



Paideia and Israel Education

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ABSTRACT

Educative processes must account for content, learners, teachers, and contexts in order for it have meaning for learners. Seen through the lens of the reflective practitioner, this paideia considers models of general education, the relationship between vision and praxis, and their implications on Israel education. Contained herein are a set of pedagogic practices and aspirations connected to Israeli and Jewish history, people, and their expansive canon of text allowing for the acquisition of values, content, and skills for all learners – students and teachers alike – to explore what their personal relationship with Israel entails.

KEYWORDS

Israel education; paideia; educational theory; reflective practice.

INTRODUCTION

The field of Israel education has grown tremendously over the past twenty-plus years. Foundational to the field of Israel education, a subset within Jewish education, can be found in Lisa Grant and Ezra Kopelwitz's landmark work in which they call for a paradigm shift of Israel education in America (Grant & Kopelwitz, 2012). Bethamie Horowitz defines the primary goal of Israel education is for learners to "cultivate a [personal] connection to contemporary Israel as part of [their] self-understanding as a Jew," further distinguishing the field of Israel education from Israel studies and advocacy efforts that emerged in the early 2000s (Horowitz, 2012, p. 11). Horowitz continues to identify six other key elements of Israel education, which are further expounded upon by the iCenter's *Aleph Bet of Israel Education* (2015) and Chazan's *Philosophy of Israel Education* (2016). Three of these components - the centrality of the learner, their relationship to Israel, and connection to Jewish identity - are essential ingredients that continue to resonate among thought leaders in the field of Israel education today: Anne Lanski describes Israel education as "the means for people to develop connections, interactions, and shared language with people, ideas, and Israel itself", David Bryfman argues that Israel education "serves the greater purpose of identity development", and Gil Troy advocates that "Jews use Zionism, Jewish peoplehood, and the Israel connection as frameworks to chart their own personal pathways toward finding meaning through community and history" (Bryfman et al., 2021).

Israel curricula of myriad foci exist, including cultural, historical, and political. Professional development programs provide Israel educators with opportunities to reflect on and refine their craft. Furthermore, these curricula and programs provide Diaspora Jewry with vehicles to foster critical thinking about identity, Jewish peoplehood, connection to the Land of Israel, and the historic/contemporary significance of the State of Israel. These developments are a boon and a blessing for Israel education, a "core aspect" of American Jewish education (Zakai, 2022, p. 15). Concurrently, the need for vision has played a significant role in shaping the landscape of Jewish education. Time and again, academics stressed the need for vision while others have ambitiously articulated a vision that has shaped Jewish and Israel educational arenas. (Ackerman, 1969; *A Time to Act*, 1990; Fox et al., 2003; Gringas, 2006; Isaacs, 2011; Woocher, 2012; Woocher & Woocher, 2013; Zakai, 2014; *The Aleph Bet of Israel Education*, 2015; Chazan, 2016; Cohen, 2016; Chazan et al., 2017; Jacobs & Chazan, 2018, 2019).

Curriculum must have, and be connected to, a broader vision. Different theories in general education assert the necessity of a core vision that can then be translated and applied to practice. For example, paideia, which claims its roots in ancient Greece, provides one such central vision. The notion of paideia saw a renaissance in the 20th century due to the significant works of Warner Jaeger (1967) and out of the University of Chicago under the guise of Mortimer Adler (1998). Another example of core educational vision and its connection to practice can be found in Lawrence-Lightfoot's investigation into what makes good (or "good-enough") schools (1983).

Just as curriculum needs grounding in vision, both need to account for practical implications and application. The development of curriculum is more than the writing of enduring understandings, essential questions, big ideas, and lesson plans. It is a process that must include consideration for and discussion about subject matter, learners, teachers, and contexts in order for it have meaning for learners and to be successful (Schwab, 1969, 1973). Pedagogues, learners, and subject matter are dynamic forces within a given educational setting and therefore a curriculum needs to be flexible in order to meet the needs of the given contexts (Schwab, 1969, 1973). Therefore, it is essential that one considers the ways vision and curriculum interact with teachers, students, and educational settings. This is true for general education and also Jewish and Israel education.

There is a need for a new way to draw upon the best ways of thinking and practice in education. Just as a multitude of Israel curricula and visions have shaped the landscape of Israel education, so too has its politicization. Israel education must instead be considered within a broader context; a theory of Israel education that is reflective of broader Jewish education, which is grounded in good educational theory and practices. The Israel education enterprise is missing a “model of approaching Israel Education that is rooted in the integration of thoughtful vision and creative practice” and centered around “core principles of being human, Israel and Judaism, and educational practice”, or a paideia (Chazan, 2019, p.1). Even the framework to create this model needed to be modified to consider and account for lived experience of the educator.

This article aims to recenter the conversation about Israel education to the learner, which in turn, will lead to better teaching. It came about through deliberations on general education, its implications on Israel education, and the dynamic between vision and praxis. It is applicable to a multitude of educational venues (e.g., formal and informal) as well as ages (early childhood through adult education). It frames a set of core principles and ideas about pedagogic practices and aspirations that connect to Israeli and Jewish history, people, and their expansive canon of text allowing for the acquisition of values, content, and skills for all learners – students and teachers alike – to explore what their personal relationship with Israel entails.

On the surface, it may appear to be a normative approach to Israel education, however it is the recalibration that Israel education needs. Prior models for Israel education, including those proposed by Isaacs (2011) and Chazan (2019) are limited and need adaptation to reflect the lived experience of educators in the field. Further, it answers the calls for a blueprint for Israel education by Zakai (2014), Chazan (2016), Bryfman & Pitkowsky (2017), and Bryfman (2021) and aims to inspire further conversation. Above all, it harnesses the work of prior Jewish and Israel educational visionaries and enriches the conversation by speaking the language of practice from a vantage point that until now has been missing: the reflective practitioner.

In schools, for example, the primary learners are the students. However, all the stakeholders – including faculty and staff, parents, and boards – are also learners. Each must embrace their role as a component of the learning institution for a school to be successful. How

can a school, or any educational organization for that matter, carry out its mission if the content and skills are not embraced and modeled by all stakeholders?

There is a distinction between “knowing” and “understanding,” and therefore a distinction between “learning to know” and “learning to understand”. The former is the ingathering of information and the latter is how that information is internalised and connected to the learner. Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy for learning (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation/creation) creates a hierarchy and process on how we build upon “knowledge” (i.e., the who, what, where, when) toward understanding through questioning what information/forces lay behind those facts (i.e., the how and why), applying that knowledge to new scenarios, and then creating something novel with that information.

The learning process is multifaceted and comes in a variety of modalities and styles (e.g., auditory, visual, kinaesthetic). Similarly, Howard Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences provides insight into the different intellectual faculties. As with modalities of learning, learners may lean toward one (or a few) style(s) and intelligence(s) over others.

Teaching is the ability to create a framework and system in which learning can occur. In many respects, teaching is about facilitation and questioning. And, just as there are different modalities for learning and multiple intelligences, there are different teaching styles and pedagogic methods.

Israel education needs distinctions of its own. Broadly speaking when referring to “Israel education” one may be referring to the historic connection between the Jewish people and *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel) and its relationship with the modern *Medinat Yisrael* (the State of Israel). That said, Israel education that focuses on the contemporary State of Israel must not begin in 1948. It would behoove the educator to allow learners to understand where and how *Medinat Yisrael* fits within the broader scope of Jewish history; that *Medinat Yisrael* is the late-19th and 20th century manifestation of what *Eretz Yisrael* has meant and continues to mean to the Jewish people. One cannot fully appreciate or understand the modern State of Israel without having a foundational understanding of the ideas, people, and events that preceded it. Similarly, one would not gain a deep understanding of American history, if they began on July 4, 1776 or in 1789 without considering the ideas and events that influenced and caused the writing of the Declaration of Independence of US Constitution, respectively.

Thus, the following objectives may be necessary to help frame “Israel education”:

- Learners will explore the notion of “homeland” as the connection between *Eretz Yisrael* and the Jewish people.
- Learners will learn the progression of Zionist and Israeli history, including pivotal events and people.
- Learners will engage with the diversity that comprises the fabric of Israeli society including the various Jewish and non-Jewish groups (e.g., Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, and Sephardim; Druze, Armenians, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Christian Arab, Muslims, Palestinians, Bedouin, respectively).

- Learners will become familiar with social complexities by examining how Israeli culture illustrates social, political, and historical ideas and issues.
- Understand that there are (and have historically been) a wide range of relationships between the land, people, and contemporary State of Israel.
- Engage with questions about the relationship of Diaspora Jewry to the contemporary State of Israel
- Learners will reflect on the ways in which they derive personal meaning and articulate for themselves what their relationship with Israel looks like and how they feel about Israel.

If there is an Israel experience as a piece of this education, it would also benefit the educator to ground students with foundational knowledge history and culture, upon which will be built by participating in the Israel experience. Additional objectives for this experience could be for learners to encounter Israel as a thriving, Hebrew speaking, Jewish state, experience Israeli culture, society, and history, and appreciate the diversity of Israel and its citizenry.

Ahad Ha'Am famously said that more than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people. The same can be said of *Eretz Yisrael*. Regardless of the Diaspora community – for example, Spain, Algeria, Germany, Iran, Afghanistan, Australia, the United States, Argentina – religious and cultural references to *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* can be found in the treasure trove of liturgy. It is imperative that Jews in the 21st Century not only continue this chain of tradition, but also understand the uniqueness of the time in which they are living.

Relationships, ideas, and connections are constantly evolving. By using the aforementioned set of objectives, it is the hope that learners will not only begin to understand the rich history and present that is both as *Eretz* and *Medina Yisrael*, and also that its history, present, and future is laden with complexities. Considering that education is about deriving personal meaning from what one learns, the hope is that students will be able to articulate for themselves what their relationship with Israel looks like, why Israel matters, or does not matter, to them. What is of utmost importance, is that students are given opportunities to explore and come to terms for themselves what place Israel has in their lives. Zakai's recent work (2021, 2022) demonstrates that a child's relationship with Israel changes as they enter adolescence and gain a more nuanced understanding of the world around them. In that vein, learners should be given an opportunity to reflect on how that relationship has evolved over time. At the end of the day, the goal is for students to not only *care* about Israel, but more importantly to know *why* they care and develop a dynamic lifelong relationship.

CORE THEMES AND TEXTS

Israel education and the aspirations stated above are underpinned by a set of core values and themes. First and foremost, among those themes is taking one's destiny into their own hands. As seen with what started as a relatively small movement, Zionists and the early *halutzim* were ideologically determined to create (or recreate) a modern and self-sufficient Jewish state. In

order for this change to occur, the thinkers *and* the doers understood the status quo for Jews living in modern European nation-states which were based either on the idea of the emancipated citizen of Western Europe and/or the ethnolinguistic states of Eastern Europe. It would be worthwhile to introduce source material that illustrates the connection to the Land of Israel of non-European Jewish communities.

The study of Israel should be grounded in the following three concepts, which are found within the canon of Jewish teachings: that wisdom is found all around us (*Pirkei Avot*, (n.d.), 4:1), that all the Jewish people are responsible for one another (*The Babylonian Talmud*, (n.d.), Shevuot 39a), and that we must take individual and collective responsibility and accountability (*Pirkei Avot*, (n.d.), 1:14). A necessary component to coalesce these three concepts is the development, evolution, and articulation of personal meaning.

As with any subject matter, Israel Education requires a set of indispensable primary texts and sources. Among those sources include, but are not limited to: *The Zionist Idea* (1997) by Arthur Hertzberg, which includes the writings and backgrounds of a number of Zionist thinkers and other selected primary source material. In addition, David Engel's *Zionism* (2009) and Gil Troy's *Zionist Ideas: Then and Now* (2018) provide concise yet thorough reads of Zionist history and present. Additional primary source anthologies such as Kurtzer & Sufrin's *The New Jewish Canon* (2020) include pertinent pieces on the place of Israel in modern and contemporary Jewish thought; Itamar Rabinovich & Jehuda Reinharz's *Israel and The Middle East* (2007) provides essential primary source documents of Israeli history and domestic and foreign relations; and Paul Mendes-Flohr & Jehuda Reinharz's *The Jew in the Modern World* (2010) put Zionism and Israel in the broader context of modern Jewish history and thought. Other historic essential texts include Leo Pinsker's *Auto-Emancipation*, essays by Ahad Ha'am, works by Theodor Herzl, and poems and writings by Raḥel the Poetess, Ḥaim Naḥman Bialyk, and S.Y. Agnon. In addition, learners should be encouraged to analyze and reflect on crucial political documents such as the Balfour Declaration, UNGA Resolution 181 (and other UN resolutions including 242, 3379, and 46/86), and the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel. Works of prominent writers, poets, and thinkers, as well as works of art including visual art, music, film, and television help learners illuminate Israeli social and political zeitgeist as learners explore various time periods of Israeli history (e.g., Prestate to 1948, Early State 1948-1967, From Six Days to Oslo 1967-1995, and the Contemporary State 1995-Present).

PEDAGOGY

“Good Israel education” is rooted in “good education” (Bryfman, 2018). Therefore, it is worthwhile to turn to the methodologies utilised in general studies classrooms to best understand what is “good pedagogy”. First and foremost, educators must do some form of backwards planning – such as curricular planning found in *Understanding by Design* by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005).

It is worth noting that *Understanding by Design* uses learning standards and benchmarks as foundation for clarifying learning objectives, Enduring Understandings, Big Ideas, and Essential Questions. Such standards are not uniformly found in the realm of Jewish education and may be a worthwhile enterprise developing. For examples of such standards that are used in the Jewish educational settings, one can turn to Standards and Benchmarks for Tanakh and Rabbinics (William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education, n.d.), Standards for Fluency in Jewish Text & Practice (Mechon Hadar & Beit Rabban, 2016), or the 18x18 Framework (Jacobs & Chazan, 2019).

To begin with, what are the goals and objectives of said courses, units, lessons, programming pertaining to Israel education? What are desirable outcomes for learners to be able *to do* and *to know* by the end of the program, lesson, unit, course? Upon clarifying these objectives, educators need to articulate Enduring Understandings (EU), Big Ideas (BI), and/or Essential Questions (EQ) for what they will be teaching. That is, what does learning about Israel teach learners that is broader and bigger than Israel? Once these are clarified then the work to develop lessons, units, etc., that are aligned with the knowledge and skillset, as well as the EU/BI/EQ's.

A good pedagogue utilises a number of methods in order to teach. This ranges from large-group to small-group discussion; learning in partnership, examining a variety of source materials (from close reading to gallery walks), giving learners opportunities for simulations or to create skits, or engaging in debates, to name a few. If one were to observe an educational setting over multiple sessions, the observer will hopefully witness a number of pedagogical methods and tools utilised. Regardless of teaching "method" a good pedagogue should be able to use a variety of teaching methods and styles with facility and seamlessly. It may be advisable for the Israel educational enterprise to take note of the different methodologies utilised in general education.

PEDAGOGUES

As with any subject matter, the professional most appropriate for Israel education is one who has a passion for the subject matter, guides students toward creating personal meaning, and fosters authentic and meaningful relationships with learners. This requires the educator to put the learner and their intellectual, cognitive, and emotional growth first. The professional should have a background, either by way of undergraduate degree or interest and experience, to teach Israel education. Furthermore, Israel educators, like good educators, should be reflective practitioners with an eye toward professional growth, including accepting that one can, and should, always be learning.

It is understood that this may limit the pool of interested and qualified and candidates. However, with the correct support and structures in place Israel *can* be integrated and taught in other disciplines and by teachers who may not have the content background on Israel. A number of professional development programs currently exist that aim to train teachers about the teaching of Israel. This could range from an outside mentor or consultant supporting an

institution's or individual's teaching of Israel (such as the iCenter's iNfuse, The Jewish Education Project and Makom's Qushiyot, or Shalom Hartman Institute's iEngage programs). It also requires educational institutions identify and recognise the talent they have laden in their staff and empower these individuals to work with their colleagues about Israel. Teacher training also includes multi-day workshops, seminars, or institutes focused on the teaching of Israel (such as the Center for Israel Education).

GROWTH AND ASSESSMENT

As mentioned above, education is about deriving personal meaning from newly gained understandings and insights. An Israel educational enterprise must strive to do both. On the one hand, Israel education is about furthering one's knowledge about different facets of Israel, depending on the specific learning objective. That said, it would be short-sighted to stop there. Knowledge must have some sort of personal meaning in order for it to have an impact. A short-term intention would be to develop a foundation for a peer Israel trip experience, on which learners will be emotionally and cognitively transformed, say for example, a capstone or graduation trip. A goal is for learners to leave said Israel experience with more questions, seeing themselves as part of a long chain of tradition, and *caring* about Israel in way that they did not before. These germinated seeds will hopefully continue to be nurtured as those learners will see their Israel education as valuable and something worthwhile pursuing.

In order to accurately and objectively evaluate the success of such a pedagogical program, ongoing formative assessment is necessary. For starters, it is worthwhile establishing learners' prior knowledge, feelings, and relationship vis a vis *Am Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael, and Medinat Yisrael*. That is, what do learners enter the learning environment already "knowing" and "feeling"? There are a number pedagogical tools that an educator can use to determine this. It could range from a "K-W-L" chart, qualitative surveys, a short introductory question, such as "What do you know about...?" or an open-ended reflection on what "Israel means to the learners", thereby allowing prior knowledge, feeling, emotions, and relationship to come to the forefront, or even an anticipatory question/hook to bring learners into the learning environment. It would also behoove the educator to articulate the overarching learning objectives at the outset so learner can, on an abstract level, cognitively anticipate what they will encounter. That said, there is no preparation for the learner to fully anticipate what they will engage with, learn, or be challenged by in an Israel curriculum, regardless of how clear the learning objectives are stated. Similarly, to anticipatory sets and "pre-reflection", ongoing formative assessments is another tool used by educators to gauge the immediate and short-term successes of learning objectives. It requires "checking-in" with learners to ensure they are or have met the learning objectives. Oftentimes, formative assessments are helpful to gauge if any educational approaches need to be tweaked to ensure learners are meeting, or have met, the learning objectives. Formative assessments can be completed in the midst of an educational program, as well as at the end (especially if there is more than one "lesson"). Finally, upon

completion of the educational program, a summative reflection and survey is necessary. Ideally, this should mirror a qualitative survey or questionnaire from the beginning of the program.

An additional method for assessment is for the learners to articulate for themselves, in a medium that suits them, what their personal relationship to Israel means, or does not mean, and why. The different media would allow for learners to select a vehicle for communicating their beliefs and relationship in an authentic way and allowing for the expression of differentiated learning styles to take place. There is an additional opportunity for learners to express what has surprised and challenged their thinking as well as further questions they would like to explore, regardless of their personal and emotional relationship. Thus, learners are tasked with not only reflecting on their personal relationship, but also articulate the ways in which they as individuals have, or have not changed, and laid the foundation for future learning and exploration to take place as a result of their learning.

CONCLUSION

The growth of Israel educational programs and curricula has been a promising advancement for Jewish education. An educator or organization can choose from a number of curricula or synthesis components from various curricula to create an Israel curriculum that meets their particular goals and objectives. At the same time, Jewish educators and academics have laid out educational visions, playing a significant role in shaping the field to meet the needs of an evolving Jewish community in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

With all due respect to those who called the need for and articulated a vision for Jewish and Israel education, they need to consider the perspective and voice of the reflective practitioner, who adapts vision to meet the needs of their learners and considers the given educational context. Education is the meeting ground between idea and practice and a dynamic process that involves (but is not limited to) learners, pedagogues, and contexts. It is this confluence that inspired works that shaped the field of general education, including the work of Schwab and Lawrence-Lightfoot. This meeting ground of praxis and theory needs to be applied to Israel education. As Chazan asserts in *A Philosophy of Israel Education*, “the more an educational system can establish coordination between vision, educational theory, and practice, the greater the possibilities of impact” on learners – the subject of Israel education (2016, p. 10). This paper answers the call for a blueprint to shape the Israel educational landscape and proposes a new approach to dealing with vision up until now: a theory to practice that harness and builds upon the work of prior thinkers while speaking the language of practice.

When taken together, each of these components comprise a paideia for Israel education. Most of the aforementioned components, such as Pedagogues, Pedagogies, Growth and Assessment, Learners and Learning are universalist educational aims, beliefs, and practices that would characterize good education, not specifically Israel or Jewish education. After all as the previously mentioned truism goes, “good Israel education...is good education”.

A paideia for Israel education brings together the emotional, relational, and cognitive spheres, which Zakai (2014) calls for as a necessary next step for Israel education scholarship. It creates avenues for learners – and pedagogues alike – to develop and reflect on their own understanding of core values and ideas together with organized knowledge, and intellectual skills, Israel curriculum and educational programs offer opportunities for learners to gain these aforementioned skills. From here, curricula and educational programs can be designed to be a place to discover and challenge, and articulate and raise big questions about Israel. Just as the *18 X 18 Framework* (Jacobs & Chazan, 2019) establishes benchmarks for Jewish education grounded in knowledge and skills, a next step would be to establish similar benchmarks for Israel education that connect the head (organized knowledge), heart (understanding of ideas and values) and hand (skills). Israel education allows learners to explore and reflect on big questions about the nature of humanity and being, about one’s identity and Judaism, and will ultimately have a profound benefit and impact on all learners and the Jewish community. The field of Israel education demands no less.

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