

A Relational Philosophy of Israel Education

Abstract Twenty-first-century Jewish life requires a new paradigm for Israel education that remains loyal to the past, but speaks to today and tomorrow. The purpose of this book is to respond to this challenge by presenting a new approach denoted as “a relational philosophy of Israel education”. The chapter analyzes the meanings of ten terms that will appear throughout the book, and then presents eight principles of a relational philosophy of Israel education.

Keywords Cognitive emotions • Ethnic education • Homeland • Jewish identity • Narratives • Relational education

OUR TASK

What a complicated life this little land has lived. It has been *terra sancta* to great religions. It has endured multiple conquerors and occupiers. It has been the object of holy memory and vision of return. It is a modern state which is part of the family of nations. It is a source of conflicting aspirations and emotions. What a complicated life this little land lives.

This book is about the place of the Land of Israel in the educational system of contemporary American Jewish education. The Jewish pre-occupation with Israel did not begin in the twentieth century. The land, people, and idea of Israel have been an integral part of Jewish life and education throughout the ages (Hartman 1978; Hoffman 1986). Twentieth-century American Jewish life perpetuated this connection

to Israel, even as it focused on the primary agenda of Americanization (Sarna 2004). The diverse educational systems of American Jewry taught about both the historical homeland and the newly created state established in 1948 (Chazan 2015). While America's Jews focused on becoming Americans, they also wanted their young to learn about the newly created state.

The twenty-first century is a different place. Jews are fully at home in, and constitute a robust part of, American life. Twentieth-first-century America is populated by a generation of post-ethnic multi-identified millennials (Hollinger 2000). The once pioneering State of Israel is now a powerful post-modern country located in a complex area of the world. These changes have significant implications for the relationship between American Jewry and Israel (Beinart 2000). The prior Jewish agenda of community and continuity has been replaced by a millennial agenda of multiple Jewish identities, the search for meaning, and the creation of affiliations of shared meaning (Magid 2013). This new situation calls for a new Israel educational paradigm that remains loyal to the past, but is relevant to the realities of today and tomorrow. That is the purpose of this book: to create a twenty-first century philosophy of Israel education.

This reconceptualization reaffirms the centuries-long Jewish commitment to the concept of Israel. At the same time it presents a new educational theory rooted in a vision of Israel education, as education for character and *humanitas* rather than ethnicity and particularism. The vision to be presented in this book focuses on relating and relationship rather than “we” versus “they” (Eriksen 2002; Buber 1934; Noddings 1992). Our work is rooted in the analytic approach to philosophy of education which views the elucidation of common language as critical for educational discourse and practice (Scheffler 1960; Soltis 1978). We also draw upon research and scholarship from philosophy, history, sociology, and education studies to enable us to propose a new educational theory and practice. Chapter 1 of the book presents the core principles of “A Relational Philosophy of Israel Education”. Chapter 2 focuses on the translation of this philosophy of Israel education into educational practice. Chapter 3 focuses on the creation of a culture of Israel education and the role of Israel educator. The Epilogue is a meditation on the implications of this study of Israel in American Jewish education for an overall vision of ethnic education as ethical education.

ESTABLISHING A LANGUAGE

We begin by analyzing certain key concepts which are important for understanding the relational philosophy of Israel education presented in this book.

Cognitive Emotions

Typically, cognition and emotion have been regarded as polar opposites. Cognition is regarded as sober, calm, reflective, and detached, while emotion is regarded as passionate, turbulent, heart-felt, and engaged. Cognition is understood as a faculty of the mind by which we analyze things in a “sensible” way, whereas emotion is regarded as a faculty of the heart whereby we feel things with “great sensitivity”. In a significant essay entitled “In Praise of the Cognitive Emotions”, the American analytic philosopher of education Israel Scheffler rejects the separation of the concepts “the cognitive” and “the emotive”, and instead presents the case for their inherent interaction. He proposes “to help overcome the gap by outlining basic aspects of emotion in the cognitive process” (Scheffler 1991, p. 3). His purpose is to show that cognition incorporates emotional components and together they create “cognitive significance”. This concept of cognitive emotions has important implications for the approach to Israel education that we shall discuss in Chaps. 2 and 3.

Ethnic Education

The field of ethnic education (and a subdivision sometimes called ethno-cultural education) emerged in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of both the mid-twentieth-century interest in the diverse groups that comprised American society as well as the impact of the Civil Rights Movement (Banks 1987). In its original iterations, the field of ethnic education focused on teaching and learning about the diverse immigrant heritages that comprised the panorama of American immigration. Over time, the agenda of ethnic education changed its focus. Toward the end of the century, it focused on political and ideological issues of race, gender, colonialism, and education, creating, what became known as, “identity politics” (Hollinger 2000). In the twenty-first century, this field focuses on multi-culturalism and on, what is now called, the post-ethnic age

(Hollinger 2000). Israel education has encompassed some characteristics that seemed similar to contemporary ethnic education (such as language and culture) and, therefore, it sometimes has been regarded as part of that genre. At the same time, it is not adequately represented by that term, and, therefore, we shall use the formulation of the distinguished American educational historian Lawrence Cremin, who describes Jewish education as an “ethno-religious educational heritage” (Cremin 1988).

Homeland

The word “homeland” is a significant concept in the language of ethnicity and ethnic education. Typically, the term refers to a land (or an area), which is the place of origin of people and its culture, as well as the locus of a culture’s history, language, customs, foods, and literary and artistic creations (Banks 2012).¹ In twentieth-century America, the term “homeland” was associated with places from which millions of immigrants arrived. It was scrapbooks with photographs and memories; dinner tables of exotic and enticing cuisine; and the language one used when you didn’t want the children to understand (Daniels 1990). America itself was not “homeland”; it was the home of immigrants from diverse homelands.² “Homeland” becomes an Americanized concept at the end of the twentieth century, and especially after 9/11 when it became associated with terrorism and security on homeland American shores.³ We shall focus on both home and homeland in discussing Israel education.

Identity

The word “identity” became popular in mid-twentieth-century America through the writings and teachings of Erik Erikson (Friedman 1999).⁴ In his early formulations, Erikson used the term “identity” to refer to one of eight stages in psychosocial development (Erikson 1950). According to this typology, there are a series of lifelong developmental stages which involve a series of epigenetic “crises” whose resolution leads to the emergence of strengths important for a balanced and satisfying life. The psychosocial crisis of the fifth stage (“adolescence”) is “identity versus identity confusion” in which identity refers to a person’s shaping a psychological sense of who she/he is. The optimal outcome of the stage of identity confusion is the virtue of fidelity. Thus, identity in its original usage was very much about an activity and a process which plays out over time; Erikson went on to later describe it as a feeling of being “most deeply and intensely active

and alive” (Friedman 1999, p. 351).⁵ Erikson most decidedly did not refer to identity as loyalty to a specific ideology or group, nor did he regard it as a “subject” to be taught in schools. We shall refer to the metamorphosis of the original psychological meaning of “identity” to its current usage in Jewish life to mean loyalty or affirmation.

Israel

The word “Israel” (*Yisrael* in Hebrew) was first used in the Bible in the *Book of Genesis*, Chap. 28, Verse 22, when the name of the biblical figure Jacob was changed to “Israel” after a long night of wrestling with an angel of God.⁶ Subsequently, the word became attached to the heretofore nameless land promised to Abraham which became *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel). The “Land of Israel” became the term used to describe this particular land, and its inhabitants became known as *B’nai Yisrael*—sons of Israel, children of Israel, or simply Israelites⁷ (Alter 1990). In the period of the Israelite monarchy (beginning approximately in the eleventh century BCE), the Northern Kingdom composed of ten tribes, was denoted by the single word “Israel” and the two southern tribes were called “Judea” (Bright 1960). In post-Temple times (after 70 CE), the word “Israel” was used in diverse constellations such as *Eretz Yisrael* (the land), *Am Yisrael* (The Jewish people), *Torat Yisrael* (the Torah of Israel), and even *Elohei Yisrael* (The God of Israel). In later centuries, Jews in some Western or Central European countries were sometimes referred to as Israelite congregations.⁸ In 1948, when the new Jewish State was established, Israel was the name chosen for the country (Friling and Troen 1998). Overall, the people known as the Jews have been connected over the ages to “Israel” and one of our tasks is to explicate the implications of this connection for Israel education (Hartman 1978).

Teaching Israel

For most of the past century, the phrase used to describe the school-based educational activity related to Israel was “Teaching Israel” (Chazan 2015). This phrase referred to a topic called Israel which was one of several topics taught in Jewish day and supplementary schools. This subject encompassed diverse topics such as the biblical Land of Israel; the ongoing link to Israel in prayers, rituals, and customs; the nascent Zionist movement, the founding of the state, and contemporary Israel (Essrig and Segal 1966).

The topic was approached through diverse frames, namely, historical, religious, ritual, and contemporary. The phrase “Teaching Israel” assumed a content- or subject matter-focused approach linked to school frameworks. Toward the end of the twentieth century, several voices called for replacing this terminology with the phrase “Israel education” which was understood as referring to a value-oriented vision and to broadening the educational frameworks beyond schools (*The Aleph Bet of Israel Education, 2nd Edition* 2015).⁹ This book is about creating a twenty-first-century theory and practice of the term “Israel education”.

Jewish Education

The term “Jewish education” is typically used to refer to the network of supplementary schools, day schools, camps, youth movements, and other educational frameworks which constitute a full-fledged system developed by twentieth-century American Jewry (Woocher and Woocher 2014; Graff 2013). Since the middle of the past century, this system has usually been categorized as religious education since schools were generally attached to denominational synagogues. It is difficult to neatly categorize Jewish education as “religious” since, while it does include faith-based elements, it also encompasses language, culture, foods, and a deep attachment to the State of Israel. Therefore, once again we shall understand Jewish education in Cremin’s terms as an ethno-religious heritage.

Narratives

Narratives are ways of looking at the world, typically embedded in stories, which reflect how a person or group of individuals understand empirical facts and turn them into frameworks for making sense out of life. The various meanings of Israel have been embedded in narratives constructed by Jews at different points in time—biblical, rabbinic, modern, Zionist, contemporary statehood, and peoplehood—to help them make sense of the Land of Israel in diverse eras. A variety of distinctive narratives of the meaning of Israel developed over time, reflecting a core commitment to the overall idea, although expressed in divergent contents. There have also been diverse non-Jewish narratives—Christian, Muslim, and Palestinian—that reflect dramatically different understandings and interpretations of facts and events. Narratives will play an important role in the pedagogy of a relational Israel education.

Relational Education

“Relational education” is a term connected to a long, educational tradition which believes that the ultimate focus in education is on the kind of life a person leads and the core values which shape that life. This tradition, which dates back to Hellenistic and Hebraic times, believes that we must learn how to be human, and that education plays an important role in that quest. The philosophic approach to Israel education presented in this book is in that tradition. We focus on the place of Israel in personal growth and development. Our approach is dialogic in the sense that it regards the relationship of the individual to Israel as the subject of Israel education (Buber 1934). It is person-centered in that it regards the individual as an indispensable partner in the educational process (Rogers 1969; Dewey 1938; Aristotle 1966). It is present-oriented in its belief that education is not preparation for some far-off time called adulthood, but rather it is for how we live in the here and now (Korczak 2007; Dewey 1938). This approach is essentialist in the sense that it is committed to the critical role of ideas, knowledge, and contents in education. It is constructivist in its belief that understanding can only be realized when the individual is an active partner in the creation of knowledge. It is difficult to delineate one precise term that encompasses all these components. We shall use the phrase “relational education” to emphasize the significant role of the interaction of the student with values, a place, a history, and a people denoted by the word “Israel”.

EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO ISRAEL EDUCATION

Relational Israel education is rooted in eight educational principles, which have decisive implications for educational practice.

The first principle is that the individual—not Israel—is the center of Israel education. This principle indicates that the learner is the pivot or axis around which education revolves and for which education exists. This is not to say that the word “Israel” is insignificant, but it is not the starting point of Israel education—the learner is. While starting with Israel is tempting because it highlights an important topic, this direction usually leads to preoccupation with Israel and neglect of the student. The person-centered assumption is rooted in the moral and epistemological belief that people of all ages can think and feel, and that understanding is a process that takes place at all

stages of development. Therefore, the focus of education should be on the person's thinking, feeling, and doing. Jerome Bruner said that any child could be taught any subject at any age (Bruner 1960). Jean Piaget hypothesized that children are young scientists who actively try to explore the world and make sense of it (Piaget 1969). Lawrence Kohlberg suggested that children are moral philosophers who confront moral issues according to a series of well-defined developmental levels (Kohlberg 1980). Nel Noddings said that children can be taught to care (Noddings 1992). Contemporary evolutionary psychologists and neuroscientists talk about "the moral sense", "the philosophical baby", "the ethical brain", and "the moral animal" (Alison Gopnik 2009; Michael Gazzaniga 2005; James Wilson 1993; Robert Wright 1994). These diverse sources are not simply romantic meditations or wishful thinking; they are increasingly verifiable findings about the central role of the learner as the focus of education. If educators presume that the young can reflect and think, then they will likely discover that students can reflect and think. If educators presume that the young are furnitureless rooms, then they will continue to see their jobs as interior decorators. The relational approach to Israel education begins with the belief that the child is the starting point on the exciting journey of Israel education.

The second principle of the relational approach is that the content of Israel education is the individual's relationship with Israel. The word "subject" is generally used in education to refer to the content or body of knowledge to be taught. Typically, the "subject" of Israel education has been defined as the history of Israel, the religious value of Israel, and the story of contemporary State of Israel, which are regarded as bodies of knowledge to be transmitted to the young. Our second principle says that these topics are not the subject, but rather they all come to serve the more central preoccupation with the development of a personal and interpersonal relationship with Israel. This principle is based on the assumption that human life is interactional and relational, and is dependent on connections with other ideas, values, beliefs, and people. It proposes that the intent of Israel education is about initiating, igniting, and nurturing a personal and hopefully long-lasting connection with Israel as it focuses on value, place, historical theme, contemporary state, and people. The creation of the relationship, rather than the memorization of a definable quantity of material, is the subject of Israel education.

The third principle proposes that the aim of Israel education is the exploration of core ideas related to the concept of Israel as being part of the larger enterprise of developing and creating a personal relationship

with Israel. It regards the explication and understanding of diverse Israel narratives as important for a person's journey toward the goal of making meaning out of Israel. This goal statement is rooted in an educational tradition defined alternatively as humanistic, liberal, progressive, or person-centered education (Aristotle 1966; Dewey 1938; Frankl 1959; Oakshott 1989; Rogers 1980). This principle implies that understanding Israel can lead to a sense of lineage with a past heritage, linkage with a contemporary like-minded group of people, and inner harmony with one's self. We use the phrase "meaning making" to indicate that the pursuit of meaning is not frivolous, fleeting, or irrational, but, rather, it is an activity in which one has to work seriously (Freud 1900). Meaning doesn't just happen; it involves the dynamics of searching, considering, and reflecting. It is work, and takes time and effort. Moreover, meaning is not a subject to be taught in school, but, rather, it is a state of mind and heart that hopefully will emerge in the process of education.

The fourth principle is that along with understanding, meaning making, and relating, the creation of an Israel culture is a primary pedagogic focus of Israel education. The culturalist theory is a perspective which emphasizes the significant role of environment and context, for example, language, aesthetics, arts, food, and customs in education (Bruner 1999; Vygotsky 1978; Cole 1996). The cultures we live in are profound factors in shaping shape mind, self:

Learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting and always dependent on the use of cultural resources... Culturalism takes as its first premise that education is not an island but part of the continent of culture. (Bruner 1999)

This means that Israel education includes the shaping of an immersive environment which encompasses the architecture, the peer culture, the hidden curriculum, teacher personality, weather, and other components that constitute the venue in which people learn. The architectonics of Israel education go beyond the formal course of study and include a much broader palate of educational opportunity. This means that the totality of educational institutions can be harnessed for Israel education.

The fifth principle of relational Israel education is that there is a rich corpus of diverse Israel narratives that are part of the Jewish heritage, which should be encountered and introduced in the context of Israel education. These narratives reflect diverse ways of looking at the world that have been

created within the context of the Jewish experience. The tasks of Israel education in this instance are fourfold. The first task is to help the learner to understand that the Jewish people have retained an overall commitment to the Land of Israel as one of its core values. The second task is to enable the learner to discover that diverse meanings and understandings of Israel have been part of Jewish life over the ages. The third task of narrative teaching is to enable the learner to understand that the multiplicity of Israel narratives reflects a tradition which invites reflection, interpretation, and understanding of changing environments in which Jews have lived. The fact that contemporary Israel is a particularly charged topic does not mean that teachers or students must leave their cognitive skill sets in the locker room when dealing with this topic. They must approach it with the same cognition and passion that they utilize in approaching any serious question. The final task of narrative teaching is to help the young develop the skill sets which will enable them, at some point, to carve out their own personal Israel narrative. Ultimately, Israel education is about the internalization of virtues of intellectual honesty, curiosity, integrity, and commitment which are critical for making us human.

The sixth principle of person-centered Israel education is that good Israel education happens when there is connectivity between vision, proximate aim, content, and pedagogy. Such connectivity or “consilience” is reflected in the Athenian Greek notion of *paideia* or the Jewish notion of *Talmud Torah* in which a core educational vision shaped the totality of society and life (Jaeger 1944). The more an educational system can establish coordination between vision, educational theory, and practice, the greater the possibilities of impact. Developing a practice of Israel education is definitely not an activity of seeking “good programs that work”. The integration of the diverse components of the educative process is a desideratum of Israel education. Such an approach aspires to create an educational symphony which both artfully and intelligently creates music and which sings to the hearts and minds of the young.

The seventh principle of relational Israel education is that it requires pedagogues who understand the overall vision, have the ability to make Israel narratives accessible to the student, can shape cultures, and have the courage to be accessible models and to teach “from within” (Palmer 1998). Understanding the vision means familiarity with the narratives of Israel that are the heritage of the Jewish people. Having the ability to make these narratives accessible encompasses skills in relationship-building, questioning, and group dynamics. Shaping cultures means to create environments

which teach by immersing the student in an environment which “breathes” Israel. “Teaching from within” refers to the willingness to reach into one’s self and to model one’s Israel relationship (and its complexities) with love and passion. Those best suited to engage in Israel education are people who co-opt their personal passion and questions in order to model a commitment that is human, but not uncritical.

The eighth principle of a relational Israel education is the recognition of the power and the limits of education. Emile Durkheim saw education as all-powerful, and he warned teachers of the frightening power they had as transmitters of society (Durkheim 1956). Sigmund Freud mused on the near-impossible and futile task of teaching in the face of the overwhelming constraints of civilization (Britzman 2009). The truth lies somewhere between Durkheim and Freud. Education—and Israel education—can make a difference and may well contribute to a meaningful Israel relationship. At the same time, we should not forget the plethora of other forces—genetics, family, media, cyberspace, life’s twists, and turns, which play such a significant role in shaping who we will become. Israel education is not the answer, the solution, or the magic bullet, but Israel educators are entrusted with the opportunity to be a force that matters. Israel education may be a Sisyphus-like activity; yet, we continue to try to roll the stone up the mountain. And there are times when we succeed (Bernfeld 1973).

So what is Israel education according to the relational approach? It is the exhilarating and the humbling mission of educating people to think, feel, and integrate Israel into their overall character as Jews and as human beings. It is about the attempt to help young Jews study their particular culture in an attempt to find meaning in a place, an idea, a people, and a value that has been dear to their tradition. It is about helping people seek answers to life’s most basic questions through the portal of one’s particular tradition.

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NOTES

1. The word "homeland" has distinct nuances and especially gender differences in various languages. In German and its variants, the word for homeland is the masculine Vaterland. Like German, Afrikaans uses the masculine Vaderland. The French phrase La Mere Patrie, the Russian word Rodina, the Hebrew word Moledet, and the Arabic Balad and Beledi are feminine.
2. The word "homeland" is not found in the "songbook" of foundational songs and anthems of America—*The Stars Spangled Banner*, *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, *America the Beautiful* or *This Land is Your Land This Land is My Land*.
3. All three provisions of the Homeland Act of 2002 link the term "homeland" with terrorism: (1) preventing terrorist attacks, (2) reducing vulnerability to terrorism, and (3) minimizing damage and assisting in recovery from terrorist attacks (Homeland Act 2012). This usage was reinforced by a television series of the same name produced by Showtime which follows the ongoing saga of agents and counter-agents preoccupied with radical religious terrorism in America and abroad.
4. Erikson notes that he first heard the term "identity" used by the Viennese psychoanalyst and member of the Freudian circle Paul Federn (Friedman, 1999). Freud used the word "identity" in his famous speech in 1926 to the B'nai B'rith Society in which he affirms his Jewishness. Ironically, Freud seems to use the term much as American Jews came to use it – linkage to a feeling of Jewishness.
5. Friedman indicates that Erikson himself may have helped this popularization with the publication (at his publisher's insistence) of the volume *Identity: Youth and Crisis* focusing on the concept of "identity crisis" and in which he used his terms somewhat loosely (Erikson 1980).

6. While there are many linguistic and homiletic attempts to explicate the meaning of the word, scholars remain uncertain about its exact meaning (Brettler 2005; Kugel 2007).
7. It is interesting to conjecture why Jews in the twentieth century chose this concept from contemporary psychology. One possibility is they sought the legitimacy and gravitas that came from adapting a concept created by a famous contemporary psychologist (Friedman 1999). A second possibility is that they were searching for an English term that did not have the sound of immigrant languages, such as the Yiddish word *Yiddishkeit* (a feeling of being Jewish) or the Hebrew word *Halacha* (strictly follow the 613 laws of Judaism). At the same time, they sought a term with enough ambiguity to signify affiliation but which in no way defined any specific criteria or demands; in “identity” they seemed to have found the perfect term.
8. Two noteworthy exceptions are an article by Bethamie Horowitz entitled “Jewish Identity and Beyond” (Horowitz 2012) and the book by Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen *The Jew Within* (Cohen and Eisen 2000).
9. The field of Israel education has grown significantly in the past decade. There is a growing literature of academic articles, and studies written by academics, independent researchers, and foundations. A Reader’s Guide on Israel Education was produced by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at New York University. Two issues of the *Journal of Jewish Education* were devoted to the subject. Two books have been written on the subject in the past five years: *Israel Education Matters* by Lisa Grant and Ezra Kopelowitz, and *Loving the Real Israel: An Educational Guide for Liberal Zionism* by Alex Sinclair. A network of researchers of Jewish education has established Israel education as one of its research areas. The iCenter for Israel Education was established in 2008 in North America, and an Israel-based center for Israel education, Makom, was established in Israel in 2000.



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