

## **Making school a place where pupils come happily**

Ministry of Education, Society and Youth Authority  
Unit for Implementation of the Pupils' Rights Law

### **Speech for the annual conference of the Israel Association of Educational Counselors**

"The period of childhood should be respected just as other periods in man's life are respected and equal rights should be afforded to the child in everything to do with his affairs..." (Korczak)

### **How do we bring the school closer to the spirit of our pupils?**

### **How do we make school a place where pupils come happily, out of choice?**

We hear about dissatisfaction with school from pupils and parents, who want to find a home at school...

It is our duty to foster the school as a house of learning – a place where the pupil's personality is nurtured through a connection to his roots, to the best of his heritage and culture, with what is unique in the personality of each and every one of them, and with the essence of democratic citizenship.

The ultimate goals of the house of learning will be cultural formation, autonomy of thought and personal authenticity, the development of a code of ethics that will enable pupils to be young citizens who are realizing their legitimate rights.

In every educational institution there must be agreement that the school should act as a microcosm of society that creates respect in practice for different social behaviors:

Freedom of thought and expression;

Freedom of expression will allow them to express themselves, to participate and to influence their lives;

It is the right of pupils to have an influence – it is the responsibility of the listeners to relate to what they say;

Maintaining processes of clarification and participation inside and outside school;

Pupils' right to elect and be elected;

Recognition of all people as being equal – education in preserving the rights of others;

The right to privacy;

The right to information, and so forth.

One of the strongest incentives for a discussion of the status of children in school comes from the understanding that we are supposed to be moving from the protection of children in school to a process of education to prevent harm to the dignity of these young people, in the understanding that they are people of equal worth, although smaller in size: young people who should be loved, listened to, given a platform for dialogue and debate.

Their opinions should be taken into account, things and events should be explained to them at their level, we should be with them and not against them or alongside them, to give them the feeling of a supportive home.

The education system today is discussing some of the issues relating to children's rights, especially the right to handling of a complaint. I suggest that a preventive system be set up that should take place on the way to shaping a school culture respecting people of all ages by means of a dialogue and consensus among all those attending the school.

The recurring claims include:

Why do children still feel that they are being unjustly treated?

Why do children draw back from their teacher?

Why do children repeat the teacher's words without expressing their own opinion?

Why are children with learning disabilities examined during recess...?

Why do children not really like going to school?

### **Did we like it?**

Director General's Circulars answer some of the children's needs: the Director General has instructed that consideration be given to different learners, with different ways of teaching;

Certain allowances are made in the matriculation exams;

The number of exams in one week is limited;

A second examination date has been added for matriculation exams in mathematics and English;

There is a commitment to setting up a student council, stipulated in the Student Rights Law;

Pupils have the right to be heard in placement committees and the appeals committee;

Pupils can only be suspended after the individual and his or her parents have been given the chance to state their claims, and so forth.

Every individual in the school has the right to a fair process and mutual respect. Respect for people should be the starting point in pupil-teacher relations. For example:

Schools should hold platforms for discussion;

Dialogue should be encouraged;

Pupils should not be insulted and physical punishment should be avoided;

Grades are not to be lowered because of inappropriate behavior;

Pupils should not be discriminated against for reasons of ethnic group, religion, economic status, and the like;

Pupils have the right to have teaching methods and exams reflect the differences between them, as well as alternative methods of evaluation;

We must recognize the culture of the different sectors of Israeli society, respect them and develop in them life skills with which they can march forwards.

Fair procedures will encourage pupils to take responsibility at the personal and social level.

Conditions for their existence:

First – **information must be available** relating to or influencing the pupil and his or her parents. They have the right to know about the different units in the ministry supporting the individual, to know what are the pupil's rights, worded so that it is understandable to all ages and in all languages. The second condition is that they should know that they will be **partners in processes relating to their lives** in school and will experience the school as a house of learning – an experience which will foster their personality and faith, with our support:

Human warmth;

A feeling of home;

Attention to emotional welfare: attention to emotional, intra-personal intelligence and interpersonal communication.

When we undertake to foster teaching strategies in the spirit of multiple intelligences, we emphasize acceptance of what is different while fostering the other, in a manner appropriate to differing needs. **Only when children feel that their opinion is important and is taken into account by adults and by their peers** will they acquire the ability and the desire to listen to and value the words of others.

We are responsible for teaching them how to create platforms for discussion, to develop debating skills, manners and customs characteristic of Israeli and global culture – in order to **know how to give and receive fair treatment and respect from all people, everywhere.**

Reinforcing the pupils empowers trust in the teacher, not only as an assistant in learning and as part of the learner's training for the future, but also as one who contributes to shaping the image of the pupil as a person with capabilities and unique attributes that will enable him to cope in the future with his liberties.

Herein lies the **value of respect for man and his liberties**, which is the true basis of dialogue with the pupils.

The rights of pupils are mostly to be found in Director General's Circulars. Realization of these rights, therefore, lies in the **responsibility of the schools** to guarantee to the pupils to go from protecting their rights to their civil place as holders of rights.

Our responsibility towards the child's liberty is in fact a responsibility to the pupil's responsibility.

The pupil who lives within the circle of responsibility created at a meeting with attentive adults uses the boundaries of the circle as a kind of support enabling him to expand his dialogue and his liberty. The appropriate word in English for this expansion is 'mastering': this is the circle of structure, the circle of control, the circle of attention, the circle of significance. A circle within which the child can be happy and can smile. And hence **our responsibility to the responsibility of his smile.**

**Written in English by Tova Ben-Ari (2002)**

**email: [I-d@zahav.net.il](mailto:I-d@zahav.net.il)**

Accompanying material:

1. Short animated film – The freedom of responsibility
2. Short film – the Dyslexic Education System – written and directed by Ben Vischlitzky as part of 5 study units for matriculation in film.