succeed.

The value of bilingual education goes far beyond the benefits of dual language learning and can be recognized as a tool for fostering understanding and building bridges across culture and language boundaries. Bilingual education, like multicultural education, has been shown to help students overcome societal and cultural tensions.[86] To communicate effectively with others requires other perspectives on the world. To help the other, one must empathize with his or her meanings, and shared language provides a means of doing so. The bilingual experience can train the mind in the habit of perspective-taking, which enhances empathy. Bilingual schools then become places of perspective-taking habit formation. A shared world of space and time in the

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[85] Zvi Bekerman, *The Promise of Integrated Multicultural and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

[86] R. E. Slavin & R. Cooper, "Improving intergroup relations: Lessons learned from cooperative learning programs," *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 4 (1999): 647–663.

bilingual classroom fosters an empathic grasp of the other's meanings in an everyday experience, and from there, of their worlds.

Here I return to my original question: Can bilingual schools in conflict regions cultivate perspective-taking and empathy among students, and is this a sufficient goal in and of itself, with implications for socio-political change? Bekerman's research demonstrates that the schools are achieving this goal. These schools do create habits of perspective-taking among students in the bilingual classrooms, a precursor to empathy, which is a necessary foundation for social change. Through their shared experience students in these bilingual environments have the possibility to consciously direct their perspective and their conversations, choosing where their attention goes in the classroom and beyond. In light of Bekerman's work and the larger project of conflict resolution, further studies on the long-term impact of these skills on students' perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict at large and on their cultural perspectives would be useful. However, I conclude that the continued existence of the schools themselves is a worthwhile accomplishment. The bilingual schools of Bekerman's study are cultivating tools of perspective-taking and empathy, tools that can potentially contribute to socio-political change and aid in resolving regional conflict. Although a culture of shared bilingualism will not necessarily change the national culture and national dialogue on its own, it remains an important opportunity to promote such change.

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