

ISRAEL IN OUR LIVES

ISRAEL IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

Written by

Peter A. Geffen

Edited by

Barry Chazan

Elan Ezrachi

Rafi Sheniak

Barbara Sutnick

Consultants

Steven M. Cohen

Rachel Korazim

Jonathan Woocher

Israel in Our Lives is a project sponsored by

The CRB Foundation,

The Department for Jewish Zionist Education

of the Jewish Agency for Israel

and

The Charles R. Bronfman Centre for the Israel Experience: Mifgashim.

In cooperation with

Jewish Education Service of North America and

Israel Experience, Inc.

Project Directors

Dr. Barry Chazan
Dr. Elan Ezrachi
Dr. Rafi Sheniak

**North American Steering
Committee**

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Beni Hager
Dr. Joel Schindler
Rabbi Arthur Vernon
Dr. Jonathan Woocher

Advisory Council

Dr. Janet Aviad
Dr. David Harman
Shaul Lilach
Dr. David Resnick
Rabbi Joseph Wernik

Project Coordinator

Barbara Sutnick

Further Information and Additional Copies Available From:

Israel Experience, Inc.
730 Broadway
New York, New York
tel: (212) 253-9334
fax: (212) 253-9710
e-mail: israel_experience@cjfny.org

JESNA
730 Broadway
New York, New York
tel: (212) 259-2000
fax: (212) 259-2009
e-mail: info@jesna.org

The Department for Jewish Zionist Education
of the Jewish Agency for Israel

110 East 59 Street
New York, New York
tel: (212) 339-6071
fax: (212) 318-6178

e-mail: wzoedu@IX.netcom.com **Project Website:** <http://www.israelives.org>

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DEAR COLLEAGUE,

As we approach the twenty-first century, we are entering a new period regarding the place of Israel in the lives of contemporary Jews. The historic eras of struggling for a homeland and creating a state are over. The State of Israel has been in existence since 1948. It is a modern country which, while beset with problems and challenges, has established itself as a vibrant and dynamic contemporary Jewish society. Israel has changed; the North American Jewish community has changed; and the world that we live in has changed. Consequently, the challenges facing Israel and world Jewry at the end of the century are different than those faced by the Zionist Movement and the fledgling state in prior decades.

As we enter the new millennium, two educational challenges call out to us. The first challenge is to make Israel a dynamic and living force in the personal life of every modern Jew. While there is little doubt that Israel has become a major factor in the life of the Jewish people as a whole, it is less clear that enough Jews are personally touched and moved by the miracle called Israel. Consequently, great energy needs to be invested in making Israel "speak" to every Jew in a very personal and compelling way. Such a personal connection between Israel and North American Jewry will ideally enrich young people in both societies, as Jews and as human beings.

The second challenge is to significantly increase the number of Jews - particularly young Jews - who visit Israel. We have been successful in bringing Israel's survival needs to the attention of North American Jewry; now we must devote great energy to enabling Jews to actually visit Israel. In the coming decades we should aspire to bring great numbers of Jews to Israel within the framework of meaningful and well-planned educational programs. Indeed a positive Israel Experience can be a vital part of the Jewish education and development of contemporary young people, and our young deserve to have such a wonderful opportunity.

Israel In Our Lives is a series of Guides aimed at helping you to respond to these two challenges. These Guides serve two purposes:

To suggest ways to help you in introducing the idea of Israel into the lives of your constituents in an interesting and accessible manner.

To suggest ways to help you in promoting the idea of a visit to Israel - "The Israel Experience" - as a critical Jewish experience for every young Jew.

These Guides are intended to help lay and professional leaders (rabbis, educators, board members, youth workers, camp directors, early childhood supervisors, and others) in their effort to introduce the idea of Israel and the challenge of an Israel Experience to their constituents. They are not program materials or curricula. Rather, they are planning documents intended to help you in your work. The Guides can be used in staff and in-service sessions devoted to the place of Israel in your organization; in policy planning sessions with your board and professional leadership; in retreats and programs with your constituents and members, and in numerous other ways.

The Guides have been created by teams of North American and Israeli Jewish educators working together. They are part of a new venture now being undertaken by a partnership of North American and Israeli agencies to promote the Israel Experience as a major priority in twenty-first century Jewish life.

The Guide you are holding includes cross-references to other titles in the series *Israel In Our Lives* which you may also find useful in your work. We look forward to receiving your feedback about the issues and suggestions raised in this and complementary Guides in the series. We hope that *Israel In Our Lives* will serve you in your blessed efforts to establish Israel as a deep and rich dimension of the lives of our young and our old.

Barry Chazan, Elan Ezrachi, Rafi Sheniak, Barbara Sutnick
Jerusalem, 1997

ISRAEL IN OUR LIVES

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Doron Krakow, National Director, Young Judaea; Chairman, North American Alliance for Jewish Youth

The editors would like to thank all the authors, advisors, and consultants of the *Israel In Our Lives* series — educational leaders who have brought their considerable insights and talents to bear on this project. In addition to those already mentioned in these pages, we extend our appreciation to those who helped in shaping the project concept: Dr. Zvi Bekerman, Gidon Elad, Dr. Cecile Jordan, Clive Lessem, Caren Levine, Dr. Zev Mankowitz, Dr. Eliezer Marcus, Susan Rodenstein, and to those who contributed to *Israel in Jewish Day Schools*: Yona Fuld, Beverly Gribetz, Elan Halperin, Paula Steisel, Shmuel Wigoda, Stuart Zweiter.

PART ONE: LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

In 1986, the 40th anniversary of The State of Israel was marked by the publication of a special issue of *Pedagogic Reporter* specifically dedicated to Israel. The issue contained a range of articles commenting upon the then current state of Israel education in both formal and informal settings. In my view, it could have been written yesterday.

There was much to engender pride. Israel had clearly moved into a more significant place in North American Jewish schools than ever before:

The surveys of “Israel in American Jewish Education” conducted by Drs. Alvin Schiff, Barry Chazan, and George Pollak in the 60s, 70s, and 80s found that in a large percentage of Jewish schools the study of Israel is directly incorporated as a separate study encompassing a broad range of topics or is indirectly integrated in the study of Bible, history, social studies, and holidays and festivals. Over the years an impressive abundance of texts and materials has been produced to effectuate the progressively increased emphasis on the place of Israel in Jewish education and the qualitative teaching about Israel.¹

But within the same corporate analysis, others noted a different reality:

...despite growing educational interest in the land, state, and people of Israel and the unanimous consensus about the importance of teaching Israel in North American Jewish schools, we remain ambivalent and become increasingly discontented.²

1 “Camping and Zionism/Israel” *Pedagogic Reporter*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 35.

2 “Curriculum Change in the Teaching of Israel,” Tamar Ariav in *Pedagogic Reporter*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p.9.

If the tendencies identified by these milestone studies (Schiff, Chazan, and Pollack studies of Israel education in the 60's, 70's and 80's respectively) would in effect continue, we should find future generations of students dealing with Israel in our schools in a more complete and fulfilling way. **And yet there is a deep sense of frustration and uncertainty in Jewish education about what it means to teach Israel and Zionism, both cognitively and affectively for maximum results.** [author's emphasis]³

Not only do the articles reflect the general state of affairs in 1986, but they help trace the conditions that lead to our current situation which is characterized by a continuation and deepening of the observed “ambivalen(ce) . . . increasing discontent . . . frustration . . . and uncertainty.” If anything, we can speak about a change that is not good news: little *frustration* actually remains today about how to teach Israel – only sincere, earnest attempts to grapple with the challenge of teaching Israel can be the cause of what we might call “frustration.”

On one hand, as an educational community, both professionals and lay people remain convinced of the seriousness and efficacy of Israel education in our schools, both supplementary and day. On the other hand, reality challenges those very assumptions. Interest in Israel is increasingly on the wane. In fact, the usually optimistic authority, Barry Chazan, begins a scathing critique written in 1995 with the words: “The State of Israel in American Jewish education is moribund.”⁴ Chazan clearly believes that American Jewish education has had little effect upon the Israel attitudes of its students and he states that “the reason for the lack of influence is that, after almost 50 years, American Jewish education still hasn't . . . figured out what to teach about Israel, how to teach it, and most important, why to teach it.”⁵

Please see...



³ *ibid.*, p.8.

⁴ “J'accuse,” Barry Chazan, in *Jewish Education News*, Spring, 1995, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 15.

⁵ *ibid.*

Issues and Ideology

■

In addition, in the areas of Israel/Zionism educational philosophy, teacher selection, teacher training, curriculum development, curriculum implementation, and materials development and selection, we continue to face the issues raised a decade ago. Various authors identified issues that were simply ignored. Much of the critique centers around matters of ideological commitment and intellectual seriousness. For example, Ron Kronish raised the sensitive question about who could or should teach about Israel and Zionism:

“. . . the teaching of Zionism cannot be relegated to amateurs or pro-Israel persons, and certainly not to non-Zionists, nor people who have abandoned Zion and the State of Israel! Therefore the first prerequisite for any teacher who proposes to teach Zionism on any level is that he or she develop a Zionist ideology No one should even begin trying to teach Zionism unless he or she has at least begun to work out his or her own Zionistic ideology in a systematic fashion.”⁶

While one may disagree with Kronish’s absolutes, we cannot ignore the importance of the underlying point that he raises. The choice of who teaches value-laden and ideological subject matter is of concern from both ends of the spectrum.

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Today’s parents and teachers have lived through the establishment and securing of a Jewish national home and the heady victory of the Six Day War. Contemporary students have witnessed historic waves of immigration, profound changes in Israel’s rela-

⁶ “Teaching Zionism,” Ron Kronish in *Pedagogic Reporter*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p.6.

Response to New Realities

tionship to its neighboring Arab states, and complex political developments including the tragic assassination of the political head of the Jewish commonwealth for the first time in 2,000 years. Teaching about a people who were snatched from the jaws of genocide and went on to win dramatic military victories is a more exciting pedagogic challenge than addressing the not-always-so-inspiring realities that face the Jewish state today. Thus, even in the best of situations, schools often tend to teach about the modern Israel of yesterday.

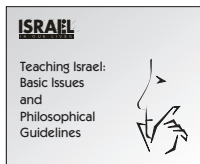
The nature of the teacher/student exchange is at the heart of Tamar Ariav's insightful comments on *how* the Israel that was being presented was being assimilated:

“Overall, the textbook authors are eager to transmit information and perpetuate myths rather than portray Israel in a realistic, complex, and multi-dimensional way. By distorting reality, stereotyping, emphasizing the past over the present, avoiding controversies that exist in Israel as well as in the Diaspora, and seeking to “Americanize” the image of Israel, these books do a disservice to both our students and teachers Students need curriculum materials which would allow them to think, solve problems, make value judgments, and use their intellectual capabilities in grappling with real issues.”⁷

She correctly understood the deeper nature of the problem facing the Jewish educational community in North America:

“The teaching of Israel and Zionism is problematic because it does not have a thoroughly conceived philosophical/ideological paradigm and sound

Please see...



⁷ “Curriculum Change in the Teaching of Israel,” Tamar Ariav in *Pedagogic Reporter*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p.9.

pedagogic underpinnings . . . [there is] uncertainty about . . . the meaning of Israel and its relationship to Judaism and Diaspora Jewry.”⁸

And on the practical level, the Director of the New York BJE’s Teachers’ Center, Shoshana Glatzer noted: “We are all aware that many Jewish educators are unhappy with their curricula for teaching Israel.”⁹ This is not to say that they do not exist. Indeed we have masses of uncoordinated materials (many individually quite excellent in quality) that fill our resource rooms and libraries. With all of these excellent materials, texts, videos, films, and accessible archives of primary sources, our presentation of Israel/Zionism remains on the fringe of what we are doing. Schools report an overbearing range of curricular mandates or requirements. With curricular “integration” a relatively accepted but little utilized (if not grossly misunderstood) approach, most schools are being honest in saying that it is impossible to add yet another subject with the competing needs for more math, more science, more English language arts, more Hebrew, more Tanach, etc. And it was a day school principal who called for “. . . a systematic, comprehensive, well-coordinated curriculum on Israel and Zionism to be implemented in our schools and complemented in our homes.”¹⁰

As in the 1980s, the actuality of Israel education in the Jewish schools of North America in the late 1990s continues to lack the more significant meaning and personal impact that Ariav described so well. David Breakstone, Director of Ramah Programs in Israel, wrote:

“The prominence of Israel in American Jewish life is a commonplace in any discussion of the community today Indeed the Jewish state is regularly

⁸ *ibid.*, p 10.

⁹ “Developing a Curriculum for Teaching Israel,” Shoshana Glatzer in *Pedagogic Reporter*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 13. N.B. A new curriculum for teaching Israel in 1st - 8th grades was authored by Glatzer et al. in 1997 and published by the BJE of Greater New York.

¹⁰ “Vision and Reality: A Message to Teachers and Parents,” Michal Korman in *Pedagogic Reporter*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 25.

ascribed a paramount role in . . . widely diverse areas of group life These pronouncements, however, reveal little of the meaning of Israel in contemporary Jewish life — if we understand meaning not in terms of observable community behaviors but in terms of influence on the development of one’s world-view, self-identity, and core values.¹¹

As much as we might like to believe differently, neither the supplementary school nor the non-Orthodox day school can claim to escape this critique (the situation in Orthodox day schools often differs; see below). In fact, in examining Israel education in the day school in North America, we are faced with a complex task. Day schools certainly *appear* committed to Israel, see themselves as “integrating” Israel into various parts of their formal curriculum, and providing informal opportunities for experiential Israel education throughout the school year. But Breakstone has correctly pointed to the profound opportunity presented by truly effective Israel/Zionism education: “(to) influence . . . the development of (the students’ and teachers’) world-view, self-identity, and core values.”



In order for this to occur, we must understand Zionism as a revolutionary movement of and for the Jewish people. How does one take a movement that has and — in the case of at least some of the recent Russian and Ethiopian Zionist emigres — continues to result in dramatically changed identities, self-images, and characters, and portray it as

a piece of “information” akin to facts about the French Revolution? Israel education that *informs*, but does not *move* is not living up to its potential.

A Revolutionary Movement

¹¹ “The Dynamics of Israel in American Jewish Life: An Analysis of Educational Means as ‘Cultural Texts’” David Breakstone in *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Fall, 1989, Vol. 66, No. 1, p. 7.

One cannot provide the type of identity/character/value education called for above by periodic, disconnected discussions of “Israel and the kibbutz,” “Israel and the Arabs,” “Israel and the computer industry,” or (as in the case of one curricular unit designed for teenagers in Great Britain) “Bus Routes in the City of Jerusalem.” It is further doubtful if Israel education can impact students’ development if our efforts do not motivate them to spend some period during their young lives visiting and learning in that country. Uninspired, stale Israel education only serves to perpetuate apathy about what could be a vibrant, provocative, and identity-forming field of inquiry for our students.

PART TWO: SNAPSHOTS AND TRENDS

This examination of Israel and Zionism’s place in the curriculum and life of the contemporary Jewish day school has been limited by the lack of ongoing research and data collection in this field. The past decade has seen no formal research on Israel education in the day schools and a minimum of reflective pieces, which immediately begs the question of how much of this paper is a reflection of personal bias. Despite the admitted dearth of empirical evidence, I believe that I have objectively assessed the current state of affairs.

In preparing this report, I conducted telephone interviews with principals and Israeli program providers representing over two dozen day schools, reviewed the general day school literature, and read and assessed some of the curricular materials used in the schools we interviewed. (These include Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, independent, and community day schools.) Conversations with community leadership, lay and professional, over the past several years throughout the United States also contributed to the findings in this study.

As can be readily seen from my interviews with school administrators, Israel education is almost universally a part of the Jewish school’s curriculum; however, it is more often than not a *well-intentioned add-on*. Let me share some examples from the interviews:



One school reported that “Israel is a part of the curriculum from pre-school to eighth grade through geography and holidays Israel is integrated into our curriculum through the Hebrew curriculum *There is no set curriculum on paper but we are trying to put together an Israel curriculum in the school.*”

Interview Excerpts

Another reported: “*There is no formal Israel curriculum at our Solomon Schechter Day School Israel is integrated into different areas through holidays and Bible studies. We have an elaborate and ambitious program for Yom Yerushalayim and Yom Ha’atzmaut. The Salute to Israel Parade is a major production.*”

A third school added: “Thirteen years ago a trip to Israel was created for eighth graders to experience Israel. *The reason for the creation of the trip was that after Solomon Schechter, children would be attending public schools and wouldn’t continue their formal Jewish education.*”

Among Orthodox day schools in North America (which range in orientation from Hasidic to “community”) the approach to Israel is varied. While many relate to Israel as a modern state, the “beginning of the dawn of Jewish redemption,” others focus on the *Land* of Israel, avoiding the issue of Jewish sovereignty. Israel is presented as the spiritual center of the Jewish people and the particular mitzvot of the Land are studied. As in the other streams, the amount of time devoted to Israel studies varies from school to school in the Orthodox world. However a key common denominator linking Orthodox day schools vis a vis Israel bears serious investigation as a model: across the board, graduates of Orthodox high schools are the most heavily represented in year-long programs of study in Israel, with almost 50 percent availing themselves of this opportunity. This is because almost all Orthodox day schools and yeshivot encourage their students (both male and female) to follow high school with a year of study at an Israeli yeshiva and help place them in a program that the school considers desirable.



The following comments reflect major aspects of current Israel education that were found within our schools (with some variance, of course, among schools):

Today’s Trends

- These is no complete, formal, graded curriculum.
- Israel is most comfortably taught through Hebrew language instruction, holiday observance, Israel-related mitzvot, prayer, and Bible studies.
- Current events provide a major vehicle, but when and where they are incorporated appears to be erratic and haphazard.
- Teachers do not have sufficient or sophisticated educational background regarding Israel.
- To the extent that modern Zionism is presented as a secular movement, Zionist history can seem incompatible with the religious mission of the day school. (This, of course, diminishes in schools that teach religious Zionism.)
- With *aliyah* not a part of the mission of any of the non-Orthodox (nor most of the Orthodox) day schools, most other philosophical bases for Israel education are inarticulate.
- The Israel Experience (i.e., an educational trip to Israel) has become an increasingly attractive choice by schools for involving their older students in building a relationship with Israel. The trend in Orthodox schools to encourage graduates to spend a year of study in Israeli yeshivot continues.
- But, the goal of that Israel Experience or year of study may have little to do with well thought out educational parameters for teaching Israel.

PART THREE: CURRICULUR MATERIALS – A CASE IN POINT

Most non-Orthodox day schools are affiliated with the Solomon Schechter movement. We may therefore gain some insight from examining their curricular materials. In 1990, the United Synagogue of America published *A Curriculum for the Jewish Day School* edited by Jay Stern. Stern reflected on the state of the Solomon Schechter schools in 1990: “. . . the differences among the schools are almost as great as the similarities There are great differences in skills achieved and curricular emphases.”¹²

With this thought in mind, Stern’s work sought to increase “commonality” of curriculum as a means of bridging those “great differences.” It is therefore instructive for our purposes to see what place Israel education has in the model Stern and his colleagues presented:

- Zionism is Unit II of the Grade 8 history curriculum and is allotted two months.
- The content begins with “The age-old hope for restoration and return” and ends with “The War of Independence (1948).”
- The 1990 curriculum outline lists two possible books for students to use, both written in 1977 (i.e., before most of the 1990 eighth grade students were born). No video-tapes or other materials are suggested for students.
- Teachers are assumed to know the material, requiring only limited sources for additional background.

¹² *A Curriculum for the Jewish Day School*, Section II, History, Section III, Rabbimics, edited by Jay Stern. United Synagogue of America, Commission on Jewish Education, Solomon Schechter Day School Association, 1990. Preface.

- Mention is made of American Jewish fundraising for Israel within the topic: “Forms of Community Organization.” No other American Jewish involvement is obvious.
- Unit V covers issues of “Contemporary Jewry” with half a month available for “The Arab-Israeli conflict: problems of security and boundaries — moving from hatred to mutual acceptance and reconciliation.” Here an additional text is offered for students, published in 1973, entitled *Israel: Years of Crisis, Years of Hope*.

Stern laid out a fine rationale for curriculum development when he stated:

“The present work is an attempt not so much to narrow the range of choices available to Solomon Schechter schools, as to raise the level of aspiration within the choices that schools inevitably will make. Thus, if Hebrew is to be taught, as it is in all Solomon Schechter schools, there ought to be some agreement on what is meant by aural and reading comprehension and speaking skills. If Bible is to be taught, as it is in all schools, some guidance is in order as to approach, books to choose, and commentaries to use.”¹³

Following Stern’s sensible logic, it is then instructive to note the following:

- the absence of curriculum on the teaching of Israel and Zionism;
- the subsequent lack of “agreement on what is meant by . . .” Israel and Zionism; and
- it is doubtful that schools will seriously aspire to include the subject of Israel in the school curriculum, given its virtual absence from the official document of the movement’s own continental association.

13 A Curriculum for the Jewish Day School, Section II History, Section III, Rabbiniics, edited by Jay Stern. United Synagogue of America, Commission on Jewish Education, Solomon Schechter Day School Association, 1990. Preface.

As we approach the twenty-first century, we are gratified by increased interest in day school education for North American Jewish children, augmented particularly by growth in the non-Orthodox world. The time is right to begin a process of changing the place of Israel/Zionism education within these schools. Maximizing the identity-influencing elements of a Jewish education is pre-eminently important in the future of the (non-Orthodox) day school. Israel/Zionism may be the single strongest agenda item in the Jewish lexicon. Indeed if the purpose of the Jewish day school is to lay foundations for continued Jewish education — which it must — and to heighten the sense of Jewish identity amongst its graduates — which it must — it will continue to avoid truly meaningful Israel/Zionism education at its own peril.

PART FOUR: WHAT CAN WE DO?

Changing the reality of Israel/Zionism education will require institutional change. All studies indicate the complexity of change for schools, which tend to be conservative and change-resistant by nature. We must therefore recognize the need for engaging all elements in the school community, particularly faculty (and preferably not just Jewish studies faculty). A serious approach to the question of Israel education should include the elements described below.



Assessment

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The school should undertake an intellectually open assessment of what it currently considers its Israel education program, ideally in consultation with an outside body (i.e., a Central Agency for Jewish Education, or a university education department faculty in Israel or in its home community). This must be similar in scope to an evaluation of a mathematics or language program, i.e., assessing curriculum, teacher competence, in-service training, goals and objectives, observable and/or testable outcomes, informal supports, parent involvement and co-education, and funding. This assessment should clarify current goals while leaving open the possibility of reassessing or expanding those goals.

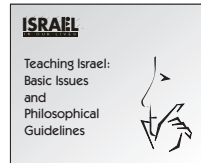


Articulating a Vision

After undertaking the assessment, the institution should consider the philosophical issues involved. Both faculty and trustees need to articulate an institutional understanding of their own personal relationship to Israel and Zionism. This struggle to confront the intellectual/philosophic

underpinnings of the school's program will only enhance the curriculum development process. All parties to decision making and implementation need to appreciate the ideological issues involved in the teaching of Israel and Zionism, and this process needs to take place in the light of traditional Judaic texts or sources as well as more contemporary materials. (For an example of an institutional understanding, see Appendix.)

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At this early point in the process the school may discover that its ability to address these questions is limited, often severely. The school may find that few of its faculty have been to Israel within the last 20 years. Israeli teachers, often carrying a “mixed bag” of ambivalence and nonreflective patriotism, will have been to visit family, but probably will have experienced little of the country's intellectual, political, social, and cultural changes. Therefore, even before the discussion of vision is concluded, the school would be advised to begin planning an in-service training program in Israel for staff.



The establishment of an in-service training program in Israel for faculty and other relevant staff is an indispensable component of school transformation. It is also worthwhile to plan a special seminar for trustees. Although the seminar can be a one-time program, a long-term, institutional commitment to cycling all faculty through such seminars will have far greater impact. In fact, an element of the post-trip follow-up work would be for participants to work on the development of the school's philosophical approaches.

In-Service Training

Some schools have assisted individual teachers to attend courses sponsored by the Melton Centre of the Hebrew University, the Lookstein Center at Bar-Ilan University, the Department of Education of the Jewish Agency, and other programs designed for Diaspora Jewish studies teachers. Until recently, some of these experiences have been

hit or miss, with teachers often returning enthusiastically to schools and classrooms where their ability to institutionalize a new idea or approach learned during the summer seminar was quickly stifled. Such a program is far more valuable when the returning science teacher, for example, is given the place, administrative support, and budget to set up a model in school of the desert agricultural methods that had so inspired her during her Israel seminar.

To effectively bring home new directions, ideas, and thoughts, let alone curriculum, the school as an institution must commit to “training” with both openness and desire. Enabling significant numbers of faculty and administrators to begin the intellectual process with Israel-based experiences will help ensure that desired change can eventually be implemented. Trustee commitment is most easily manifested by a clear mutual understanding of the overall goal of curricular reform and by providing funding to support teacher fellowships for participation in such programs. Economies of scale, and a sense of broad-based community support, are achieved when more than one day school in a given community unite to plan and undertake such in-service work together. Several Atlanta Jewish day schools, for example, are in their third year of a project coordinated by their city’s Jewish Educational Services in which faculty members participate — on a rotating basis — in summer study seminars at the Melton Centre of the Hebrew University, complemented by preparatory and follow-up work in Atlanta.

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As part of in-service training, the school should explore the question of whether Israel/Zionism education will become an additional area of curriculum or will be integrated into the existing curricular design (with obvious adjustments). In concert with the Israeli faculty, the school may identify specific age groups, curricular areas, themes, and/or specialties on which to focus during the course of in-service programs in Israel. It is likely, if not necessary, that these take place over a three-to-five year period, with long-term consideration of annual training programs in Israel for faculty.



The development of curriculum is obviously the most challenging and difficult of the tasks, but it is also the most creative and rewarding. Curriculum development must involve consultation with teachers, curriculum designers, and scholars to reflect the best possible meshing of theory and practice. Teachers should be encouraged to bring their current “successes” with them into the process. They need to be empowered to realize the expansive possibilities of Israel studies as part of their programs, not as competition for valuable time needed for other things.

Special Israel days at school have the greatest impact when they are supported by Israel studies in the classroom. For example, SAR, which serves pupils from nursery to eighth grade in Bronx, New York, ran a *Yom Ha’atzmaut* Fair that included both classroom study and school-wide involvement for all age groups. Each class selected an age-appropriate Israel topic, studied it in depth for several weeks either in Jewish or secular studies classes (e.g. stamps of Israel in history class, modern agricultural methods in science class, paths of the patriarchs in Bible class), and created a display for a huge *Yom Ha’atzmaut* fair. The day opened with a festive prayer service, reflecting the school’s view of *Yom Ha’atzmaut* as both a religious and national holiday.

High school students, in particular, can be encouraged to take initiative and bring Israel into school through their after-school clubs. Student ownership of Israel programming can have many benefits. Current events bulletin boards mounted by students

Curriculum Development

themselves have a particular draw for their peers. At Ramaz (New York) students are given greater leeway when they, themselves, invite highly political Israel speakers to address them during lunch hour than the school administration could take when it invites speakers. (For “official” school events, balanced panels are required.)



In the School Community

Israel-oriented programming should begin to find a more meaningful and comprehensive place within the life of the extended school community. For Israel education of the kind we are seeking to have an impact, it cannot be limited to the day school graduate of age twelve or even fourteen. The adult community — faculty, parents, lay leadership — must come to appreciate that Israel is far more than falafel and folk dancing. School can become the catalyst for bringing Israeli arts, culture, intellectuality, and social and political issues to the conscious awareness of the entire extended community. One successful example of this is the SAR Israel Day (described above) that was moved to the local JCC and opened to the public after its run at the school.



Hebrew Language and Literature

It goes without saying that the acquisition of modern Hebrew language enhances ones ability to communicate with Jews all over the world today, and especially in Israel. As such, Hebrew has an important place in the curricula of most Jewish day schools. Even more than a vehicle of communication, however, the Hebrew language embodies the cultural, historic, and religious codes of the Jewish people. To learn Hebrew is to learn the main language in which Judaism “thinks” - both today and in the past.

Realistically, we must acknowledge that it is the rare day school student who graduates fluent in modern Hebrew, spoken or written (even though many do acquire a strong foundation). It is, nonetheless, important that schools not miss the opportunity to include the full range of modern Hebrew literature in their language arts curriculum even though sufficient language ability may be lacking in students. Prose, poetry, drama, and journalism written in Israel today offer a brilliant and beckoning window to modern Israeli culture and society. Although these pieces must be studied in translation by most day school students, perhaps with small selections read in the original, they are a young person's entree into the modern Jewish bookshelf. Let us not forsake these works, even at the price of providing translations.



Making an Israel Experience a regular, integral part of the school program has the advantage of “institutionalizing” the trip. Teachers and curriculum planners are able to build toward the travel program and to effectively draw upon students' experiences of Israel upon their return. The astute teacher will also capitalize on the “trickle down effect” that occurs when older siblings of their students who are in Israel send news and personal feelings home. Institutionalized travel allows parents to plan financially for the trip and know that the framework in which their child is travelling is familiar and trustworthy.

The timing of such a trip is an important consideration for each school to make. For example, if students travel to Israel for a summer of fun after tenth or eleventh grade, might this preclude a more serious year of study after high school or will it whet their appetite to return? If students attend a two-week Israel seminar during their eighth and

Israel Experience Travel Program

final year of Jewish studies, is there the danger that they will feel that they have “done Israel” sufficiently for the foreseeable future or, alternatively, if they do not go during that year will they *ever again* be motivated or have the opportunity to visit Israel?

In any case, the school should seriously consider the establishment of an Israel Experience program in which faculty and students spend an extended time in Israel as a major component of the curriculum. Although an Israel Experience is most powerful after the entire curricular reform has been undertaken and implemented throughout the grades, it can be offered as soon as the faculty has created its Israel/Zionism curriculum for the relevant grade.

High schools may want to follow one of several existing models. The Bialik and Herzliah high schools in Montreal, for example, have nine-week summer programs in Israel, with high student participation rates, that complement the Israel studies curricula of the schools. These programs have already been clearly institutionalized, with parents aware of the need to budget for them well in advance. The Hebrew Academy high school in the same city sends its graduating class for a three-month program that combines summer travel with five weeks of study in Israeli high schools during the fall semester. Another model, adopted by the Charles E. Smith school in Washington D.C. and the Beth Tefillah school in Baltimore, is to send the graduating class to Ramah Programs in Israel for up to three months, where their final semester of high school (often under-utilized time in a student’s school career) culminates in an exciting, identity-building learning experience. The Ramaz School in New York, by contrast, has chosen not to mount an Israel travel program during the high school years. It prefers to concentrate efforts in encouraging students to spend a full year of post-high school study at the educational program of their choice in Israel. (Over 50 percent of Ramaz graduates avail themselves of this opportunity, which is somewhat over the national average among Orthodox day schools.) Environments for post-high

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school study in Israel vary considerably, and it is a challenge for schools to direct their students to programs with the outlook and degree of exposure to modern Israel that they feel is most beneficial for their students.



Many day schools today are beginning to include a *mifgash* (an educational encounter between their students and Israeli peers) during their Israel Experience programs. These meetings, when properly programmed, can strengthen visitors' bonds with Israel, putting a more human face on the entire trip. The many Solomon Schechter schools that send eighth graders on two-week trips try to arrange at least one day in joint programming with Israelis. Other students visit peers in their Partnership 2000 communities. The Kelman Academy in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, for example, holds a three-day encounter (*mifgash*) with eighth-graders in Arad, involving joint travel in the Negev and home hospitality. Many other communities have also adopted this approach, which is to be highly encouraged for all.

Mifgashim

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School twinning, in which schools in Israel and the Diaspora pair up for joint study and other interactions, is still a relatively new and ambitious undertaking. The significant logistical challenges require serious commitment and careful coordination by professionals in order to run programs that are ultimately rewarding. The Montreal community has trail-blazed a unique undertaking in school twinning with its Partnership 2000 city, Beersheva. Seventeen Montreal educators from two high schools travelled to Beersheva to meet with Israeli colleagues and develop several different twinning activities for their schools: students in both cities will study some similar subjects, write projects together

Twinning Projects

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using the Internet, and eventually meet when the Montreal youth visit Israel. The teachers continued their joint work via electronic mail, and Israeli teachers travelled to Montreal several months later to further fine-tune the project. In a similar vein, six New York Jewish day schools and one JCC have teamed up with six Jerusalem schools and one community center to run “Cyberchaver,” seven different school twinning programs designed collaboratively by the educators involved. Each set of partner

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schools developed its own joint curriculum, on which students work together using the Internet. The schools in both cities represent a range of religious streams but, interestingly, are not paired along ideological lines; rather, teachers paired the schools based on mutual interests during educators’ planning sessions (both in Jerusalem and in New York). Although initiated by the New York Federation, this program is being educationally shepherded jointly by the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York and the Jerusalem Education Authority.

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A FINAL WORD

The forgoing analysis of the current state of Israel/Zionism education clearly points to the enormous opportunity and consequent challenge confronting those seeking serious changes. Erikson taught most conclusively that identity is built on solid foundations of basic trust, autonomy, and competence — all characteristics of the “deeper” Israel/Zionism story. In an American Jewish community that has been characterized by some critics as obsessed with the Holocaust, it is vital to create positive, living models of Jewish communal and personal life. Such examples will strengthen the psychological underpinning of Jewish identity, and enable it to emerge as a central part of the overall identity of our next generation. The story of Israel and Zionism offers just such an opportunity. The education of children regarding Israel and Zionism must encompass the majesty and tragedy, the challenges and achievements of the creation of a sovereign Jewish people in the Land of Israel.