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FIFI THE PUNISHING CAT AND OTHER CIVIC LESSONS FROM A LEBANESE PUBLIC KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL

THEA RENDA ABU EL-HAJ, GARENE KALOUSTIAN, SALLY WESLEY BONET,
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ABSTRACT

Across the world, education is tasked with rebuilding societies torn apart by violent conflict and riven by economic injustice. In this article, we focus on kindergarten education in the vulnerable, conflict-ridden Lebanese context. However, rather than analyzing the academic learning offered to the children, we consider the affective civic education they are getting through the everyday practices in their classrooms and schools and explore their agency within this social world. By affective civic education we mean the ways that children, even those as young as three to five, are developing embodied messages about their public place as citizen-subjects: about belonging and/or exclusion; about how they are expected to relate to power and authority; and about how to act within and on their social world. Thus, we analyze how children are educated into the affective, lived dimensions of citizenship and belonging.

INTRODUCTION

It's late October 2015. I (Abu El-Haj) am balanced on a tiny red chair in a small, crowded kindergarten classroom in a public school in Beirut, which our research team has dubbed Amal Al-Bilad, or "hope of the nation." On this day, my eye is repeatedly drawn to one of 26 children, a Palestinian boy I call Malik, who is a recent arrival from a Palestinian refugee camp in the Syrian capital of Damascus.¹ This child of generational displacements is nothing if not a symbol for what psychologists like to call resilience. With a smile that spans his entire face and

¹ All names have been changed for confidentiality.

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huge black eyes that see everything, Malik participates passionately in every classroom routine, every morning's repetitive recitation of the days of the week and the months of the year, every song, belted out with gusto. Less than one month into his first-ever year of school, Malik is already participating in literacy practices in two languages. One of the languages is English, which neither he nor his classmates hear outside of their daily lessons. When I return to visit months after my October trip, Malik is right by my side making sure I know what is going on. He never misses a beat; he meets the rote, monotonous routines of each school day that leave many children distracted, bored, or angry with enthusiasm and zest. Unfortunately, Malik's enthusiasm for the classroom and for learning goes, for the most part, unrecognized. In the context of this overcrowded classroom with one teacher and a scripted, fast-paced academic curriculum, he is frequently disciplined and yelled at for all kinds of behaviors: calling out answers, moving around in his seat, talking and playing with his peers.

In many ways, Malik and his peers are the poster children driving international educational policy-making in general and early childhood education in particular. Across the world, education is tasked with rebuilding societies torn apart by violent conflict and riven by economic injustice. In this article, we focus on kindergarten education in the vulnerable, conflict-ridden Lebanese context. However, rather than analyzing the academic learning offered to the children, we consider the embedded, affective civic education they are getting through the everyday practices of their classrooms and schools. We also explore children's agency in this social world. We show how, well before they are taught a formal civic education curriculum, children as young as three to five years of age are learning affective civic lessons about their public place as citizen-subjects: about belonging and/or exclusion; about how they are expected to relate to power and authority; and about how to act within and on their social world. Thus, we analyze how even very young children are educated into the affective, lived dimensions of citizenship and belonging—dimensions that have been shown to affect youths' civic and political perspective and practices (Abu El-Haj 2015; Levinson 2012; Rubin 2007).

We ask these questions relative to the most vulnerable children in Lebanon—Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian children who face daily the insecurities of poverty, displacement, and political violence. We draw on longitudinal ethnographic research conducted in one public early childhood school to illuminate critical disjunctures between the optimistic goals of official policy in emergency and (post)conflict contexts that emphasize education for the development of social cohesion and active citizenship for all, and the embedded, affective civic lessons

that children as young as kindergarten age are being taught through the quotidian practices of classroom routines and curriculum. We show how these everyday practices educated children into marginalized civic positions by emphasizing obedience to external authority (including authority over knowledge) and creating shame around their poverty. However, we also show that young children do not simply adopt the expected affective registers. They play with, make fun of, and at times actively reject rigid authority. We conclude by arguing that analyzing the inherent civic education embedded in all early childhood classrooms is critical to understanding education in contexts riven by historic and contemporary conflict. Moreover, in concert with critical early childhood scholars, we conceptualize the importance of play as necessary space within which children do civic action.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL CONCERNS

EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

The burgeoning research literature on education in emergencies is one lens that frames our understanding of the relationship between current educational reform efforts in Lebanon and its recent civil war, cycles of ongoing conflict, and the influx of a large number of Syrian refugees. Traced to a relatively new commitment on the part of humanitarian organizations, there is growing consensus about the imperative and benefits of centering on educational access and quality as key components of responses to conflict and humanitarian crises (Burde et al. 2017; Cahill 2010; Davies and Talbot 2008; Kirk and Cassity 2007; Tawil and Harley 2004). These components are outlined in the Minimum Standards of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2010).

Scholars in the field of education in emergencies have described the short- and long-term benefits of schooling for children living in areas affected by disaster and conflict, including providing them with a sense of normalcy and a nurturing environment; assisting them with socialization; helping them to cope with trauma; and creating hope for a better future (Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003; Martone 2007; Winthrop and Kirk 2008). Research also implies that education is particularly important for children who have been affected by violent conflict (Boothby 2008; Boothby, Crawford, and Halperin 2006). Although there is good reason to support a commitment to increasing access to and the quality of education for children and youth living in conflict-affected regions, Burde and her colleagues' (2017) recent comprehensive review of the literature illustrates that the picture is more complex than that and that more research is needed along several dimensions.

For our purposes in this article, there are two dimensions of particular import to the Lebanese context.

First, there is the critical question of the relationship between access to education and conflict. Research has shown that a lack of or unequal access to education, as well as education that is segregated along sectarian, ethnic, or ideological lines, can contribute to conflict (Davies 2006; Kirk 2011; Salmon 2004). This was certainly the case in Lebanon, where, prior to the Lebanese Civil War, education, like other aspects of the country's society and political system, was largely separated along confessional and national (Lebanese and Palestinian) lines (Farha 2012). Educational achievement was also stratified along sectarian lines—divisions that also reflected different economic levels. Without claiming a causal link between inequitable educational access and (educational) opportunities, educational disparities at the very least reflected the injustices that tore the country apart for 15 years. In the aftermath of the civil war, access to equal educational opportunity became a key component of the Lebanese recovery efforts, including government support for developing a strong public education system in the ensuing years (Abou Assali 2012; Farha 2012; Frayha 2012; Shuayb 2012). Although support for public education declined in the late 1990s at the same time the system of private schools grew (Farha 2012), in the past decade the commitment to public education was reinvigorated by an infusion of external funding from the European Union, World Bank, USAID, and United Nations agencies. One force behind the support that foreign states and supranational organizations have given to educational reform in Lebanon developed in the aftermath of 9/11, within problematic securitization discourses that focus on education as a means to bolster “fragile” or “failing” states (Burde et al. 2017; Menashy and Dryden-Peterson 2015).

The second dimension of education in emergencies that is particularly relevant to the Lebanese context is the relationship between specific educational practices and conflict. The research literature on education in emergencies suggests that curriculum content and pedagogical practices in classrooms and schools may contribute to social division and exclusion, but that they also have the potential to mitigate intergroup conflict (Burde et al. 2017). In postconflict states, the question of how to repair the social divisions that predate and are exacerbated by the wounds of war is often viewed, in large part, as an educational endeavor (Freedman et al. 2008; Levine and Bishai 2010; Quaynor 2011; Rubin 2016; Tawil and Harley 2004). Within the school context, this task of bringing together a populace divided by war is typically relegated to formal citizenship education. While there is some positive evidence about the impact of peace education and critical approaches to the teaching of history for students from diverse communities (Bajaj

and Hantzopoulos 2016; Burde et al. 2017), research continues to demonstrate the complexity and contradictions of leveraging formal education as a means to promote peace and justice across social groups (see, for example, Murphy, Pettis, and Wray 2016; Freedman et al. 2008; Rubin 2016). In the aftermath of the civil war, Lebanon committed to creating a new curriculum to promote social cohesion, not only by increasing access to education but also through developing citizenship education to promote national unity. Unfortunately, the efforts to recraft citizenship education in the service of social cohesion has proven an elusive goal (Akar 2012; Bahou 2015; Shuayb 2012). The goals of reimagining citizenship education for social cohesion are undercut by several factors, including a school system that remains largely informally segregated by sect because of both residential patterns and large numbers of sectarian private schools, but also by educational practices that cling to didactic and authoritarian pedagogies that do not encourage students to develop the critical skills needed to challenge social divisions.²

Our research is informed by and, in turn, makes a distinct contribution to the literature on education in emergencies by analyzing through longitudinal ethnographic work how, in response to repeated cycles of violent conflict, Lebanon's efforts to reform education in state schools unfolded in real time, on the ground, in one school.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Over the past few decades, there has been increasing international attention given to the critical importance of early childhood education as a foundational component of child welfare, particularly in contexts of poverty, conflict, and crisis (OECD 2015). The primary research on early childhood education has been forward-looking, evaluated in relation to school readiness and to future academic and even economic success (Barnett 2008). Research has shown that high-quality early childhood education takes an integrated approach to children's cognitive and social development (Sheridan et al. 2009; Pramling and Samuelsson 2011), which have been shown to contribute to improved social behaviors and emotional wellbeing, as well as cognitive learning (Burchinal et al. 2000; Curby, Grimm, and Pianta 2010). Children who enter elementary school with positive profiles of social-emotional development have been shown to succeed both academically and socially (Birch and Ladd 1997; Howes and Smith 1995; Ladd, Birch, and

² Although it is beyond the scope of this article, we want to note our agreement with Shuayb's (2012) critique of the normative definitions of social cohesion that tend to promote neoliberal educational agendas that fail to redress deeper structural inequalities at the root of the civil conflict.

Buhs 1999). However, despite these findings about the importance of attending to young children’s social and emotional development, the entrenched approach to early childhood public education in Lebanon is predominantly academic and oriented toward providing equal educational opportunity in the hopes of building a bright economic future for all children. In this article, we do not consider early childhood education as a future-looking enterprise (see also, Adair, Colegrove, and McManus 2017); rather, as we argue next, we attend to early childhood education as an inherent civic education.

EDUCATING “CITIZENS”

We frame our understanding of citizenship and civic education within an anthropological perspective that focuses on the everyday experiences through which individuals develop a sense of belonging, as well as civic and political identities and practices (Abu El-Haj 2015; Bonet 2018; Levinson 2012; Rubin 2007). Citizenship, as lived experience, entails much more than one’s juridical status. It references the ways that, amid unequal social structures, individuals and their communities are differentially positioned to access rights, experience a sense of belonging, and engage in civic and political life. This perspective illuminates the fact that a large part of civic education happens outside the formal content, and context, of schooling—for example, in public spaces where experiences with civic and political institutions shape people’s civic understanding, identities, and practices (Abu El-Haj 2015; Rubin 2007). Much recent research has documented the fact that, in societies with deep structural inequality, young people from differentially positioned communities are educated to have very different kinds of relationships with civic and political life through their everyday experiences in their schools and communities (Abu El-Haj 2015; Dyrness 2012; Levinson 2012; Rubin 2007). Critically, these experiences entail affective dimensions through which individuals embody understandings of public life and their place within in it. Developing a sense of belonging or exclusion, empowerment or disempowerment, trust or distrust in relation to one’s social environment all affect how young people grow up to act within and on the civic and political spheres.

In concert with a small group of early childhood researchers (Adair et al. 2016; Nicholson, Shimpi, and Rabin 2014; Subramanian 2015), we explore kindergarten as a public space within which children are not only developing as individuals but also experiencing civic life and doing civic action. Adair and her colleagues focus on the collective action of children, specifically on their play, “not [as] the development of civic action, but the actual doing of civic action” (Adair et al. 2016, 2). Civic action, they suggest, includes “compromising, making collective

decisions, identifying as a group, welcoming diversity, and sharing concern” (2). Adair and her colleagues document the civic actions that children create on their own terms through play and show how the institutional space of classrooms affords or constrains these actions. In this article, we have a different primary focus in relation to the institutional spaces in which the children at Amal Al-Bilad spend their day. We turn our attention primarily to the curricular and pedagogical practices children encounter, and explore classrooms as sites that produce embodied, affective experiences of civic life. We analyze the everyday civic education, hidden in plain sight, through which children are learning their “place” in society.

THE LEBANESE CONTEXT

A small country, Lebanon is continually rocked by political crises and war. The country has never completely recovered from a civil war that began in 1975 and ended in 1990 with the Taif Agreement (signed in 1989). A nearly 20-year Israeli occupation of southern part of Lebanon ended in 2000; however, Israeli aggression continued, and an invasion by Israeli forces in 2006 resulted in massive carnage and a crippled infrastructure. The Lebanese government also faces continual challenges to its stability, perhaps the most dramatic being the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. This led to large demonstrations that ended with the withdrawal of the Syrian army, which had been in Lebanon since 1976.³ Since 1948, a large Palestinian population has remained in Lebanon, stateless and without basic rights, including citizenship and, until very recently, the right to work in most jobs. Since 2011, the civil war in Syria has overwhelmed Lebanon’s fragile public sector with nearly 980,000 registered Syrian refugees and an estimated 200,000 unregistered (approximately 20 percent of Lebanon’s population, UNHCR, 2018c), giving Lebanon the highest per-capita proportion of refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2018a). This puts immense pressure on all of Lebanon’s state institutions, including its public schools.

³ The Syrian army came to Lebanon in 1976 as part of a pan-Arab peacekeeping force in order to separate tensions between the belligerents of the Lebanese Civil War (i.e., PLO, Lebanese Leftist movement and the Lebanese Front). All of the Arab contingents withdrew with the exception of the Syrian army. Ever since, Syria has had a prominent role in Lebanon, one that became even more apparent following the Taif Agreement in 1989. Syria had the first and final word in Lebanese politics, including extending the term served by two presidents through the amendment of the Lebanese Constitution. In September 2014, Syria forced an extension of the term of President Lahoud against the will of most of the political actors. As a result, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1559 in which all foreign forces were requested to leave Lebanon, which served as a clear message to Syria. In February 2015, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, a large portion of the Lebanese population accused Syria and organized massive demonstrations against the Syrian military presence in Lebanon. This led to a final withdrawal of the Syrian troops in April 2005.

This is the precarious context within which educational policy-making seeks to strengthen public-sector schools. Public schools in Lebanon serve only about 30 percent of school-age children (Center for Educational Research and Development 2017), who are the most economically vulnerable (Bahou 2015; Maadad and Rodwell 2017). The majority of children in Lebanon attend private schools, some of which are subsidized by charitable (often sectarian) institutions. A little over half of the Syrian refugee children aged 6-14 attend Lebanese public schools (UNHCR 2018b).

Educational policy discourse in Lebanon, which echoes the internationalist aims for education in postconflict societies, reverberates with lofty goals for individual students and for the country, including a reinvigorated public school system that will create citizens empowered to participate on an equal footing in the economic, civic, and political realms of the state. Lebanon's commitment to education as a key institution for rebuilding the nation's war-torn fabric is reflected in myriad documents, including the Taif Agreement, which emphasized the role of schools in promoting social cohesion (Shuayb 2012, 2015); in curricular initiatives drafted by Lebanon's Ministry of Education and Higher Education in 1997, that were aimed at fostering a nonsectarian, Lebanese Arab national identity through a national civics curriculum (Akar 2012); and in recent reform initiatives, such as the 2007 National Education Strategy (NES) and its latest iteration, the 2015 Reaching All Children through Education, which promise to deliver quality education to public school students at all levels (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2017).

The NES promised a reformed public education delivered "on the basis of equal opportunity"—its first principle—and aimed at creating social integration and active citizens—its third principle. Moreover, the NES identified early childhood education as a key intervention in its overall educational reform strategy. At the kindergarten level, the principle of equal opportunity for all translated into a new bilingual, academically focused curriculum that offered children from low socioeconomic backgrounds the same rich bilingual literacy program to which their wealthier peers had access. As we illustrate below, this academic focus structured almost all of the daily routines and interactions that took place in the classrooms, crowding out attention to the social and emotional development of young children that is central to the standards and goals of quality early childhood education.

RESEARCH METHODS, CONTEXT, AND ANALYSIS

Our research project grew from questions and concerns that Kaloustian, a Lebanese citizen and a professor at a university in Beirut, developed as she conducted a study in 2012 that examined the overall quality of the early childhood learning environment in 15 public kindergarten schools serving three- to five-year-olds across all the governorates in Lebanon. This research coincided with the mass migration of Syrian families, which exacerbated the existing problems of overcrowded public kindergartens already struggling to provide high-quality programs. Kaloustian employed two assessment tools in her research: the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised, which evaluates the overall quality of the learning environment, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, which analyzes the quality of teacher-student interactions. Her findings consistently yielded low scores on the overall quality of the early learning environment on both scales. In a second study, conducted in 2017, Kaloustian found similar outcomes in 68 representative schools across the country. Kaloustian's 2012 research showed that, across all schools, academic learning takes precedence over the social and emotional dimensions of early childhood education. It also revealed the huge demands placed on preschool children's structured academic performance, rather than giving value to play as part of their learning experience.

As a means of understanding further what it meant for the most vulnerable children in Lebanon to be educated in contexts that did not attend to their social and emotional development, particularly those fleeing the civil war in Syria, Kaloustian reached out to Abu El-Haj (a U.S.-based Palestinian American professor who grew up in Lebanon and other areas of the Middle East) and Bonet (an Egyptian American graduate student at the start of the project, who grew up mostly in Cairo), both ethnographers, to design a collaborative project. We set out to document and analyze in careful detail over time the everyday realities of classroom practice for the children and their teachers in a typical public school, our aim being to shed light on what happens as optimistic policy reforms actually unfold on the ground. Moreover, given the Lebanese (post)conflict context in general and the Syrian refugee crisis in particular, we decided that one of our key foci would be the implicit civic education the children were receiving—that is, the affective dimensions of citizenship. Because Lebanon decided to create double-shift schools that isolate Syrian children from their Lebanese peers beginning in first grade, kindergarten remains the one integrated space within public education, and as such is an important site within which to ask questions about citizenship and belonging.

We conducted our research at Amal Al-Bilad, a public coeducational kindergarten school.⁴ Located in the southern section of the city, the school draws children from the surrounding neighborhood, a predominantly Muslim area that includes both Sunni and Shi'a communities. The school is also in the vicinity of Palestinian refugee camps, but the vast majority of Palestinian children registered as refugees in Lebanon attend UNRWA schools. According to the principal, the few Palestinians that did attend Amal Al-Bilad went back into the UNRWA schools upon the arrival of the Syrian refugees. The Syrian civil war led to a large enrollment of refugee children, including Palestinian refugees from Syria, that ranged from 30 percent to 50 percent of the schools' population, depending on the year. In addition, and again with some variation from year to year, approximately 25 percent of the Lebanese students live in a nearby charitable institution because their parents cannot afford their upkeep. The children live there during the school week, receiving regular meals, health care, and education; the majority return to their families on the weekends.

Amal Al-Bilad, like other public schools, primarily serves children whose families live in poverty and are unable to afford the fees for private institutions. Although school-level poverty statistics are unavailable, according to a recent report by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2017), 28 percent of the Lebanese population lives under the poverty line, as do 49 percent of the refugees residing in Lebanon. Families of the children at Amal Al-Bilad tend to work in low-income service jobs at such places as local bakeries and the racetrack, or as delivery drivers; many hold several jobs to make ends meet. As a public kindergarten school, Amal Al-Bilad is tasked with the care of 300 (plus or minus in any given year) three-, four-, and five-year-old children whose lives are severely circumscribed by the fallout of wars, political conflicts, and the social and economic injustices that characterize vulnerable states like Lebanon. It is critical to note that, because of the Lebanese government's decision to create second-shift schools for Syrian refugee children's primary and secondary education, and because Palestinian refugee children who have historically resided in Lebanon have been largely segregated in UNRWA schools, Amal Al-Bilad offers a rare look into a public education system that serves children across national groups.

⁴ In general, there were few distinctions between the education of boys and girls. An analysis of the occasions in which subtle social distinctions were made, such as the use of pink or blue hand towels, is beyond the scope of this article.

We chose Amal Al-Bilad as our focal school for two primary reasons. Kaloustian's initial 2012 study illustrated that the school was representative of kindergartens across Lebanon in critical relevant dimensions: the population of children it served, the characteristics of its teaching force, and its curriculum and pedagogy.⁵ However, it also was one of a few and one of the largest kindergarten-only schools in Beirut, and as such we were able to conduct participant observation across many classrooms. Amal Al-Bilad has a total of 13 classrooms, including three KG1s (for 3-year-olds), five KG2s (for 4-year-olds), and five KG3s (for 5-year-olds). The school year generally runs from mid-September until mid-May, and schools are open Monday through Thursday, and on Saturday from 8 A.M. to 1 P.M.⁶

In Lebanon, teachers in the early childhood classrooms come from a range of educational backgrounds, typically holding bachelor's degrees from the Lebanese University or teaching diplomas from the Dar al-Mu'alemeen (Teachers' Academy) or smaller technical institutes. Teachers' jobs are either contractual or tenured. Of all early childhood teachers around the country, 85 percent are contractual, which means they are paid per teaching session; if they miss a day they do not get paid. Salaries are dispersed twice per year. Contractual teachers get paid \$12 U.S. per class session and average \$1200 U.S. per month. Tenured teachers get paid around \$1600 U.S. per month. Unlike the contractual teachers, tenured teachers get paid every month, even if they miss days of work. With the exception of the tenured principal, all of Amal Al-Bilad's teachers are contractual and they are quite experienced: all the KG2 and KG3 teachers have worked at the school ten or more years, and all the KG1 teachers have at least five years in the system. Moreover, of the seven teachers whose classes we attended regularly, four held a bachelor's degree in psychology or early childhood education, and one held a master's degree in sociology.

We engaged in ethnographic research at Amal Al-Bilad from May 2014 to May 2017, simultaneously conducting interviews with a broad range of people—ministry officials, principals at other schools, curriculum writers, professional development team members—and collecting documents—official curriculum, assessments of the reform efforts, and so forth. We conducted an initial set of

5 Although the school does not serve children with physical or low-incidence disabilities, it does officially claim an inclusion model for children with diverse learning needs. Unfortunately, the school has no resources to identify these children or to differentiate instruction, and inclusion thus is a source of conflict between the principal's commitment to inclusion and her teachers, who feel unable to support the learning needs of all the children in their classrooms.

6 In 2015-2016, the demand for early childhood education among Syrian refugees had grown to such a degree that the ministry of education created a second shift that ran from 1:30-6 pm, but it served only Syrian children. We have been unsuccessful as yet in gaining permission to observe this second school shift, due to the principal's concerns about the quality of education delivered.

interviews and one day of observation in May 2014. In March 2015, Abu El-Haj and Bonet made a second trip to Beirut, during which time they, Kaloustian, and her team of three Lebanese graduate assistants, began five full days of intensive participant observation at the school. Beginning with this visit and continuing through May 2017, our local team (Kaloustian, Chatila, and two other graduate assistants) conducted twice-weekly observations in the classrooms of seven teachers in the school for approximately 12 weeks of each school year. Abu El-Haj and Bonet made subsequent one- to two-week visits to collect data during those years; during those trips, they and other members of the team conducted full days of participant observation. As ethnographers, our observations were focused on capturing all aspects of classroom life in vivid detail, including the physical and emotional environment, particulars of lessons conducted, specific dialogue and interactions between teachers and students, and between students and students, and so forth. At different points in the research process, we focused on particular questions that emerged from the iterative data analysis; for example, we paid close attention to the specific mechanisms through which teachers asserted authority, the messages children were receiving about poverty, and so forth. We also chose focal students from a range of positions in their classrooms, such as children from institutions, teachers' classroom favorites, "troublemakers," etc.

Throughout the data-collection process, both the Beirut and the U.S.-based research teams conducted preliminary data analysis, which we used to inform future data collection in an iterative fashion. In the spring of 2017, we analyzed our completed dataset and generated codes through an iterative process. We used the collaboration-enhancing web application Dedoose to organize our large dataset and code data; most data were coded by two team members. We held regular team meetings via Skype to discuss emerging themes, refine codes, and collectively analyze data as we developed our findings. In this article, we share the data that pertain to the theme of civic education.

EVERYDAY CIVIC EDUCATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Although the new educational reform policy in Lebanon calls for active citizenship as one of its critical goals, our analysis shows that the kindergarten children were being schooled into a very different kind of embodied citizenship. Rather than learning, for example, how to ask questions, negotiate with others, share in collective endeavors, and develop a sense of belonging and inclusion—all critical components of engaged civic practice—these children were being educated into affective regimes of absolute obedience to authority and shame about their social

position as children living in poverty. In what follows, we show first how children's relationship to authority was created through three mechanisms: mundane official classroom routines and a scripted curriculum; denial of children's knowledge about the world; and an affective climate of fear and punishment for deviations from the demands of authority. We then turn our attention to the constant messages of shame they were getting about their social position. Finally, we illustrate briefly the ways that some children disrupted the embedded civic education on offer to them.

While our descriptions reflect the curriculum, routines, and affective climate that were pervasive across all of the classrooms we observed, we offer a word of caution against reading our observations as evidence of incompetent, uncaring, or even cruel teachers. In fact, we found the teachers on the whole to be extremely committed to the children and their jobs. They were faithfully delivering the scripted curriculum and following classroom-management practices as they had been taught to do. Moreover, while the screaming, fear, and shame used as disciplinary tools were endemic across the school, we also saw more loving interactions throughout our time there. We saw teachers share their snacks with children who did not have one, and we saw moments of intimacy and care, like hugging children as they entered the classroom, comforting students when they got hurt on the playground, remarking on a new article of clothing, a haircut or hairstyle, and giving children compliments. Thus, while we focus here on the overwhelming trends across all classrooms, we caution against reading this as a condemnation of the teachers. We take up the implications for teacher education in our discussion section.

RELATIONSHIPS TO AUTHORITY

CLASSROOM ROUTINES AND CURRICULUM: CHANTING, SILENCE, STILLNESS, AND WORK

Arabic class in Ms. Rasha's KG 3. It's first thing on a March morning and the children are seated quietly around their round tables. Ms. Rasha, walks to the back of the classroom, points to the weather bulletin board and asks the children, (in Arabic) "What is the weather today?" They all say in unison. "Rainy" (mumtir). Then the teacher asks them, "What else?" Some children say, "Cloudy" (gha'im). Then the teacher asks, "What else?" and the children say, "Cold" (barrid). She tells them they did a good job, and then asks them to recite the days of the week. Most of the children recite the wrong day of the week. The teacher

then says, “OK, well let’s sing the days of the week.” The children begin singing the days of the week. Many of them sing them incorrectly, so the teacher leads them in a second round of the song, and sings it with them a third time. The teacher then asks how many months there are in the year, and some children call out “Five!” and others call out “Seven”, and one child, a small girl with pigtails calls out “Twelve!” The teacher says, “Yes, there are twelve months. What are the names of the months?” The children start reciting the months of the year as the teacher points to the names of the month on the bulletin board. Then the teacher asks, “What was the date yesterday?” The children start calling out all sorts of numbers “17!” “11!” “15!” and then the teacher says, “Friday was the 20th. So what is today?” The children again begin calling out random numbers, but one child says, “21!” The teacher says, “Yes, 21. Today is Saturday, 21 of Athar (March, in Arabic).” Then the teacher holds up some flash cards of numbers and the children begin reading the numbers she holds.

In every class we observed, twice a day, once in English and once in Arabic, the children at Amal Al-Bilad recited a version of the routine as observed here by Bonet. And, as was the case on this day in March, when the routines were quite familiar to all, a few of the children could correctly perform the expected recitation but most could not. No matter the children’s level of understanding (about the order of the days of the week, months of the year, date, or weather), the lessons went on.

This daily ritual—one found in many preschools across the world—was immediately followed by an Arabic or English literacy and numeracy lesson. Children spent two hours a day in Arabic class and another two in English class (or, in two cases, French class⁷) being instructed in how to read and write in two languages. Except for the opening ritual chants and the occasions when a few children were called to the board to demonstrate some aspect of the lesson, students were expected to sit silently while listening to the teacher deliver the curriculum. Each formal lesson was followed by a writing activity, also expected to be conducted in silence. New material was introduced each day, as dictated by the official curriculum. A few children appeared to follow along with the content delivered, but the majority had little or no idea what was happening. Our field notes reflect the strict adherence to the curricular texts; from one year to the next,

7 For the sake of ethnographic immersion, we did not observe the French section.

the same lessons appear in our notes during the same weeks. No matter who the children were in any given year or any given class, the curriculum marched on.

Between the morning Arabic or English lessons, the children had a break that lasted around half an hour, during which time they were expected to eat a snack silently at their tables, taking care not to drop any crumbs on the floor. When the weather permitted, children who finished their snack could walk around, but not run or play, on the small balconies attached to each classroom while they waited to line up for a brief recess in the school gym. Each recess period saw half of the school's students (i.e., there were two shifts) running and screaming wildly around a gym that was devoid of any play equipment. This was the only time of the day the children were free from the demand to be silent and work. It was a period of playful abandon, but also of much conflict among the children.

Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, these young children were asked to sit straight in their chairs, chant (or pretend to chant) rote lists, and to keep their eyes on the board while the teacher was instructing them (whether or not they could understand what she was saying). Children were expected to perform whatever the teacher demanded. Like puppets controlled by the puppetmaster, they were to be silent or to speak on command, to absorb “lessons” and not ask questions, and to control their bodies at all times. Many “failed” at this performance, but nevertheless the official curriculum taught young children to embody a particular relationship to institutional authority—one that demands strict obedience to the regime, no questions asked, no understanding required.

DENIAL OF WHAT CHILDREN KNOW

We observed again and again the ways these children were being implicitly taught to distrust their own knowledge and authority. In one typical example, Ms. Nada, an English teacher, gathered the class around her on the carpet and took out a picture book. She held up the closed book and pointed to the picture of a turtle on the cover. One child said in Arabic, “*Biyimshi ‘al-ard*” (“It walks on the ground”)—a reflection of the English lesson they had just finished in which the teacher had been telling them that airplanes “fly in the air” and cars “ride on the road.” Ms. Nada responded in English, “No, it is the cover.” Next she opened the book to the title page that showed a picture of a duck and asked the children, “What is this?” Immediately another boy called out in Arabic, “*battuta*” (“little duck”). “No,” said Ms. Nada, “This is the image.” These two examples illustrate moments in which the children’s understanding (in the first case, evidence of his understanding of the preceding English lesson) went not only unnoticed

but rejected. It would be easy to dismiss this as just a harmless mistake on the teacher's part. In fact, she was following the lesson plan she had been given that was imported directly from the United States and reflected "balanced literacy" practices.

However, we argue that it is critical to pay attention to the hidden lessons children are learning when, again and again, they face such denial of what they know. Our data provide a cumulative record of children being told that their experiences of reality were not true. For example, we documented numerous instances of a teacher asking the children in both English and Arabic classes, "What is the weather?" and when the children correctly identified the weather conditions outside, they were told "No, it is . . .," followed by whatever the season required the weather to be: the cloudy skies the children observed in spring were called sunny because that's what the lessons on spring dictated.

Even in the context of a lesson explicitly designed to teach children to name emotions, the children receive confusing messages. The following are from Chatila's field notes:

[After Ms. Tayseer] finished introducing the party hat and the party-themed song, she blew an actual balloon and went to Ahmad and asked him in English: "If I blow this 'balon' (using the French word for 'balloon') and give it to you, how do you feel?" Ahmad said: "happy." Then, she moved toward Ali and asked him: "if I blow this 'balon' and tell you this is not for you, how do you feel?" Ali, with a big smile on his face, answered: "happy." She then says: "No! If I say this is not for you. This is for Layla, how do you feel?" Ali insisted: "Happy." Ms. Tayseer then asked: "I say this 'balon' will be for Layla, how do you feel, happy or sad? (She asks in a way that gives him a hint as to what the right answer should be, which is sad.) Ali finally answered, "Sad." She then moves to another child, Jad, and asks him: "If I tell you you're a hero how do you feel?" Jad stared for a few seconds at her and then said "happy." "No!" she exclaimed. "You're a hero! You feel proud! What mean proud? Proud yaani fakhoor (translation: means proud)."

At the most basic level, this example illustrates a lesson in emotional vocabulary poorly executed. However, it is important to note that the issue here was not that the children did not understand the English words. From previous observations, it was clear to Chatila that the children knew the meaning of the English words happy and sad. However, children were once again also learning that it is not their feeling but a correct answer that is required here. In Jad's hesitation—his pause as he stares at the teacher trying to puzzle out what it is she wants from him— we see that he has learned to seek authoritative answers elsewhere. Perhaps Jad, who is told he is a hero, would have felt happy rather than proud. However, the teacher's strict adherence to her lesson, meant lost opportunities for any exploration of real feelings the children might have experienced. Thus, through a scripted curriculum delivered faithfully by their teachers, children were persistently, if subtly, being educated to distrust their knowledge and experiences—and to rely instead on truth claims being made by authority figures.

PUNISHMENT, SHAME, AND FEAR

Finally, the children's relationship to institutional authority was developed through an affective environment in which they experienced teachers yelling at, threatening, and shaming them every day; one teacher was even observed hitting them. Teachers routinely screamed at children for not following the letter of the law. Many different behaviors could elicit yelling: whispering or talking to a peer, fidgeting, playing with a toy, dropping crumbs from their snack on the floor . . . the list goes on.

Teachers often yelled at children, "*Azabooni al-yom*" ("You gave me a hard time today"), claimed they had given the teacher a headache, or suggested that the children's behavior might make the teacher sick. For example, Ms. Dima (an Arabic teacher) stopped class one day, shouting, "My ears are hurting. Do you want me to get sick tonight when I go home?" Embedded in these admonitions is the expectation that children must focus on the needs of the teacher over their own needs. One particularly painful incident involved a black cat puppet, Fifi, who became the shaming voice for Ms. Dima. Our research team had never seen any stuffed toys or puppets—a staple of many early childhood classrooms—at the school. When one of us (Abu El-Haj) entered Ms. Dima's class in the spring of 2016, she was excited to be introduced to Fifi, who sat on the teacher's desk. At the end of the class period, Ms. Dima took up Fifi and asked the children if they wanted to know what the cat had observed that day. They were rapt and eager to hear Fifi's observations. Holding Fifi up to her ear, Ms. Dima "listened" as Fifi "reported" what she had seen. One could have heard the proverbial pin

drop as the children awaited her report. Ms. Dima then told them that Fifi was upset by how unruly they had been and how they bothered Ms. Dima all day. Fifi threatened to leave them and spend her time with their partner section of kindergarten. The children cried out that they didn't want Fifi to leave them. Even this puppet, often considered an instrument for storytelling and play, became a tool for shaming and disciplining the children. Moreover, Fifi's commentary did not at all match what Abu El-Haj had observed to be a highly regulated and typically routine day in Ms. Dima's classroom.

In another incident, Ms. Faiza (one of the English teachers) threatened her class that she would call the Children's Police ("shurtit al-atfaal") if they did not behave. As it turns out, there are mobile apps for parents to ring up the "children's police" with programmed threats for various "bad" behaviors. For example, in one scenario that our team called up on a phone, a deep ominous voice threatens to jail and beat a child for refusing to go to sleep. Children in Ms. Faiza's class appeared to know about this program. Although Ms. Faiza threatening her young charges with a call to the children's police was an anomaly, using fear and shame as a disciplinary technique was not. In all of the classrooms we observed, screaming, threats, and shame were routine modes of controlling (or attempting to control) children's behavior.

MESSAGES ABOUT POVERTY

Children at Amal Al-Bilad were also receiving an education about social class, in particular about poverty being a consequence of "poor family environments" rather than an outcome of structural oppression. As described above, the school served a population of children that, for the most part, lives in poverty.

There were many ways in which the children's poverty was highlighted and stigmatized. Teachers routinely commented within earshot of the children about their families and their environment ("bi'a"), as the following field notes of Abu El-Haj illustrate:

Sally and I arrive after school has started so the door is locked. Sally reaches easily inside the gate to turn the key and let ourselves in. Ms. Jameela (an administrator) greets us with her usual quick smile. There is a little girl, dark hair in ponytails, pink coat, sitting on the floor sobbing and screaming inconsolably. Ms. Jameela and one of the aides are trying to calm her down. As she hold the child, Ms Jameela tells us that she is one of the

children from the mu'assisa (charitable institution) and that she spends the weekends with her parents, and now is inconsolable because she has to go back to the mu'assisa for the week. Ms. Jameela asks us, "shoo ha'l im?" (What kind of mother is this?)

Teachers frequently had particularly harsh words for the parents of the children who lived in the mu'assisa. They wondered why parents, especially mothers, would "keep having babies" if they do not want to care for them. However, the judgments teachers made about poverty were not limited to the children living in the mu'assisa. Teachers and administrators routinely told us stories—both within and beyond earshot of the children—about the children's "bad environments." Educators complained about myriad conditions: a child being allowed to "run free in the streets" while his parents worked at the racetrack; a child who witnessed parents having sex as they watched pornography while the child was separated from them only by a curtain; a mother blamed for her daughter's lice infestation. The examples fill our notes. We do not deny that many of the children attending Amal Al-Bilad were living in conditions of deep familial, social, and economic distress. However, we want to highlight that, from the perspective of the educators, the burden of poverty rested with the poor choices parents made and the "bad environments" in which their children lived, rather than with an economic structure riven by injustice and inequality.

Our essential point is that the children were being taught explicitly and implicitly that their conditions were shameful and a consequence of their familial and local environments.

Unfortunately, as illustrated in the example above, teachers often communicated particularly harsh judgments in front of the children about their parents. However, they also did so in more subtle ways. One area in which shame about poverty was communicated daily was around the children's snack. Although children were supposed to bring in sandwiches for their mid-morning meal, many brought in large quantities of cheap snacks, such as chocolate or jam-filled croissants, cookies, and candy—snacks that were filling, if not ideally nutritious. In response, in classroom after classroom, teachers publicly called out children who did not have what they considered to be a nutritious snack. Typically, a teacher would tell a child in front of the whole class, to remind their mother that she needed to send in a sandwich. However, we also often heard teachers harshly threaten to, or actually take away, children's cookies or candy, telling them that the food was unhealthy and dangerous to consume. (Despite the nearly daily messages about the evils of cakes and candy, with one exception, the only food the school

ever provided for children for special celebrations consisted of sweet juice drinks and cakes.)

At times, the children from the mu'assisa seemed particularly marked. For example, during the first few months of one school year they wore special name tags on their school uniforms. None of the other children wore name tags. As a result, in every classroom a visitor could easily pick out all of the children living in the mu'assisa.

Children also got shaming messages around their hygiene and health. In one particularly distressing incident, a child who was ill and threw up was isolated on a chair, rather than being held or comforted, while his teacher shouted across the balcony to her colleague that he had wet himself (which he had not) and called in a custodian to disinfect the whole classroom. As all this activity was going on around the boy, his teacher relayed his history to one of us (Abu El-Haj), telling us that this boy's mother had died, his father had remarried, and, except for the rare occasions when he goes to his grandmother's, he is often left in the mu'assisa on weekends. The children at Amal Al-Bilad were getting clear, if implicit, instruction about their social position of poverty. Poverty was shameful and was a consequence of bad decisions for which their parents were to blame.

Our findings illustrate that children at Amal Al-Bilad were receiving an embedded, affective civic education teaching them critical lessons about their social position on the margins of society, and about relationships to knowledge and authority that did not support them to learn the kinds of civic actions necessary to participate fully as agents in the shared practices of public life.

CHILDREN AS AGENTS

Children of course take up these civic lessons in a variety of ways. There were many children who spent their days silently sitting in their chairs, at times trying to follow the rules, at others appearing to zone out. A small number of children, typically girls, became teachers' aides, eagerly volunteering to hand out or collect materials and papers, always first to demonstrate their new knowledge on the board. Some children became reinforcing agents by aligning with the teacher's regime and calling out their peers for infractions against her authority. Others rejected the authoritarian regime "offside," flying under the radar as they played with their friends or, in a clever twist, used songs and games they had learned in class to break out from the rigid routines. A handful of children rejected the social position that was on offer to them.

It was not unusual to hear children police their peers, admonishing them to listen to their teacher and follow her instructions. Children frequently repeated the teacher's instructions, commanding their friends to do what the teacher asked. As children do in many settings, students often called out individuals publicly if they were not following the rules. A majority of the instances in which children admonished other children's behavior and reinforced the teacher's authority appeared to be genuine expressions of a desire for order and rule-following. However, on occasion we observed children acting the part of a rule-enforcer, as a kind of cover for breaking those rules. The following is an example from Abu El-Haj's field notes:

Selma has huge eyes that appear continually alert and wide open to all that is going on, fair, curly hair pulled up in a high ponytail. She spends this time while Ms. Karima is testing children individually at the front desk, finding ways to amuse herself. At first, she is chatting sotto voce with Hamad [the child seated next to her]. At one point, she turns her attention to a child at another table, loudly informing Ms. Karima that this child has put papers on a table [a forbidden action]. Although both Selma and Hamad are whispering, or playing hand games quietly, it is only Hamad that Ms. Karima calls out several times. After he turns to a boy at the table behind him and begins to hug and wrestle with him, Ms. Karima calls Hamad in a loud voice and moves him up to the table near her desk. After Ms. Karima has moved Hamad, Selma has to find another source of amusement. One is to continually, but very quietly tip her chair backwards until she falls over, and then pick herself up off the ground. She begins chatting now with another boy sitting next to her, who I find out later is her cousin. She also amuses herself by clapping. She then pretends to punch her cousin. As Ms. Karima calls out to admonish various children for their behavior, Selma says loudly, "Pay attention to the teacher," and then starts pinching her neighbor. Ms. Karima's voice is getting louder and louder throughout this time period, but she never notices Selma.

This observation occurred over 20 minutes, during which time Ms. Karima was conducting individual reading assessments of each child in the class. The other children were expected to wait silently at their tables with no activity to keep them busy. Many children, like Selma and Hamad, could not sustain this inactivity and silence and they found other ways to amuse themselves. Ms. Karima

frequently raised her voice to yell at a child to stop doing whatever it was they were doing. Selma, however, was adept at tattling on other children and mimicking the teacher's authority while simultaneously keeping her play out of sight of Ms. Karima. Across classrooms, children created various means to make space along the margins within which to take breaks from the rigid obedience demanded of them. In a sense, children created alternate worlds when the teacher's attention was elsewhere.

Another way the children created an alternate world alongside the sanctioned school culture was by using curricular content to break out and play. Bonet's notes reflect one such instance:

The children come back inside the classroom [from the balcony] and sit at their desks silently waiting to go to the gym. Suddenly, in unison, they begin to sing their song about Mother's Day, quickly resorting to screaming it out.

On numerous occasions we observed children break into singing songs or reciting poems they had been taught, as a way to interrupt the monotony of silence they were expected to maintain while they waited through endless periods of what our team came to call "dead time." At times the teachers would try to restore order and silence, but more often they would allow these outbursts to continue in a tacit nod to children's need for self-expression.

In every class there were children who impressed us with their refusal to bow to the institutional regime, insisting on creating space within which they could learn and play on their own terms. Farah was one such child. This excerpt is from Bonet's field notes taken in an English class:

Ms. Mona stands in front of the class and asks, "What is today?"

Different children respond loudly, "Thursday! Wednesday! Friday!"

The teacher says loudly, "Yesterday was Friday. So today is....?"

Farah says loudly, "Saturday!" The teacher says, "Yes. It is Saturday. Clap for Farah." The children clap for Farah. At this, Farah immediately runs to the calendar and begs, "Can I do the calendar Miss?" Without waiting for an answer, she begins

grabbing at the numbers of the calendar. The teacher tells Farah to return to her desk. Instead Farah continues to talk to the teacher about the calendar, while the teacher is trying to go over the fact that today is Saturday with the rest of the class. Finally, the teacher grabs her by her shirt sleeve and leads her back to her seat.

However, Farah does not leave it at that. Later in the lesson she asserts herself again, this time practicing her school knowledge while subverting the order of this classroom in which children are expected to speak only English. Here is another excerpt from Bonet's field notes:

The teacher goes to her desk to get something when Farah stands up and begins to sing the Mother's Day song in Arabic—a song she and her peers had learned in their Arabic class. The teacher looks up and says, "No Farah." Farah smiles and then sits down. A few seconds later, Farah begins to sing again in Arabic the "Winter" song she had learned in Arabic class. She sings loudly, and makes the gestures which go along with the words that tell about building a snowman. The teacher looks up again and says, "Farah, stop." Farah smiles again, and in a few seconds, begins singing the Mother's Day song again. The teacher looks up again and this time shouts, "NO! Don't sing in Arabic! This is not the time for singing in Arabic, Farah!" Farah is quiet for a few seconds, and then sings a fourth time. The teacher suddenly stands up and heads quickly for Farah's direction. She grabs hold of Farah's arm, and begins dragging her towards the door. Farah goes limp and pulls herself towards her chair, and says, in Arabic, "Okay, Miss! I'll be quiet. I promise!"

Farah was carrying on a one-child campaign to create a space in which learning and joy were entwined. Unlike so many of her peers, she actually seemed to be learning the academic curriculum on offer, but she refused again and again to be constrained by the institutional practices that refused her a right to move, play, and sing in her own language.

DISCUSSION

Citizenship, broadly understood outside the constraints of juridical status, is an embodied practice of belonging to and acting upon one's society that develops from the experiences individuals have with and within public institutions and spaces (Abu El-Haj 2015; Benei 2008; Levinson 2011; Levinson 2012; Rubin 2007). Recognizing citizenship as an embodied experience means understanding that there are affective dimensions to one's understanding of, and relationship to, the practices of public life: for example, feeling a sense of belonging or exclusion, trust in or fear of authority, shame or pride in one's community are all constitutive of how one acts within and upon their society. Schools are one of, if not the, critical institutions within which children and youth learn these embodied practices of citizenship. As such, in postconflict societies that aim to strengthen democratic citizenship, education reform that promotes civic education for social cohesion and active citizenship is of utmost importance. Unfortunately, education reform directives focus primarily on formal civic education that typically begins in middle or high school, and even then, as is the case in Lebanon, it often falls short of the goals (Akar 2012; Bahou 2015; Shuayb 2012). What this focus on formal civic education misses is the fact that children in schools are, as we have shown, already getting a civic education. Moreover, although some research has shown that young children do get more explicit formal civic education that schools them into the passions of nationalism (Benei 2008), we suggest the need to also attend to the more foundational, if implicit, affective civic lessons embedded in the routine practices of everyday life in classrooms (Graham 2017; Jackson 1968). It is here that children learn the "rules" for relationships, interactions, and the practices of public life (Adair et al. 2016). As we have shown, instead of developing the kinds of practices needed to create a robust, collective, active, and democratic social life in a diverse public context, children at Amal Al-Bilad were getting a civic education in marginalized forms of citizenship that demanded unquestioning obedience to authority in terms of knowledge delivered and discipline expected, and reinforced continually shaming messages about poverty.

Of course, the students in our study demonstrated various ways of being agentic within their restrictive environments, including creating and sustaining shadow worlds in which illicit play was hidden from their teachers, breaking the expected codes for talk, movement, and silence. We are, however, wary of overestimating the ability of these moves by the children to create alternatives to the authoritarian classroom environment. Children's actions might have brought life and joy into their classroom—as well as additional punishment—but more importantly they brought play to the space within which children do civic action (Adair et al. 2016).

However, due to the extremely structured and rigid classroom environment, these moments were stolen ones. In their comparative analysis, Adair and her colleagues argue that contexts that assume play is key for learning and integrate play throughout the day are those that foster collective action, concern, and leadership skills among children. At Amal Al-Bilad, some students rejected the crushing emphasis on an academic and disciplinary curriculum by stealthily creating play space; however, this cannot be assumed to give students the same capacity for civic action as play that is built into the curriculum. Screaming a song at the top of one's lungs in one's native language or playing with a friend behind the teacher's back might break the authoritarian rule of the classroom, bring some relief, and add an element of play, but it cannot substitute for a curriculum that recognizes play not only as children's fundamental means of learning but also as their space for doing civic action (Adair et al. 2017). Moreover, we emphasize the need to pay attention to the affective dimensions of citizenship into which young children are being educated through the everyday practices of their classrooms.

Our research has two critical implications for education in emergencies. First, focusing on children's play as civic action and the early childhood classroom as a space in which children are getting an embedded, affective civic education, we suggest that the conundrum of how to create sustainable and peaceful forms of shared public life in societies riven by inequality and conflict must be addressed well before children begin to receive formal civic education. From the earliest years, schools are the primary space within which children learn to be public, social actors. Well before formal civic education begins, children have learned much about social relations, their place in society, empowerment and disempowerment, collective action, and more. It is in these spaces that the lofty goals of social cohesion, integration, and active citizenship—goals driving educational policy-making in vulnerable, (post)conflict societies—are made and unmade. In a country that has largely segregated stateless Palestinian children in UNRWA schools for more than 60 years and has recently created separate shifts for Lebanese and Syrian children in the state schools beginning in first grade, Amal Al-Bilad, similar to other kindergartens, was the rare public space in which Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian children were being educated together. As such, it could have been a space in which young children from these different communities learned to work, play, share, negotiate, and take collective action—to be full participants in their worlds together. Instead, as we have shown, it was one in which the most vulnerable children in Lebanon were learning civic lessons that stressed obedience to authority, disempowerment, distrust in their own knowledge, and shame about their social position. We suggest that if we are serious about the mandate to educate children and youth for a future beyond civic

conflict and fracture, we must begin by restructuring the earliest public spaces in which they live and learn. Early childhood classrooms must be transformed into spaces for learning a sense of belonging, trust, and efficacy, and for centering play and the opportunities it affords for civic action—civic action understood not only as practice for future action but as inherent in children’s social play.

A second implication of this research is that, to develop these kinds of classrooms, there can be no end run around robust forms of teacher education in (post)conflict contexts. As we cautioned earlier, it would be a mistake to view the teachers at Amal Al-Bilad as bad teachers who simply do not know what is best for children. In fact, these teachers were doing exactly what they were being asked to do—to deliver a scripted academic curriculum to the children. Teachers were judged on the silence and orderliness of their classrooms. In fact, teachers frequently lamented that they were unable to meet the health, safety, and emotional needs of the children and worried about their inability to care for these dimensions of children’s lives. And, although teachers did not use our language of civic education to describe their work, they were keenly aware that early childhood education would ideally provide children with a foundation within which to learn to share and collaborate with their peers. Teachers often expressed concerns about aggressive interactions between children, and they pointed to the limited resources of the school (no nurse or counselors, an insufficient play area with no equipment) and the lack of professional development around a range of critical issues, from teaching large numbers of children, to using the games and manipulatives UNICEF had provided for the school (which remained wrapped in plastic), to addressing the needs of children who experienced trauma. If teachers are to fundamentally change the kind of civic education offered their students, they must have ongoing opportunities for inquiry and reflection about children as learners and social actors. There are no quick professional development fixes for this kind of transformation. It requires transforming the vision of teaching at all levels of the system from one of content delivery to one of creating sustainable pedagogical practices that draw on and enhance children’s strengths and capacities as learners and social actors, particularly for children living in societies riven with conflict.

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