



THE JEWISH  
EDUCATION PROJECT

# REIMAGINING ISRAEL EDUCATION



# WHAT WE LEARNED AND WHAT COMES NEXT

BACKGROUND REPORT

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE INITIATIVE

## Introduction

Israel education is essential to a complete Jewish education. A “mature and meaningful Jewish identity”<sup>1</sup> includes both an understanding of the many ways Israel is embedded in Jewish tradition and a proud, resilient connection to modern-day Israel.

In the last two decades, thanks to many committed leaders and practitioners, Israel education has grown as a part of the North American Jewish educational experience. Since the late 1990s, there has been an increase in resources available to educators, in thought leadership on Israel education, in conferences and convenings, and in programs directly available to learners.

Still, the tumultuous and heartbreaking winter and spring after October 7, 2023, exposed confusion (at best) or significant weaknesses (at worst) in the field of Israel education. Jewish students in college encampments, Jewish day school students publicly accusing their alma mater of educational malfeasance, and parents raising concerns about and challenges to our standard practice all created dissonance in the field. The speed of generational change has outpaced our planning and policy work. Today’s learners—and many of their educators—bring new perspectives and expectations that demand a refreshed, more strategic approach to Israel education.

These challenges point to broader questions about Jewish education itself, questions of generational disconnect and shifting identity. For too long, Jewish education has carried the weight of preserving the Jewish future, often driven by fear of loss more than by confidence or curiosity. The events of these two-plus years are forcing a reckoning, an evolution of Jewish education for a new era of Jewish life and peoplehood.

This is the moment to reimagine what we can do and to shift what we will do to meet new realities.

<sup>1</sup> This description is Yehuda Kurtzer’s, in a panel discussion and published in Kaiserman, S. (Moderator); Kurtzer, Y. & Winer, L. N. (Panelists). (2024, May). *New paradigms for Israel education*. In *Re-CHARGING Reform Judaism: New paradigms for Jewish education (Plenum IV)*. Stephen Wise Free Synagogue.

*Today’s learners—and many of their educators—bring new perspectives and expectations that demand a refreshed, more strategic approach to Israel education.*



And still, this is not a crisis response, developed in reaction to specific situations. Good Israel education—good education more broadly—must be proactive, helping learners to develop a vision of the world they want to live in and lead. Ours is a moment of great opportunity to advance bold, systemic change across the landscape and to move in one clear direction.

Reimagining Israel Education is providing the field of Jewish education with data-driven conclusions about the challenges we face, recommendations for change, and a strategic framework for growth. Rooted in this framework, we will build on the field’s past successes to move forward with confidence, cultivating in learners a powerful, resilient, and enduring connection to Israel. We will help learners become educated, inspired, and empowered as they explore and connect with Israel in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the world we live in and the world of their futures.

# The Initiative

Facilitated by The Jewish Education Project, in partnership with the Jim Joseph Foundation and Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Reimagining Israel Education used a dual approach to explore the field, seeking grassroots input and working with leading practitioners to collect and build theory.

Working bottom-up, in 2025, the project's facilitators heard from more than 400 practitioners through daylong convenings, conference sessions, small-group virtual meetings, and one-on-one conversations. The data presented in this report primarily come from this work.

**In addition, the project solicited new thought leadership, which led to:**

Production of new theory about Israel education and about the relationship between global Jewry and Israel, in the form of essays from nine scholar-practitioners on challenges and opportunities in Israel education today

**The project also reviewed existing work, including:**

Approximately 400 pieces of literature that comprise the research on Israel education, building a meta-analysis of themes, implications, and open questions, and developing a comprehensive literature review

Development of an empirical essay on excellent practice, through interviews with eleven experienced educators about excellent Israel education

Nineteen Israel education curricula, drawing conclusions about needed curriculum development

Reimagining engaged two Advisory Committees comprising twenty-five organizational leaders, representing thousands of learners across North America.

## Advisory Committees

Key organizational leaders working together on vision and strategy

## Convenings and Conversations

Nearing 400 people engaged, across diverse settings and throughout North America and Israel

## Excellent Practice Study:

With 11 experienced educators on excellent Israel education

## Literature Analysis

Focused on 400 pieces of research on Israel education

## Curriculum Analysis

Including 19 publicly available curricula

## New Theory

9 scholar-practitioners building new theory



**Expand your engagement with Israel education:  
explore these materials on the Reimagining website.**

[CLICK HERE](#)

While the convenings, sessions, meetings, and conversations are highlighted here, all of the data contributed to the findings presented in this report. In each finding, multiple practitioner voices are woven together, with similar ideas drawn from different settings and across geographic locales.

# Clarifying Terms

“Israel Education” refers to opportunities to explore and learn about Israel across settings (not only formal ones) and in its many forms within Jewish tradition (not only the modern state).

## Education:

This project defines “education” as a process in which an educator helps learners make personal meaning of content in the context of their reality and future. Good Israel education follows principles of good education.

## Different from Advocacy:

Education that helps learners combat antisemitism and advocate for Israel is distinct work (and outside of this project’s scope). Advocacy may be an outcome of Israel education, but it is different from the activity of Israel education.

## Audience

The initiative aims to influence youth education, with a particular focus on learners from birth through college, across settings. As we worked, the critical role of parents as influencers and gatekeepers quickly became apparent, and adult education, particularly for parents (and grandparents), became part of the initiative.

## On Jewish Education

*“We are not here to transmit or continue a given Tradition; we are here to engage in a passionate and knowledgeable exploration of the past for the betterment of our present and as a model for our future. We are here to build that tradition into what it can become in the next century.”*

Zohar Raviv, “On Truth, Tradition and Respect in Jewish Education.”  
*Journal of Jewish Communal Service Summer 2000, 275-291.*

*“We say: ‘The child of today is the citizen of tomorrow.’ We are wrong. Children are not the people of tomorrow; they are people today. They have a right to be taken seriously, to be treated with tenderness and respect. They should be allowed to grow into whoever they were meant to be—the unknown person inside each of them is the hope for the future.”*

Janusz Korczak, *The Child’s Right to Respect (1928)*

*“When we claim that the purpose of education is the transmission of knowledge, we neglect its deeper moral aim. Schools must be concerned with the formation of persons who will care for themselves, for others, and for the world they inhabit. This requires that caring relations be established and maintained in schools, not merely talked about as an abstract virtue.”*

Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools (1992)*

# Challenges

The challenges shared by hundreds of stakeholders who contributed to the Reimagining project fell into several themes. These themes connect directly to opportunities to advance the field in ways that reflect our world and educators' and learners' needs today.



## 1

### Educators Want to Feel More Confident and Competent

In person, and in the research, educators describe a lack of training and comfort leading interpretive conversations. Generally, they do not know how to lead conversations that accommodate diverse opinions or help students consider and talk through different possible personal interpretations.

**“It requires leaning into socio-emotional intelligence, creating conditions for talking through disagreement. We aren’t prepared now to do that.”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*

Educators want examples of instruction that help students reflect on the content independently, building their own meaning and connection. They don’t know what that looks like; curricula don’t spell it out.

**“There is no real educational curriculum for us. It’s not deliberate anywhere.”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*

When educators talk about “Israel education,” they tend to think of the modern state rather than three thousand years of story, evolution, memory, liturgy, culture, and hope. The past supports the present. But educators do not naturally connect the two.

**“We teach *medinat Yisrael* most of the time. But it’s *medinat Yisrael* that’s crumbling for people. We need to teach *am, erez*.”**

*(from a Hillel professional)*

When educators have access to curricula or educational images, they see simplicity in these resources, an orientation toward demonstrating pure love to students. When they are emotionally prepared to move beyond teaching uncomplicated love, they aren’t sure technically how to do so.

**“We go in with an underlying assumption that Israel is good. But that’s not education.”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*

# 2

## Educators & Educational Organizations Struggle with Consistent Goals

Advocacy and education are distinct activities. Understandably, Jewish organizations often advocate strongly or express general support for Israel. Simultaneously, educators and, more importantly, learners may perceive the “We Stand with Israel” message as contradictory to their educational goals.

**“Education is engagement with a multivocal tradition that empowers through learning led by experts. You are working with the good, the bad, the ugly daily, and there is room to find your place. This is not an organizational statement.”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*

Questions that educators are demonstrated to be asking are explored in the research, but most educators seem not to know the research, and education is not designed according to demonstrated smart practices.

Educators understand and appreciate multiple goals for Israel education. But they see them as competing, particularly when they hear from parents. They lack tools to execute toward all of their goals simultaneously, and they lack tools to work with stakeholders to express their appreciation for these multiple goals.

**“There are 70 faces of Torah. Why can’t there be 70 faces of Israel?”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*



# 3

## Educators Are Overwhelmed

It is hard to anchor the current state in its past and in the land, largely because the current state is so prominent in North American media and so challenging for many educators. Personal questions and struggles dominate, either putting the current state front and center or encouraging educators to avoid the topic altogether.

**“I want to help them have fun. And I follow the parents’ lead—I can only push them so far.”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*



# 4

## The Work is Disconnected

Israel education continues to be, frequently, an add-on, avoided in the primary curriculum. “Yom Yisrael” during a school year or a camp summer brings joy and some exploration of subject matter, but it often lacks context. It is a one-off. Israel is mentioned repeatedly in *tefilah*, in *Tanakh*, and in other areas of education and Jewish experiences—but it isn’t explored. This reduces Israel to soundbites.

As a one-off, content is often emphasized, without an opportunity to raise big questions of personal meaning and growth.

**“If I have an hour, I’m going to do rah rah. I’m going to choose something that gets them to want more, to do more.”**

*(from a synagogue educator)*

**“I learned that Israel has four seas. But what am I supposed to do with that?”**

*(from a college student)*

# 5

## Educators Are Anxious

Educators feel a lack of unified goals and resources, they hear competing messages, they experience a lack of clear strategy and direction, and they feel anxious about making mistakes, fearful of angering stakeholders.

**“I strip down and do less, as a result.”**

*(from a Hillel professional)*

**“I have an unforgiving audience. I have no space for failure or experimentation. If I make a *halachic* mistake, people don’t care the way they care about this.”**

*(from a rabbi educator)*

Some parents are choosing Jewish engagement specifically because of Israel education. But many others put pressure on educators to avoid Israel in educational environments, or avoid teaching what they see as “nationalistic” education.

**“We haven’t collectively internalized the experience of sovereignty. Our tradition doesn’t match our reality.”**

*(from a communal educator)*



# A PATH FORWARD

Out of this research emerged key concepts, a new approach to Israel education, and, ultimately, a full educational framework.

## Key Concepts

In total, the research suggested that Israel education today must:

- **Deepen** and expand foundational knowledge of Israel, in all of its manifestations in Jewish tradition and history
- **Integrate** Israel education into all of Jewish education, and distinguish it from advocacy for learners and educators
- **Adapt** Israel and Jewish education; root practice in ongoing research and respond to shifting times
- **Empower** educators with strong leadership and support; professionalize educator standards and training
- **Connect** through authentic and personal relationships with Israel and Israelis
- **Teach** toward resilient connection, where learners can engage with Israel through and despite challenges, remaining in relationship that includes celebration and critique
- **Embrace** multivocality:
  - Affirm that learners will develop all kinds of ideas and opinions
  - Explore and teach Israel's diversity, throughout time and today



## The Approach

These key concepts suggest a bold, definitive approach to Israel education, defined by these criteria:

- 1 Israel Is Integral, Integrated, & Comprehensive:**  
Bridged silos and coherent, cumulative learning
- 2 Good Israel Education Is Good Education:**  
Respect, inquiry, and engagement
- 3 Israel Education Is Identity Development & Jewish Peoplehood:**  
Relationships that develop sense of self
- 4 Head, Heart, Hands All Matter:**  
Intellect, emotion, and action
- 5 Diverse Perspectives, with Boundaries & Norms:**  
Diverse opinions, shared values
- 6 Israel Education Must Reclaim Zionisms:**  
Learners' and educators' obligations to their tradition
- 7 Israel Education Is Not Hasbara—The Learner Is Sacred:**  
Centered student voice and experience
- 8 Educators Need Support:**  
Brave leadership that facilitates multivocal community

# The Strategic Framework

The Framework developed from this approach provides a shared language to sharpen Jewish educational practice, both for each educator and across the field. It can galvanize all stakeholders, align expectations, and ensure we move forward together.

## Mission and Vision

Through this kind of Israel education, generations of Jews will:

Be proudly connected to the Jewish people and Israel

Have strong senses of themselves and contribute to bettering their communities and the world

Be engaged with their tradition in ways that co-create their Jewish community



### Framework: 10 "Cs"

Cumulative

Complex

Constructivist

Collaborative

Courageous

Continuous

Contrasting

Convenantal

Connected

Curious & Caring

# What Comes Next

The Framework will require advancement of a set of field practices, including these:

Once the Reimagining Framework is adopted, the next phase of work will focus on five interconnected workstreams designed to translate vision into sustained, field-wide impact. Together, these workstreams ensure that the Framework is not only implemented but continuously strengthened, widely adopted, and meaningfully experienced by educators and learners.



## 1. Educator Capacity and Professional Learning

- Develop a robust, tiered ecosystem of professional learning opportunities that meet educators at different stages of their careers and in varied settings.
- Build opportunities in core pedagogies, including argument, interpretation, and facilitation of complex conversations.
- Bring educators to Israel, working at scale; deepen their knowledge, strengthen their personal and professional connections, and align their learning with the Framework.
- Support educators with real-time coaching and mentoring, ensuring that educators can translate theory into practice and respond flexibly to current events.

## 2. Framework Development and Thought Leadership

- Teach the Framework throughout Jewish educational settings.
- Collect and disseminate examples of the Framework in action.
- Use feedback and testing in the field to iterate the Framework, keeping it relevant and responsive.

## 3. Content Development and Digital Enablement

- Build high-quality, accessible content, fully aligned with the Framework's principles and pedagogies, available immediately and applicable to educators' specific contexts.
- Leverage emerging technologies (including AI-supported tools) to support lesson planning and resource development.

## 4. Research and Field Building

- Advance a multifaceted research agenda that identifies and addresses gaps in current knowledge and generates new insights into practice.
- Disseminate findings widely; ensure that research is translated into practice.

## 5. Innovation and Field Growth

- Pilot new models and approaches to underdeveloped areas of Israel education.
- Focus on, for example, Hebrew language education, parent engagement, expanded roles for *shlichim* (Israeli emissaries), parent education, and a curated speakers bureau.

Taken together, these recommendations and the Framework point toward an Israel education ecosystem that is coordinated, relational, and advanced, that has moved beyond isolated programs toward a shared field with common direction, expansive infrastructure, and mutual accountability. Educators are supported across the full arc of their professional lives through a flexible, tiered system of development that builds core pedagogic capacities, integrates sustained engagement with Israel itself, and embeds Israel learning across all areas of Jewish education. The field can become adaptive, interconnected, and future-oriented, able to evolve to meet learners as they—and their world around them—inevitably change over time. Building this ecosystem will take time, resources, and constant assessment of what's working. For the benefit of learners and educators from various backgrounds and in a range of settings, this work with committed partners must now begin.