

Literature Review
With Bibliography:
Assignment 2

Tuvia Book

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Visual arts
Research Methods
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What is the Current State of Israel Education in North America?

Since my childhood membership of the Bnei Akiva Zionist youth movement, Israel has always been the central *raison d'être* of my existence. As I advanced to leadership and educational roles within the movement, Israel education became my passion. Many years have passed since then and Israel education remains a central part of my life. I have been actively involved in the field as an educator and curriculum designer. In addition to educating high-school and college students, I have been leading teacher-training sessions on the subject of Israel education throughout the world, and in Israel.

The recent phenomenon of an upsurge of renewed interest in Israel education supports my thesis that major Jewish institutions have come to realize that Israel education is core issue. Educational foundations, Federations and Boards of Jewish Education are commissioning research and studies into the issue. The big question on the agenda is how does one teach about Israel effectively?

In order to go about researching this question (methodology) one would have to:

1. Conduct in depth interviews with teachers, administrators, students and Jewish thinkers
2. Participate in and observe symposia and seminars on the subject of Israel education
3. Conduct a literature review of curricula, articles, studies on the subject.

The research domains which are integral to my research and which provide backgrounds necessary to tackle the research question are:

1. History, development, critique and ideological and conceptual framework of Israel education
2. The educational context or venue that Israel education takes place in a formal setting: Day-schools, Community high School and supplementary schools of all major denominations of Judaism (Conservative, Modern-Orthodox and Reform).
3. The Israel Experience
4. Israel–Diaspora relationships

Literature Review

1. History, development, critique and ideological and conceptual framework of Israel education

Israel education is a relatively new field. The State of Israel itself only recently celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of its founding. There has, however been an

expedient burst of development in the past few years. Despite one of the most significant and important events in the history of the Jewish people, the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, Barry Chazan in his article, *Teaching Israel in the Twenty-first Century*¹, notes that “teaching Israel has emerged as one of our most ambiguous and problematic areas.” Chazan comments that for the first half a century of Israel education:

“The main basis for our connection with Israel over the years has been rooted in two themes: Israel’s struggle for survival and Jewish pride. For half a century the main thrust of teaching Israel has focused on the heroic effort to create and maintain a Jewish state and on the pride and joy of the Jewish people in that achievement.” (Chazan, p. 304)

Chazan terms this ideology “survivalism and pride.” He further suggests that this ideology has run its course as an underpinning on teaching Israel. Chazan posits that Israel is no longer a fledgling country heroically battling for its first breaths of air, but rather, Israel is now a mature nation state like any other marked with both achievements and blemishes. He claims that the biggest issue today is when educators ask the fundamental question: “Why Israel?”

Lisa Grant in her article *Connecting Israel to Jewish life*² concurs with Chazan. She defines teaching Israel as; “one of the greatest challenges of Jewish education in American communities.” Grant adds: “Few are able to articulate a clear vision or their reason for teaching Israel that extends beyond vague and implicit expressions of Israel being a core component of Jewish Identity formation.” (Grant, p.1) Her solution is to: “strengthen the bonds of connection that cut across time and space, the sacred the profane, personal and collective, particular and universal, Jew and other...[until] we are enriched by Israel and

¹ Chazan, B. (1988). Teaching Israel in the twenty-first century. In R. E. Tornberg (Ed.), *The Jewish educational leader’s handbook* (pp. 304-309). Denver, CO: Behrman House.

² Grant, L.D. (2008). Connecting Israel to Jewish life. *Sh’ma*, 39(648), 1-2.

enrich it in turn through our active relationships with *am, Torah, medina, and Eretz Yisrael*" (Grant, p.2). This is an effective "sound bite" but offers little "substance."

Alex Sinclair in his article *Beyond Black and White, Teaching Israel in the Light of the Matzav*³ argues the dangers of over-simplifying Israel Education. He found the polarity of either "Israel needs our support right or wrong" or "Israel is the aggressor and the Palestinians are the bereaved party" to be equally ineffective. He comments that, "Nothing in life is black and white, and ever since Dewey we have been wary of such either-or themes in education" (Sinclair, p.70). Sinclair observes that because of the *Matzav* (renewed wave of terrorist violence directed against Israeli since the breakdown of the Camp David II discussions in 2000) educators have been forced to revert to the "struggle for survival" theme that seemed to have run its course. He refers to this situation as an "educational tragedy." Both Chazan and Sinclair argue for an Israel education that focuses on Israel as a modern dynamic society full of rich diversity and on our personal connections to Israel. In order to foster their personal connections Diaspora Jews need to take, what Sinclair terms, a "dialogical approach" to Israel in order to become aware of the plurality of voices in the internal Israeli debate and gain an understanding of the dilemmas and questions with which Israelis themselves grapple. "Then they might be able to find the voice in Israel that resonates with their own." (Sinclair, p. 76) The famous eighteenth century Chassidic leader,

³ Sinclair, A. (2003). Beyond black and white: Teaching Israel in light of the *matzav*. *Conservative Judaism*, 55 (4), 69-80.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, echoed a similar sentiment when he stated:

“Everyone has their own special place (*Dalet Amot*) in the Land of Israel.”

One of the gravest challenges to contemporary Israel education, according to

Yoram Hazony is the phenomenon of “Post-Zionism.” In his book *The Jewish*

*State: the Struggle for Israel’s Soul*⁴ he states that:

“Today there exists the possibility that Buber’s ideological children are on the verge of transforming Israel into precisely that which the early dreamers of Zion had fought to escape: A State devoid of any Jewish purpose or meaning, one that can neither inspire the Jews nor save them in distress.” (*Hazony, xxx*)

Hazony’s scathing attack on Post-Zionism and its proponents would seem to bode ill for the future of Israel education. Hazony states that the problem with this trend is the manner that “every aspect of Zionism is made to appear individious, every ideal repugnant and every adherent loathsome (Hazony, p.19).

This all contributes, according to Hazony, towards the disconnect felt between today’s American Jewish youth and Israel.

One of the leading proponents of post –Zionism, according to Hazony, is Tom Segev. Segev in his Book *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*⁵ claims that recently unearthed archival documents from the early years of Israel history showed that “Israel’s history was less beautiful, less noble less innocent, less just and less wise than the country had always claimed (Segev, p.130). This kind of self-doubt and reassessing the “carved in stone” educational foundations of Israel’s history, using Hazony’s

⁴ Hazony, Y. (2000). *The Jewish state: The struggle for Israel's soul*. New York: Basic/New Republic Books.

⁵ Segev, T. (2002). *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

argument, is a major contributing factor to the lack of clarity and direction in contemporary Israel education in North America.

Israel Bartal in his "*What's Left of the Onion? A 'Post-Modernist' Tract against 'Post-Zionism'*"⁶," takes issue with Hazony's doomsday scenario. He claims that Hazony is guilty of "cultural McCarthyism (Bartal, p.133) and that Hazony's book itself should be taught at university seminars to, "illuminate the vast damage that post-modernism has wrought on Jewish Studies" (Bartal, p. 137). He portrays Hazony's work as an extremely negative portrayal of Zionism and indeed takes issue with Hazony on several points, such as his inability to accept anyone from the "new-historians" as a legitimate Zionist. (The "new-historians," who include academics such as Tom Segev and Benny Morris, dispute the standard Zionist narrative). The way forward to an effective ideological and conceptual framework of Israel education in my opinion is not to present Israel through "rose coloured glasses" or "my way or the highway" but rather the "dialogical approach" suggested by Sinclair.

2. The educational context or venue that Israel education takes place in a formal setting: Day-schools, Community high School and supplementary schools of all major denominations of Judaism (Conservative, Modern-Orthodox and Reform).

⁶Bartal, I. (2001). What's left of the onion? A 'post-Modernist' tract against 'post-Zionism.' *Israel Studies*, 6 (2), 129-138.

Jehuda Reinharz in his *Israel in the Eyes of Americans: A call for Action*⁷

recognizes that Israel education is of central and crucial importance in a Jewish-Day schools curriculum, precisely because:

“The knowledge of our history and our willingness to learn about the present has been our hallmark through our history... The future of our American Jewish community and indeed that of world Jewry hang in the balance” (Reinharz, p.8)

Jewish Day schools have been grappling with the issues of Israel education and its place in the school structure and curriculum for decades. Chazan mentions that there is a practical problem of Principals and teachers not knowing where to fit Israel into the school curriculum, or how to teach it in the classroom (Chazan, p. 304).

Alex Sinclair’s *A Conservative Jewish Educational Approach to Postzionism*⁸

touches on many themes of Israel Education in a Conservative Jewish Setting. For the Solomon Schechter Day School network since the eighties, as Barry Chazan observes in his *Through a looking Glass Darkly, Israel in the Mirror of American Jewish Education*⁹ there has been significant increase in the number of staff members who are Israeli-born residents in North America or *Shlichim* (Jewish Agency emissaries). In addition the Israel experience has become an increasingly mainstream phenomenon. (This will be examined in the next chapter, “The Israel Experience.”). Sinclair comments that one of the biggest issues in Conservative Israel education is “How we could or should talk about and teach

⁷ Reinharz, J. (2003). Israel in the eyes of Americans: A call for action. *Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies*, 1-23.

⁸ Sinclair, A. (2006). A Conservative Jewish educational approach to Postzionism. *Conservative Judaism*, 59(1), 29-58.

⁹ Chazan, B. (2000). Through a glass darkly: Israel in the mirror of American Jewish education. In A. Gal and A. Gottschalk (Eds.), *Beyond survival and philanthropy American Jewry and Israel*. (pp. 123–30). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

about Israel and Postzionism in the 21st century?” (Sinclair, 29) Sinclair suggests that the education of Israel should follow the Conservative approach to Judaism.

In order to illustrate this approach he uses the acorn metaphor of Louis Jacobs:

“A sound theological approach...will acknowledge that here is a history of Jewish observances and that these did not drop down ready made from heaven...It will see the whole area of Jewish observances as growing naturally out of Israel’s experience. But it will see the hand of God in all this, will see the “tree of Life” that the Torah as yielding no less nourishing fruit because it began its existence as an acorn” (Sinclair, *Conservative Approach*, p.31)

Sinclair argues that Postzionist education focuses only on the acorn they have uncovered and rejecting the whole tree as a result of these flawed origins. He argues that Israel education needs a “good dose of the Conservative Jewish approach.” (p.31) That is, the ability to criticize Israel without rejecting its core values, importance and significance for Jews worldwide.

The Reform movement has a somewhat vague and less centralized vision of Israel education. Lisa Grant, who conducted a survey among educators and students of Reform congregational schools, as the focus for her article *Israel Education in Reform Congregational Schools*¹⁰ states: “Goals for teaching Israel continue to be expressed in broad and diffused term, most respondents were unable were unable to articulate a clear and concise vision for teaching Israel” (Grant, p.5). Grant posits that Israel is taught is one of three ways by the Reform movement:

¹⁰ Grant, L. D. (2007, Summer). Israel education in Reform congregational schools. *CCAR Journal, a Reform Jewish quarterly*, 3-24.

1. As a sacred symbol, emphasizing Israel as the Jewish homeland through episodic encounters and celebrations and the study of bible and other Jewish texts
2. As a content area in which students develop basic knowledge about the history of the state its geography, culture and politics
3. As a means of developing and reinforcing Jewish identity. In some cases behavioral goals of expecting and preparing students to actually travel to Israel are set. (Grant, *Reform*, pp.5-6)

All three movements today emphasize the Israel experience as “The most powerful Jewish experience that exist” (Chazan, *Teaching Israel*, p. 206) in advancing their goals.

3. The Israel Experience

Barry Chazan in his *Through a looking Glass Darkly, Israel in the Mirror of American Jewish Education*, posits that Modern-Orthodox day schools are more effective in Israel education because since the eighties it has become the norm for the students of these institutions to experience Israel during or immediately following high school this led to “large numbers of people experiencing Israel first hand” (Chazan, p.127). Many conservative day schools and non-affiliated Jewish day schools have since followed this successful model. Chazan refers to the “Israel Experience” as a “powerful educative force (Chazan, p.126). Gil Troy, in his *Why I am a Zionist, Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today*¹¹,

¹¹ Troy, G. (2006). *Why I am a Zionist, Israel, Jewish identity and the challenges of today*. Montréal: Bronfman Jewish Education Center.

notes that there is “a positive association between a visit to Israel and measures of Jewish identification, community affiliation and religious practice.” (Troy, p. 16)

There is one other model that deserves consideration, that of the “*mifgash*” (meeting). While there is an almost universal consensus that the “Israel Experience” is an intensely powerful and positive Israel “experiential” educational experience, it is not always practical. Elan Ezrachi and Barbara Sutnick in their *Israel in our lives: Israel Education through Encounters with Israelis*¹² argue that one of the reasons that learning about Israel is so difficult is that it is a “theoretical process” in which the learners are geographically removed from Israel. They call this phenomenon “Israel-once-removed” (p.2) In addition the considerable cultural differences between the Diaspora and Israel Jewish experiences leads to the “Israel-twice-removed” phenomenon. The way to address these phenomena is ideally an Israel experience. If this is not practical, then “the most intense form of cross-cultural exposure is...face-to-face contact. (p.5) They advocate the “*mifgash*” that is a direct physical encounter with Israelis as a powerful Israel education experience. The “*mifgash*” is a way to challenge traditional stereo types and lead to a greater understanding of the common bonds that unite the Diaspora and Israeli Jewish communities.

4. Israel and Diaspora Relationships

The relationship between Israel, American Jews and Israeli Jews is a core factor in the success or failure of Israel education in North America. According to

¹² Ezrachi, E. and Sutnick, B. (1997). *Israel in our lives: Israel education through encounters with Israelis*. Jerusalem: CRB Foundation.

Steven M. Cohen and Charles S. Lieberman in their article *Israel and American Jewry in the Twenty-first Century, A search for new relationships*¹³ American Jewry until recent times have been in what they term “The Mobilized Model.” This has two dimensions. One is when the Jews of the United States “lobbied their national leaders to lend Israel economic, military and diplomatic support” and the other is fund-raising to; “support the social welfare needs that largely flowed from the rescue of Jewish refugees and their resettlement in Israel” (Cohen and Lieberman, 5). According to Cohen and Lieberman the “mobilized model” is becoming less relevant and less important as Israel does not require the political and financial assistance it once did. They argue that this model reached its Zenith in the years 1967-1977. A strong and resurgent Israel both militarily and financially is less dependent on American Jewish philanthropy. This, coupled with an increasing “we do not need you” self-confident attitude of some leading Israeli politicians and thinkers, including most notably the controversial remarks of A.B. Yehoshua:

“If...in 100years Israel will exist...I will come to the Diaspora [and] there will not be [any] Jews...I will not cry...I don't say I want it...But if...Israel will disintegrate...for me personally...there is no alternative to be a post-Zionist Jew.... [being] Israeli is in my skin; it's not my jacket¹⁴”

which seem to negate the importance of the Diaspora, has led to a feeling of separation and disconnect between these two communities. It seems, according to this argument, that the connection is only strong when there is a “good crisis.”

¹³ Cohen, S. M. and Lieberman, C.S. (2000). *Israel and American Jewry in the twenty-first century, a search for new relationships*. In Gal, A. and Gottschalk A. (Eds.), *Beyond survival and philanthropy: American Jewry and Israel*. (pp.3-24). Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press.

¹⁴ Bayme, S. and Wieseltier, L. (Eds.) (2006). *The A.B. Yehoshua controversy: an Israel-American dialogue on Jewishness, Israeliness, and identity*. (p.5). New York: American Jewish Committee.

Olga Zambrowsky and Malka Or-Chen in their article *American Jewry as reflected in the Secondary School Curriculum in Israel*¹⁵ state that after having conducted exhaustive research they found that there was a “significant gap between the stated intention of the system and their implementation. Although American Jewry appears in the senior high school curriculum, in actual fact it is often not taught [!]” (Zambrowsky and Or-Chen, 139). It is considered a “controversial” subject because it is an emotional and ambivalent topic that arouses “admiration and interest along with anger and criticism” (139). The parallels with Israel education in North America are remarkable.

Chazan, Sinclair and Gil Troy all agree that Israel’s entanglement in Lebanon marked a change in the views of North American Jewry’s educational and emotional relationship with Israel. Troy writes that: “Most North American Jews remain politically liberal, most Jews are uncomfortable with intense patriotism, religious fundamentalism and militarism-yet Israel is often caricatured as committed to all three.” (Troy, 16). Whilst Troy does take note of bright spots in the North American Israel relationship, specifically the Birthright phenomenon, He states that what we really need is to teach our students;

“about the multidimensional nature of the Jewish people’s relationship with the Land of Israel, and the State of Israel. Israel should not be thought of simply as the central headache of the Jewish People, but as the historical, ideological, intellectual and emotional epicenter of our people. We must teach *Ahavat Yisrael* (love of Israel), not simple the Arab-Israeli conflict” (Troy, p. 24)

¹⁵ Zambrowsky, O. and Or-Chen, M. (2000). American Jewry as reflected in the secondary school curriculum in Israel. In Gal, A. and Gottschalk A. (Eds.), *Beyond survival and philanthropy: American Jewry and Israel*. (pp.131-149). Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press.

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