High School Student Councils: Types, Platforms, Arenas of Activity, and In-school Initiatives

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ABSTRACT: This study of high school student councils examines council activities and classifies them according to their main concerns: focus on the student, school development, and civic engagement. The objectives of the study were to expand the theoretical knowledge concerning high school student councils and their areas of activity in general, and specifically to identify their most meaningful and significant activities. In the study, 600 high school students evaluated their student council's level of activity. The study's findings showed that student council activities can be divided into five different platforms and three arenas of operation. The study found that "integrative" student councils received the highest score in all the variables examined. The primary conclusion is that encouraging students to actively experience a broad spectrum of activities, the way it comes to the fore in the "integrative" type student council, is important, and its contribution greatly affects the school council's activity.

Keywords: Student councils, student involvement, student initiatives

RESUMÉ: Cette étude sur les conseils étudiants du secondaire examine les activités du conseil et les classifie selon leurs préoccupations majeures: centré sur l'étudiant, développement scolaire et l'engagement civique. Les objectifs de l'étude étaient d'élargir les connaissances théoriques concernant les conseils étudiants du secondaire et leurs domaines d'activité en général, et spécifiquement d'identifier leurs activités les plus significatives. Durant l'étude, 600 élèves du secondaire ont évalué le niveau d'activité de leur conseil étudiant. Les résultats de l'étude ont montré que les activités du conseil étudiant peuvent être divisées en cinq programmes différents et trois espaces de fonctionnement. L'étude

a révélé que les conseils étudiants « intégratifs » recevaient le score le plus élevé à partir de toutes les variables examinées. La principale conclusion est d'encourager les étudiants à expérimenter activement un large éventail d'activités. La façon dont le Conseil étudiant passe au premier plan est important, et sa contribution affecte grandement les activités du Conseil.

Mots-clés: conseils étudiants, participation des étudiants, initiatives étudiantes.

Non-formal Education and Student Councils

Much research exists that supports the premise that exposing students to non-formal settings is a good preparation for adulthood, in the twenty-first century. In our era we have had to adjust to new social settings, such as family structure, gender status, youth culture, and the socialization of individuals (Cobo, 2013). New codes of behavior based on multi-dimensional thinking result in a great variety of activities, all equally important in terms of their value to the community, and a symmetry of human relationships is possible when adults and adolescents enjoy a reciprocal relationship based on equality**.**

Non-formal education, which aims to be an inviting, multi-dimensional environment which is inherently pluralistic and inclusive (Romi & Schmida, 2009), offers some of the educational answers to the unique needs of students of the twenty-first century. In non-formal education young people take an active part in the social groups to which they belong (Cohen, 2007), therefore, non-formal education naturally provides youth with an environment where they feel free to express themselves in an open, liberal manner, based on an equal, democratic relationship between adults and youth (Cohen, 2004; Halfon, 2012).

While schools are usually characterized by formal attributes, student councils form one of its few non-formal entities, and they prepare the students for their adult life in the post-modern era (Halfon, 2012). They play three major roles: (1) preparing the students for life in an egalitarian, democratic society, (2) representing the school's enrollment, and (3) protecting students' rights (Halfon, 2014). Awareness of the latter has already been raised by the Geneva Convention, whose Charter on the Rights of the Child recognizes children as having full rights. In recognition of the

Charter's articles, schools reacted by promoting the establishment of student councils (Alderson, 2000). Out of 54 articles written up in the Charter, articles 12 and 29 refer to the topic of the child's empowerment through education. The former supports the principle that children should be part of the decisions that affect their lives, and that every child has the right to express his/her opinion freely, while the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. The latter incorporates educational goals which include developing each child's personality, talents, and abilities to the fullest, and to educate him/her to be a responsible citizen, involved in a democratic society based on equal rights (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)).

In the Charter's wake, formal and informal organizations have been founded whose purpose is to represent pupils in their various institutions of learning (Cook-Sather, 2014; Pharis, Bass, & Pate, 2005; Yates, 2003). In addition, protocols dealing with pupils' rights have been written (Shamgar-Handelman, 1994), while pupils are learning to recognize their rights and obligations as present and future citizens (Lesko, 2002; Yates, 2003).

To date, few studies have systematically addressed the issue of student councils (Gilljam, Esaiasson, & Lindholm, 2010; Pharis et al., 2005; Schlinker, Kelley, O'Phlean, & Spall., 2008; Soderberg, 1997), and the gap between their intense activity. The developing research about them is disproportionate. A possible explanation may be that student councils belong to the non-formal area of education where the gap between enthusiastic activity and the paucity of research is vast. In order to close this gap, researchers have turned to the complexity of non-formal education as a distinct educational arena with distinct settings and plans of action (Cohen, 2004; Romi & Schmida, 2009). Cohen (2012) offers three explanations for the complexity of investigating non-formal education – first, because of their sheer numbers, the settings and activities are difficult to compare; second, non-formal education programs are not required to follow defined curricula and are therefore more difficult to classify; third, it is more complicated to conduct a systematic analysis of a non-formal setting than of a formal one which operates by the book (Cohen, 2012).

Student Councils' Platforms

Student council involvement is of great importance to the school (Griebler & Nowak, 2012; Mager & Nowak, 2011). It enhances a positive school climate (Kaba, 2001), shapes student behavior (Alderson, 2000), promotes their rights (Cross, Hulme, & McKinney, 2014; Griebler & Nowak, 2012). In addition, it also helps prepare students to take their place in a democratic society (Cross et al., 2014; Griebler & Nowak, 2012**;** San & Diosdado, 2008) and strengthens their sense of belonging to this society (Mager & Nowak, 2011). Lastly, it helps develop the students' leadership skills (Halfon, 2012; San & Diosdado, 2008) as well as their social skills **(**Griebler & Nowak, 2012).

Specifically, when student councils promote activities concerned with society, culture, and leisure, students tend to become more involved in their school, and this, in turn, strengthens their sense of belonging to the educational institution and its principles (Halfon, 2012). Student councils that take part in the decision-making-process of the school empower students, and discussions of school issues increase the students' sense of belonging (Kaba, 2001). An involved student council helps accept the school's educational principles and contributes to the sense of responsibility for everything that goes on in school (Barenholtz, 2005).

San and Diosdado (2008) recommended that in order to increase the student council's influence, the arenas of student council involvement should be expanded, and student councils should be made a more prominent part of secondary schools. Alderson (2000) referred to the way students in the UK and Northern Ireland aged 7 to 17 evaluated the effectiveness of their student council. He found that effective student councils contributed to fostering a positive school climate, reducing violence, and strengthening students' positive thinking. In contrast, he found that the student population that viewed the student council as less effective also reported lower satisfaction with the school and its teachers as well as reporting an increase in violent events in school. Students who did not value the student council felt that school regulations were too rigid and that the teachers barely listened to them. Conversely, the student population that viewed the council as effective and saw it as a contribution to the school also showed a positive attitude satisfaction in all variables.

In 2009, Israel's Ministry of Education issued a position paper about how to create a safe climate in secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2009). One of the suggestions was that the school's educational team should create guidelines to allow the students to experience democratic processes as a way to prevent violence and promote a positive climate. Indeed, Kaba (2001) had written that cooperation with student councils in writing the school's bylaws and defining areas of responsibility could increase the students' satisfaction with the school's disciplinary policies.

In addition, student councils are a hands-on means to educate for democracy (Alderson, 2000; Kaba, 2001) and to serve as the forum to promote students' rights and needs (Alderson, 2000). They are instrumental in creating situations where students can experience socio-political processes, manage democratic institutions (Halfon, 2012), and learn about active citizenship (Cox & Robinson-Pant, 2005; Garratt & Piper, 2008). They encourage activities that foster interpersonal teacher-student relationships and promote services that improve the school's physical surroundings such as initiating a school cafeteria (Halfon, 2012).

In the year 2000, in Great Britain, an organization aimed at encouraging the establishment of student councils was founded. It created a document to guide schools in implementing students' rights. The guidelines included a list of students' rights which schools were required to protect, from students' demands for self-respect to including students in decisions that would affect their lives (Alderson, 2000). Similarly, a position paper issued in Israel (Ministry of Education, 2001), emphasized the objective of a student council as a means for students to experience life in a democratic society (Van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

Student councils are generally formed once every year or so, usually through democratic elections that include election campaigns, presenting the candidates' platforms, and other democratic procedures (Halfon, 2012). Once elected, a school student council provides opportunities for students to play leadership roles (Yates, 2003), thus developing their leadership skills (Halfon, 2012). Student council members are required to foster relationships with other leading groups, in their school or in other schools to provide them with a first-hand experience in practicing public-leadership skills (Dror, 2007; Soderberg, 1997). Peleg (2000) interviewed adults who had been on student councils, to study the effect of student

council activity on the former students' social involvement and ambition to succeed as adults. She found that a high percentage of participants had achieved high positions in the army and in politics.

Student councils also promote community volunteering (Boylan, 2005). Members of the student council take part in planning and implementing volunteer programs aimed at the community and select the locations and assign roles. Volunteering is thought to be of great importance for the development of the adolescents' personality (Holdworth & Quinn, 2010; Youniss, Bales, & Christmass-Batesy, 2002) and increases their self-confidence (Magen, 2011). Studies also show that voluntary activity in school educates toward proactive citizenship (Ben-David, Haski-Leventhal, York, & Ronel, 2004; Magen, 2011; Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003).

In summary, student councils represent a wide variety of platforms and work to promote them. They enhance a positive school climate, foster the students' sense of belonging to the school, promote students' rights, develop students' leadership skills and social skills, educate for democracy, proactive citizenship, and community volunteering. However, the research literature on student councils reveals that sparse studies relate to the councils' arenas of activity, and even when they do, these studies examine the issue indirectly (Alderson, 2000; Cross et al., 2014; Garrat & Piper, 2008; Gilljam et al., 2010; Griebler & Nowak, 2012). Therefore, in this study we have attempted to address directly this omission.

Types of School Councils

Our initial search of the literature revealed that thus far, no analysis of types of student councils has been made, except for a study by (Halfon & Romi, submitted) where four types of student councils were identified by means of a typology carried out by using a two-dimensional MPOSAC program analysis based on the evaluation of school principals' assessment of their student councils. The analysis discovered that two variables out of the 13 checked were the banner variables of the study as a whole: community volunteering and student rights. These two variables have been used as the basis for the four types of councils derived:

1. The "Integrative type" student councils promote both volunteering and students' rights, so that students in these schools are active in both areas.
2. The "Volunteer type" student councils promote just one platform- community volunteering- but not students' rights.
3. The "Rights type" student councils, like the previous type, promote only one platform– students' rights- and not volunteering.
4. The "Undefined type" student councils neither promote volunteering nor promote students' rights (Halfon & Romi, submitted).

Gilljam et al. (2010) compared various types of student councils, but their classification is based on the way the councils are selected (elections, nominations, or lottery) and not on types of councils themselves. The present study, on the other hand, examines the different types of student councils based on their platforms and arenas of activity, and strived to identify their most meaningful and significant activities

Method

Participants

The participants were 600 students from 16 Israeli junior-high schools and high schools. The schools were selected according to the four types of student councils. Some of the participants ($n = 202$), served as members of student councils, the remaining 398 did not. The non-members were all eleventh-grade students as they were the most available.

Research tools
Student council evaluation questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on the one used in a study by Yona (1993) concerning the involvement of student councils in school. This was a two-part questionnaire which checked the extent of the council's success in acting on its stated platforms in terms of council involvement and initiative. Part 1, degree of involvement, consisted of 18 items: participants were asked to rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all,* 4 = *very much so*) (Gottfredson, 1998). In Part 2, scope of student council initiatives in school, participants were asked to rate their answers on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 3 = *often*), and report their view of the council's independent initiatives in school (Gottfredson, 1998). In addition, part 2 included one open-ended question

to be answered by those who had given positive answers to the closed questions. Here, participants were asked to list two arenas where the council had successfully promoted its own platform. In addition, they were asked to indicate the frequency of council initiative on a scale of 1 to 3 (1= *not at all*; 3 = *often*), and finally, to list two arenas of student council activity during the previous year.

Reliability and validity

The items on the questionnaire were divided according to student council platforms. Five judges (three educators and two educational researchers) received the list of statements and were asked, simultaneously and independently, to classify the statements according to student council platforms. Next, these platforms were compared, and five were selected. In the third stage, the judges were asked to re-classify the items based on the new list. The fourth stage was a comparison between the ways the judges had classified the items, this time with a focus on where each item was placed on the council platform. An examination of the reliability among the judges revealed high scores, ranging from $r = .89$ to $r = .94$.

Using this evaluation process yielded five platforms: (1) Fostering school climate, (2) Enhancing democratic values, (3) Advancing students' rights, (4) Developing leadership, (5) Volunteering in the community. Using the same procedure, we divided the same items into core arenas of activity: (1) Students, (2) School, (3) Community. Items 7, 13, 16 were removed from the questionnaire as they were found to be irrelevant to assessing arenas of student council activity, but rather measured its members' work techniques.

In order to validate the questionnaire's division into its various platforms, we carried out a factor analysis using a principal component method with Varimax rotation of the questionnaire the students received (those active in student councils, and those who were not). The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Factor analysis for the questionnaire about student council platforms

		Factor 1 School climate	Factor 2 Students' rights	Factor 3 Leadership skills	Factor 4 Community volunteering	Factor 5 Educating for democracy
	Factor loading	7.43	1.01	.85	.72	.64
1.	The council acts to alleviate tensions between students and the administration	.71	.17	.10	.15	.31
9.	The council makes students like school life	.67	.45	.19	.12	.04
8.	The council helps the administration maintain school order and procedures	.67	.40	.14	.23	.03
5.	The council acts to enhance education for citizenship	.61	.13	.28	.14	.50
3.	The council contributes to creating positive climate in school	.56	.09	.12	.24	.25
12.	The council develops its activists' critical thinking	.22	.69	.55	.30	.14
6.	The council presents students' interests to the administration	.17	.66	.34	.07	.23
11.	The council is a channel of communication between the teaching staff and the students	.41	.57	.24	.14	.18
17.	The council takes care of the needs of all students	.21	.57	.31	.18	.23
10.	The council increases the students' sense of belonging to the educational institution	.52	.53	.19	.25	.08
4.	The council develops its members' leadership skills	.31	.24	.75	.21	.02
15.	The council is a place to gain team-work experience	.06	.39	.74	.15	.18
18.	The council acts to help people in society and in the community	.14	.30	.13	.84	.11
2.	The council enhances community volunteering	.27	.11	.24	.83	.09
14.	The council enables experiencing the principles of a democratic regime	.23	.33	.14	.14	.81
	Explained variance	19.7%	17.8%	13.1%	12.4%	8.0%

$N = 600$

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the factor analysis validates the division of items into five platforms in accordance with the theoretical-structural division of the questionnaire. However, several items (5, 10, 12) did not adequately distinguish among the factors and simultaneously matched more than one. The five factors explained 71% of

the variance among questionnaire items, and the loading of all items within each factor was higher than 50.

The division of questionnaire items regarding student council activity based on five platforms, and the internal reliability of each is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Student council questionnaire items by platforms, and internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for each

Student council platform	Number of items	Item number in questionnaire	Cronbach's alpha
Fostering school climate	5	10 ,9 ,8 ,3 ,1	.85
Educating for democracy	2	14 ,5	.63
Maintaining and enhancing students' rights	3	17 ,11 ,6	.77
Developing leadership skills	3	15 ,12 ,4	.73
Community volunteering	2	18 ,2	.80

$N = 600$

As seen in Table 2, the 15 items regarding student council activity resulted from five platforms: (1) Fostering school climate, (2) Enhancing democratic values, (3) Advancing students' right, (4) Developing leadership, (5) Volunteering in the community.

Table 3 presents the division of the items into three arenas of student council activity, and the internal reliability of each.

Table 3 Student council activity questionnaire by arenas of activity, and internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for each

Student council arena of activity	Number of items	Item number in questionnaire	Cronbach's alpha
Students	6	,11 ,10 ,9 ,6 ,3 17	.87
School, and education for democracy	7	,14 ,12 ,8 ,5 ,4 ,1 15	.84
Community	2	18 ,2	.80

$N = 600$

As seen in Table 3, the 15 items regarding student council activity were divided into three arenas –for the benefit of the students, the school, or the community.

To achieve structural-empirical validation on the same Euclidian space, combining the five platforms and the three arenas of activity derived from the factor analysis, we conducted a small-space analysis (SSA) of facets (Guttman, 1982; Levy, 2005). The method, based on facets theory, is a multidimensional and nonparametric analysis that provides a

structural analysis of factors (Cohen & Amar, 2011) and enables creating a graphic representation of the structure and attributes of the research population (Cohen & Amar, 2011; Levy, 2005). Factor analysis was conducted by calculating a matrix of correlations that are translated into distances in a geometric space (map). The variables are presented as dots in space, with distances between dots representing dimensions of proximity. The matrix is based on the level of correlations among the observed variables, and thus the map is derived (Cohen & Amar, 2011).

The quality of the correlation between the factors and their spatial representation is the coefficient of alienation. This coefficient describes the degree to which the physical distances among the factors in the map truly represent that setup of correlations among them. In other words, it describes the degree to which the software succeeded in properly arranging the items graphically. The range of the coefficient of alienation is 0-1, with lower values indicating better correlation (Levy, 2005).
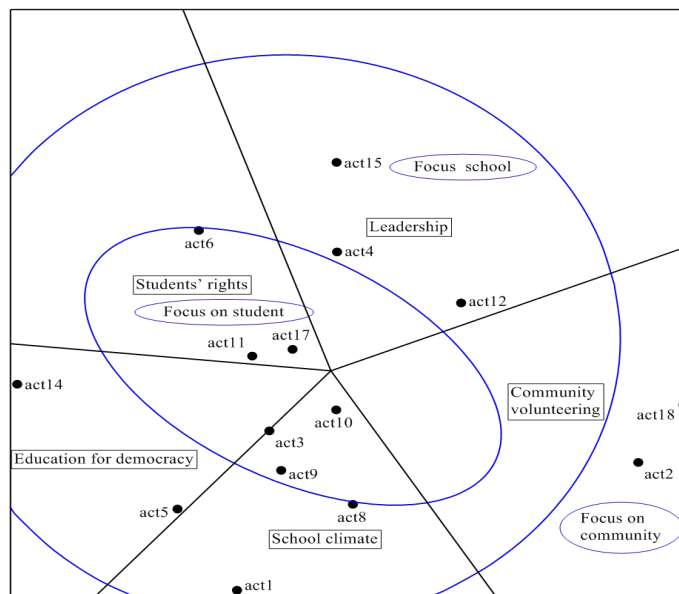

Figure 1. Student council activity questionnaire: Spatial mapping of the items and their distribution to two facets of elements by students' perception of platform and arena of activity ($N = 600$). A two-dimensional presentation (1/2); coefficient of alienation - .22, coefficient of regional specialization = 1.00

Map 1 reveals a clear, Radex (polarized) division into five arenas: (1) Fostering school climate, (2) Enhancing

democratic values, (3) Advancing students' right, (4) Developing leadership, (5) Volunteering in the community. The measures in the map are consistent with the judges' assessment. The strong correlations within each section indicate a correlative association between the items within the same section, and weak correlations with items in adjacent sections, indicating a distinction between them (Guttman, 1982; Levy, 2005).

Looking at the map further reveals that alongside the division of items into sections according to their platforms, the variables on the map are also organized into a circumplex – three-circle – division. In this division, the items are organized hierarchically by arenas of activity.

In the inner circle, student council activities focus on students with the platforms being students' rights and school climate. The middle circle of activities is school oriented, instilling democratic values, and developing leadership and fostering school climate. The outer circle turns to the community, and the platform is community activity.

Procedure

The research population included 600 students in junior-high and high schools. In all schools, the questionnaires were first distributed to students who were not members of their school's student council. Following this step, members of student councils received questionnaire which had an additional five questions about student council meetings and sessions.

Findings

The five platforms promoted by different types of student councils

We conducted a three-way (4 x 2 x 5) MANOVA with repeated measures to examine the differences among student councils based on the assessment of both council members and students who are uninvolved: 4 – type of student council (Integrative, Volunteer, Rights, Undefined), 2 – student type (– member of student council or not), and 5 – platforms (degree of advancing students' rights, education for democracy, developing leadership skills, community activities, and activities for fostering school climate).

The three-way MANOVA revealed a statistically significant primary effect for the type of council regarding the degree of activity: $F(3,588) = 24.60$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .11$. This

effect superseded the effect of type of student and platform. Follow-up Duncan analyses to examine the reason for the variance among the groups reveals that the level of activity is higher in the Integrative student councils (M = 2.81, SD =. 68) than in the Volunteer student councils (M = 2.35, SD =. 66), Rights (M = 2.17, SD =. 64), and the Undefined one (M = 2.48, SD =. 68). Furthermore, the Rights councils were found to have less activity than the others.

A statistically significant interaction was found for type of council and platform, superseding the type of student, $F(12,2352)$ = 10.87, p = .000, η^2 = .05, indicating significant differences in the degree of student council activity based on their stated platforms. Follow-up one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine the reason for the variance, comparing the type of student councils' platforms individually.

The differences among the types of various student councils in relation to the degree of activity based on the five platforms are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Student council activities based on their platforms and type of council:Means,[1] Standard Deviation, MANOVA results and Duncan Post-hoc Analysis[2]

	Integrative (n = 159)		Volunteer (n = 137)		Rights (n = 143)		Undefined (n = 157)		ANOVA df(3, 588)	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Students' rights	2.80	.77	2.34	.84	2.32	.77	2.49	.74	11.25***	.07
Duncan	A		B		B		B			
Education for democracy	2.53	.83	2.04	.81	2.12	.86	2.14	.82	12.24***	.06
Duncan	A		B		B		B			
Leadership skills	3.07	.83	2.68	.92	2.55	.87	2.84	.88	8.57***	.10
Duncan	A		BC		C		AB			
Community volunteering	2.97	.78	2.46	.88	1.69	.82	2.65	.94	45.73***	.19
Duncan	A		B		C		B			
Fostering school climate	2.67	.76	2.23	.76	2.15	.78	2.27	.74	16.32***	.08
Duncan	A		B		B		B			

N = 600
[1] Means are 1-4, with higher values indicating more student council activity.
[2] The differences among groups marked with different letters are statistically significant.
***p < .001

A look at Table 4 reveals significant differences among student councils of the various types in the degree of student council activity based on their five platforms. Furthermore, Integrative student councils are perceived as significantly more active than other council types in students' rights, community activity, educating for democracy, and fostering school climate. The Integrative and Undefined councils are perceived, significantly, better at developing leadership skills than the Rights councils. Furthermore, the Rights councils had the lowest degree of community volunteering among the four types of councils.

The involvement of various types of student councils in three arenas of activity

The degree of a student council's activity was also measured, with the activity divided into arenas to show who benefited from the activity – students, the school, or the community. We conducted a two-way, (4 x 2) MANOVA to examine whether there are statistically significant differences among the various types of student councils regarding the councils' arenas of activity with the school: 4 – type of student council (Integrative, Volunteer, Rights, Undefined – inter-subject variable), 2 – student type (member of student council or not a member – inter-subject variable).

The two-way MANOVA revealed a simultaneous and statistically significant primary effect for the type of council regarding the three arenas of activity: $F(9,1430) = 17,17$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .08$. This effect superseded the effect of student type, so that significant differences among the student councils were found regarding the activity in the three arenas.

Follow-up one-way ANOVA and post-hoc Duncan analyses were conducted to reveal the reason for the variance among in each arena on its own.

The differences among the four types of student councils in relation to the degree of activity in three arenas of activity – student oriented, school oriented, and community oriented, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Assessment of student council activities by arenas of activity for each type of council: Means,1 Standard Deviation, MANOVA Results and Duncan Post-hoc Analysis[2]

Arena of activity	Integrative (n = 160)		Volunteer (n = 138)		Rights (n = 143)		Undefined (n = 157)		ANOVA df(3, 590)	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Students	2.80	.75	2.33	.81	2.28	.76	2.42	.71	15.05***	.07
Duncan	A		B		B		B			
School	2.72	.70	2.28	.70	2.24	.69	2.39	.68	15.87***	.08
Duncan	A		B		B		B			
Community	2.97	.78	2.46	.88	1.69	.82	2.65	.94	45.56***	.19
Duncan	A		C		D		B			

N=600

[1] Arenas of activity means are 1-4, with higher values indicating more student council activity.

[2] The differences among groups marked with different letters are statistically significant.

***$p < .001$

The findings in Table 5 reveal that the Integrative student councils are more active than the other councils in all three arenas. An additional finding showed that the Rights councils are engaged in the least activities for the benefit of the community.

Extent of student council initiative concerning school activities by type of council

Another issue examined in this study (part 2 in the questionnaire) was to what extent student councils have initiated different school activities. The distribution of students' answers was examined along general lines among the various types of councils, with comparisons conducted using $\chi2$ tests for independence.

The results of the $\chi2$ tests for the degree of student councils' initiative in advancing various arenas in school are presented in Table 6. The results compare the four types of student councils.

Table 6. Student council initiative to promote various arenas by type of council: Frequency in percentages

	Integrative	Volunteer	Rights	Undefined	
	%	%	%	%	$\chi^2_{(6)}$
Never	7	17	32	21	52.20***
Several times	39	51	43	53	
Often	54	32	25	26	
Total	100	100	100	100	

N=202

***$p < .001$

As seen in Table 6, a greater percentage of students with Integrative student councils (54%) stated that the student council often initiates the promotion of issues, at a higher percentage than those whose councils are of other types (an average of 28%).

The differences among types of student councils regarding specific areas promoted through the initiative of student council in school are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Student council initiative to promote various arenas by type of council: percents

	Integrative	Volunteer	Rights	Undefined	
	%	%	%	%	$\chi^2_{(6)}$
Intra-school culture	37	51	51	17	8.30*
Students' rights	38	21	69	25	23.38***
Discipline, rules, & regulations	7	4	0	10	3.95
Community volunteering	62	21	0	21	50.08***

*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$

N=600

The findings presented in Table 7 reveal that the Integrative student councils mainly promote activities within the community; the Volunteer type mostly promotes cultural events within the school; the Rights councils mostly promote cultural events within the school and activities related to students' rights, and the Undefined councils are characterized by not advancing activities in any specific areas. Furthermore, the degree to which activities are promoted by the Undefined council is low in all four arenas.

In conclusion, the findings reveal that the differences among the councils come to the fore in all five platforms, as well as in the three arenas of activities. The Integrative councils show the most activity within their platforms and their activity arenas compare to that of the other types of councils. The Rights Councils show the lowest degree of activity within the platforms and the civic activity arena as well.

The findings also indicate that Integrative student councils are more inclined to initiate activities independently compared to the other types of councils. An examination of the difference among the types of student councils regarding

specific areas promoted by the council independently shows that the Integrative councils mostly promote activity within the community, Volunteer and Rights councils mostly promote cultural events within the school, and Rights councils also promote issues related to students' rights. In addition, the degree to which activities are promoted by the Undefined council was found to be low in each of the four arenas.

Discussion

The student council is an example of a non-formal setting in schools (Halfon, 2014). The councils are involved in a great variety of activities and serve as a foundation for new educational trends in the postmodern era. In the present study we identified platforms and arenas of activity in student councils. In addition, we examined the relationship between the platforms, the arenas of activity identified, and the four types of student councils. In the following discussion we will examine the importance of identifying the platforms and arenas of activity and their relationship to each of the four types.

Categorical organization of student council activity

Student councils promote a wide variety of programs and activities, each of which making its own unique contribution (Griebler & Nowak, 2012). However, neither the research literature (Alderson, 2000; Cross et al., 2014; Garrat & Piper, 2008; Gilljam et al., 2010; Griebler & Nowak, 2012) nor the professional literature (Ministry of Education, 2015) have resulted in a categorized organization of these programs and activities. This lack of organization into categories may lead educational institutions and educators to avoid defining the student council's goals. This oversight has already been noted by researchers who claim that most non-formal educational settings lack defined curricula, and decisions regarding content and values are vague (Cohen, 2004). And, indeed, student councils do not have defined curricula, and each school constructs its own arena of activities in accordance with the considerations of whoever leads the student councils or in keeping with the school's needs (Ministry of Education, 2015). The resulting ambiguity may be an obstacle for the educational team that leads the council – both in planning and in finding suitable modes of activity. The classification and categorization offered in the present

study should be helpful to schools – and the educators who oversee student councils – in defining the platforms to be promoted in school, and the ways to do so.

Four types of student councils as they relate to platforms and arenas of activity

Our findings reveal that the Integrative student councils received markedly higher scores for all variables examined. They promote students' rights, promote activities to foster school climate and education for democracy, enhance the development of the students' leadership skills, and encourage volunteering in school and in the community. In addition, Integrative student councils tend to initiate frequent activities connected to their stated platforms. The findings reveal that councils of the Integrative type have an active work pattern connected to their platforms. The fact that schools with an Integrative council allow their students to act in and impact upon various arenas of activity characterizes these schools as encouraging their student councils' active, multidisciplinary involvement.

The excellence of this type of student councils in all the variables studied may be explained by the interdisciplinary approach to learning (Duerr, 2008; Jones, 2009; Szostak, 2007). This is a modern approach to instruction which allows simultaneous learning of several disciplines, and it differs from the traditional approach that encourages focusing on a single discipline. The interdisciplinary approach is of great value to the students because it helps enrich their educational experience and develops learning skills by looking at various perspectives (Jones, 2009). This educational approach makes learning more efficient, especially for adolescents, and prepares the students to be adults who are secure, independent, and curious to learn beyond the discipline (Duerr, 2008). Dar (2012) addressed the multidisciplinary approach in non-formal education in what he defines as the hybrid type, which is one of one of six types where there is symbiosis between formal and non-formal dimensions and a dynamic equilibrium between the formal and non-formal codes that operate in combination with each other, together leading to good quality processes of execution and learning.

Student councils of the Rights type scored lowest in community volunteering, and actually received the lowest scores on all measures examined. Compared to the other types they do less to foster school climate, are engaged in fewer activities regarding educating for democracy, do less to

develop students' leadership skills, and are less forthcoming in their encouragement toward student volunteerism. The surprising findings regarding the Rights type had to do with advancing students' rights, the very forefront variable of this type. The study revealed that Rights student councils do less to promote student rights than do the other types, on all fronts, even the one whose banner they wave. Like the Rights type, the Volunteer student councils also received medium scores in all arenas.

The findings regarding the Rights and Volunteer types seem to indicate that the names given these types in a previous study (Halfon & Romi, submitted) do not necessarily define them. One possible explanation for this incongruity could be that in the previous study the school principals named the groups, whereas this study is based on answers gathered from students. Perhaps the principals named their councils according to an ideal to which they aspired, rather than actual circumstances. If so, however, this is true only for the two types in the middle of the continuum. The scores for the two polar types– Integrative and Undefined – showed perfect compatibility between the students' views in this study and the principals' in the previous one.

Findings regarding the fourth type, the Undefined student council, indicate that councils of this type operate vaguely and in a non-systematic way. We found that Undefined student councils enhance students' leadership skills, although this finding did not come to the fore in other analyses conducted for this study. Furthermore, the present study reveals that the Undefined student council's initiative to act in school is low in each arena examined. The Undefined type may be compared to Dar's (2012) "weak framework", a compromising type. This type is characterized by achieving the organization's goals through a low level of activity. It is possible that the educational teams in schools of this type avoid formulating a clear position regarding the goals and objectives of the student councils in their schools, and do not follow defined work plans, which is typical of non-formal settings (Cohen, 2004). From an educational standpoint this means that it is important to define student councils' goals, objectives, and work processes before the councils become active in school. It is important to identify the needs for each arena of activity, to act based on preparations to define goals and priorities, so as to contribute to expanding the student

councils' effect on the entire school population and to increase the level of efficiency of their working patterns.

To conclude, this study reveals that encouraging students to take part in a broad spectrum of activities and to experience this involvement at various levels will, as researchers have noted, better prepare these adolescents for life in the postmodern era where the individual must be able to protect his civil rights, and at the same time, be willing to defend the democracy in which he lives (Cobo, 2013; Cohen, 2007). As far as possible, educational teams who lead student councils must encourage multidisciplinary activity, along the lines of the Integrative student council.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for follow-up research

The present study has several limitations. Because research on the types of student councils is new, we focused on the student population for our assessment of the councils' activities. Follow-up studies can build on this to expand their examination to additional populations that are significant to the arena of student councils, such as student council coordinators and teachers on the school staff.

The quality of student council activity was assessed by examining the promotion of their platforms, arenas of activity, and their level of initiative. We recommend that future studies be conducted to continue the assessment of the quality of student councils' activities using additional variables.

Furthermore, a qualitative study of this issue would help build a larger corpus of knowledge concerning the contribution of student councils and provide a more in-depth understanding of the different types identified and studied. We also recommend that a study be conducted to further investigate the issue of defined curricula and platforms for student councils, based on a division into the arenas of activity arrived at in the present study.

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